

Rev. Charlie Holt:

Father, we ask that you would be filling us with the knowledge and love of your son, Jesus Christ, who calls us actually to a radical discipleship, where we are to give our lives completely and totally to Him. And so we ask that the ministry and preaching of your Word might be His Word, and for the sake and glory of His name, it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

We've come to a section in the Gospel of Luke that is, there's actually three of these parts in Luke where Jesus is inviting those who are following Him to really stop and think about whether you really want to be a Christian. Do you really want to be a follower of Jesus? And He calls the question on the crowds that are following Him. This is part of a larger section, which is called the travel narrative. In Luke's Gospel, it starts when Jesus moves out of the ministry and Galilee and starts to turn His attention and His focus towards Jerusalem, where He knows that He is to die on a cross for the sins and salvation of the world. And He begins to teach that to His disciples. Three times in the travel narrative section, Jesus will say that the Son of Man must suffer at the hands of the chief priests and the scribes, and that He would die, and that three days later He would rise from the dead. And this, of course, was not what they were thinking that the Messiah was coming to do. In their mind, the Messiah was coming to solve all the earthly and worldly problems, to get rid of the tyrannical Roman governor and bring Israel back on top, and solve all the poverty and wealth issues, and so on. In other words, turn the upside-down nature of this world on its head, all in a strong military fashion. And instead, what Jesus said is, "I, as the Messiah, have come to die,

and to unseat a deeper evil, Satan and the spiritual forces of evil." But then the corollary to that, and this is what our passage is about today, is that if the Messiah has come to pick up His cross, then what does it mean to be a follower of a cross-carrying Messiah?

Well, if you want to be my disciple, you must also pick up your cross and follow me. And three times through the travel narrative, He talks about this.

And so what Jesus is asking is for us to really sit down and count the cost of that for our lives personally. Think about that on a very, very deep level.

Am I really willing to do that? Am I prepared to do that? Do they have the capacity to do that? And then to commit.

So the first thing He does is He says, "There were large crowds following Jesus, and He turned and He said to them, 'Whoever comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.'" So the first thing that we need to do is to sit down and really get a sense of what exactly is Jesus calling us to do.

And this is a really hard passage where you hear that and you're like, "I need to hate my parents, and I need to hate my children and my wife and my brother and sisters and my even myself." Is that really what Jesus is calling me to? Is that the goal of the Christian life, is hate?

And one of the things that we need to think about with that is it's not hate in the sense of emotional hostility. That is one sense in which hate is sometimes used in the Scriptures.

But this is a different idiom or different way of speaking that is used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, that really comes down to what are your ultimate priorities in your life.

What is your ultimate allegiance to? An example in the Old Testament of what is called the comparative idiom of the use of this word is back when Jacob had two women that he loved, Rachel and Leah, and he actually ended up marrying both of them, which I don't advise, marrying more than one wife. That is not good. You're supposed to be a man of one wife, so don't get too. But Jacob did that. And one of the things that it says in the text is that Jacob loved Rachel and he hated Leah.

And it wasn't that he hated her in the sense of didn't love her, but that he hated her in the sense that she was secondary.

Now, if you want to be and desire to be, and expect to be in the primary position and the one that you're wanting to be loving you in the primary position,

loves another one before you, what does that feel like?

It feels like you're hated.

And this is what Jesus is getting at with all of our family relationships.

One of the biggest problems in our world is that all of our priorities are out of whack,

that we have things that are taking primary positions in our life that should not be. I've often sat down with couples and I've asked them, "Okay, order what you think the ideal priority order should be in your life." And they'll list off, "Well, God." I think they always say that because they're meeting with a priest, but they always say, "God should come first. God should be first." I'm like, "Yes, that's right. Jesus is first." And then what's next? And then sometimes they say, you know, "My wife or my husband." Good. Marriage is second. Okay, what's after that? Your children, great. Okay, and then I always kind of throw this one in, "Well, where does your job fit in?" And I'm like, "Well, that's be like after your wife and kids." Good.

And you might stick your extended family, your brothers and sisters, and your parents in there somewhere before your job or after your job, but that's usually the order. And I say, "That's what we say is the ideal order, but what happens in reality? What do you think is really what happens in most people's lives? What becomes the number one thing?"

What? Their job? Or football, but Gator fans are being disillusioned of that consistently.

Yeah. Your hobbies, golf, fishing, whatever it is.

But more often than not, we will take something that is supposed to be third or fourth in order and make that the number one thing. In fact, the word for "idle" in the Old Testament was always the work of our hands.

And so they worshiped cows, which was kind of a weird thing to worship, but if you are a herdsman,

a cow is exactly the thing that you would worship if you were going to worship the work of your hands.

You would make that into a golden cow. In fact, we still call companies that give a lot of money to us cash cows, and we call it a bull market because that language is still there that we still worship cows.

And so what Jesus is challenging us as we first sit down, and this is something we all need to do,

is order our priorities. "Do I love," and he's really messing with us, "Do I love my parents more than I love Jesus?"

I'll give you an example from just very personal to me. When I was in college, I come from a long line of car washers, as many of you know. My grandfather started the first car wash in Jacksonville in 1951. It was one of the first full-service car washers in the nation's history, actually. And it was right downtown on Main Street, Main Street car wash. So he put his sons into the business, and my dad is a son-in-law into the business. And there were car washes all over Jacksonville that all belonged to my family. We're like the car wash mafia.

"You want your car wash, you come to us." So I was the heir of that. My dad had several of them, and he was building this incredible business. You want to talk about a profitable business? It was a great business at the time when I was in college, and I was looking at business school. I went to University of Florida. I did business school, and I was preparing to inherit the family business, and then Jesus got a hold of my life.

In my junior year of college, I felt called to go into the ministry, and I absolutely felt called to do that.

And one of the most difficult things that I ever had to do, and one of the reasons why I did it, actually, was because of this passage right here, where I just heard the voice of the Lord speaking to me through this very passage.

And I knew exactly what Jesus meant. He didn't mean I needed to go and despise my father.

But what he was saying was, I needed to be willing to create distance in that relationship, and maybe even hurt that relationship for the sake of following Jesus.

And so I went to my dad, who's now a member of this church, by the way, and he's not here today, but he would remember this very well, but I went and had dinner with him, and I said, "Dad, I think it's wonderful that you want to give me this business, but I've really thought about this, and I've considered the cost of what I'm about to say, but I feel called to go into the ministry."

He was speechless. He was absolutely dumbfounded by that. It was like a punch in the gut to my father to hear that.

And my stepmother said, "Well, I think that's wonderful, Charlie. What do you think, Charlie?" who's my dad's name, and he goes, "I don't know what I think about that. That's the first I've ever heard of it."

Ouch.

But here's the thing.

Jesus is calling us to order our relationships in the right order, and that doesn't mean that I couldn't have a good relationship with my father or my spouse or my children or my brothers and sisters,

but their place had to come in the divine ordering.

And this is true not just of clergy. This is true of every single one of you, that we all have to assess what are our priorities in life and where does Jesus fit in. And there are certain things that are kind of small, you know, that are... they seem small, but they're still hard. I mean, I kind of joked about football, but where does football fit into your Sunday weekly worship? Does it take priority over worshipping the Lord sometimes? Well, we're hitting that season, aren't we? And we got the Jaguars and we got the Gators and the Seminoles and the Georgia Bulldogs and all these wonderful things that we can be doing with our time,

but where does the priority of our time work in our hearts and our lives?

Same thing with our relationship to money and giving and so on.

Jesus said that not only do we need to sit down and really think about our priorities, but we need to estimate the costs involved in these things because when we begin to reorganize our lives around Jesus Christ and put Him at the center and orient everything else around it, there will actually be painful discussions and sacrifices that get made as we begin to do this type of work. There was the illustration that He uses. He says, "Which of you intending to build a tower doesn't first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, he might lay a foundation and is not able to finish. All who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." There actually is a great example of this in Orlando. There was a Christian Trinity broadcast, I think is the name of the TV station. I might have that wrong, but basically, they decided that they were going to build a high-rise right on I-4 in Altamont Springs.

It was an 18-story building. They got it all designed by an architect, and they started to build it, but they made this commitment to themselves that they were only going to build it as people from the television audience funded it.

I'm not sure how much of the money that was given all landed into the building. Some of it might have gone to the administrative costs, but the money was coming in, but it wasn't enough. So this building, an 18-story building over decades now, has been incomplete.

It's supposed to be called the "Majesty Tower."

And instead, what people call it is the "I-Soar on I-4." Google it. It's a lot written about it, because people in that area are not happy about it. But it's a fantastic example of somebody who did not do the feasibility study of counting the costs.

We're in the middle of thinking about building some buildings and redoing roads and that sort of thing, and that's one of the important things that we're doing right now, is doing a feasibility study, where you not only study what things cost and what you're planning to build, but you also then have to ask the question of whether this is something that is supported by the congregation and whether we can afford it and these kinds of things. And so, you know, like one thing I want you to know is we will not be building the "I-Soar on Artiga Boulevard." I don't want to do that. I don't want us to start a project and not be able to finish it. That is not something that we want to do. It's bad stewardship, and that's what Jesus is saying, not just about buildings, but about our lives.

We have to do a feasibility study when it comes to whether we can truly follow Jesus.

I spent a lot of time with young couples talking to them about marriage when they're preparing for marriage. I asked to meet with them like three or four times before they get married, and a lot of couples really discount that premarital counseling, which is sad, but they shouldn't, because they're about to make a lifelong covenant commitment to something. They're going to be married to somebody, and with a difficult profession in life, being married, that they actually have never done before, so it's a lot harder than you think it might be when you're all in love and the romance is flowing. One of the couples that I was interacting with, who was very romantically in love, they were just such a cute couple. They looked like they went together, and they had a beautiful relationship, and every conversation I ever had with them was just really fun, actually.

And yet his parents were Roman Catholic, but they were Persian Roman Catholics. They were from Iran, and they were very strict Persian Roman

Catholics, and she was Episcopalian, and so here they were coming to me to honor her family and to get married in the Episcopal Church, but his family said, "Unless she converts to Persian Roman Catholic, you will be dead to us as a son." And that was the pressure that they put on their son, and that is a very Middle Eastern way of looking at things, and it used to be even an American way of relating. And it was not just with Catholics and Protestants, it could go with Presbyterians and Methodists. I mean, it was, it could be tough. I'm not letting you marry those Methodists, but this guy, this couple, I mean, we had to talk about that. And while the rainbows and the butterflies were flying all around, I had to sit down and say, "Have you really thought about this? I mean, you're going full steam ahead, and I see a train wreck coming your way. I don't think you've really counted the costs of what your parents are saying and what you're proposing to do with your life." And when we had those tough discussions, and this young man, I mean, as he, to his credit, as he started thinking about it, and he realized his parents were serious because they had done it to his sister, and they no longer talked, even mentioned her name at the dinner table.

He broke off the marriage because she wasn't willing to convert and to submit to that family order.

And it was heartbreaking, and I, you know, I was so sad for her because he, in all other ways, was a great guy. But I had some time with her just one-on-one. I said, "Aren't you grateful that you know where his allegiances really are and his loyalties? You know what the Scriptures teach about marriage is that you are to leave your father and mother and cleave to your wife and be joined to your spouse."

And here was a young man that was unwilling to do that work of reprioritizing his life around a new nuclear family. And if she had gone through with that, there would have inevitably been a divorce on the horizon, and it probably wouldn't have taken very long at all.

So, count the costs of your discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's not always tough things like that, but some people are called to do things that are pretty radical. There was a couple of brothers that started a crane business,

big, heavy equipment that builds buildings like the Destiny Tower, Alan and Eric Barnhart.

And they started this business, and they felt called by the Lord to decide what enough was for their salary.

And so, they personally were studying passages about love of money and so on. And the brothers made a commitment that they were just going to pay themselves a set salary, and the rest of the profits of this company were going to be given to the Lord.

And so, this became a \$250 million company. And yet, consistently, they just paid themselves a set salary. And it wasn't a bad salary. I mean, they were living well, but they weren't making what became \$100 million of profit.

And personally, taking that into their own income, instead, what they did is they dropped that company and gave it away to the National Christian Foundation. 99% of the shares are in a foundation, and 100% of the profits of that company are given away to charities that are determined by the 1% shareholders, who are the employees of that company.

Wow. Now, did they sit down and really think about the cost of that? I'm sure they did, but what a sacrifice that was made on behalf of their Christian commitment, and doing that as what they sensed was their calling as Christian disciples.

Jesus would go on to say, "Therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions."

And that's literally what those two brothers did, was they made a sacrifice of their company unto the Lord.

Now, I'm not saying that that is what all of us are called to do. I don't think every one of you is supposed to give up your family business and join the ministry. I don't think that's what you're supposed to do.

In fact, I don't think it's for any one of us to tell another person what your cross to bear is. And this is the sacrifice that you need to make for Jesus. And, you know, every single one of us have difficult situations and challenging places where we might be called to give up something personally, or we might have to confront a challenging relationship, or do something, you know, stand up for our integrity and our business versus compromise. But there are all kinds of situations that come up in life and following Jesus. And I am not the boss of you. I'm not the one that will tell you, "Today is your day to die, to self."

But what I will challenge you to do is to take those moments and those situations and those questions and really wrestle with them before the Lord, because that's what He's calling us to do.

To sit down with them and to count the costs, to see what that commitment or that challenge might be, and then ask yourself the hard question of whether I'm willing to do that. And I'm going to take resources to pay the cost. It'll take personal resources. And maybe I'm talking about money, but really what I'm talking about is courage and honesty and truthfulness and sober thinking and assessing life with faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Lord, and really taking a look at self and where I fit in my relationship with Him. And I'm talking about a relationship with God, and that's hard. But it also takes spiritual resources and a recognition that you are children of God and heirs of the kingdom of God, and you're not without help. The Lord loves you, gave His life for you to purchase you, and you have the gift of the Holy Spirit in your heart and in your life. You have power to do these things. And the Lord is not going to ask you to do something that isn't good for you. These disorderings of our life are actually tyrannical, idolatrous problems that have to be dealt with. And when we reorder our lives around the kingdom of God and His faithfulness, ultimately,

even though it might involve temporary sacrifice, ultimately it will involve tremendous blessing and the gift of the kingdom itself.