



A Passion to Follow Jesus

Luke 14:25-35

A few weeks ago I started a series of sermons on following Jesus: the One who said “I am the way, the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through me.” So therefore if we want to get to the Father, we need to follow Him. We saw that there was a difference between believing that what Jesus said is true and actually basing life decisions on what He said and promised.

And we saw how when we trust we realise that what he said is true and that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to open our minds to the truth of God and give us power to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

That’s all pretty positive stuff I think you’ll agree. Jesus changes lives and changes situations and we have heard that in testimony this morning and we give God glory for what He is doing in the lives of His people. So it can be and is exciting to be a follower of Jesus – a disciple. Incidentally, if you are a Christian this morning, then you are a disciple – a learner. As we follow the Master He teaches us and we learn more about Him, more of the things of God.

But let me go to the other side of the coin. Understanding what Jesus has done for us, trusting Him, receiving His presence and power through the Holy Spirit and the desire to follow Him as a disciple has massive implications for our lives.

As we look at a Passion to Follow Jesus this morning, we are going to realise afresh that following Jesus is not the easy option in life. It’s one thing to want to follow Jesus, but the road he leads us down isn’t the easy option in life – it can be a rocky one. Following Jesus has consequences.

Jesus had crowds of people following Him. Why were they there? To learn from God? To follow him wherever? To do whatever He would ask? Or were they there for other reasons? Perhaps it was to hear his wonderful stories? To listen and be challenged by His stirring preaching? To see Him do wonderful miracles? After all, it was excellent theatre! It was great entertainment! It warmed the soul! It was something they could cherish and tell their children about. Surely God will be pleased with them for having followed Jesus and listened to His teaching? They’d have given God their portion and He will have given them a lift? Wasn’t that OK? Surely they were more spiritual for listening to Jesus and seeing His miracles?

They saw in Jesus vitality and the power of God but seeing and hearing had not changed them. Why was that? Theirs was a faith of doing religious things like going to hear the Rabbi, because that was the nature of law. To them that’s all religion was. The writer of Ecclesiastes said quite correctly that there is nothing new under the sun and right down to the modern age we see faith as something religious we do and that pervades right down into good evangelical churches – like ours!

Thinking goes like this If we are Christian, disciples of Jesus Christ, then we do “religious” things. Normally it means doing church in some way. "And God is happy with that – isn’t He?

The problem is that each one of us is committed to something: it may be our house, our family, some activity we do, some political thing. And our devotion to God somehow fits around all that. But we come to church so God is going to be happy with that – isn’t He? And Jesus turned to this religious crowd and cuts the ground from under all their feet. Being a disciple isn’t defined by what we do, but by what we are. It’s a radical message and turns religious logic on its head.

Why is it radical? Because being a disciple of Jesus is not about going to Church on a Sunday, or following laws and traditions - about being religious - but entering into and deepening a relationship with God, and Jesus sets down what discipleship means here.

◆ Discipleship changes our priorities

"Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well.

Other translations are more blunt than the GNB. Jesus actually said, you can't be my disciples unless you hate all these people. This seems a strange way of putting things doesn't it? This is a good example of what people call hyperbole. It's when you exaggerate something for effect. Jesus doesn't want us to start a hate campaign against our closest relatives. What it means is what the GNB says *"Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well.* Discipleship is loving Jesus above all others so that which is most important in the world seems like hate in comparison. And why would we want to do that? Because it is the example of Christ. It was because of His love for us that He was prepared to leave that which was His right and die for each one of us.

When we see the world in this eternal context, we see things as they are. We have changed priorities. Life is not something that finishes at death, but is something that leads us into eternity. What truly matters are the values and priorities of heaven because that is the only thing that lasts.

For the people following Jesus, they had their lives, their and religion which was immensely important to them. It controlled their lives. And Jesus says: forget that and follow me.

And that's us too. What's the most important thing in our lives?. It's Jesus who should be the most important thing in our lives. Not family, not jobs, not ourselves - but we should be conformed to Him. Like Him. Reflecting His nature, His love. If we love Him, we will desire Him. We will long after His presence and we will yearn to know Him more.

It isn't about doing more service in the Church. When I hear sermons on this passage - and I've even preached on it myself - it's easy to guilt trip people into doing more things in church - to being more committed to the church. But the church isn't Jesus and I've come across enough people in my life who love the church, but Jesus? It's easy to love the church before loving Jesus - and when we do that, things are the wrong way around.

Discipleship is about realising the love God have for us and in understanding we love because He first loved us. It's not a call to do, it's a call to be. And it's that change of heart in us that changes our priorities as human beings.

It's a change of heart that makes us look at our possessions and say "Where's Jesus in these?"
It's a change of heart that makes us look at our relationships and say "Where's Jesus in these?"
It's a change of heart that makes us look at our motives for service and say "Where's Jesus in these?"
It's a change of heart that makes us look at the use of our time and say of each moment of the day "Where's Jesus in this?"

All I can say about these words this morning is look on them again and let the Holy Spirit minister into your life, because it's His work in us. I'm not saying to you - here's scripture and you must be more committed. You must do this and you must do that. What I'm saying is look again at the cross and see the Saviour dying for you and let the Spirit remind you afresh of His love for you and that will control everything you say and do. And just loving Him above all others will determine how you want to follow Him and start to follow Jesus with His priorities in mind and not your own.

◆ Discipleship changes our direction

27 Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.

This seems a strange thing to say. Carry a cross - the Roman symbol of execution: a mark of shame. And people as we know wear these things as jewellery. In the youth Alpha book there's a great picture of a lady wearing electric chair earrings and another wearing a gun necklace - all like the cross being symbols of execution. Hardly delightful stuff.

But before we shun identification with the symbol of the cross, we see here that Jesus wants to identify with the cross by taking ours up - he says daily in Luke 9. So we should be people who identify with the cross, not as something we wear but something we live.

Many people would say that this identification with the cross must mean that we should be so dedicated to Christ that we should be prepared to die for Him. I guess that's true because as we have explored before, the Christian word for love, agape is self-surrendering love, love for others that even means death on a cross. So if you wear a cross, that's what you are signifying - or should be.

But there's more!

- ➔ *it is a symbol of God's love in action for the human race therefore it is a symbol of our love in action as we join Him in that mission of love. As we take up the cross of Jesus, we as disciples show we are following Him in His mission of rescuing the world.*
- ➔ *it is a symbol of obedience to the Father - for us it is a symbol of obedience going to follow Him - where He goes, I go. Whatever He asks, I'll do. It is an acceptance of God's power, not mine. Jesus did His earthly work in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we take up the cross we recognise that we can't do any of this without the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus never asks us to do things that are impossible. What He asks is possible - but never in our power: only in the power of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to have the same vision of our lives He does and see what He can do in His power.*

If this is you already this morning - then wear your cross with pride because it signifies who you are committed to and ready to die for.

Discipleship isn't just about our devotion to Jesus, but our devotion to His mission and task by expressing His love to others and to a lost world. Like our love for Him, it's not something we can vamp ourselves to or an obligation of law to do things. It's a passion that wells up from our heart as the Spirit ministers into our lives. So let God do His work of grace in you.

◆ Discipleship is costly

28 If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and figure out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. 29 If you don't, you will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of you. 30 "You began to build but can't finish the job!" they will say. 31 If a king goes out with ten thousand men to fight another king who comes against him with twenty thousand men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. 32 If he isn't, he will send messengers to meet the other king to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off.

Counting the cost of something we all do. You don't do something if you can't pay - although in our credit hungry generation, that's exactly what many people do and find themselves counting the cost afterwards when they have difficulty paying the bill! However much we might want something, there is a price to be paid. If we start something and then we can't finish then we look very foolish don't we? Come and have a look at the flat-packed wardrobes in my hallway if you don't believe me! It looks even sillier when it is a prestige building that runs out of money as the presentation pictures show.

When we become Jesus' disciples, we need to understand that it involves something. Jesus doesn't skimp on the descriptions. He doesn't deceive. If we follow Jesus, the consequences could be costly. As in Mastermind, they say "I've started, so I'll finish"; there's nothing sadder than seeing individuals and churches becoming shipwrecked because they don't understand what Jesus is all about. The second picture that Jesus uses is even sadder. If we enter into the spiritual battle without the resources then we have to find terms of peace with the enemy - surrender! As we look at the church in Britain today; as we look at the individuals within it, we see surrender all over the place.

Bing a Christin is costly – it may cost you that family, your friends, your possessions – even your life! That's what loving Jesus above all things is about. If you are a disciple of Jesus, that's as far as God may ask you to go. Would you do it for Him? That's hard isn't it? So often it's the other way around. We try to juggle *our* time so that we can serve Him a little more. We try to juggle *our* money so that we can give more. We try to give God some of *our* attention so we can pray and read His word. *Our* time, *our* attention, *our* money. Ours – or His? It's time to look at God from a different perspective – to give up *us* and follow Him.

◆ Discipleship should not be neglected

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. 35 It is no good for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown away. Listen, then, if you have ears!"

This little verse comes at the end of this passage and is put there for a reason. It comes three times in the gospels, each in a different context, although the meaning is the same. The implication in terms of discipleship here is that disciples are the salt which is the same as in Matthew and Mark's gospel. It's here for more than the sake of putting it somewhere. It comes at the end of this section on what it means to be a disciple and as we have seen as disciples we are called to be different, not in what we do but in who we are. And if we follow Him as we are supposed to - in the power of His Spirit - we will be people who are world changers or Felixstowe changers. So what's this about?

Jesus is probably referring to rock salt. It's not the refined salt we have which is pure Sodium Chloride, but contains mostly other stuff too which is tasteless. If we neglect our rock salt and leave it lying around in the damp, the sodium chloride will dissolve and lose it's saltiness as the other, tasteless material in rock salt gets left behind. We have something - our faith - let's not neglect what God is calling us to be because if we do, we become useless in serving the purposes of God.

The bottom line is that when we came to Christ, we entered into a relationship with our Father, with His Son and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It was (or should have been or perhaps should still be) a life-changing experience. We said that we were no longer going to live our way but God's way – following Jesus. Being a disciple changes our passions from self-gratification to following Jesus because we have entered into a new love relationship where our passion for Him eclipses our pattern for other relationships and things.

Because our passion for Him is so great, we have a passion for what He does: His work of redemption. Most of all we are people who must understand that we have a God who is a finisher and who has the resources to finish what He has started.

Are we going to let Him?

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