

Jesus had just told the parable of the Great Banquet. It was in response to a man's declaration that those who tasted of heaven's banquet would truly be blessed. The man was implying that one day he and the other guests, as children of Abraham, would surely be among them. He was saying, "This is a great feast, but just think of the blessing we will have to be at heaven's banquet." Jesus responded with the parable that implied they weren't going to be there, but the humble poor and disabled along with many Gentiles would. He had said they must strive to enter the narrow door. Following the parable He said He was on His way to Jerusalem to die (Luke 14:33<sup>i</sup>). After leaving the banquet the crowds were following Him. He described to them what that narrow door looks like.

*<sup>25</sup> Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "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.* Luke 14:25,26 Jesus wasn't building a megachurch. By that I mean He wasn't after big crowds. In fact, they were a detriment. They limited His movement and kept Him from entering cities (Mark 1:45<sup>ii</sup>). They filled the area around Jesus with many who had wrong motives and that limited the number of true disciples who could hear Him. Here and in John 6 (John 6:51<sup>iii</sup>, 66<sup>iv</sup>) Jesus gave out hard sayings meant to thin the crowds. Some megachurches insist that living things grow so healthy churches should grow. They forget that cancer also grows rapidly.

Dr. Eli Lazorin-Eyzenberg attempts to go beyond the Greek and get back to the Aramaic that Jesus would have been speaking. He comments on this passage: "There are certain texts in the Bible that make modern Christ-followers cringe. One of the most difficult is Jesus's statement about hating one's father and mother in order to be his true disciple. The key to resolving this difficulty is hidden in the ancient meaning of the Hebrew word שונא (pronounced: *sonah*) inaccurately translated as "hate".

We read that God loved Jacob, but "hated" Esau (Malachi 1:3<sup>v</sup>). However, we can see that God actually blessed Esau greatly (Genesis 33:9<sup>vi</sup>), even warning the Israelites not to attack the sons of Esau or risk the withdrawal of His protection from them if they were to do so (Deuteronomy 2:4-6<sup>vii</sup>).

So, from the Hebrew word for hate in the OT and its parallel usage here we can see that Jesus meant "to love less." Jesus would never break one of the ten commandments, to honor your father and mother. But because He is the subject of the first four commandments, He can say that one should love family less than they love Him. In fact, the Great Command is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That is what Jesus is asking of the crowd, perhaps in a way intentionally meant to send away those who are not serious disciples.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He added that if we desire to become His disciple, we must hate our own life also. Again, I think we should interpret it as loving our own life less than our love for Him (Leviticus 19:18<sup>viii</sup>). He must be our all-consuming priority and the motivation behind our words and actions. Following Jesus can't be a hobby or merely an interest. The body of Christ can't be a club or just an addition to your routine.

No prophet ever demanded such allegiance. Only God in the flesh could rightly ask this kind of devotion. Cult leaders sometimes demand it, but that is idolatry. The definition of idolatry is putting anything before God. In that sense, this proposition is Jesus' claim to being divine. We might translate it, "If you want to follow and learn from me, you must put me first above family, even your own life. I must be your primary love." Remember, He is on His way to die in Jerusalem and He doesn't want these happy-go-lucky followers to think they are on their way to a party. Nor does Jesus want His followers since to think that following Him is a bed of roses. We do a disservice to people when we tell people how wonderful it is to be a Christian without warning them that it also means living a life of sacrifice.

Napoleon understood this principle when he said, "I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander [the Great], Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and this hour millions of men would die for him."<sup>ix</sup>

Whether or not one can be saved and not be a disciple is hotly debated. The side that says that is not possible can cite John 15:6<sup>x</sup>. The branch that does not bear fruit is cast into the fire and burned. The side that says that one can cites the fact that some will be saved yet so as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:15<sup>xi</sup>). As in all these controversies, I suggest you err on the side of dedication, which in this case means to strive by the grace of God to be a disciple. Ask God to help you love Jesus more than your own life. Then when the Holy Spirit prompts you to do something you don't want to do, you will do it instead of what you desired to do. That's because you love Jesus more than your own life.

How do we know if we have elevated Jesus to that position of first place in our lives? The best indicators are thoughts, words, actions, and time. Do I think on Him, meditating in God's Word, listening for the still small voice of the Spirit? Or do I let my thoughts run wild without making them obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)<sup>xii</sup>? Do my words testify to my belief, or do they often sound like a contradiction to what I believe? Do my actions testify or deny that He is my Lord? Do I use my time to love and serve Him or fulfill my own desires? Jesus isn't saying here that everyone must do this. He is saying if you want to be a disciple then this is a condition that must be met. But that is not all.

<sup>27</sup> *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.* Luke 14:27 When Rome sentenced a man to death by crucifixion, the judge would declare, "Put the cross on the man." The crossbeam would be placed on his shoulders and his arms tied to the beam. He would then be led to the place where he would die. Jesus is saying discipleship under Jesus is a death sentence. It is death to self so that His life might be manifest in you (2 Corinthians 4:11)<sup>xiii</sup>.

In other passages, Jesus gives the lighter side of discipleship. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30)<sup>xiv</sup>. He gives us abundant life (John 10:10)<sup>xv</sup>. He is our Shepherd and leads us to green pastures and still waters (Psalm 23:1-3)<sup>xvi</sup>. But here in this passage with large crowds tagging along to see a miracle or get a free lunch, Jesus

was discouraging people from following half-heartedly. His message was a “die to self”. It was an all or nothing, no compromise demand.

Is it any different today or in our culture? Why does He have the right to make this demand? It is because He is Lord of all, gave us all we have, and wants to save us from our destructive sinful nature. But we must see that dying to self brings about the best life possible. It may be hard, but a sinful is just as hard or harder. It may cost everything, but everything you have came from Him anyway. It is a call to total surrender. It’s why Paul could say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20<sup>xvii</sup>).

It is a reasonable demand when you look at the whole picture. If we are talking only of passing pleasure, it sounds like nonsense. But if we are looking at eternity and the love of God, well then of course it makes perfect sense. It’s a wonderful offer. It’s a very gracious offer. Putting yourself second to the desires of Jesus is the best thing you could do for yourself and your family. Then you can love them in the right way and more fully. It’s a holy adventure filled with blessings.

Remember that when Jesus said this, no one knew He would be crucified. It must have sounded excessively harsh. But later He would demonstrate that He meant it, even if it led to His literal crucifixion. To die to one's self is to continually put God's will first. We will fail at this sometimes because our flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41<sup>xviii</sup>). Then we repent and ask for resurrection power to help us the next time to choose His will over our own (Philippians 3:10<sup>xix</sup>). Other times God will give us the grace to put Him above every other desire. Then we thank God for helping us do what we could never do on our own. We thank Him for the opportunity to serve Him.

Notice that Jesus said, "his cross". **Each of us has a unique cross.** For some it is rejection by family. For others it is giving up something they love. For all it is some form of persecution (2 Timothy 3:12<sup>xx</sup>). And for all of us it means, "not my will but Yours be done." Kent Hughes explains: “Discipleship is a series of deaths—perpetual dying. Disciples follow Christ on a path of self-denial. Disciples embrace suffering as a part of life.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Here is how C.S. Lewis describes the cost in *Mere Christianity: The Christian way is different. ...Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or top it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit.”*<sup>xxii</sup> I think he caught the feeling of Jesus’ demand in this passage.

*<sup>28</sup> 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? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Luke 14:28-30* In the Baja Peninsula you can see building after building that has walls and rebar sticking out the top of those walls, but

nothing inside the buildings. During a boom, investors built but then found that business slowed down, and it was not worth finishing the building. Now these shells remind us of a bunch of bad investments. Jesus is telling us that we have to decide whether or not He's worth dying to self. Is He worth surrendering our lives, our desires and plans? Are we willing to stick it out? It's not a decision to take lightly (James 4:14<sup>xxiii</sup>).

If we declare we are followers of Jesus and then after time fall away, you know what people will say. "It was just a fad. I didn't think it would last. He finally came to his senses." It ends up being a bad testimony and confirms their suspicions. On the other hand, I've heard parents say that their son or daughter will get over the Christian thing in time, only later to realize it is not only the child's life, but it turned out to be a blessing to them as well. Will you persevere to the end regardless of the cost? Are you willing to face anything He allows to come into your life with His help? And don't forget the greater cost that a sinful life can extract. It is usually more than we ever imagined.

*<sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.* Luke 14:31,32 This was another way to tell His followers to think through the cost of following Him. Most would be messiahs and their followers were killed by Rome, often by crucifixion. How far were these people willing to go? Or when the threats became too much would they compromise rather than lay down their lives.

Another way to look at this is that Jesus is the king of the larger army. If they are on the wrong side, they should seek to make peace with God. The terms of peace are submission to the more powerful King. Are you really willing to risk your life on the hope that you can escape the final judgment? Do you think Satan stands a chance?

*<sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.* Luke 14:33 Unconditional surrender is the only way to become a disciple. You can't hold anything back and still be a disciple. Relationships, money, possessions, notoriety, and everything else must come second to Jesus. Those can no longer be your motivation for acting. It's an all or nothing proposition.

This is another of those key verses to memorize. It will constantly challenge us to be sure that nothing is taking over the throne of our hearts and putting us back in bondage. Surrender to Jesus is freedom to be who God made us to be. We can be worry free sheep of His pasture. Children of God trust their heavenly Father to see them through whatever situations they face (Psalm 62:8<sup>xxiv</sup>). They have faith in Him. They know they can't do it on their own, so, they leave it all up to Him.

*<sup>34</sup> "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? <sup>35a</sup> It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away.* Luke 14:34,35 Jesus concludes the thought with an illustration of someone who begins to follow but decides following is too costly. Pure salt never loses its flavor. It is extreme dilution that would take away the saltiness. That happens when we our love for things or even those close to us gets in the way of our love for Jesus. When that dilution supersedes our love for Jesus, we lose our flavor. We may have been zealous, but the fire went out

(Revelation 2:4<sup>xxv</sup>). That is the case with those who were the rocky soil where the seed fell, or those that were choked by the weeds (Matthew 13:22<sup>xxvi</sup>). Once a person settles on compromise, they are of no value in advancing the kingdom of God. The flavor they add to life is gone, for they are like everyone else.

Are they saved? That is for God to decide. May our love Jesus be to so great that we do not want to consider compromise. Let us fear being thrown away and check our hearts frequently to see if we are losing our flavor from the dilution of worldly loves that surpass that of our love for our Savior Jesus.

Jesus ended this as He did some of His most important lessons: if you have been blessed with ears that hear, that are able to consider the challenge that Jesus has set before us, then take it to heart. Receive it and act on it. Let it be fixed in your heart and mind. Make it a core life lesson that stays with you to the end.

I'm so glad the Lord led us back to a gospel. Prophecy, types and shadows, doctrine and instruction in the letters are all needed, but the Gospels are the core. Jesus' words are the basis for it all.

*<sup>34b</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” Luke 14:34b Do we have spiritual ears? Jesus spoke eternal truth. Some can hear it because their hearts are open to the truth. Others cannot hear because their hearts have no desire to hear anything but what they want to hear. You've probably noticed that when you talk to some people there is no sense of logic or reason. They believe what they want to believe and can't hear anything else. It hits their eardrums and their mind controlled by their heart rejects anything that doesn't fit their desired belief. You will never get anywhere with them. Pray that their heart will change. Check your own heart to see if there are areas in your heart that can only hear what you want to hear.

We need salty Christians full of the life of Jesus. They inspire us, provoke us, and encourage us that we can be like more like Jesus. They show us this sold-out all-in life is anything but boring. Some of you are pretty salty. You add zest to our fellowship. There is life wherever you go. You got that way by putting Jesus first in your life, your relationships, your finances, and your time. We need more like you. What do you say fellow believers? Shouldn't we join them and put Jesus first in everything? He deserves nothing less!

## Questions

- 1 Did Jesus desire large crowds? Why or why not?
- 2 Why should we interpret “hate” to be “love less”?
- 3 Why can Jesus make such a demand?
- 4 What else did He demand for disciples?
- 5 How can we see Jesus is first in our lives?
- 6 What was the final demand and what did it mean?
- 7 What is your cross?
- 8 What were the count the cost illustrations?
- 9 What is Jesus ultimate demand for disciples?
- 10 Are you salty? Do you have spiritual ears?

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<sup>i</sup> **Luke 13:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'

<sup>ii</sup> **Mark 1:45 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

<sup>iii</sup> **John 6:51 (ESV)**

<sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

<sup>iv</sup> **John 6:66 (ESV)**

<sup>66</sup> After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

<sup>v</sup> **Malachi 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."

<sup>vi</sup> **Genesis 33:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."

<sup>vii</sup> **Deuteronomy 2:4-6 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> and command the people, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. <sup>5</sup> Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. <sup>6</sup> You shall purchase food from them with money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink.

<sup>viii</sup> **Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

<sup>ix</sup> The Enduring Word Bible Commentary - Luke.

<sup>x</sup> **John 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

<sup>xi</sup> **1 Corinthians 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

<sup>xii</sup> **2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

<sup>xiii</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

<sup>xv</sup> **John 10:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Psalms 23:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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xviii **Matthew 26:41 (ESV)**

41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

xix **Philippians 3:10 (ESV)**

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

xx **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

xxi Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.

xxii C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 1955 pp 155, 156

xxiii **James 4:14 (ESV)**

14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

xxiv **Psalms 62:8 (ESV)**

8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

xxv **Revelation 2:4 (ESV)**

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

xxvi **Matthew 13:22 (ESV)**

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.