

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(March 5, 2023)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom
(*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*)

The Pricey, Priceless Life of Discipleship Study #9 (Luke 14:25-35)

Introduction: Free (to us) lunches and pricy (to us) following ...

One day, Jesus told a story about a rich man who was throwing a big, lavish dinner. He invited a lot of people to this banquet. Sadly, all of those he invited gave excuses and didn't attend.

But the host was bound and determined to throw this party. So, he extended invitations to others, lots of whom wouldn't have normally been invited to a fancy feast. These all said, "Yes" to the invitation - and still there was room for more guests.

The invitations then went out to an even broader audience. And these eagerly came, too. Everybody was invited to come to this man's house for the banquet, free of charge.

They could have never afforded to pay for the meal he was offering. It was free to them and all they had to do was say, "Yes."

The parable of the banquet (Luke 14:16-24) provides a perfect picture of the gift of eternal life God promises to everyone who believes in Jesus.

Eternal life is incredibly valuable. We could never earn it. It's unaffordably expensive so we can't buy it. We must receive it as a gift, or we will never have it.

But all of that is NOT to say that eternal life doesn't cost anything.

Just as the lavish banquet cost the host dearly, but it was free to the guests, it cost Jesus' His life for us to have eternal life. Still, it is free - to us.

We revel in this message: We contribute nothing to our salvation but our need. Jesus paid it all. Yes, He did.

So, Luke recorded Jesus' parable of the free, but pricey dinner, which was a picture of the gift of eternal life. Then, without missing a beat, he recorded Jesus' description of the life of costly discipleship.

We listen today as the Lord outlines some of the costs associated with being, in the fullest possible sense, His disciple.

Prequel: Thinking about "the disciple"

The History of Discipleship

Now Jesus didn't invent the term or the concept of *discipleship*. The history of the concept of a disciple / discipler relationship dates hundreds of years before the time of Jesus.

In the ancient world, a *disciple* was someone who was trained by or mentored by someone in some arena of life who was more experienced or skilled.

Prior to Jesus, among the Greek philosophers, Socrates disciplined Plato and Plato disciplined Aristotle.

And the Jews of His day frequently used this arrangement to train younger people, especially in matters of faith.

Among the Jewish Rabbis, the disciple was assigned menial tasks to perform for his mentor.¹ The Jewish disciple was to constantly question his discipler, learn from his discipler, imitate his discipler.²

And when we come to the New Testament to explore Jesus' relationships with His followers, we find some two hundred and fifty references to disciples and discipleship.³

And we find that the term is used in different ways, depending on context.

Jesus-Centered Discipleship

Discipleship in the broadest sense

For instance, in John 12:4, Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus, is referred to as Jesus' disciple. Judas learned about Jesus, but Judas never believed in Jesus.

Then, when Jesus gave a message filled with hard truth (we call that message "The Bread of Life Discourse," found in John 6), most of the thousands who were present walked away from Him on that day. Those who left were called "disciples" while they were leaving.

This is not the ideal, but the biggest-tent understanding of "disciple" is someone who is learning something about Jesus. Even without belief. Even without following.

But even believing, following disciples didn't always follow all that well. For instance...

¹ Things like tying and untying the Rabbis shoes This gives us insight into John the Baptist's statement that he was not "*worthy to untie the sandal thong*" of Jesus, in John, chapter 1.

² To show how necessary such a relationship of discipling was to a well-educated Jew, consider this quote from one of the rabbis, "*Even though a man has read Scripture and learned the Mishnah, but has not served a teacher as a disciple, he is as one of 'the peoples of the land.'*" (a term of great disparagement)

³ All these occurrences of the word are in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. It would be well worth exploring the significance of the absence of the term in the letters of Paul, Peter, John, and the rest of the New Testament.

...in Luke 8, Jesus and His disciples got into a boat. They were sailing across the Sea of Galilee when a storm blew up. The **disciples** panicked and Jesus rebuked them with, **[Luke 8:25] "Where is your faith?"**

...in Luke 9, the **disciples** were unable to cast out a demon because of their lack of faith.

...later in that same chapter, the **disciples** James and John asked permission to call down fire from heaven to consume some Samaritans who didn't welcome Jesus into their village. Not surprisingly, Jesus soundly rebuked them.

So, someone could be called a disciple who was just starting or still struggling to learn about Jesus and His ways.

But, as Jesus' ministry progressed, the meaning of the word narrowed considerably.

Discipleship's focus narrowed

To be a *disciple* increasingly implied being in a committed relationship with Jesus.

It was into this relationship that Jesus called the twelve apostles, whom Luke routinely called "**the disciples**" when they were all together.⁴

Here, the focus of being a disciple is more intense.

And there is a third way in which the Gospels use the word *disciple*. We see that most clearly in our passage for today.

Discipleship as a constant growth process

Jesus called the Twelve His *apostles*. They were His hand-picked "sent ones." His ambassadors to the world. But even after they were in place as apostles, He still challenged them to be, to become, *disciples*.

What we understand from this is that there is always a "next step" to take when it comes to the life of discipleship.

⁴ See Luke 8:22; 9:14, 16, 18, 40; 10:23; 18:15, 34; 22:11, 39.

You're a disciple? Great! Now, grow as a disciple.

There is always one more layer to peel off the onion on the way to the core of being a fully formed disciple. There is always progress to make, always room for growth.

The closer Jesus came to the end of His life, the more He spoke of discipleship with this content.

You and I heard Him speak about it already, when He said to His disciples, **[Luke 9:23] *If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.***"

Today, Jesus is describing this ever-deepening level of being His disciple. He is calling us each into something more. He's inviting us all into a life-long process of growth and transformation.

If this is the road you're already on, great. If this is not the road you were traveling when you arrived this morning, I am praying that it will be the road you are on as you leave.

When we catch up to Him today, He is passing through the region of Perea, on the east side of the Jordan River, attracting great crowds along the way.

I will assume that most of those who were listening were following Him as disciples (at one level or another).

Here, Jesus speaks to them - and us - about the most radical and intense kind of discipleship.

In what follows, He doesn't mention faith or eternal life. That's because He isn't giving a Gospel invitation. This isn't an offer to enjoy a meal bought and paid for by a gracious host.

This is a call to those who have received a free meal to a life of commitment and to sacrifice.

Jesus to the Would-Be Disciple: Love Me Supremely! (v. 26)

[Luke 14:25] Now large crowds were going along with Him, and He turned and said to them, [26] "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."⁵

A disciple is giving and re-giving his or her primary allegiance to Jesus. The disciple loves Jesus to such an extent that all his or her other relationships appear to be hatred by comparison.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we find commands about how we are to function in the human family. We know from the writings of Moses and Paul and everyone in between in Scripture that love is to flow between husbands and wives and kids and siblings and extended family.

So, what Jesus says here must be taken in the context of what God's Word says elsewhere about loving parents, spouse, and children.⁶

What we must not do, though, in thinking about this statement is reduce it to something benign.

No, Jesus didn't literally mean that we are to hate our parents and wives and husbands and children and brothers and sisters.

Jesus' point is to say, *"Your devotion to Me must be so wholehearted that it surpasses your devotion to all other loves."*

For a few years, we held Citizenship classes here at Northwest for those who were going through the process of becoming US citizens.

I was fascinated to learn that in order for a non-citizen to become a citizen of the US, she or he must renounce allegiance to their native land.

⁵ In this figure of speech called "hyperbole" more is said than is actually meant. But, for those in Jesus' immediate audience, and for many today - certainly worldwide - discipleship often means the loss of family relationship.

⁶ The parallel passage is found in Matthew 10:37, where the Lord says, *"...do not love father, etc... more than Me."*

They must take an oath of loyalty to their new home, the United States of America.

The new US citizen can continue to think highly of his old home and can continue to have relationships with the folks back home. But his allegiance now lies here.

That's what our country asks of people who want the privileges of citizenship. How much more is it right for Jesus to expect that kind of loyalty from His disciples? We are to love Jesus supremely.

While that idea is still percolating, we turn to the second of three watermark requirements for Christian discipleship.

In addition to demanding total allegiance from His followers, the Lord also expects us to follow Him. Period.

Jesus to the Would-Be Disciple: Follow Me Unreservedly (vv. 27-32)

Cross-Bearing

[Luke 14:27] "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

What would that statement, "**Take up your cross**" have meant to Jesus' audience?

Well, they all would have known all about crucifixion.

It is likely that all of them had seen people take up their crosses on the way to being crucified. They would have understood cross-carrying to be a one-way journey with no possible turning back.

When the Spanish explorer, Hernando Cortez, landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1519 with a small force of seven hundred men, he set fire to his entire fleet of eleven ships.

⁷ Similar thought at Luke 9:23.

Standing on the shore, his men watched as their only means of retreat to Spain sank to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

With no possibility of retreat, there was only one way to move. That was forward into the Mexican interior.

The disciple understands that there is no retreat. Our armor doesn't cover an about face. Discipleship is boat-burning. No turning back.⁸

What Jesus is saying is clear, but being a Master Teacher, He rarely simply explained some important truth without an illustration. He invariably told a story to make the truth unmissable. Here, He tells two stories.

The first one is about tower building.

Tower Building (vv. 28-30)

[Luke 14:28] "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? [29] Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who are watching it will begin to ridicule him, [30] saying, 'This person began to build and was not able to finish!'"

Or, simply, "*Who, in their right mind, would start a project without determining first if they have the resources to finish it?*"

And, of course, the answer is, "**NOBODY!**"

The scene of the uncompleted tower is self-explanatory - and a bit convicting. There are now and have always been some uncompleted towers at 15315 Grey Fox Terrace.

⁸ That truth is amply illustrated in the life of James Calvert, a missionary to the Fiji Islands. On the way over, the captain of the ship sought to change Calvert's mind, "*You will lose your life if you go among such savages.*" Calvert's response - "*I died before I ever got on this boat!*"

I clean up my garage once-and-for-all, three times a year. There are garden and yard projects not completed. And you don't want to hear about my desk.

And, then there are books half-read and magazines not opened, and on and on and on.

Maybe there some uncompleted towers at your place, too.

Of course, we try to finish what we start in the garage, in our careers, and in our private lives.

We don't intentionally start a project thinking, *"Well, I'll abandon this building project right before I get half-way done."*

Or, *"I'll work out / diet / budget for a few days, and then I'll revert back to just feeling guilty about not working out / eating unhealthy / spending unwisely."*

We don't plan them, but mid-course quitting points just seem to happen.

Jesus doesn't want this to happen to Christians when they turn to consider discipleship. He wants us to know that being a disciple is not a bed of roses. It is going to cost.

So, be prepared to pay the full amount. Look before you leap. Know what you're getting into.

Don't start out to be a disciple without serious thought. Jesus says, *"Sit down and count the cost before you decide to follow Me!"*

This scenario of the tower builder outlines the cost of saying "Yes" to discipleship - and certainly there is great danger in saying "Yes" to the challenge of discipleship without forethought.

But there are even greater dangers to saying "No."

Warfare (vv. 31-32)

[Luke 14: 31] "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to face the one coming against him with twenty thousand? [32] Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and requests terms of peace."

The simple fact that Jesus used a military example here highlights the reality that there are risks involved in being a disciple.

It points to the opposition that is inevitable (2 Tim. 3:12) for those who take stands for Christ. Discipleship can be likened to a battle.

But let's be sure that we get the point of Jesus' illustration here. I think the point is easily - and frequently - missed.

There is an obvious difference between the first parable of tower building, and this second parable of fighting a war.

The man who was building a tower was free to act or not to act. Nobody was forcing him to build. But here, the king with ten thousand soldiers is being attacked. He has a decision to make. He has to DO something.

If I read it correctly, what the Lord is saying is this: You and I, as "would-be" disciples, are the king with ten thousand. Jesus is the king with twenty thousand.

He is "attacking" us with demands for discipleship.

No king will sit still while he is being attacked by a doubly strong enemy. He will calculate.

He may calculate and realize that he can't win and negotiate a peace with the stronger king. Or he may figure that he can win in an unfair fight against a stronger force.

The would-be disciple is faced with the same decision as the less powerful king. The need is to act. Neutrality is as impossible for the Christian as it would be for the king.

To say “No” is to walk into a can’t-win fight with King Jesus. It will be disastrous. It won’t end well. He will keep after you for as long as it takes.

This has been, from time to time, my experience.

The first year and a half of my life after coming to know Jesus was miserable precisely because I was fighting against Jesus’ call to be a disciple.

At other points in my journey I have drifted away from loving Jesus supremely and cross-bearing. In those seasons I have not enjoyed the abundant life He offers. I was waging war against Jesus’ calls to follow Him - and He was relentless in His pursuit of me.

Saying “No” is no way to live. But to say “Yes” to King Jesus is to invite His reign. And THAT is to live the joyful, purposeful life of the disciple.

What is Jesus’ point in here? What is He telling us by urging cross-bearing and giving us a couple of word pictures? It is this: *Being Jesus’ disciple means following wherever He leads.*

The road of Christian discipleship is a bumpy road that will cost the amputation of unholy internet habits, surgery on the sins of slander and gossip, and taking tough medicine to fight the cancer of pride.

There is a choice to be made. Give in to King Jesus and submit to discipleship, or fight Him tooth and nail if you think you are up to it.

But there is no safe sideline.

Once you are a child of God, He will relentlessly pursue you for the purpose of enlisting you in a life of discipleship.

That is the course that brings Him glory AND it is the course that is best for you. But you’ve got to decide. Might as well decide today. Say, “Yes.”

Disciples are those who love Jesus with their whole hearts and follow Him wherever He leads. And one more thing.

Jesus to the Would-Be Disciple: Give Up Your Possessions (v. 33)

[Luke 14:33] “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

You will notice, as many others have noticed, that Jesus didn’t say, “*give away*” all your possessions. That would be to put it all in a garage sale, get pennies on the dollar - and then give away the proceeds of the sale.⁹

No, Jesus said, “*give up*” - and there is a difference.

But let’s not kid ourselves. To give up our rights to what we have earned and collected, to what we consider ours, is not an easy assignment. In some ways, “*giving up*” may be more difficult than “*giving away.*”

Jesus says that we are to hold our possessions with an open hand, not with a closed fist. We don’t view ourselves as owners, but as stewards. Managers.

The disciple may possess homes, cars, and bank accounts, gifts, talents, and abilities. Jesus calls her or him to turn over the rights of ownership to Him - “*Use these things that I have as You will, Lord.*”

If we want to honestly call ourselves *disciples*, then we “*give up*” our right to use what we have the way we choose. We commit to use what we have to further Jesus’ purposes.

To the extent that I am not willing to devote my possessions to Jesus, to that extent I cannot be His disciple.

⁹ The Bible never condemns the owning and acquiring of private property. It does speak a lot, though, about the dangers that accompany wealth and the problem of materialism.

From all that Jesus has said, it is clear that He has raised the bar of what it means to be a disciple really high. But He's not trying to discourage us from discipleship.

He wants us to fully commit. He just wants us to know what we're getting into when we do. If we would know the real thing we will love Jesus supremely, follow Him unreservedly, give up all we have to His control.

And He isn't quite finished. So far, He has only defined discipleship. As He concludes, Jesus gives discipleship's rationale.

Here, Jesus doesn't tell us what makes a disciple, but the result of not becoming one.

Jesus to the Would-Be Disciple: Don't Say "No!" (vv. 34-35)

[Luke 14:34] "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? [35] It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile, so it is thrown out. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The Usefulness of "Salty Salt"

Regular table salt is a mainstay in the lives of people around the world. And salt (sodium chloride, NaCl) has been put to many uses for thousands of years.

Salt is a seasoning agent at mealtime. Salt preserves food. Salt was used in the Old Testament Jewish sacrifices.¹⁰

Any or all of these may have been in Jesus' mind when He said in the Sermon on the Mount, ***[Matthew 5:13] "You are the salt of the earth."***

¹⁰ Today, salt is used in the manufacture of lots of chemicals and is also used as a weed-killer and even in fertilizer.

We can't pin down exactly what He meant there, but I suspect that He mainly had in mind that those who followed Him as disciples were going to whet people's appetites for God.

But here, Jesus mentions salt that has become tasteless. What in the world does He mean by that?

The Uselessness of "un-Salty Salt"

Salt can never become tasteless. Sodium Chloride never loses its saltiness.

However, the salt that was used in Jesus' day and in that region was a very impure kind of salt, a mixture of Sodium Chloride and carnelite (gypsum).

When the Jews would reach the bottom of their salt barrels, much of what would be left would be the earthy residue, and it would be said, *"This salt has become tasteless."* It tasted alkaline and stale.

And there was nothing they could do with the stuff. It was useless for the purpose for which it was gotten in the first place. So, they tossed it.

The point? "Salt" can be white and granular, and you can find it in the salt barrel.

But, if it doesn't have the primary qualifying traits of tasting like salt, preserving like salt, and seasoning like salt, then the secondary characteristics don't matter.

As far as salt's purpose is concerned, it is worthless.

Conclusion:

Just so, we Christians may be many things. We may be nice, pleasant, polite, thoughtful, and attractive.

But, if we are lacking that one qualifying characteristic that defines a disciple - commitment to the Person of Jesus Christ - then as

far as the purpose for which we were saved is concerned, we are worthless.

Today, Jesus has painted a picture of the only satisfying life around: the life of the disciple. And, yes, it will cost you dearly.

But the dividends - joy, peace, purpose, meaning, a growing relationship with God, rich relationships with others, treasure in heaven - are priceless.