

<sup>25</sup> Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, if he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, everyone who sees it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This fellow began to build, but was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup> Or what king, as he goes out to confront another king in war, will not first sit down and consider if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> And if he is not able, he sends out a delegation and asks for terms of peace while his opponent is still far away. <sup>33</sup> So then, any one of you who does not say farewell to all his own possessions cannot be my disciple. <sup>34</sup> Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how will it become salty again? <sup>35</sup> It is not fit for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

I think I’ve finally found the perfect reading for weddings and anniversaries. Yes there’s nothing quite like telling your wife, she’s number two. I just hope that she understands there isn’t someone else rather that someone else is God and that’s exactly where she should place me as well. We don’t like to be number 2. What sports team wants to be number 2? What product boasts we’re number 2 behind...” You might as well be advertising for the competition or cheering for them. But that’s not what exactly hating – that’s loving less...

Jesus wants us to count the cost of discipleship. He wants us fully aware of what it means to follow him. Jesus is not a salesman, turns to the crowds and tells the people to take a long hard look at what it means to be a Christian. Christianity much like marriage isn’t just something that you want to jump into. Look at your options when it comes to eternity. Jesus doesn’t want an immediate emotional response. Rather he wants careful deliberation as we count the cost and evaluate the consequences. While a disciple looks at the options they are also convinced, “There really isn’t any other option.”

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. He’s left the dinner party at the bigwigs house where they tried to trap him by healing the man with dropsy. Either he is a Sabbath breaker or unmerciful. After healing the man, lecturing them on mercy, he speaks the

parable of the great banquet. Those invited make excuses as to why they can't make it to the banquet. *'Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled.* After that parable it appears that the people have done just that, invited everyone. The crowds gather and follow Jesus. You'd think Jesus would be delighted but instead he turns to them and says, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* If Jesus wanted to get rid of followers this would be the way to do it. Tell people to hate the closest bond in the Middle East – Family. Hate what is closest to you and even your own life? If Jesus wanted large crowds he should have told people to love themselves, think highly of themselves, take time for yourself, but instead he says, *"Hate,"* and *"Cannot be my disciple."*

The parallel passage in Matthew uses the term, "Love less." Luke however says, "hate" with all of its harshness. So is the 4th commandment out of the window? The highest demand of loyalty was for father. Jesus requires what is impossible to the Middle Easterner and that is to hate anything and everything that contradicts or prevents discipleship. They loved family. They depended on family. Family was their source of security. Family was honored above all. They were children of Abraham and God's chosen people. Jesus didn't want them to focus on who their daddy was or what they have done. Instead he calls them to hate family, their life, take up a cross and follow. Jesus wants them to realize that they bring no value to the equation and that should become apparent as they look at the options.

Consider the cost – like a guy building a tower. He'll build a monument to his foolishness if he can't finish. Or like a king waging war he will be a fool and destroy all that he has if he charges into battle without a plan. Make peace before you put to death. *Renounce all that you have or you cannot be my disciple.* Jesus is serious.

Simple enough right. Hate family? – Good I didn't like them anyway. That's why God made brothers and sisters... Amen. Let's go. It's not that simple or easy and Jesus calls for us to seriously consider the call to be a Christian. Some would reduce discipleship down to something that the pastor does on their behalf but Jesus turns to the crowds not just to his apostles. He wasn't looking to the Spiritual Navy Seals to do the hard work. He was looking at any and all who would make the claim to be Christian.

Do you really want to know what it means to be a Christian and follow Jesus? Jesus doesn't want an immediate emotional response. He doesn't want a hasty

decision. Discipleship is serious business in which Jesus/God comes first – before family, friends, and even ourselves. And we are called to hate. Why? It's not the things that we hate that tend to separate us from God but the things we love. Our love for God demands that we hate sin. But look at what kind of disordered people we are. We love the things we are told to hate. We hate the things we are told to love. We love the things that can and will kill us, separate us from God, and instead of fleeing from them, hating them, we think we can cozy up to them. It's the struggle of Romans chapter 7.

I'm fully convinced that there are Christians who have not counted the cost. Who think they can continue to love sin, love rebellion, love family, friends to the detriment of their faith. But what would you call someone who claims to be a Christian but does not know or follow the Ten Commandments, they do not know, gladly listen or hear the Word of God. They do not gather together with the body of Christ. They don't even want to gather together with them because they love the things of this world... You can hardly call them Christian. I'm fully convinced that there are such Christian because I'm one.

They haven't considered the cost of what it means to be a Christian. Discipleship is cross carrying which means people may hate you, persecute you. But we too tend to water down discipleship from suffering and serving to church attendance. Some even want church to be painful. If we don't come to church, pastor is there to babysit. No Jesus shouldn't expect much from the American Christian who is so easily offended that they leave church if music doesn't suit their taste. That's not discipleship. That's a soldier running back to the Commanding Officer complaining, "They're shooting at me."

The life of a disciple costs everything. This could cost you your life. You can't depend on your family to get you there. You can't even depend on yourself. Sit down and count the cost, who has enough to complete a tower? I can't even finish the RV. Sit down and deliberate whether you are able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against you with 20,000. The Christian who turns away as soon as life turns tough is like a fool who couldn't finish or like a king who loses a battle.

Upon counting the cost you'll realize we don't have enough to complete a tower to heaven. We can't wage war with God and win. Our standards are drastically short. And such a disciple isn't worth his weight in salt. That salt is neither fit for food nor the manure pile. God is coming. God hates sin. He is coming to destroy both sin and

sinner in hell. He will come with more than 20,000. You can't win. You can't be his disciple. The options don't look good. They aren't in our favor. It doesn't seem as if we have any option.

That's why Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem. Jesus has carefully considered the cost. He knows it's going to cost him his life and he is ready and willing to lay down his life for you. Jesus has settled the terms for peace with the enemy who has come to destroy you. He carries the cross that we, you and I deserve to bring peace. Jesus was hated. The devil, the world, the sinful nature did their worst to destroy him and kill him. But he came back from the dead. He has considered the cost and that cost was his life for ours. We don't even deserve to be a disciple but that's what he calls us.

That's why we confess, "*I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in my Lord Jesus Christ or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel – enlightened and sanctified and kept me in the one true faith.*" This price paid for us was costly. It came at a great expense to the one who paid it. His holy precious blood. His innocent suffering and death. So we can be his own. There are no other options.

We can build a tower that we can't complete that will end in a monument to our foolishness. We can wage war and lose against the one who comes. We can renounce everything we have, even our family, and everything we can do, and fall on his mercy. We can hate the things that hurt us and try to tear us from him while at the same time honoring father and mother and praying for those who don't know or continue to ridicule you.

We can love the Lord and all that he has done for us. We love because he first loved us. That's why we follow him. We've looked at the options and there is no other way. We have seen how horrible we really are. How our sin really is. You and I are not good enough to prove anything to God.

Consider his cost, and the tremendous cost of Christianity. We may lose life. Family may hate us. Our country may try to exterminate us. Is it worth it? Absolutely. The God who gave his life for me is the one I'll willingly lay down my life for. Though there will be difficult and discouraging days ahead where we wonder if there will be a way out, there is. Jesus is our way out. The kind of commitment that he calls us to is complete, like a marriage. Be dedicated, committed, because he loves you and

wants to save you. He doesn't want anything to get in the way of what he has already won for you, not even the things you love.