

The Cost of Discipleship: A Cross

Luke 14:27

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Let us turn in our Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, verses 25 to 33. Now great multitudes went with Him, and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

Father, we come before You once again, and we ask that You would send the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our understanding, to fill us with Your Spirit. We ask that there might be strength and power to hear, to submit ourselves to Your word. You give me the grace to preach Your word in a way which would magnify the Lord Jesus Christ and would turn the hearts of Your people more fully to You. And we ask that You would get a hold of each person's heart here this day, that they would understand what it means to follow Christ and the cost of being a disciple of our Lord. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We've been considering the costly conditions that our Lord Jesus lays down for this great multitude that was following Him in Luke chapter 14. And He turned to them in verse number 25 and He addressed them, laying down some solemn conditions of discipleship, things that they must be ready for if they would wish to embark on this enterprise of following Jesus Christ as their master, as their Lord, as their Savior. He lays down these costly conditions and illustrates it, as we looked at last week, with the illustration of a builder and of also not only a builder but a king who is going to war. And He says you must consider, as a king will consider and as a builder will consider before they embark on their great enterprise of either war or

building. And they sit down first and they calculate the cost, whether they have enough to finish what they have started in the case of building, or whether I have enough men in battle to succeed in a war.

He says, but the failure for them to sit down and first consider and count always results in the shame of the king or the shame of the builder that leads to mockery and leads to them being despised because of their failure to finish. And Jesus says, in My kingdom, those that want to be My disciples, you also need to do what a king would do and what a builder would do. And you need to sit down and count the costs. And He lays out three areas of costs in this text that was read just this morning that helps us understand, I guess, the compass of the sacrifice that would be involved in being a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. And last week we considered the first of that cost, which was the cost of commitment. We looked at the fact that being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we must have total love and allegiance for Him alone, above all our earthly relationships, that in our lives we are confronted time and time again with people that are most dearest to us that might conflict, it might be a conflict in our hearts concerning the commands of Christ and the expectations of our family or the expectations of our friends or even our own spouses. But what Jesus is simply saying here is that your love for Me must prevail so high that it may even be considered as hatred in their eyes because you love Me more than those that are dearest to you.

But today, I want to look at the second cost of what it means to be a disciple, and that is the cost of a cross. The cost of a cross. Look what He says in verse number 27, "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." There's a lot of modern sentiments and opinions about the cross. In our day in which we live, people view the cross generally speaking as merely a religious status. For Islam, it's the crescent moon. For Judaism, it's the star of David. And for Christianity, it's the cross. And therefore, if you identify with the cross in that way, you're a Christian. Others see the cross in light of superstitiously, where they view the cross as a power to ward off evil. Maybe put it in their car to keep protecting them on the road from an accident or in their household to ward off evil spirits that might come or whatever other fears individuals might have. And they look at the cross more superstitiously. Others look at it merely as a fashion statement. It amazes me that even now there seems to be a comeback regarding the cross placed on the back of a T-shirt, but really doesn't have much regard for the Christianity. There are people that would wear it as just a jewelry accessory, but really themselves would testify that I'm not a Christian. It's just I like it. It's a fashion statement and a symbol.

But there is also not only this general view of the cross that's held to by unbelievers in general, but there's also a theological view of the cross that

Jesus is not referring to here, but we may be mistaken that He is referring to here. And that is the theological view that believers hold to, and we understand the cross to be the cross of redemption. The cross of Jesus Christ that speaks of God's love. That speaks of God's mercy. That speaks of the wrath of God poured out on His Son for His people that we might be redeemed from the bondage and from the power and from the penalty ultimately of sin. And we look at the cross in all these wonderful theological realities that are true, and we glory in its beauty. We glory in what it represents this side of redemptive history. Speaks to us of forgiveness in that theological sense also.

But the statement that Jesus is making in this passage is not particularly theological in terms of what it all means in a theological sense, neither is it in a sense general, but it's rather understood best in its cultural context in the Roman Empire. When Jesus calls His disciples to take a cross and follow Him, or to bear the cross and follow Him, He is talking about the shameful reproach that a cross represented in the Roman world as a form and means of capital punishment. You see, the cross was despised, forsaken, rejected. The cross, as is even said in the Bible, to the Jews is a stumbling block because they understood cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree. And to the Greeks, it was foolishness because it was the utter folly of a man to be hung on a cross because it just spoke to the fact that he was a criminal deserving of death, and there he would be publicly shamed and ridiculed before the world that stood before him.

And so, in the mind of Jesus and in the mind of the great multitudes, they were not thinking of the theological realities of the cross when Jesus was calling them to bear a cross. They were thinking of what Jesus was thinking, and that was the shame and reproach that the cross represented. It was common in the Roman Empire that when a criminal was condemned, that a band of Roman soldiers would come to that criminal with the cross beam. And they would point out that criminal, perhaps out of his village or out of his home or out of his community or wherever he may have been when he was confronted and therefore arrested, and they would compel the criminal to carry the cross to his execution. We see that in the life of Jesus that was carried by Simon of Cyrene, and he carried Jesus' cross along. But the idea was that the Roman soldiers would compel criminals, condemn criminals, to bear their cross to the place of execution.

And it was a form of Roman punishment, but not only that, but it was bearing it to the place of execution. But one thing was true about a man that was carrying a cross, that everyone understood. They understood that this was a man who was an outcast of society, worthy of condemnation and rejection, one who is to be despised, and one that they knew was never coming back. You never saw a man bearing his cross to the place

of execution return the following day to his home. The cross spoke of the shame and reproach and the pathway that eventually led to his death and to his execution.

This was the understanding of the cross in the Roman Empire, and when Jesus calls His disciples to bear a cross and come after Him, He's talking about this pathway of pain, rejection, suffering, and ultimately, even if it so be, death for the sake of His name. The cross, according to Jesus, was not just merely sickness or a tough job situation or difficulty that we might have in our families or among family members. The cross, in the context of Jesus, particularly the cross that we are to bear and come after Him, was the reproach, shame, and rejection that we would experience for the cause of Jesus Christ. As we pursue Him, for our pursuit of Him, we will be rejected, we will be despised, and we will be forsaken. And Jesus wanted His followers to understand this, that if you want to be My disciple, there is a condition, and it is this condition that you must be ready and willing to bear a cross as if it were to the place of your execution and death, bearing the shame and reproach for My name, for My name's sake.

What becomes very interesting is there's a difference and a distinction between what Jesus is asking and what the Roman soldiers did. You say, what's the distinction? Well, here's the distinction. The Roman soldiers compelled criminals to carry their cross. It was involuntary. It was a form of capital punishment. They had no other choice but to carry their cross. It was laid upon them, and they would be whipped, beaten, bruised, and they would carry their cross to their place of execution. It was involuntary. The difference between what Jesus demands of His disciples, and should I say of the world, is different in this sense. Jesus calls those that are following Him or hearing His words to not an involuntary sacrifice, but a voluntary sacrifice of themselves to the place of execution. There's a vast difference, isn't there? Here is a man bearing a cross because he has no other choice but to bear one to the place of his execution because he's a criminal and the soldiers are making him do it. Here is Jesus turning to a multitude and saying to him, "If any of you want to come after Me, if you want to be My disciple, come, bear your cross, and follow Me." I want you to think about that for a moment.

It's in one sense easier involuntarily to bear the cross. There's no conflict of soul as to whether I should or shouldn't. You must bear the cross. In that sense, you're made to bear the cross. But here, Jesus looks at the multitude and says, "If you are not willing to suffer for My name's sake, don't bother following Me. Just walk away. Don't consider following Me." He's calling to Him to a voluntary submission to a pathway of suffering that leads to death for His name's sake. And why this is important is because of this: Most places in the New Testament where we find the command to

carry our cross, it is preceded by an instruction to self-denial. The man who bears his cross involuntary requires no self-denial. But those that are called to bear a cross voluntarily must first come to understand what it means to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and to follow Christ. And this is why the Bible connects in almost every case where you will find these words to bear the cross or to carry the cross, you will see that there is an instruction preceding it or some kind of inference or some kind of implication that you must first deny yourself before you are willing to bear your cross.

And what Jesus is simply saying to the disciples when He connects these things together is, forget about the pathway of suffering if you first don't come to grips with disowning yourself. Because everything in the human heart cries out, no pain, no suffering, no rejection. But Jesus says you must first deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me. Let me give two examples of this. Look in the text with me in Luke chapter 14 and consider with me in verse number 26, the last passage that we looked at last week. "If any man comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, and children, brothers and sisters, and listen to these words, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." See what Jesus simply says, if there is an unwillingness to hate your life also, you cannot be My disciple. Meaning that if you love yourself more than Me, you are not worthy of Me. You cannot follow after Me. It will be impossible. And so, in one sense, in verse 26, He calls them to a sense of self-denial, a rejection and a disowning of their own selves, and a supremacy for the love of Jesus Christ in such a way that they could pursue Him and follow Him and love Him more.

But there's another passage where we look at in Luke chapter 9, if you'd like to turn there, just a few pages over in your Bible. Luke chapter 9, verses 23 and 24. In Luke chapter 9, verses 23 and 24, Jesus says, "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and is himself destroyed or lost?'" Jesus says here very plainly that what precedes the bearing of the cross is a voluntary denial of oneself so that it may voluntarily bear the cross. And in this text, He says daily. And He goes on to show that we must be willing even to lose our lives. Which once again points to that idea of self-denial, of the rejection of the self-life that is so strong within the hearts of mankind.

And so we're called here to a voluntary self-denial, which is a disowning of one's own inclinations, one's own passions, one's own desires, one's own pleasure, so that they might pursue Jesus Christ as their supreme love and might bear His cross and His reproach for His name's sake, even though it may mean the end of their own name. This is what Jesus is calling the

disciples to do, or even calling, should I say, the multitudes to do. And this was part of what it meant to bear the cross in the context of Jesus. This self-denial that precedes so that we might have a voluntary, if I could say, submission to the pain and reproach of the cross of Jesus Christ.

So what is Jesus simply asking of the multitudes? What is He asking of us? Well, He's simply saying to us that we ought to prepare for a pathway of self-denial, suffering, and shame. Simply He says to the multitudes there, just sit down and count the cost. The path which I tread is not a rosy path. Yes, there is much blessing. Yes, there is much joy. Yes, there is much there to cheer the heart. But in this world, you will have tribulation. But Jesus says, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.

You see, the cross is a call to self-denial, suffering, and shame that we must be willing to consider and count before we decide to follow Jesus Christ, or if we ever would even dream of following Jesus Christ. You say, oh, this is just the gospel. Surely this is not the meaning of the Christian message. You can turn to almost any page of the New Testament, and you will find the same teaching that is revealed here in this passage. In fact, the heart of the Christian message is about a Savior who was unworthy of death, who was undeserving of suffering, who was undeserving of reproach, who voluntarily submitted Himself to the will of His Father that He might be the Savior of man, that He might redeem men from their sins and bring in everlasting joy and righteousness. Did He deserve the things that befell Him? No, He did not. But at the heart of the Christian message is a Savior that laid His life down. He became obedient unto death, as the scripture says, even the death of a cross. And therefore, God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. The heart of the Christian message is about this reality.

Jesus did not say to His disciples that when you come to Me and when you believe on Me, you will be received by all men everywhere because they will love you and love Me. In fact, He told them the exact opposite, not only in this passage but in other places of the scripture. Death and self-denial are right throughout the Bible. We look at some of these in our application, but it's right throughout the Bible. Even Jesus Himself said these words, "Except a corn of wheat fall to the ground and die, it abides alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit." And Jesus was talking about His own death, but not only His own death, the call of the disciples also to die with Him and to be fruitful in their ministry for His name's sake. The grain of wheat must first fall to the ground and die, or it abides alone.

When Jesus calls sinners to repentance, what are they being called to? But to deny themselves, to turn from their own lusts and their passions, to turn from the things that grip them, to turn from the things that sat-

isfy them in a worldly sense, and to turn to Jesus Christ alone as their hope and as their salvation. The parable of the sower speaks of a seed that fell among stony ground. And the Bible teaches that they are those which hear the word of God and straightway with joy they receive it, but they have no root in themselves. And so it says when the time comes, after a little while, tribulation and persecution arises, and it says because of the word, because of the cause of Christ, because of the truth of God, because of the very seed that they receive, that blessed gospel, it says they by and by wither away. And they never bear fruits, giving evidence that they belong to Him.

What Jesus is trying to say that it must be understood that there will be trials, there will be afflictions, there will be temptations that will try the faith of those who profess Him as Lord and Savior. Jesus, Paul also says, should I say, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, that all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. You desire to live godly; you must expect persecution. This is the pathway of the Christian life; this is the pathway that is built within the Christian gospel, that we are called to a life of self-denial and co-crucifixion with Jesus Christ, whereby we ourselves are denied, and that Christ is exalted.

The cross of Jesus Christ is taken up by the writers of the epistles to show us that the cross is not just there for the gospel, but it's meant to bear upon all our lives. That the Christian life is one of death and resurrection, is one of self-denial, one of mortification, one of reproach, as was read to us in 1 Peter chapter 4. We must be as those that are willing to be misunderstood for the faith of Jesus Christ and be ones that are reproached for His name. Listen to the words of what Jesus says to His disciples in John chapter 15, verses 18 to 20. He says, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My word, they will keep yours also." What is Jesus telling His disciples? He's telling them, don't be surprised if the world hates you. He's telling them about the cross that they're going to bear for His name's sake. He said, "You know that they hated Me before they hated you."

We think to ourselves, this is very difficult to take. It's very hard to comprehend, to be hated of all men for My sake, to be rejected and despised by the world. Jesus is saying, this is what it means to be My servant. You're no better than the Master. They did it to Me; they will also do it to you. The problem that we have with being reproached for Christ's sake and bearing our cross in that regard is so often, and more often than not, connected to

the idea that we always want to be understood. Jesus is telling His disciples here that they will not understand you. I have called you out of the world. You are not like the world. Don't expect the world to understand you. Therefore, they're going to look at you with ridicule and reproach and think, what is wrong? You're a mad person for doing these things. How on earth are you going to love your enemy? You should be hating that person. How on earth are you going to endure hardship when you should just be taking the path of least resistance, and it makes no sense to the comprehension of the world.

How is it that you sacrifice and lay down your life for your spouse? That's madness. Just leave her and find another one. Jesus says, no, you won't be understood. And we think, if I choose to follow Jesus and if I choose to follow this path, they will not understand me. Paul says it plainly, "The natural man understands not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them." And if we seek to live our Christian lives in this world as seeking always to be understood, we will soon leave the cross for the acceptance of man because we do not want the ridicule of our friends, of our family, of those in our workplace. But part of bearing the reproach of Jesus Christ and denying yourself is coming to the realization that I will not be understood if I follow Jesus because the world does not understand Jesus because they do not know Him because Satan has blinded their eyes that they cannot understand the truth.

And this idea that the Christian should be so concerned with being understood by the ungodly causes the Christian church to lay the cross down and to think of ways in which we can satisfy the curiosity of a people that rejects God. And so, bearing the cross includes being reproached for Christ's sake, which will be helped if we understand that we must deny the need to be understood. But also, bearing the cross involves the cross in all of our lives is that we lose things for the sake of Jesus Christ. We're going to look at that in more detail next week. But for some of us here this morning, perhaps the call to follow Christ and bear your cross would mean obedience for the cause of Christ that will cause you to lose things that are important to you.

There are many people in the history of the church that have lost their jobs because they cannot deal in ungodly practices or do things that dishonor God because they want to honor Jesus Christ above their boss. Corruption, underhanded business deals, selling perhaps things or working in a trade that does not glorify God but rather distorts men's minds and causes men to stumble into sin. Jesus says, if you want to bear your cross and come after Me, part of bearing that cross is counting the cost of what it may cost you, the loss of following Jesus Christ. What about the loss of friends and the loss of acceptance, the loss of reputation, the loss of all

these things that are so dear to us, a part of bearing the cross and coming after Jesus?

The man who carried the cross when the Romans came to him that day lost everything. He lost his rights. He lost his respect. He lost all these things because he was compelled to carry a cross. And what Jesus is simply saying is you must be willing to lose everything if it means obedience to Me, if it means supreme love to Me, if it means bearing your cross and coming after Me. But the cross also is not something that we bear for reproach for Christ's sake or the fact that we lose things for Christ's sake, but the cross also is brought out in relationship to our self-denial and mortification of sin. That there are things in our lives, that there are lusts and there are desires in our hearts that we yield to and that we listen to and that we obey. And the call to follow the cross and take up the cross and follow Jesus Christ is to shun ungodliness, is to turn our back on sin, and to follow Jesus Christ in obedience to His commandments.

And as Paul says, "Therefore put to death those ungodly members which are in your flesh: fornication and lust and anger and bitterness and all these things that are against the wisdom and counsel of God." And part of bearing our cross for Jesus Christ is not trying to find ways to sin but rather saying, "Lord Jesus, how does the cross apply to this area of my life and that area of my life and that area of my life? I want to be done with sin. I want to carry the cross and follow You, dear Jesus." Putting to death our pride, putting to death the things that dishonor God, putting to death our desire for pleasure in this world.

Think about what was said of Moses in Hebrews chapter 11, verses 24 to 26. It says, "By faith, when he became of age, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward." It's said of Moses that he refused to identify with Egypt, the world. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was an Israelite and Hebrew, one set apart from God for a special purpose. And yes, he grew up in Pharaoh's household, but he belonged to God. He said, "I'm not going to live under the demands and under the gods and under the worldliness and under the riches and under the things that satisfy my flesh there in Egypt. I'd rather identify with the people of God." To carry the cross of Jesus Christ, it says he bore the reproach of Christ. Moses carried his cross before the cross. He carried his cross, as it were, out to the Midian desert, back in to rescue the people, and back out. He carried his cross, serving God, honoring God, at the rejection and turning his back on all the treasures of Egypt. Why? Because he knew what God had for him was greater than the treasures of Egypt. The reward at the end of his

journey, the reward of honoring God, the reward of making Christ known and delivering God's people and fulfilling God's will.

So the cross applies also to the mortification of sin in our lives. But we must also bear our cross in a general sense that all of our self-life must be laid at the altar of sacrifice. All the particulars that I have just mentioned that we shrink away from are at the heart of the self-life. And very interestingly, a man once came up to George Muller and asked him this question. He said to George Muller, "What was the secret of his service for Christ?" And George Muller answered, "There was a day when I died." And as he spoke, he bent lower until he almost touched the floor. Continuing, he added, "Died to George Muller. His opinions, his preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends. And since then, I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." Here is a man that was asked the secret of his success, and he said there was a day when I died. And Paul brings this out. The day we were converted, we were crucified with Christ. We died. And Paul says we need to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God. Meaning that in our lives, we must come to the place where we understand that we have been crucified with Jesus Christ. And that our lives, if we are believers in Jesus, are hid with Christ in God. And that the only opinions that matter are God's. And the only will that matters is God's. And the only thing that truly matters is the praise of God, not our own praise. The acceptance and approval of God, not our own approval, not our own acceptance.

And my friends, if we don't come to that place, as it were, of reckoning ourselves to be dead with Christ, buried, raised to walk in newness of life, we will keep trying to have Christ without a cross. We will keep trying to have a kind of Christianity that can cater for our self-life and still somehow apparently please God. But Jesus tells us that there is no such life. There is no such life. The question comes to us this morning: are you willing? Jesus speaks to us as He speaks to the great multitudes: are you willing to bear your cross and come after Me? Oh, you say, surely there's another way. Surely there's another way. Jesus says, well, you cannot be My disciple unless you're willing to meet that condition. There's no other way. You say, oh well, sure we can have Christ and no cross. Well, then we're only showing ourselves to have a wrong view of the cross. We're seeing the cross as something that we might wear or identify ourselves with generally, but not seeing it as something that we are to bear.

Some of us love the theology of the cross, but we don't want to bear it and walk in the footsteps of our Savior Jesus Christ. We must think of the hymn writer that said, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me." You

say, "I'm willing, but it's hard." You said before us almost life and death; these are difficult things. How on earth am I meant to bear my cross and follow Jesus? Do you understand what it might mean for me? I can only encourage you this morning to take a fresh look at Calvary, and there you will see a Savior, the innocent, spotless Lamb of God, suffering for our sins, bearing the reproach that was owing to us, hanging under the weights of our sins which we are called to deny. There you will see a Savior that did not consider Himself but considered God, His Father, and considered the people that He was going to redeem.

Here you see a Savior laying down His life, giving up that which was dear to Him, even the idea that it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. And there was, in a sense, the wrath of God falling on Him. And He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He went through such, you could say, trauma, such experience. What for? For our redemption, for our salvation. And we fight in our hearts. The cross, me carry the cross? Look to the cross, see one who bled and died for our sins. See from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flowed mingled down. Did ever such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

It's not that hard to deny yourself and carry the cross when you have a right vision of Jesus Christ who bled and died for our sins. So whatever struggle and conflict is in your heart this morning, I encourage you this morning to come to the place of sacrifice, the altar of sacrifice, and lay yourself there down with your Savior and say, "This day, I am done. I am done living for myself. I am done living in my own strength. I am done living after my own wisdom. I must die. He must live in me." And be done with it. And you, in sincerity, will come to that place this morning. You will find joy and peace and strength and grace to go on in the strength of the Lord. The strength of the Lord as a cross-bearer who one day will receive a crown.

Let us pray.

Oh Lord our God, help us, we pray. Oh Lord our God, deny ourselves to take up our cross this morning and to follow You. Let us be done this day with the world's approval and our own self-satisfaction. And let us long to walk the path that You tread for our justification and for our redemption. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.