

Disciples Take Faith Seriously

September 8, 2019

Theme: Move beyond nominal Christianity.

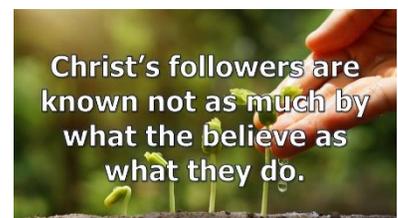
Scripture: Luke 14: 25-33

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.



Today we begin our Fall Discipleship sermon series called "What Disciples Do". This series will focus on the

idea that Christ's followers are known not as much by what they believe as what they do. This will be the theme of this series as we explore what disciples do as we live out their faith. Faith in action. Let us pray...



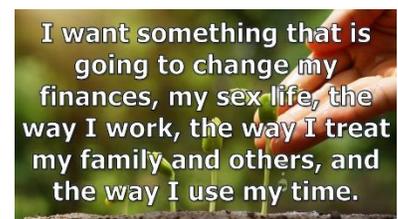
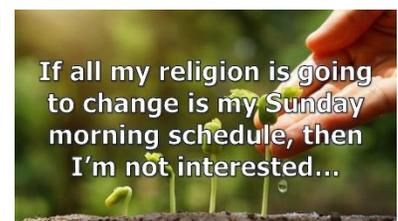
If one were to survey the landscape of Christianity today in the United States or any other first world “Christian” nation, one would find the general state of affairs to be rather non-Christian. At first glance, it would appear that secularism, or secular culture, is taking over our nation and other nations like ours. In Pew Research survey after survey reveals that there are fewer and fewer people self-identifying as Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, and so on. Mirroring this decline is the rise of two growing groups known as the “nones” and the “dones”. The first – the “nones” – is the group that claims no religious affiliation. They are “spiritual” but do not belong to any named, organized religion. The second group is the “dones” – as in, “I am done with church”. A negative experience or the lack of a personal connection to God and/or the church has led them to walk away, to be done.

As grim as this all sounds, I think the greatest threat to the faith today is nominal Christianity. The commonly practiced faith that many exhibit today is shallow and noncommittal and it does not lead to vital believers and vibrant and engaged congregations. As one young survey

respondent summed it up, “If all my religion is going to change is my Sunday schedule, then I’m not interested.

I want something that is going to change my finances, my sex life, the way I work, the way I treat my family and others, and the way I use my time”. I ask, does your faith dramatically impact all of these things? I’ll

give you a minute to think through that list. Now I’ll ask the question again: does your faith dramatically impact all of these areas of your life?



The young man that I just quoted has a very good point. He understands something very important. Authentic faith should impact EVERY part of our lives. Living an authentic faith should impact the way we spend our money and our time. Living an authentic faith should impact the way we work. Living an authentic faith should impact the way we treat our family, our friends, our co-workers, our teammates, our neighbors, and the strangers or aliens among us. Living an authentic faith should impact the way we treat the environment and the poor. Living an authentic faith should impact our character, our ethics, our values, our language. In short, living an authentic faith should impact every aspect of our lives. As disciples, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to take our faith very seriously.



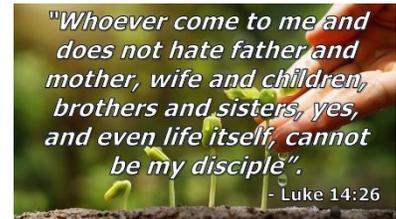
In today's passage from Luke 14, Jesus makes this point very clear. As disciples, we must take and practice our faith seriously. As we turn in our Bible to Luke 14, verses 25 through 33, we will see that the cost of discipleship is high. If you are not there already, I invite you to turn to Luke 14. In these nine verses, Jesus is very clear that we must be prepared to first count the cost of discipleship. As our passage opens, Luke makes note that large crowds were now following Jesus. Many were people interested in the miracles, others were along for the ride. In today's language, many in the large crowd were nominal followers. But a crowd is not the same thing as a church. Many things can draw a crowd. A church is gathered only through evangelism and discipleship.

In his book, The Imitation of Christ, Thomas A. Kempis wrote these words on nominal Christianity, although it was not called that at the time of his writing. Reading from short this devotional book that he wrote in the early 1400s, hear his assessment of the state of Christianity:

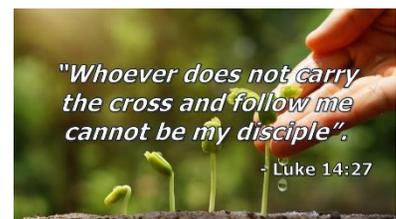
Jesus has many who love his kingdom in heaven, but few who bear His cross. He has many who desire comfort, but few who desire suffering. He finds many to share his feast, but few his fasting. All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to suffer for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of the bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of his passion. Many admire his miracles, but few follow him in the humiliation of his cross. Many love Jesus as long as no hardship touches them. Many praise Him, as long as they are receiving comfort from him. But if Jesus withdraws Himself, they fall to complaining and utter dejection.

In his day and in our day today, one can easily see that faith can be shallow and noncommittal. Modern day author Kyle Idelman puts it this way when assessing some of the Christians he knows: many are fans of Jesus, few are followers. In his book, Not A Fan, Idelman observes that many like Jesus, will support Jesus to a degree, and will even cheer for him now and then. But he also notes that few are willing to actually follow Jesus.

In verses 26 and 27, Jesus cuts right to the chase. Here he sets a very high standard for discipleship. In verse 26 we read, *"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple"*. Here Jesus is not talking about carnal hatred. "Hate" is used metaphorically here. What Jesus is saying by using the word "hate" is that our father, mother, wife, children... need to be such a distant second priority to following Jesus that it seems that you hate them by comparison. Our Christian family and even our own wills cannot become idols. We care for our families and we provide for our families, yes. Discipleship will call you to relegate your family to second place and to reprioritize them in ways completely contrary to the ways of the world. Jesus is making it clear that we must be "all in" if we are to be a disciple. This is part of the cost that we must count.



Verse 27 is a familiar verse and also helps us to understand the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It reads: *"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"*. This means we must join Jesus in his suffering. Every disciple has a cross to bear. That cross is our dying, our self-denial, the surrender of our will to God's will. Picking up and carrying our cross daily is what enables the kingdom of God to advance here on earth. Cross-carrying is essential to the Christian faith; it is not optional. Our crosses all look different and most of our crosses bear more than one burden. For one, the cross is family persecution. For one, the cross is remaining sexually pure until marriage. For another, the cross is refusing corruption at work. For yet another,



the cross refusing to look at pornography one last time. What it means to bear our cross varies from person to person. But to be a disciple, one must carry our cross, one must be willing to suffer with and for Jesus and our faith.



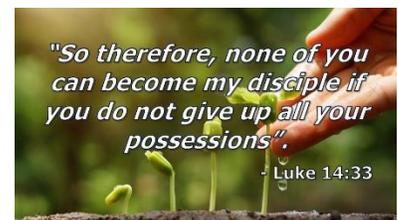
Jesus next addresses how we are to count the cost of discipleship using two illustrations that we find in verses 28 through 32. The first is an example that relates to building a tower. Before beginning, one must sit down and estimate what the project will cost. If one begins and then is unable to finish the project, others will bring ridicule and shame. The second example relates to going off to war. If a king realizes that he is vastly outnumbered as they are preparing for battle, instead of foolishly engaging in battle, he sends a delegation seeking the terms for peace. Both of these illustrations emphasize that we must consider what will be required of us to complete the faith journey before we begin it. If we do so, then we will not be forced to turn back when the moments of truth arrive. Jesus wants us to know, up front, what he expects of us and to look squarely at the costs of following. Once we have done so, he asks us then to commit ourselves, with that knowledge, to following him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Using the language of the baptism today, that “by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ”. It is an “all in” commitment that Jesus seeks.

Here are a few questions that I believe will help us think through this commitment. First, will you persevere until the end no matter what? No matter what life brings or does not bring, will you persevere in your faith? Think about

Job or even Jesus himself and their examples here. Second, will you deny yourself in order to serve Jesus? No matter what temptation comes along, no matter how bright and shiny that new thing looks, no matter what gains you would get if you succumbed just this one time, will you seek to deny self?

And third, will you endure hardship for the sake of knowing Christ? Paul wrote about this in Philippians 4: 11-13. Hear his words: *"I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me"*. Will you endure hardship for the sake of knowing the Christ who strengthens you? These questions are not intended to make us turn back before we begin we being our journey of faith or to deter us from continuing to follow. We must consider the costs, take stock of ourselves and our faith, and then embrace the costs because they are worth the commitment. As someone said, "Salvation is free, but it will cost you everything". If we know all this and we continue to walk the road of faith, working out our salvation day by day, then we are and will be Jesus' disciples.

Turning to verse 33, we find a good summary of what Jesus has been saying in our passage today. Read along with me: *"So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions"*. Jesus calls us to renounce everything we have. Jesus calls us to renounce our relationships, our desires, our possessions, our very lives. None of these things



can have a hold on us. Only Christ can have a hold on us. Nothing in this world can keep us from serving Jesus Christ and those he loves. In discipleship, we die to self and to family and to all other worldly things so that we can live for Christ. To follow Christ as his disciple means that we exchange the entire world for the kingdom here on earth and for that kingdom to come. It is a blessed exchange.



As I draw near to a close this Sunday, a short story about a seventh-grade girl from Texas. She ran on the middle school track team. Due to bad weather, an important meet was postponed to the following Saturday. However, this young lady had committed to be on a church mission trip that Saturday. She went to her coach and told the coach her dilemma. The coach told her, "Your teammates are counting on you. You can't let them down. You are either here for the meet or you turn in your uniform". After many tears and much deliberation, she went back to her coach, handed him her uniform, and walked away. That night she explained her decision to her family. She said, "This is about God. And God is more important than sports".

This seventh-grade girl can teach us all a thing or two about true discipleship. She understood that faith is primary and all else is secondary. She knew, believed, and lived her commitment to God. It outweighed every other priority in her life. In short, she counted the cost and decided to be "all in" for her God.

In closing, one more quote from Thomas A. Kempis' The Imitation of Christ:

They who love Jesus for his own sake, and not for the sake of comfort for themselves, bless him in every trial and anguish of heart, no less than in the greatest joy. And were he never willing to bestow comfort on them, they would still always praise him and give him thanks. Oh, how powerful is the pure love of Jesus, free from all self-interest and self-love!

This young, seventh-grade girl blessed Jesus in the trial. Her pure love of Jesus was free of self-interest and self-love. She blessed Jesus and she showed her love for him as she stood for her faith, as she held true to her priorities. As we explore what a life of committed faith looks like over the course of this sermon series, I hope that we too will decide to be "all in" for Christ. May it be so. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Grow. What 'cost' have you paid for your faith? How did it lead to growth in your faith or in your relationship with Christ?
- 2) Pray. What dilemma do you face? What hard choice is God calling you to make for Jesus? Pray for guidance and strength.
- 3) Serve. Taking up our cross often involves serving the other – the one we would rather not serve. How can you pick up this cross this week?