

New Hope Sermon Costly Discipleship

Scripture: *Luke 14: 25-27,33* Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: **26** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. **27** And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple...Those of you who don’t give up everything you have cannot be my disciple.” Let’s pray.

Last Sunday Bruce preached on costly devotion, using the example of Mary of Bethany when the week before Jesus died, she took a bottle of expensive perfume (perhaps saved as part of her dowry), broke it open in the midst of a dinner party at a Pharisee’s house, and anointed Jesus’ feet with it. She gave the best she had in an act of devotion – despite what would be (and was) censure from others.

She enacted our follow-up theme for today: Costly Discipleship. I want us to consider two radical implications of costly discipleship from the text today:

1. It involves an issue of loyalty to Jesus first – before all other attachments and relationships v. 26
2. And it involves an issue of loss – disciples are to give up everything, including their own self-centered ways v.27,33 – It involves a cross.



First, **an issue of loyalty**

Jesus says: *If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.* That is blatantly radical. The fabric of human society is built on the sustaining relationships of family but Jesus’ meaning is not as some would think. The word “hate” us a comparative word. “Hate carries a comparative force. “In comparison with our loyalty to Jesus, if we are forced to choose between or family or friends and Jesus, Jesus must come first. He is to be loved more than anyone else.” (NIV Application Commentary Luke, Darrell Bock, p. 401.) It is the ‘more than’ that determines the loyalty issue. ‘More than’ continually cuts across our lives in our daily priorities. I have had students tell me that Netflix has been a consuming time issue for them. As soon as they finish an assignment or a part of an assignment, they take a break and watch something on Netflix – maybe more than once a day. Netflix is their go-to for relaxation or entertainment – at the expense of their Bible reading or prayer or going to talk to someone God has directed them to connect with or even finishing a school assignment.

Or ‘more than’ is a relational issue. Perhaps there is a person or a group you really want to like you and approve of you. So your priority each day is to try to connect and be affirmed by one or more of that group – Perhaps you schedule breakfast at the expense of your daily Bible reading or going to the movies instead of to a fellowship/prayer time with a group of believers or having a social outing with a friend– all of which jams your schedule so you miss church – maybe even so that you get a paper in on time. Do we seek human praise and acceptance more than the approval of Jesus? Or are we like Mary of Bethany who loved Jesus more than her financial security or social standing?

Or more than can include the approval or love of your family. If they counsel not to be involved in global outreach because it is too dangerous, you listen and perhaps do not obey God’s call to go to... Or, as in our case, you hold on too tightly to family and don’t want to lose them so you may hinder them from doing what God calls them to or not do yourself what God calls you to. Jesus often cuts across your familial loyalties with this verse “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.*”

I speak from personal experience.

Twenty years ago shortly after Bruce graduated from Wheaton and then married Becky, they began preparing to go into full-time mission work together. He wanted to head to Asia and she wanted to focus on a Muslim woman, so they narrowed down their search to Indonesia. They chose Pioneers as their mission organization, got accepted as Pioneer missionaries, raised their support and prepared to head to Indonesia. At that time I was reading a book called *Rough Edges*. It is a series of short stories – all based in Africa and centered on the issues Christian face in various African contexts. The first story was what gripped my heart. It is called “Requiem.”

The story is about a young Christian student named Marcus who attended University in an African country ruled by a corrupt military dictatorship. Daily there were “secret arrests, executions,...and injustices.” (Rough Edges, Rhena Taylor, IVP 1984, p. 10). A number of his university friends had decided that their voice in demonstration would be the last chance the world could know about the terrors of the regime and its dictator. They reasoned that since there were still some foreigners in the country, they “would report the demonstration to the world press and then their countrymen who had fled into exile would know there are those here who would support an uprising against the present rulers if these in exile would return and take back the country” (Ibid, p.12). One of those in exile was Marcus’ brother Peter. The regime had tried many ways to silence him abroad, but still he wrote articles citing the police-state brutality in his country. The regime was known, like Eryogen of Turkey, for violently eliminating any voice that spoke out against it.

But Marcus finally decided to join the demonstration. The day after that demonstration, there was a small article in a U.S. newspaper citing that “as many as 50 students are said to have been killed or seriously injured. A number are held for questioning”(p. 16). Marcus’ brother read that report grimly. “I wonder if Marcus was in this. I hope they haven’t arrested him. They could easily use him as a lever to force me back into the country,” he told his friend (Ibid). And that’s exactly what happened. Marcus was in the demonstration and sent to jail. He gave a false name when he was interrogated, to protect Peter, but the regime tracked his true identity down and began their pressure/scare tactics: If his brother would come back, Marcus would not be shot with the others for conspiracy. But Peter and Marcus both knew that if Peter returned, they would still kill Marcus and him as well. With an agony of heart, he stayed in the States. And Marcus was killed along with several of the other leaders and a group of older men who had also threatened the regime. In the death row cell the night before Marcus’ death, Marcus was asked by an older conspirator if he was afraid to die. He said, ‘NO, I am a Christian and Jesus will take me right to heaven.’ ‘Tell us about this faith of your, son, that makes you unafraid of death.’ So that night Marcus preached a sermon about how faith in Jesus brings the hope of eternal life to all his followers. It is believed that many of those hardened criminals believed in Jesus and entered into heaven with Marcus the next day (p.25).

As I finished that story, I felt the Lord say to me, ‘Mary Lou, are you willing for Bruce to die for Me overseas? Will you surrender all your hopes and dreams for him, trusting Me completely with his life or death in My service? Will you be my disciple and love Me ‘more than” him”? What a question. But that’s exactly the import of Luke 14:25. I knew my answer. Tears ran down my cheeks as I sobbed out: “Yes, Lord,” I love you more than my own son. I give him into your care, for your service, for your glory. In life or death.”

Oswald Chambers, a well-known Christian of the late 1900’s said “Beware of anything that competes with loyalty to Jesus.” Anything or anyone – family included. *If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.*

An issue of loss

Second, Jesus' challenge tells us that true discipleship involves an issue of loss. He said *Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:27* "The root word for disciple in the Greek means 'the mental effort needed to think something through.'" (Mark Batterson, *Play the man*, Baker Books, p. 41) By any measure that is radical teaching. We need to carefully consider the implications of being a disciple. It is not just about the self-help books that say you can become a more happy, fulfilled version of yourself; you can have health and prosperity as a Christian; you can "be the Me I want to be." (John Ortberg's book title -) – all emphasizing a self-enthroned Christianity.

So what is that cost? Death to self.

Billy Graham's take on this teaching was: "When Jesus said, 'If you are going to follow me, you have to take up a cross,' it was the same as saying, 'Come and bring your electric chair with you. Take up the gas chamber and follow me.' He did not have a beautiful gold cross in mind--the cross on a church steeple or on the front of your Bible. Jesus had in mind a place of execution. *Billy Graham in "The Offense of the Cross" (from Great Sermons on Christ, Wilbur M. Smith, ed.). Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 12.* In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words: 'When Jesus calls a person, He calls him to come and die.'

What exactly are we putting to death? Our human self-centeredness. Our self-life; our self-sufficiency- our pride and desires to be in control; our image and our own priorities or, as Mary of Bethany did, our financial security and social standing.

Amy Carmichael articulates the daily implications:

1. If I myself dominate myself, if my thoughts revolve around myself; if I am so occupied with myself I rarely have a 'heart at leisure from itself,' then I know nothing of Calvary love. (Amy Carmichael, *IF* (Christian Literature Crusade, p.30)
2. If, the moment I am conscious of the shadow of self-crossing my threshold, I do not shut the door, and in the power of Him who works in us to will and to do, keep that door shut, then I know nothing of Calvary love.
3. If I feel bitterly towards those who condemn me, as it seems to me unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love.(p.39)
4. If there be any reserve in my giving to Him who so loved that He gave His Dearest for me; if there be a secret 'but' in my prayer, 'anything but that, Lord', then I know nothing of Calvary love. (p.48)
5. If I become entangled in any 'inordinate affection'; if things or places or people hold me back from obedience to my Lord, then I know nothing of Calvary love.(p.49)
6. If the praise of man elates me and his blame depresses me; if I cannot rest under misunderstanding without defending myself; if I love to be loved more than to love, to be served rather than to serve, then I know nothing of Calvary love.(p.51)

Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:27. What do you think Christ's challenge meant to his early followers? David Platt in his book *Radical* says:

"Jesus was calling them to...reorient their entire life's work around discipleship to Him. Their plans and dreams were now being swallowed up in his...He was calling them to abandon their possessions...to abandon their family and their friends,...to abandon themselves. They were leaving certainty for uncertainty, safety or danger, self-preservation for self-denunciation. In a world that prizes promoting oneself, they were following a teacher who told them to crucify themselves. And history tells us the result. Almost all of them would lose their lives because they responded to his invitation" (David Platt, *Radical*, Multnomah Books 2010, pp. 11-12).

And count it a privilege.

Fast forward to today and hear the application of this text to a young family from the States. When they got married, they told God they were His and would go wherever he wanted. Over time, they got established in business in the States and had 3 little children. Then they took a mission trip to a very

poor Muslim country in North Africa on the edge of the Sahara Desert. Here's the wife's account of the final day of that trip:

There were beggars everywhere. Some were in wheelchairs. Others crawled or pulled their shriveled bodies – little more than skin and bones—along the dirty ground, trying to shield their hands and knees with worn-out, mismatched flipflops. I had been exposed to some poverty from church trips to Mexico but this was on another level entirely. Boys ranging from the ages of 3-16 or 17 would spend all day standing on the burning pavement, holding out their large empty tomato paste cans and begging at car windows. Most of them, were sent by their poor families in distant villages to the imam to learn the Qur'an. Usually the families had no idea the desperate situation they sent their children into. The boys spent only an hour or so each day memorizing the Qur'an with the teacher before they were sent out to beg for the rest of the day. If they didn't meet their quotas by the end of the day, they were beaten or left outside for the night. Sometimes a car would hit one of the boys and no one would come to identify them. Other time, boys would just disappear, possibly into the dark world of human trafficking. My throat tightened as I looked at their malnourished bodies, calloused feet, and hopeless faces. Those faces lingered in my mind as we arrived at the airport...Suddenly I sensed a prompting in my spirit: "If I called you back here, would you come?"

'Really, God?'...The quiet question persisted. 'Will you come back here? Are you willing to trust me with your life? With your children and your future?' I looked down at little Joshua...God sacrificed his own Son for me and my children. Will I trust him with their lives, out future? I was tired of the struggle in my heart. I prayed for deeper faith and trust and exhaled slowly. 'Yes, Lord., I surrender. Again.' And I prayed for grace to face the daily inevitability—the temptation to back out, to play it safe, to escape death. Day after day I would once again have to 'die' to myself, to my right to have full control over my family's life." *We Died Before We Came Here*, Emily Foreman, NavPress, 2016, pp.11-13).

Emily and Stephen did go back to that poor North African Muslim nation and served among the people as a witness for Christ for 7 years before Stephen was killed by Muslim extremists. He did literally give his life for Christ and for the Muslims in that country they had come to love. But as Emily says at the end of her book *We Died Before We Came Here*, "when we died to ourselves, we died to anything that would stand in the way of our lives bringing honor to God among the nations" (Ibid, p. 186). The work they were doing in the NGO continues today and Emily and her children and family return often to that country to continue to serve and demonstrate love and God's forgiveness to the people. Plus, Stephen's life was such a positive witness for God that the mayor of the city where he lived and died "expressed how much Stephen was loved and appreciated by him and his entire country. Then...he unveiled a monument [at the street intersection where Stephen had been killed] inscribed with the words "God is Love" in English, French and Arabic" (p.180). Stephen's witness goes on.

Total discipleship is costly. Jesus did not minimize that cost but in fact bore it himself in his sacrificial death and resurrection. We have the privilege of following in His steps. Let us pray.

Song of Response:

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus (3x)
The world behind me, the cross before me, (3x)
Though none to with me, I still will follow (3x)
Will you decide now to follow Jesus? (3x)

No turning back, no turning back
No turning back, no turning back
No turning back, no turning back
No turning back, no turning back

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