

Over the past month I've had the tremendous privilege of marrying two young couples from our church. And while both weddings were beautiful and glorious, I am always laser-focused on the covenant ceremony. In it, I tell the bride and groom what God's Word demands of them as godly husbands and wives. I use words like faithfulness, give up your life, serve, honor, love, respect, humble, forgive, build up. And then I say "As you enter into this covenant today, you are committing to live with one another in that way." In other words, "Here's what it's going to cost you, so make sure you are on board before you commit your lives to one another." Most would agree it is worth the cost.

That level of commitment, and the sober assessment of whether we want to pay it, is not reserved for just marriages. There is another relationship that is far more important, and that is our relationship with Jesus. Over the last several weeks we have been looking at some of the very hard things Jesus says about what it means to follow him and, this morning, we come to the most challenging of all of them. Jesus is going to make clear that, while salvation is free, the cost of discipleship is everything. And the question he has for us is "Do you really want to be my disciple, or do you want the benefits of heaven without the cost of following?" Jesus is saying what I say to brides/grooms: "This is what it is going to cost you, so make sure you are on board before you commit your life to me." So let's count the cost and see if we want to pay it.

[Luke 14:25-30, 33] ²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, 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 begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'...³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Most of the passages we've looked at so far have been Jesus addressing disciples or Pharisees, while the crowd has been within earshot. But here, he addresses the crowd, which we've seen grow over the course of the series. Jesus is attracting more and more people, but not all are there to see and follow their Messiah. Some are there for the show or to get the benefits of being close to Jesus without having to meet his demands. So, Jesus gives what you could call a crowd-thinning sermon. It's kind of like a weed-out course in discipleship. **Jesus is not interested in attracting a crowd. He's interested in leading a following.** So he does something very confident and courageous. He tells them the demands of discipleship knowing it will cause some to bail out. He sets the bar of discipleship so high that many will say "no thanks".

We could learn a lot from Jesus both as individuals and as the church. We are at the end of the age of the attractational church, the few decades the American church did all they could to get as many people in the door as possible. And while there was fruit in that and many people came to faith, an unintended consequence was the diminishing call of discipleship. What Jesus set high, we began to set low so that we would not lose anyone. The problem, though, is that weak discipleship leads to weak faith, very little life change, and an impotent witness to the world. The

promise of heaven became enough, and many Christians continued to live a worldly life, knowing they'd see Jesus in eternity. I was one of them for my late teens and early 20's.

That's why Jesus is still preaching this message today. He is still weeding out the crowd, interested in quality over quantity, and he has pruned his church the last couple of years. While there has been loss, there has also been great gains, and Fellowship Dallas is proof of that. When someone asks me to describe our church, I say we are lean and hungry. We are a body leaning in, listening to the Lord, eager to live our lives with and for him, and open to receiving anyone who walks through our doors to belong to this family and become more like Christ. Still, we must check ourselves and be challenged by Jesus' words. Where does he set bar?

Jesus says if you want to be his disciple you must hate your parents, spouse, and children and, yes, even your own life. OK, Jesus. You got our attention. This likely hits you pretty hard, maybe confuses you, and likely concerns you. We know the Law says we are to honor our mother and father, love our families, love our neighbors, and even love our enemies. So why is Jesus telling us to hate. Well, we have to understand what the Bible means by the word "hate". In the Old Testament Hebrew, "hate" can mean "to love less". We see this in Genesis 30 where we're told Jacob loved his wife Rachel but hated his other wife, Leah. But then it goes on to say he loved Rachel more. When Jesus tells us to hate our family and even ourselves, he's not telling us to actively loathe. It's to make him our first love. It's a call to change allegiances where Jesus is #1 in our lives.

The great theologian Augustine, Auggy the big fat doggy, according to one of my seminary profs, said a holy and just life is possible only when we love things in the right order. Jesus is giving us that order. Him first, family second, self last. But it goes just beyond an ordering. Jesus is inviting us into a love relationship with him, emotions and all. The Gospel is not just about heaven and forgiveness and peace. Those are benefits, but that's not why we believe. We believe because we get Jesus. God is the gospel. Jesus is to be the greatest desire of your heart, the central focus of your life, the driving force in your decisions. And the love we have for him is to be so great that the love we have for others looks like hate in comparison.

Are you there? Is Jesus the greatest desire of your heart? What is competing? Personally, this is a difficult and convicting passage for me. I'm a family man. My people are sitting in this room, and I would do anything for them. So my loves can get out of order. Not so much for Martha. She tells me all the time she loves Jesus more than me. I'm also doing the thing I love. Ministry is a gift, but the Church can become my first love if I'm not paying attention. What about you?

In our Colossians series I put up a bunch of isms to see where our heart was tempted to go, and it was a significant moment. I've reworked and added to some of those so we can consider what we are loving the most.

Others: Our human relationships are a gift, especially in our families and those in the church. And God calls us to love one another! Anyone take priority over Christ?

Work: Since the beginning we've been called to work. We are co-creators with God, we get worth and satisfaction from being productive and making a difference, and we provide for ourselves and our families. But it can also take our hearts. We can find all our worth there.

Stuff: We put our worth, resources, energy into accumulating more. But none of those things can save, none of those things can ultimately fulfill, and none of those things will last. Jesus doesn't mind you owning stuff. He just doesn't want your stuff owning you.

Pace: He who is busiest wins. We are convinced that if we kill ourselves and our kids with more and more that somehow, we will live the full life. **But nowhere in Scripture does Jesus commend exhaustion, nor does he say a walk worthy of the Lord is one full of achievement.** And when you are maxed out you have no margin or energy for Jesus.

Approval: I called this one Instagram-ism in the spring. We live our lives in public view looking for acclaim and wind up putting our self-worth in the hands of others instead of in the hands of the one who created you and loves you. God clicked the Like button when he sent his son to die for you and reconcile you to himself. We also compare our lives to others and are left disappointed and discontented.

Me: I am the center of my life. I am to be loved and fulfilled no matter the cost. What I feel is what is true. God's role is to make me happy.

Do you see yourself in any of those? Any of those on top of your love list? If you're not sure, go back to the time audit we invited you to do a few weeks ago. **Whatever gets the most of your time likely has the most of your heart.** Jesus wants to be first.

Now, you may be saying ok, I'm ready to make Jesus #1. That's great, but Jesus would tell you to hold on and make sure you understand what you are saying yes to. To illustrate, Jesus the example of a building a tower. It's easy to say you'll build one but, when the time comes to do it, you must count the costs to ensure you have enough to complete the job. Otherwise, you'll get halfway through and be left with half-finished tower for all to see.

For the first 15 years of living in DFW, every time I'd go to Las Colinas, I'd see these tram supports, but no tracks (It finally did get done, as you see in the pic.) It was a project started by the city but left incomplete for a long time. I always thought it looked so bad and was an embarrassment for them. They didn't count the costs, so they didn't see it through.

That's what Jesus is warning us of and challenging us with regarding discipleship. He doesn't want us to casually jump into discipleship and then be surprised and unable to see it through. So he tells us the cost, the standard for all, which is everything, and tells us to count it before you raise your hand and say "I'm in." I'm sure the crowd thinned that day, and I'm sure the crowd thins every time this passage is preached. Are you willing to pay that cost? If you really want to be a disciple, Jesus says that is what it is going to take.

So, how do we pay it? V27 says we are to bear our cross and follow. It's the same command we saw in Luke 9. Discipleship begins by dying to self, identifying ourselves with Jesus, and subjecting ourselves to whatever suffering may come. You may have heard the name Andrew Thorburn this week. He was the chief executive of a soccer team in Australia, that is until they found out he is a member of an evangelical Anglican church in Melbourne. It wasn't because of anything he did or said. The club says his church affiliation is out of alignment "with their values as a safe, inclusive, diverse and welcoming club." He's bearing his cross. As for how else we pay the cost, look at the rest of the series: sacrifice, sitting at the feet of Jesus first, obedience, a public faith, and stewarding our resources for the Kingdom. Pay that cost, and you will be a disciple.

Now, we must take a minute to understand the difference between salvation and discipleship. Some would say they are synonymous. Others would say differently.

Jesus seems to make a distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay a price. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus Christ. Jesus wants as many sinners saved as possible, but He cautions us not to take discipleship lightly...He made it clear that there is a price to pay. - Warren Weirsbe

There is a spectrum of beliefs between salvation and discipleship. Both extremes believe we are saved by grace, through faith, and we agree. But how should that belief manifest and what does it say about our salvation? On one side you are saved when you put your faith in Jesus and, even if there is no change in your life, we can trust you are saved. On the other extreme, you are saved the same way but, if there is no life change, that salvation moment is likely not genuine. I believe we need to live in that tension while making one thing clear. Jesus did everything necessary for you to be saved. We do not earn it by paying the cost and following well. It is a free gift we receive by believing in him where we get credit for his life and he takes the penalty of our sin. But if the internal change of salvation does not produce change externally, we must ask why. If you want all the benefits of salvation but have no desire or intent of paying the cost of discipleship, you need to check yourself. Those are not my words. Jesus himself said, in the end, some will call him "Lord, Lord" but he will say "I never knew you." In other words, there are those who think they are Christians because of some religious activity in their lives but they never truly put their faith in him. Paul says it this way.

[2 Corinthians 13:5] ⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test.

My intent is not to make you walk out today nervous about your eternal state. Ultimately, only God knows if someone is saved, and Romans 8 says the Holy Spirit testifies to us we are children of God. God will not leave you in limbo. But a burden I and many other pastors carry is for those who think they are saved but are not. If you look at your life and see no evidence of change or a desire to pay the cost of discipleship, ask why. If there is any doubt where you stand

with God, determine what you believe and place your trust in Christ if you have yet to truly do so. God wants you with him forever.

Come back and pay up. If you are not currently paying the cost, you are missing out on the life Jesus has for you and, more importantly, missing out on him. As an encouragement, remember discipleship is a process. Tim Keller spoke on this passage and reminded me that death on a cross takes time. So, if Jesus calls us to bear our own cross, it takes time for us to die to ourselves. It's a morbid way to think about it, but it's true. We don't have to read this passage and believe we've got to be perfect today. But we do need to be challenged by it and ensure we are walking in the same direction as Jesus. Perhaps a great place to start is at Next90 next Sunday. It's ok if you haven't been through Repurposed or Younique. Come spend some time seeing what God is up to in your life and how he wants you to begin paying the cost. It will be worth it.

Lastly, abide. **[John 15:9] ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.** If you want to grow in your love for Jesus, you have to rest in his love for you. We don't wake up and say "I'm gonna love Jesus the most today!" We have to let him captivate our hearts, and that only happens when we are with him.

Jesus is saying "Make me #1." It will cost you everything, but it is worth it. No...HE is worth it!