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Everything: The Cost of Following Christ

Church & Community, Prayer, Discipleship

Jesus is unlike any leader the world has ever known. When the crowds swell around him, he does not seize the moment to build his following — he turns and tells them the truth. Following him will cost everything: family loyalties, personal ambitions, even life itself. These are not the words of a harsh king trying to thin the ranks. They are the words of a loving Savior who knows that half-hearted faith is no faith at all.

This week we walk through one of the most searching passages in the Gospels — Luke 14:25–35 — and let Jesus' crowd-shrinking, hype-killing words do their work in us. Each day we will sit with a different facet of his call: the high cost, the deep loyalty required, the cross we are invited to carry, and the extraordinary joy that awaits those who count the cost and follow him anyway.

Day 1 — The Hype-Killing Savior

Luke 14:25-27

> *Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.*

Luke 9:51

> *As the day of His ascension approached, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

There is something profoundly counter-cultural about Jesus. In a world that runs on hype, on building momentum and expanding followings, Jesus does the opposite. When the crowds swell around him, he doesn't ride the wave — he turns and speaks words that shrink it. He is not interested in bandwagon followers.

The reason is love. Jesus knows that hype cannot save anyone. A crowd that follows out of excitement, curiosity, or cultural convenience is a crowd that will scatter the moment the road gets hard. So he speaks clearly, even provocatively, about what it truly means to come after him. He puts the cost in the headline, not the fine print.

This honesty is itself a gift. A savior who lets people wander into discipleship unprepared is no savior at all. Jesus respects us enough to tell us the truth: following him is a decision of the most serious kind, with real and lasting consequences. He is not a product to be sampled. He is a king to be surrendered to.

Reflect: In what ways have you been drawn to Jesus by excitement or comfort rather than a clear-eyed understanding of what it means to truly follow him?

Day 2 — First Allegiance

Luke 14:26

> *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be My disciple.*

Exodus 20:12

> *Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

Ephesians 5:25

> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*

Jesus' words about 'hating' father and mother land like a shock. They are meant to. He is not contradicting the commandment to honor parents, nor is he calling us to be cold or cruel toward those we love. He is using strong, provocative language to make an unmistakable point: no relationship — not even the most sacred ones — can occupy the throne of our hearts where Jesus alone belongs.

The reason Jesus speaks this way is that he understands human nature deeply. Our family bonds are the most powerful bonds we have. They were designed by God and are genuinely good. But precisely because they are so powerful, they can become the very thing that pulls us away from him. When a parent, a spouse, or a child pressures us to compromise our faith, the pull is enormous. Unless Jesus is clearly, unambiguously first, we will bend.

Here is the surprising grace in this teaching: putting Jesus above our families does not make us worse parents, spouses, or children. It makes us better ones. To grow in Jesus is to grow in his love, and his love overflows into every relationship we have. The person who loves Jesus most is being shaped into someone who can love others most faithfully. Reordering our allegiances around Christ is not a loss — it is the only path to loving our families as God created us to.

Reflect: Is there a relationship in your life that has quietly been placed above your loyalty to Jesus? What would it look like to reorder that allegiance this week?

Day 3 — Take Up Your Cross

Luke 14:27

> *And whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.*

Luke 9:22-23

> *"The Son of Man must suffer many things," He said. "He must be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Then Jesus said to all of them, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*

Philippians 1:29

> *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him,*

When Jesus told the crowd to bear their own cross, they did not hear a metaphor. They had seen crucifixion. They had watched people they knew die that way, stripped of dignity, exposed, suffering slowly. The cross was not a symbol of mild inconvenience. It was the most brutal and humiliating death the ancient world had devised. To pick one up and carry it meant one thing: you were walking toward death.

This is what Jesus calls his followers to. Not a vague sense of self-improvement or spiritual enrichment, but a total surrender — laying down the old life so that a new one, his life, can be lived through us. As one voice from church history captured it: when Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die. There is no light version of Christianity on offer here.

And yet Jesus is not asking his disciples to do something he was not willing to do himself. He was, at the very moment he spoke these words, walking toward Jerusalem, toward his own cross. He would die there, not for his own sin but for ours, absorbing the judgment we deserved. The call to take up our cross is not the demand of a tyrant — it is the invitation of a savior who walked that road first, for us. Following him costs everything. But it is a path he has already blazed out of love.

Reflect: What does 'bearing your cross' look like in your concrete, everyday life right now — and what makes it feel costly?

Day 4 — Count the Cost

Luke 14:28-33

> *Which of you, wishing to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it? Otherwise, if he lays the foundation and is unable to finish the work, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This man could not finish what he started to build.' Or what king on his way to war with another king will not first sit down and consider whether he can engage with ten thousand men the one coming against him with twenty thousand? And if he is unable, he will send a delegation while the other king is still far off, to ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any one of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.*

Matthew 13:44-46

> *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one very precious pearl, he went away and sold all he had and bought it.*

Jesus is remarkably practical. After the hard words about hating family and bearing a cross, he tells two stories — one about a builder who runs out of money mid-project and becomes the neighborhood's joke, and one about a king who charges into battle without calculating whether he can win. The point is simple and sobering: do not start something you haven't thought through.

Jesus is not trying to frighten people away from following him. He is doing the opposite — he is protecting them from a shallow commitment that will collapse under pressure. A half-finished house is worse than no house. A disciple who turns back at the first sign of hardship not only fails, but brings reproach. Jesus is saying: sit down, think clearly, understand what you are committing to — and then commit fully.

What makes this possible? The parables in Matthew about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price reveal the secret. The man who finds the treasure doesn't reluctantly sell everything — he does it in his joy. When the value of what you have found exceeds the value of everything you are giving up, the cost no longer feels like a loss. Counting the cost of following Jesus and counting the worth of Jesus are inseparable. The more clearly we see him, the more gladly we surrender to him.

Reflect: Have you genuinely sat down and counted the cost of following Jesus — and have you equally counted the worth of what he offers?

Day 5 — Salty, True, and Glad

Luke 14:34-35

> *Salt is good, but if the salt loses its savor, with what will it be seasoned? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile, and it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Revelation 3:15-16

> *I know your deeds; you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were one or the other! So because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to vomit you out of My mouth!*

John 16:8

> *And when He comes, He will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:*

Romans 5:8

> *But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

In Jesus' day, two piles of white granules could sit side by side on a table and look identical. One was salt — useful, preserving, full of flavor. The other was the useless mineral residue left behind

when the salt had evaporated out. You couldn't tell the difference by looking. Jesus closes his teaching on discipleship with this image, and the warning is clear: not everyone who appears to be a disciple is one.

True discipleship is not found in the extremes of watered-down, low-commitment faith that lowers the bar just to fill seats — nor in cold, performance-based religion that keeps people out unless they check every box. Both are counterfeits. Real, salty Christianity holds two things together that the world rarely sees in the same place: radical welcome for every kind of sinner, and radical cost — the surrender of the whole life to King Jesus.

What produces this kind of disciple? It is not willpower or moral determination. It is the grace of God received and truly tasted. When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see our sin for what it is, and then opens our eyes to see the staggering love of God that met us in our sin through Jesus, something shifts. The cost of discipleship no longer looks like a burden — it looks like the only reasonable response. The person who has truly encountered the mercy of Christ finds that Jesus becomes more precious than anything they are being asked to lay down. That is salty Christianity. That is the real thing — and it is the most joyful life there is.

Reflect: As you reflect on this week's meditations, where do you find yourself on the journey — a bandwagon follower, a counterfeit disciple, or someone being drawn into wholehearted surrender to Christ?

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