

WHO CAN BE JESUS' DISCIPLES

Luke 14:25-35

Key Verse: 14:26

“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.”

Today's passage is very challenging. Just reading the key verse makes us cringe. Is Jesus teaching us to practice hatred? Am I supposed to hate my wife and children? It seems to be crazy. Is Jesus trying to stir up trouble and cause division in our families? Furthermore, Jesus teaches us to carry the cross and give up everything. Otherwise, we cannot be his disciples. Jesus' teaching seems too heavy and too serious, even to think about. Why did Jesus teach these? We need to understand this passage in the context in which it was given. We should not take this verse out of context, like a little child who needs an excuse to be rebellious toward his parents. He may say, “Mom, look at this verse. I hate you! I am being Jesus' disciple.” We need to understand today's teaching in the historical context, and in terms of Jesus' discipleship ministry as a whole. Jesus wants us to become disciples who have a right relationship with him, with our family members, and even with ourselves. When we think about the deep meaning of this passage, it is not burdensome; it is the life-giving word of God. Let's learn what it means to be Jesus' disciple and how it impacts our lives.

While the setting of the previous passage was a dinner banquet in a Pharisee's house, the setting of this passage is along the road to Jerusalem as Jesus travels with a large crowd. Though the setting has changed, there is continuity in Luke's message. Everyone was invited to the kingdom of God, regardless of any human distinctive. However, only those who give first priority to the kingdom of God will be able to enter. Verse 25a says, **“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus....”** Who were they? There must have been many who wanted to be healed from their diseases, or set free from demons. Others might have expected that Jesus would establish the Messianic kingdom upon arrival in Jerusalem, and they wanted to be part of it. We don't know exactly what kind of crowd this was. Nevertheless, most of them were not deeply committed to Jesus. Jesus knew that most of them would desert him at the time of his arrest, suffering and death on the cross. Jesus was not satisfied to have them as traveling companions. He wanted them to be his disciples who would follow him to the end and experience the true victory and glory of his kingdom. So Jesus challenged them in three ways (25b).

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First, Jesus challenged them to give first priority to their relationship with him in order to be his disciples (26). Jesus begins by addressing their relationships with family members. Usually when we think of discipleship ministry, we think of a program or some activity at church. However, discipleship begins in one's own home by giving Jesus first priority in relation to our family members. Let's read verse 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."** The relationships Jesus mentions are immediate family; the closest and most intimate. It is hard to separate from them, especially from spouse or children. For example, we see the story of David and his mighty men in the books of Samuel. David's men were so loyal that they would risk their lives, going behind enemy lines, to bring him a cup of cold water. But when their sons and daughters were taken captive in Ziklag, they became so bitter in heart that they began to talk about stoning David (1Sa 30:1-6). Parents and children are deeply attached; to hate one's children is unthinkable. Actually, to hate our family member is a violation of God's law (Ex 20:12).

Then what did Jesus mean when he said to hate our family members and our own lives? The word "hate" is very strong. It is to dislike intensely with an implication of aversion and hostility. It is an intense emotion, just as love is. Though hatred and love are opposite, they are closely related. There is a saying, "There is a fine line between love and hate." Indeed, scientific research shows that the same brain circuits which express hatred also express passionate love.¹ In Matthew's gospel Jesus gives the same teaching but uses the word "love," instead of "hate." Jesus said, **"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"** (Mt 10:37). This love sets apart the beloved as the number one object of affection and devotion. In comparison, love for anyone else is so much less that it can hyperbolically be called "hatred." So in the New Living Translation, verse 26 says, **"If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple."** Why did Jesus make such radical terms to be his disciple? It is because he is so much more than a mere human being. Jesus is the Creator God, who made the heavens and the earth and each one of us. Jesus is

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/scientists-prove-it-really-is-a-thin-line-between-love-and-hate-976901.html>

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our only Savior, who died for our sins and rose from the dead to give us eternal life. Jesus is our Sovereign Ruler, who sits at the right hand of God. Jesus is worthy of all our love and devotion and worship. Jesus requires first place in our hearts. This is the way to be his disciples and have a right relationship with him. We cannot allow any other relationship to become an obstacle between us and Jesus.

Here we learn that we should acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our families. Each member should give first priority to Jesus. This means to acknowledge Jesus' reign over our family members. Parents need to recognize Jesus as the author of life. Children's lives are entrusted to parents by God. Parents are just stewards of their children's lives. For a certain time, parents have the privilege and responsibility to raise their children in the Lord. Biblical instruction and discipline are essential (Eph 6:4). A godly influence through showing a good example is crucial. Parents should guide their children to have personal faith in Christ and to discover God's purpose for their lives. Abraham is a good example. He loved God more than Isaac and helped Isaac to obey God's will for his life (Ge 22). Parents should not raise their children according to their own ambitions, desires and expectations—like “tiger moms” or “helicopter moms,” or “self-glory seeking dads.” Rather, they should help discover and nurture their children's God-given gifts. Children should acknowledge God's sovereignty over their lives and families and be obedient to their parents in the Lord and honor them (Eph 6:1-3). Jesus is a good example. At the age of 12, Jesus had to be in his Father's house. He loved God first. Yet he obeyed his parents, submitting to them. When Christ is Lord of the family, Jesus' disciples are raised in the home to become a source of blessing to the Christian community and to the world.

On the other hand, when Christ is not acknowledged as Lord of the family, what happens? One tendency is that parents put themselves in the place of God and abuse their authority. Parents wound their children and make them bitter. The children's character does not form properly and they become rebellious and a source of grief. It is easy for husbands to misuse their authority over their wives. Then the wives become too sorrowful and depressed to mother their families wholeheartedly. Another tendency is for parents to love their children more than God. Their children become their idols. Parents are always anxious about their children's futures instead of trusting in God. Their anxiety infects their children and leads to unhealthy emotional development. Such parents fail to discipline their children. Then the children become spoiled and

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useless. In his book "Counterfeit Gods" Tim Keller explains how a woman who put her daughter first in her heart and life became an idol worshiper. The consequence was mutually destructive. If any other relationship comes before Christ, it becomes an idol for us. This is why Jesus challenges us to put our first priority on Jesus by "hating" our family members. It is for our own good.

Here, we need to consider what true love is, and how it relates to hatred. People use the word "love" in many ways. The general concept of love in our time is a call to embrace anything and everything without discernment. This is indeed dangerous. God's love is based on the truth. The Bible says very clearly, **"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good"** (Ro 12:9). 1 Corinthians 13:6 says, **"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth."** Love is not blind to evil; it is very discerning. In love there is no hint of deception, evil or wickedness. Love must be true and sincere with a pure and good intention. When we love Jesus with this kind of love, we can have an intimate relationship with him. With this love, we can love our family members, and ourselves also. When a family member indulges in sin, we speak the truth in love to warn them and help them repent. Also, we are very clear toward our own sinful nature; we hate sin in ourselves and struggle against it to the point of shedding our blood (Heb 12:4). When we have this kind of love, we can be disciples of Jesus and a blessing to others. So the question is, **"Is my love for Jesus so hot and fervent that all other loves are hatred by comparison?"** I am sorry to say that this is not the case for me. The love that was once burning so hot in my heart, has now cooled. I cannot but repent my lack of love for Jesus, and pray to love him more. Lord, have mercy on me and restore my first love for you.

Second, Jesus challenged them to carry their cross in order to be his disciples (27). Although discipleship starts in our homes, it must go beyond, to how we live in public. Jesus said, **"And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"** (27). In Jesus' time, to carry one's cross had a precise literal meaning. Those condemned to die by Roman law were forced to carry a cross through the city to publicly acknowledge that the Roman Empire was right in its judgment, and the criminal deserved to be punished. It was intended to make an example of the criminal and to uphold the Roman government. But in Jesus' case, there was no charge against him; he was sinless. He took our places and publicly bore the shame and disgrace that we deserve in his body and died for our sins. This is the way of salvation God designed. Only Jesus could carry the cross of salvation for all mankind. For us to carry our cross

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is to accept what Jesus has done for us and to testify publicly that he is our Lord and Savior. Jesus said, **“I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God”** (Lk 12:8). Since Jesus' time, countless sincere Christians have publicly testified that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. For many, this testimony was given in spite of being socially outcast and even martyred. To testify in this way requires courage and commitment and a decision to receive persecution, even to give one's life.

These days we have been encouraged by Olympic athletes who publicly confess Jesus as Savior and Lord. After winning a silver medal in platform diving, David Boudia said, “...our identity is in Christ and we're thankful for this opportunity to be able to dive....” Wayde Van Niekerk of South Africa won gold in the 400-meter race. Afterward, he tweeted a picture of him kneeling on the track with an inscription saying “Jesus did it,” and “God is power.”² Usain Bolt, known as “the fastest man alive,” won gold medals in three sprint events for the third straight Olympics. Before and after his races, he takes a moment to give thanks and praise to his Lord Jesus Christ.³ When the BBC interpreted this as having a moment to himself, he corrected them, “I was giving thanks to God.” Brianna Rollins won a gold medal in the hurdles. Afterward, while being interviewed on television, she gave all glory to God and to her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Though the interviewer was not so happy about it, she continued to thank God who heard her prayer. These athletes gave their minutes of fame to Jesus Christ to testify about him publicly. Let's carry our own crosses as disciples of Jesus by testifying about him publicly in our campuses, workplaces, and everywhere.

Third, Jesus challenged them to give up everything in order to be his disciples (28-33). As we learned thus far, the condition to be Jesus' disciple is very radical. It cannot be approached with a casual attitude, nor can one be a partially committed follower. It requires one's full commitment, not just in the short run, but throughout one's lifetime. Jesus offered two illustrations in order to help people count the cost and make a serious decision—not a hasty or emotional decision. For example, if we stop in the middle of building a tower because we ran out of money, that would be shameful, not to mention a great waste of time, money and effort. Also, to begin a battle without confidence in our forces would be foolish and fatal. After giving these illustrations, Jesus said, **“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have**

² http://www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=18950

³ <http://qpolitical.com/usain-bolt-reveals-god-blessed-speed-spread-word-jesus-christ/>

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cannot be my disciples” (33). Following Jesus is “all or nothing.” There is no middle way. Jesus did not advertise a “disciple trial period,” with a money-back guarantee. He required full surrender from the beginning. How can Jesus expect us to give up everything? It is because Jesus already gave up everything for us. He renounced his position, power and authority as God and came into this world as a little baby in a manger in order to serve us. He did not live a comfortable life, but a common, ordinary person’s life in order to understand us. He gave up his life as an offering to God in order to redeem us from our sins. In this way Jesus has given us everything: the forgiveness of sins, adoption to sonship, eternal life, fruitful and meaningful life on earth, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of God as our everlasting inheritance. Whatever we give up is very small in comparison. From time to time, someone tells Mother Barry, “I admire your sacrificial life—you even gave up marriage.” She responds, “When I think of what Jesus has done for me, I don’t feel that I have sacrificed anything.” In truth, it is a great privilege to give up something for Jesus.

In verses 34-35, Jesus concluded with a metaphor of salt which teaches his disciples to be influential to the end of their lives in this world. Jesus said, **“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.”** Salt melts into whatever it is sprinkled on and makes it tasty. Salt is also a preservative which keeps perishable foods from spoiling. In the same way, influential Christians are pleasing to Jesus and a blessing to others. However, if a person loses influence by compromising and becoming half-hearted, they become useless, and even harmful. Jesus really wants us to live with wholehearted commitment as his disciples until we give our lives to him. But only those who have ears to hear can understand his teaching (35b). Let’s be salty disciples.