

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 14:25-35 **“The Cost Of Following, And Of Not”**

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(4th Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 14:25-35 "THE COST OF FOLLOWING, AND OF NOT"

v.23, Jesus Post-Symposium (poor, maimed...) Of 14:1-24

1) vv.25-27 THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: FAMILY/SELF AS A POSSIBLE BLOCKAGE.

			L (v.25) + //Mt. 10:37-38(Q), GT 55, 101, Attitudes Not Emotions
25		Now great multitudes accompanied him (i.e. on way to Jerusalem);	Wanna-be Disciples, <i>Crowd</i> : 12:1, 13, 14:15-24
		and he (i.e. Jesus) turned and said to them,	With Grace Comes Demand, Allegiance, Jesus Gives Cost
26	a1	"If any one comes to me	9:18-19, Popularity → Sudden, Deliberate Confrontation
FAMILY	2	and does not hate his own father and mother (1)	Accompanying Must Become Following = New Center, Hypothetical "If"
		and <i>wife</i> and children (2)	Hyperbole = Prefer, Detached, 16:13 (Mt. "Loves more")
		and <i>brothers and sisters</i> , (3)	New Identity, Jewish Family Loyalty At Top Of List, 18:20
SELF		<i>yes, and even his own life</i> (Gk. <i>psyche</i> = soul),	14:15-24 Same Impediments, What Determines My Choices?
	3	he cannot be my disciple.	New Center, Our Most Precious Possession
			9:59-62, 18:28-30, Dt. 33:8-9, Learner, Call Of Jesus Before Family/ Self
27	b2	Whoever does not <i>bear</i> his <i>own</i> cross	Discourage Hasty Enthusiasm, A Thoughtless Start
WORLD	1	and come after me,	Shame, Expands v.26, 5:11, Christ Exceeds Other Loves/ Loyalties
	3	cannot be my disciple.	Unredeemed Self Counted As Dead, Call Of Jesus May Mean Martyrdom
			Is not able to be my disciple, 9:23-27 Echo, Not Ease, Active Demand
			Jesus Did Family/Cross First! Preoccupation With Family/Self, Relativize All

Earlier Challenges On Discipleship, 8:4-21, 9:23-27, 57-62, 12:13-59

2 Parables **2) vv.28-32 TWO EXAMPLES OF COUNTING THE COST BEFORE.** Fools At Work & War
Count Cost Since Demands Are Rigorous

a) vv.28-30 Example No. 1: Construction Project, Q & A. Prov. 24:3-6 (Only Luke)

FUTURE			Protect A Home, You Need A Defensive Fortification: Conflict
28	Q1	For which of you , desiring to build a tower,	Sober Pre-Planning And Self-Assessment
		does not first <u>sit down and count the cost</u> ,	Take Stock Before You Rise To Meet The Challenge
		whether he has enough to complete it? (No one, of course)	Can I Do It?
29	A1	Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish,	Onslaught From Satan: Judas (22:3), Peter (22:31)
		all who see it begin to mock him,	Honor/Shame Culture, Failure
30		saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'	Ex. = Judas, Goal = Avoid Public Shame

b) vv.31-33 Example No. 2: Military Campaign, Q & A. (Only In Luke)

			Plan To Protect Country From Foreign Subjugation: Conflict
31	Q2	Or what king , going to encounter another king in war,	Prov. 24:3-6, You Need An Offensive Plan
		will not <u>sit down first and take counsel</u>	2 Sam. 8:9-12, Calculate Changes Before Beginning
		whether he is able with ten thousand	Lesser To Greater: Shame → Defeat/Enslaved
		to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? (No one, of course)	War/Discipleship Require Total Dedication, Not Play
32	A2	And if not, while the other is yet a great way off,	What Is The Cost Of Not Following The Powerful Jesus?
		he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.	Kin, Comfortable Life, Life Itself No Longer Primary

STUFF

1') v.33 THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: GOODS AS A POSSIBLE BLOCKAGE.

			(Only In Luke)
33		So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce (lit. "bid farewell to") all that he has	Summary, Acts 2:44, 4:32
		cannot be my disciple. "	Apprentice = Understudy = Student, Jesus Demands Exclusive Loyalty
			14:18-19

Devotion + Dogged Tenacity, If Give Up Relationship To Jesus, Lose Salinity

1 Parable **2') vv.34-35 SINGLE EXAMPLE OF COUNTING THE COSTS AFTER, Q & A.** v.34 (Mark 9:49-50), v.35a (Mt. 5:13b), v.35b (L)

34		"Salt therefore is good;	(Truism) Success
	Q3	but if salt has lost its taste (lit. "grown foolish")	Evaporation: Dead Sea, Many Impurities (i.e. gypsum)
		how shall its saltiness be restored?	(It's primary value) Failure
			(It cannot!) Warning To Those Already Disciples
35	A3	It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill;	Failure To Persevere Is As Useless As Saltless Residue
		men throw it away.	Same Judgment
		<i>He who has ears to hear, let him hear."</i>	What God Does! Salt Is To Food As Wisdom To Life
			Always On The Road, Discipleship Means A Sober Evaluation
			(L), 8:8, How Respond? Call To Hear For All Who Have Ears

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 14:25-35

The next unit in Luke's treatment of Jesus' final journey concerns both the initial and ongoing cost of being his follower or disciple, i.e. his student or apprentice: one who with others and by constant exposure is taking on the teaching, priorities, and worldview of a master, in this case Rabbi Jesus who embodies his Father's kingdom in the power of the Spirit. Jesus called followers to himself and immersed them in the multivalent conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers of this world. Jesus was the engine; they were the rail cars who hooked their future to his. The word *disciple* is used 269 times in the New Testament, *Christian* only three. There were no universities in that day; one learned in a formal apprenticeship, much as one studies plumbing or carpentry today. Jesus learned the building trade from Joseph, the skills of the kingdom from his heavenly Father. The twelve who stood at the core of Jesus' all-Israel-renewal-project fumbled and stumbled along after him, and the costs were high.

The surface structure is a four part alternating parallelism (1. vv.25-27, 2. vv.28-32 // 1' v.33, 2' vv.34-35) in which 1//1' confront the eager crowds with the cost of discipleship, with 2//2' offering questions and answers on beginning and continuing as disciples. Note that in the first half (1. vv.25-26, 2. 28-33) each part has two paragraphs and two questions, while in the second half (1' v.33, 2' vv.34-35) only one. That the teaching is general and intended for potential disciples is indicated by the open references to *great multitudes* (v.25), *any one* (v.26a), *Whoever* (v.27a), *which of you* (v.28a), *Or what king* (v.31), *whoever* (v.33a), *He who has ears* (v.35b). The threefold *cannot be my disciple* links 1//1'. While there are parallels in Mt. 10:37-38, 5:13, Gospel of Thomas 55 and 101, Mark 9:49-50, most of the material is unique to Luke; his editorial hand is everywhere apparent. Having opened the kingdom invitation to all (14:15-24), Jesus now turns and confronts the naive crowds with the cost of following. That new folk (e.g. *poor, maimed, blind, lame*) are invited in does not mean discipleship is discounted.

The reference to the journey (v.25a) is editorial. Jesus then turns and speaks to the crowds, "If anyone comes to me..." The language of *hate* is a hyperbole for *to prefer* or *choose one thing over another*. Jesus' teaching on love of neighbor (10:25-42) includes family, but in his culture family loyalty was a high value and thus a potential block to discipleship. Jesus is not asking followers to do anything he's not done (Mk. 3:31-35, Lk. 4:16-30). *Father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters* (v.26) are a Jewish family system of identity and loyalty. To this is added the ultimate loyalty: *and even one's own life*. No bonds are as ultimate as allegiance to Jesus. This new center puts one at odds with the current order and may result in suffering, thus the need to *bear his own cross* (v.27).

The example parables of vv.28-30 and vv.31-32 counsel forethought. This is no emotional altar call but a sober assessment of costs. The question (vv.28, 31) and answer (vv.29-30, 32) format is rhetorically engaging. To avoid the shame of not finishing (vv.29-30) or the disaster of being finished off (v.31), do the math. Jesus is not into bait-and-switch; he calls all to see the value of joining him. To the earlier three issues (family, self, suffering), a fourth is now added: *all that he has* (v.33). Jesus assumes the right to reorient all we are, all we've loved, all we control. If the twin parables of 2. vv.28-32 are pre-discipleship, then 2' vv.33-35 concerns continuing discipleship. The salt of which Jesus speaks was evaporated from Dead Sea pools with the sodium chloride mixed with gypsum and other minerals. When moisture dissolved the salt, what was left was tasteless and worthless, and this is what happens to disciples who make a good start but do not maintain the saltiness which comes with Jesus being central. Initial enthusiasm can and will leach away. What then? Are we listening (v.35b)? To make a good start, consider closely; to finish well, stay close to the source! Maintain your focus on the person of Jesus.

THE COST OF FOLLOWING, OR OF NOT

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

One of Jesus’ favorite ending lines.

L U K E 1 4 : 3 5 b

Jim Caviezel (whose initials are *J.C.*) was thirty-three when he played Jesus in Mel Gibson’s 2004 blockbuster *The Passion of the Christ*. Caviezel has publically said his faith is his guide and that God called him into acting. Before casting him, Gibson told the promising actor the role might cost him a career.

But Caviezel wanted to honor the Lord by portraying his life and death and responded to Gibson, "We all have a cross to carry.... If we don't carry our crosses, we are going to be crushed under the weight of it."

Caviezel's decision to carry the cross of Christ has definitely cost him. Following his role in *The Passion of the Christ*, Caviezel's credits have been anything but impressive. He starred in the little-known thriller *Unknown*, had a supporting role in the Denzel Washington's *Deja Vu* and leading roles in *Outlander* and *The Stoning of Soraya M*, both of which were panned by critics.

Not until Fall 2011 did he land a part that resulted in positive buzz. His role in the CBS series *Person of Interest* has been well-received. Caviezel said he doesn't worry about the career price he paid in a film that led to fewer, not more, offers. "The awards, the hall of fame" that actors get into here on Earth, he said, don't matter to him. Caviezel said, "Jesus is as controversial now as he’s ever been. Not much has changed in 2,000 years We have to give up our names, our reputations, and our lives to speak the truth."¹

Now a story from the other end of the scale, not the well known but the unknown. When Texas pastor Jim Denison was in college, he served as a summer

¹ Roger Moore, "'Passion' star Jim Caviezel talks about Mel Gibson's troubles, and his own, at Orlando church," *Orlando Sentinel* (4-30-11)

missionary in Muslim East Malaysia. At one of the services in a small church, a teenage girl came forward to follow Christ and be baptized. Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the building and asked the pastor. He pointed to the girl who'd just been baptized, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again, so she brought her luggage."²

As American Christians we know little about the cost of discipleship. Faith for most of us is seen as a *enhancement to life*, not as an *alternative life* that sets you at odds and in danger from the culture around you. Most of us will hopefully die *in the faith*, but somewhere around a hundred and fifty thousand die a year *for the faith*.³ Life is cut short because they bear the name of Jesus; the age of the martyrs is not over. Thank God for the freedom and peace of this country, but we must not forget those who seal their baptisms in their blood. They remind us Jesus is worth dying for, and if worth dying for, then perhaps worth living for.

I first preached this text in the fall of 1980; today is my third and maybe last try. I was then green as the grass, a new preacher in my first appointment, full of naive faith I could influence the church and the church change the world. I was twenty-seven and neither Daniel nor Ellen yet born, just me and Lori on a four-point circuit in rural Fairfield County. Here is my opening paragraph from 1980.

“A Hindu published an article some time ago in a native magazine in which he urged that Christianity be adopted at the national religion of India, because, as he said, ‘I know what I’m talking about.’ Here in this country we give all for our religion and often keep ourselves poor in doing so. But I have been to America, and I know that there are millions of professing Christians in that land who spend more for gasoline than they do for God, more for their own personal pleasure than they do for the advancement of the faith they profess.”⁴

That remains a stinging indictment of *bargain basement discipleship*, which

² Raymond McHenry, *Stories for the Soul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 48.

³ The exact count remains controversial among researchers, so I have given a range; see christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.

⁴ Quoted in Earl L. Douglas, *Strength For The Day* (no date or page).

is the finely honed church practice of *making easy* what God has made hard and *making cheap* what God made costly.⁵ We Methodist preachers have become highly skilled at it, maybe the best in the world at making sharp edges smooth and round. It's church membership without church discipline, tipping instead of tithing. It's preaching that would rather be popular than prophetic, happy feelings instead of holy living. It's having the name *Methodist* in your obituary when you rarely darkened the door. It's the baptism of infants and marriage of couples without serious instruction, and the idea that the Rotary Club or my favorite TV program deserves about the same level of loyalty as Jesus. It's listening to sermons and never cracking your Bible. It's paying the minister to take care of the church and then to stay out of your life and away from your friends. It's having a certain feeling of nostalgia about the faith but no real understanding so you prefer sentiment to substance.

What is bargain-basement discipleship? It's coming to church expecting inspiration rather than conviction. It's thinking you're doing God a favor by being here. It's the church as the last custodian of morality and manners but not the alternative society of salty saints Jesus imagined. It's knowing where my next vacation will be and not what my mission is. It's being in the church for decades and still feeling embarrassed instead of confident when issues of faith come up. It's having convictions only when convenient. It's a therapeutic Jesus who fulfills my highest dreams and fills me with self-esteem. It's the cross as a piece of jewelry instead of a lifestyle. It's God as *the man upstairs* and your choice of six of Ten Commandments. *Church lite*. Bargain basement Christianity used to sell well, which is why so many of us preachers took out a franchise, but it's not cutting it any longer. It is not that we are overtly wicked so much as superficial with just enough of the Christian virus to inoculate us against a full-blown case of the disease. It is the

⁵ Recent works on discipleship include Michael Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), *Following The Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 2006), *Living in Christ's Presence* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 2014); Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006); Alan Andrews, ed., *The Kingdom Live: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010). On Luke's particular vision, see Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1995), Chapter 5, "Let them take up the cross daily," 102-121. For an article summarizing several books and from which the appendix to his sermon is drawn, see Anthony Robinson, "Follow me," *Christian Century*, Sept. 4, 2007, 23-25.

religion of the multitude and not the costly discipleship Jesus advocates. Everything was going just fine on the Jerusalem journey till Jesus suddenly turned on them.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

1. Cost And Example (vv. 25-26)

Luke is clear: Jesus was popular. You would be too if you could heal the sick and cast out demons and call back the dead as effectively as he did. None who came to him were turned away. He was a one-stop-shop for human restoration as a window into what the kingdom of God was about, a preview of coming attractions when all would be made whole. In him there was forgiveness- a new relationship with God; there was physical healing- a new relationship with yourself and your community; and there was deliverance- a liberation from spiritual oppression and torment.⁶ Jesus was hot and had lots of hangers-on and wanna-be’s, the Jesus mob, and you can see why. He was an oasis of life in a landscape of death. Jesus was accessible and high-touch. He was popular, so popular if you’d taken an aerial photo of verse 25 it might have looked like a shot of the Boston marathon, “Now great multitudes accompanied him.” Jesus was a rock star, and for good reason. To be near him was to see and feel what love was like up close. He was a sign of hope.

Have you ever had someone turn on you? Things were going well; they then turned and spoke more directly than you were prepared for? “And Jesus *turned* and said to them...” At a command of the Spirit he spun around. It was time to trim the numbers and count the costs. Time to expose the idol most people held dear, which in the culture of his day was family.⁷ Two of the ten commandments are about family: honor mom and dad, and no adultery. It was in the family Jewish faith was passed on; every man was expected to marry and raise children. It was a sacred obligation Jesus did not fulfill for the sake of his mission, and you can bet it stirred questions in Nazareth. What’s wrong with him? Why did he all of a sudden wander off into the desert and abandon his family. An oldest son, to think of that!

⁶ For a recent summary article, see Graham Twelftree, “Deliverance and Exorcism in the New Testament,” in William Kay, Robin Parry, editors, *Exorcism and Deliverance: Multi-disciplinary Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 45-68.

⁷ On the sociology of ancient families, see Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009).

How offensive Jesus' words were is hard for us to grasp. A rough paraphrase might go something like this, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate the United States of America and his Southern heritage and the Clemson Tigers and his favorite hobby and his family name, yes, and even his own hunting dog, he cannot be my disciple." That's my upstate South Carolina good-ole-boy version, but you get it.

Now we ought to spend some time noting that Matthew in his version changes the harsh word *hate* to the comparative *loves more* and that exaggeration for the sake of shock value was one of Jesus' teaching techniques.⁸ He verbally slapped them in the face. Discipleship is an exclusive new loyalty, a new center; it is allegiance to Jesus. For most of life we may follow him and remain loyal to our families and jobs, but if a choice comes or is forced, it must be Jesus first. So if you are called to preach, to stay in the family business is treason. If you find yourself protesting, "But Lord, they just won't understand," you are about to resign from discipleship.

In recent years it's become tempting to think that the purpose of the faith is to support the family, so we hear messages that Jesus is good for marriage and parenting and budgeting and communication and quality time and building a heritage. This is true so far as it goes, but the danger is it reverses the polarity. Jesus is not the servant of the family; the Christian family at its best is the servant of Jesus and supports his claim on every member. Luke lists not just mom and dad, but also wife and kids and brothers and sisters, the entire system. Jesus goes after the whole mob with a frank recognition the people we love and depend on us may have a very different plan for our present and future than the Lord does. A *happy Christian family* can become an idol, something we serve rather than something that serves our following of Jesus Christ.⁹

But then he goes a notch higher, "Yes, *and even his own life...*" Not just the plans of our family but those we have for ourselves. Our dreams, our hopes, our plans, all on the altar of this wild Nazarene who sets the standards high and announces them publicly. When church becomes pleasant and predictable, when the crowds are good and the money flowing, when religion as success and social adjustment is the order of the day, watch out. Jesus is just about to turn and shake us to the foundations with his uncompromising demands for exclusive loyalty. Only a

⁸ Matthew 10:37-38.

⁹ On this counter-cultural perspective, see Cameron Lee, *Beyond Family Values: A Call to Christian Virtue* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1998).

church where Jesus Christ and his agenda is more important than family or country or life itself can bear witness to the radical nature of God’s kingdom.

Premier Nikita Khrushchev was speaking before the Supreme Soviet and was harshly critical of the late Premier Stalin. During his speech someone in the audience sent up a note, “What were you doing when Stalin committed all these atrocities?”

Khrushchev shouted, “Who sent up that note?” Not a person stirred. “I’ll give him one minute to stand up.” No one moved. “All right,” he said, “I’ll tell you what I was doing. I was doing exactly what the writer of this note was doing- exactly nothing! I was afraid to be counted.”¹⁰

It was that kind of moment for the crowds. A moment of decision: all I know and have loved, or him? All that is familiar, or him? As if family and one’s own life were not enough, Jesus went a higher notch still, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

For them the cross was a frequently seen Roman instrument of torture and humiliation, a way to discourage political dissent. On Friday I saw pictures of two crucified Syrians and heard of six more. It’s a very effective way to say, “Do not act like this person!” To preserve the effect in our day would mean to wear little gold electric chairs or nooses around our necks in place of jeweled crosses. Walk with the crowd to follow Jesus. Level one of commitment. Give up your family dreams if required. Level two. Surrender running your own life. Level three. Embrace the shame of a humiliated Jesus. Level four. To call Jesus *Lord*, as we do in the church, is to give him *ahead of time* the right to ask for anything that gets in the way of our obedience to him. In his book *The Christian’s Attitude Toward World Religions* Ajith Fernando writes from the perspective of India:

“One who trusts in Christ will completely give up his idols, horoscopes and other such practices of his old life that go against Christ’s Lordship. When a true believer is made aware of any area in his life that is not yielded to Christ, he will yield it. When he is made aware of a Christian principal to be followed, he will follow it whatever the cost. So when a new believer finds out that a follower of Christ should love his enemies, he will do so, even though that seems sheer folly in today’s society. When he finds out that a follower of Christ cannot pay a bribe,

¹⁰ James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1990), 128.

he will stop paying bribes and pay for it dearly as far as his success in society is concerned. When he finds out that a follower of Christ treats high and low caste people, both rich and poor as equals, he will do so, however hard it may be for him.”¹¹

Cultural Christianity is easy; being an apprentice of Jesus is radical. It makes you different from those who adhere to some folk version of the faith that knocks off the sharp edges and explains away the tough words. Bishop Walpole, once said to a friend who was weighing a call, “If you are uncertain of which of the two paths to take, choose the one on which the shadow of the cross falls.”¹²

Voluntary suffering for the sake of others, freely embraced and offered without complaint as a consequence of being Jesus’ follower: this is the meaning of the cross. I don’t design yours; you don’t design mine; one’s been custom-fitted for each of us. Pastor Ray Ortland helps us here when he writes:

“You and I are not integrated, unified, whole persons. Our hearts are multi-divided. It's like we have a board room in every heart. Imagine: a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a whiteboard. A committee sits around the table in your heart. There is the social self, the private self, the work self, the sexual self, the recreational self, the religious self, and others. The committee is arguing and debating and voting, constantly agitated and upset. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision. We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is that we're just divided, unfocused, hesitant, and unfree.

“That kind of person can *accept Jesus* in two ways. One way is to invite him onto the committee. Give him a vote too. But then he becomes just one more complication. The other way is to say to him, ‘My life isn't working. Please come in and fire my committee, every last one of them. I hand myself over to you. I am your responsibility now. Please run my whole life for me.’”¹³ This is discipleship.

¹¹ Quoted in *Christianity Today*, Volume 36, No. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, Volume 31, No. 18.

¹³ Ray Ortund, “What Does It Mean to Accept Jesus?” blog (6-4-10).

2. Two Accounting Parables (vv. 28-30, 31-33)

I find it instructive that Jesus did not leave the crowd hanging on the hook of his demands. He went on to tell two stories. One from their agricultural world, “*Which of you, desiring to build a tower...*” and one from the world of geo-politics, “*Or what king, going to encounter another king in war...*” What holds the two together is they start with a question, give unfavorable consequences, and contain the phrase “sit down and count the cost” in the first story and “sit down and take counsel” in the second. In the first the sitting down is alone; in the second it’s clearly with counselors. Sometimes we need help to make good decisions. Bad enough to leave a half-built tower, much worse to leave half an army dead in the field. For one you get laughed at by the locals, for the other written up in the history books as a fool. But that is what happens when people follow Jesus and only later count the costs after they’ve become unacceptably high. Preachers who don’t lay out the costs ought to be charged with deceptive advertising. If you’ve ever hear me or another lay out some *sweet Jesus who promises to solve all your problems and not add any new ones*, you have my permission to stand up and walk out because you’ve been lied to.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not totally against decisions made under inspiration; I’ve made a few myself, but few stick. When the goose bumps go, so do the vows. Jesus does not say *come forward while the choir sings* but *sit down and count the cost*. Get out your calculator and your calendar. Talk to your broker. Examine your contractual obligations. Don’t make a hasty decision. Your life rides on this one. Is this something you really want to do? Is Jesus trustworthy? How do you know? He thinks so, but do you? Is he more attractive than anything else in life? Is he the way and the truth and the life and the smartest and most loving man who ever lived? Is he the human face of the living God?

Bargain basement discipleship is a reduced message, and Jesus is against it. He doesn’t make it easy to follow him. He wants all to follow him because it means life, but not ignorantly and not naively, not superficially and not temporarily, and not on the basis of emotion alone. John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer fits the call to count the cost perfectly:

“I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
Exalted for thee or brought low by thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”¹⁴

Like wedding vows, that prayer covers all possibilities and leaves no escape clause except death. When Luis Gonzales played outfield for the Astros his personal motto was “Go hard, or go home.”¹⁵ That’s what Jesus say to the multitudes who followed and what Wesley offered in his prayer. “Go hard, or go home.”

My guess is that they peeled off like layers of an onion. Some left at the word about family. “This is too much!” Others when the phrase *his own life* challenged their preferred future. “I’ve got plans.” Still others with the word about the cross and more after a time of sit-down reflection. “The cost is too high. Goodbye Jesus.” More often than not, when John Wesley visited one of the societies, the numbers would shrink because of his discipline. Church growth is not unimportant, but church health is to be preferred. We are in the business of making disciples according to the original pattern, not in numbers games or easy-believism.

1' All Your Stuff At His Disposal (v.33)

But just to be sure he’d trimmed away all the fat and left only lean, Jesus returned to the demand in verse 33, “So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce *all that he has* cannot be my disciple.” Pile it all up. Car, boat, house, bank balance, clothes, pictures, mementoes, credit cards, degrees, retirement and health plans, land, whatever you own; put it all in one big pile. Draw up a statement of net worth. And if Jesus Christ and following him is not more attractive than that pile, you cannot follow him, at least not every very far. You won’t make it. You will always return to the pile. This is about everything you own at his disposal, so that he doesn’t have to ask for it or argue with you when he needs it. Tithing is not the goal; it’s simply

¹⁴ *The U. M. Hymnal*, No. 607.

¹⁵ Raymond McHenry, *The Best Of “In Other Words,”* (Houston: TX: Raymond McHenry, 1996), 73.

practicing with a little bit for when Jesus comes for a bigger chunk. It's easy to come up with a balance sheet of what you own? But who own me, and who owns you?

2' The Call To Stay Salty (vv.34-35)

There are some truly worthless things in life. My list includes accountants who embezzle, preachers who flatter and bishops who don't *bish*, a can with no shaving cream, a dog that won't hunt, a flashlight with no batteries and a Bible with an unbroken binding. But one of the worst is to have a perfectly cooked piece of prime rib laying there, aroma filling your mouth with juices, and no salt. No selective sprinkling of sodium chloride to bring out the best of the beef. It tastes flat and unappealing, not worth the price you paid for a premium cut.

Modern table salt, being pure, does not lose its taste, but in that day salt was formed by evaporation from the Dead Sea. All kinds of minerals in what was left, particularly gypsum. And if the sodium chloride leached out because of moisture, what was left looked like salt but had no salty taste. It was utterly worthless, a joke. Not even good for the manure pile, said Jesus using the graphic word *dunghill*.

What is more worthless than a backslidden Christian? Just enough religion to make them miserable. Neither a happy pagan or a joyful believer. They know too much to go back and love too little to go forward. Laughed at by the world, no good to God. Useless. Even the *dunghill* doesn't want it. Don't let that happen to you. Stay salty. Let your presence season and bring out the flavor of everything that's good in life. Get radical for Jesus. Take risks in faith. Pray for the impossible. Ask God to put you on the edge where faith is required. Those kind of people have an effect all out of proportion to their numbers. Like salt, compared to weight of the meat, it doesn't take much to change the flavor of the whole. John Wesley wrote, "If I had three hundred men who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I would set the world on fire."¹⁶

In 1955 God had such a prepared one in Montgomery, Alabama. She was a seamstress, a devoted follower of Christ and member of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Somewhere between Bible study and Sunday preaching a notion crept into her head that Jesus had something to teach a segregated world about justice and community. So one fine Montgomery morning in December she *sat down*, as Jesus

¹⁶ Albert M. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 27.

said, to count the cost. Not for a tower but in a battle for bus seats. She was told to move to the back so that a white patron could have her seat. In an act of the Christian courage she said *No* and went to jail. The next Monday night 10,000 followers of Christ gathered together at her church to pray and to ask God, “What do we do next?” The costs were high. Many beaten, many imprisoned, some died. But eventually it changed the conscience of a nation. Rosa Parks was a salty saint who sat down and counted the cost of following Jesus.¹⁷ Hers was no bargain basement discipleship.

CONCLUSION

You have two of each. Lovers look into the eyes and call them the windows of the soul. Only your mother or doctor looks in your ears, then only to clean out the accumulated crud. My mother used to say, “Son, you could grow tatters in there!” Eyes are more beautiful than ears, but when it comes to Jesus the ear has priority. Words are heard, and it is in the speech of Jesus that we have access to the truths of revelation.

Reach up and touch them- those big folds of skin on either side of your head. Some of you can create quite a breeze if you flap ‘em back and forth. Some of you have bristles growing out of them. They’re very useful organs. “Faith comes by *hearing*,” said Paul in Romans, “and hearing from the Word of God.”¹⁸ More than anything Jesus wants us to listen. An open ear can soften a hard heart and instruct a mind ignorant of God. “If you got ‘em,” said Jesus, “use ‘em. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” He then turned and continued his journey to Jerusalem, content with whoever stayed with him. And unless something in my or your life changes after this message, we simply haven’t heard what Jesus is saying.

¹⁷ John Ortberg, “A Mind-Expanding Faith,” *Preaching Today*, Tape. No.126.

¹⁸ Romans 10:17.

“Follow Me: A Renewed Focus On Discipleship” vs. “Church as Civic Club” Model
(Disciple = 269x in New Testament, Christian = 3x)

Issue	Church-as-club (mainline malaise)	Church-as-disciples (minority report)
Terms	I am a Member, church has a club feel with a low expectation for change. One of many beneficial civic associations.	I am a Student, Follower of Jesus, Kingdom apprentice, church as discipleship culture, central commitment of life.
Gospel/ Good News	Reduced to baptism, conversion, entry into heaven, neglects much of here and now life, often reduced to a civic faith, good works, being nice, fitting in.	Present reality of the kingdom of God through a relationship with Jesus in which we become students in a school of whole-life transformation to become like him.
Mission of church	Comfort and satisfaction of members as customers & consumers of religious services in comparison to other churches. A caring community.	To worship God and to mobilize all as ministers and living extensions of Jesus Christ to make a difference where they live. To invite others to follow Christ.
Role of clergy	Chaplains, counselors, trained experts, markers of events in the key rituals of life: birth, marriage, death, etc.	Fellow follower, coach and trainer of disciples, leader in mission, guards and promotes the mission and vision.
What matters	Length of involvement, cultural status	Faith and faithfulness, spiritual gifts
Tradition	<i>little t</i> = Focus on our history, our lore and legends, the way we always done it.	<i>Large T</i> : Scripture, Sacraments, Church Doctrine, holy living
Introduction	“Been a member here for (x) years... My family founded...”	“I’m a Christ follower, involved in and outside the church using the Spirit’s gifts.
Staff	The people we pay to do it. Evaluated on what they do as employees.	Specialists who keep us on track and encourage us in our ministries. Evaluated on what they enable others to do in a gift-based church culture where all serve.
Spiritual Formation	Attend well-planned events for their entertainment and inspirational value as passive observers, offer critiques.	Learn and practice spiritual disciplines for transformation, active participants, appreciative of the help and work of others.
Stewardship	Tip, pay my dues, invest elsewhere.	Tithe and more, invest time and money in the mission which captures my heart.
Activity	Heavy on programming, often impersonal and at-arms-length.	Heavy on relationships, life-to-life learning and experimentation that is vulnerable and self-revealing, process oriented.
Prayer	Up-front by professionals	Diffuse and passionate
Focus of loyalty is	Paying institutional apportionments	Fellow disciples, our common mission
Identity	Building focused: invite people inside	Mission focused: go outside
Energies	Busy, full-service, cluttered	Simple church, focused
High status service	Institutional concerns: Finance, Trustees, Conference issues	Missional concerns: Outreach, Prayer, Evangelism, Social action, Service