

A Word For Fair-weather Followers

By Mark Jarvinen

²⁵ 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.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. (Luke 14:25-33)

Well, our beloved **Minnesota Twins** have been winning this season in fine fashion and have shattered the team home run record set by the Yankees last season. Predictably, the Twins’ fair-weather fans are back on board once again. Only one problem, we’ll likely face the Yankees in the postseason again. Anyone ready to jump? **Will we suddenly become fair-weather fans?**

In today’s text we find Jesus facing the reality that He had picked up some “**fair weather followers**” along the way. Jesus is now half way on His journey to Jerusalem where a cross awaited Him. The focus of Jesus’ public commentary now shifts from confronting his critics, the Jewish leaders who had been antagonistic toward His Kingdom mission; to

warning His would be followers that since suffering and death lay ahead for Him, they too could expect reprisals. Many who had followed Jesus up to this point could be classified as “**curious onlookers.**” Jesus felt it was time to “**lay it on the line**” in terms of the cost of discipleship. Comfort and convenience were not to be the hallmarks of the life Jesus offered, the kind of “**Prozac Messiah**” that David Tripp describes in his devotional, New Morning Mercies. The going would get tougher as the shadow of the cross now lengthened over Jesus’ earthly ministry. Those who would go the distance with the Master were those who would give Him their core allegiance, come what may, and honor Him above all else. Therefore, along the roadway, Jesus stopped to address the curious multitude who followed after Him. He issued a difficult challenge. Let’s take a closer look.

I. THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP vv. 26-27

As we encounter this text, it seems on the surface to teach that discipleship, (being a true follower of Jesus) is restricted only to an elite few. We’re given the impression that Jesus is speaking like a Marine recruiter who is seeking “**a few good men,**” or like a cult leader - calling only those willing to renounce all earthly ties, such as family and possessions. **But is it only the highly committed, self-renouncing few who are able, by sheer will power, to summon forth the inner resolve and moral rectitude to follow Christ?**

As we dig deeper, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, we’ll see a different emphasis emerge from this text. **Coming to faith is by grace and so is living by faith.** The emphasis is not on our own worthiness based on self-effort, but on Christ’s all sufficient grace.

A) What does Jesus mean in v. 26, where he states that to be his disciple one must “*hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters*”? Why would Jesus require every disciple to “*hate*” those whom He elsewhere commands them to “*love*”? Elsewhere in Scripture we are not even given the luxury of hating our enemies, let alone those nearest and dearest to us. The key to resolving this tension is to be found in an accurate definition of the term “*hate*” used here.

Scripture becomes its own best commentary at this point. In **Exodus 20:3**, for example, Israel was taught that they were to have no other gods before Yahweh. In **Exodus 20:5**, God says –

“*You shall not worship them or serve them [other gods]; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.*”

In other words, to have other gods, is to prevent the one true God from being top priority; in effect, hating Him. Having other gods is tantamount to “*hating God*,” because He won’t share the top spot in people’s hearts with anyone or anything else.

As we move to **Matthew 10:37** for a comparison, we read Jesus’ words –

“*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;”*

Consider this comparison closely. Jesus conveys essentially the same meaning as He does in our text from **Luke 14**, but in a more readily

understandable way. In **Matthew 10** Jesus doesn't use the word "**hate**" like the Luke passage does, but He means essentially the same thing by saying - "**Don't love family more than me.**" Thus, to "**hate**" one's family in the Luke passage actually means one must "**love them less than they love Jesus.**" To hate one's family is to make Jesus one's highest love in the language of **Luke 14**.

Cult leaders have induced youthful followers to literally abandon their families by quoting them this verse from Luke 14. **What does Jesus really mean?** Surely Jesus does not mean that one should renounce or give up one's responsibility to his/her family. Within the family structure there is an implicit understanding of mutual love. Parents support and guide, while children respect and obey. Jesus is not suggesting that his followers relinquish their **DUTIES** to their families, but rather their **DEPENDENCE** on their families. (**Remember Jesus as a 12 year old in the temple?** He did his duty to his earthly family, Mary and Joseph, by going home with them once they found him there. But he showed His dependence upon His heavenly Father by being about His business in the temple.)

To follow Christ means that He must be the object of our supreme dependence. When our Lord demanded that His disciples must "**hate**" their family, He actually meant that they must give up their dependence upon family in terms of the status and security they provide, and must depend totally on Him. **To be Jesus' disciple is not only to love Him more than anyone or anything else, it is to depend upon Him alone as one's source for living.** Independence from God is at the core of sin, and conversely, dependence on Him is at the core of discipleship.

There was a sign posted at a **textile mill** which read, “**When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman.**” A young woman was new on her job at the mill. Her thread became tangled and she thought,

“**I’ll show initiative and just straighten this out myself.**”

She tried, but the situation only worsened. Finally, she called the foreman.

“**I did the best I could,**” she said to the foreman.

“**No you didn’t,**” replied the foreman. “**Your best would have been to call on me right away.**”

The life of discipleship is just like salvation itself in the sense that neither one depends on us doing our best. It depends on us knowing that we can’t depend on ourselves.

B) Neither do we live to achieve our own goals. As v. 27 says, “**And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**”

In other words, Christ’s Kingdom purpose, which He fulfilled by going to the cross, becomes our purpose as well.

Author, **Steve Arterburn** tells the story of **Chiune Sugihara**, a Japanese man born in 1900. As a boy, Sugihara cherished the dream of becoming the Japanese ambassador to Russia. By the 1930’s, he had become ambassador to Lithuania, just one step from Russia. His life goal was within reach.

Years later, during **World War II**, a huge throng of people gathered outside his home. **They were Jews from Poland, seeking to escape Hitler's Gestapo by obtaining visas to travel to Japan.**

Three times Sugihara wired Tokyo for permission to provide the visas; but three times he was rejected. He had to choose between the fulfillment of his lifelong dream to be an ambassador on the one hand, and saving people's lives on the other hand. **He chose the latter. He disobeyed Tokyo's orders and began writing out the visas that would save the lives of these Jews from Poland.** For 28 days he wrote visas by hand, barely sleeping or eating. As a result of his insubordination, Sugihara was recalled to Japan, but he was still writing visas and shoving them through the train windows as the train chugged out of the station. **Ultimately he saved some 6,000 lives.**

Sugihara was not only a courageous Japanese; he was also a follower of Jesus Christ. **His loyalty to Christ had prompted him to give up his own ambitions in order to save lives.** He spent the rest of his days in Japan, humbly selling light bulbs. He had “**hated his own life**” (goals and agenda) for the sake of Christ. When the demand of discipleship presented itself, Sugihara said, “**I'll take up my cross and follow Christ.**”

So far we have considered the “**demand of discipleship,**” but now we move to ...

II. THE DISCOVERY OF DISCIPLESHIP vv. 28-32

Jesus shares **two illustrations** to highlight the cost of discipleship, while at the same time leading the multitude toward a wonderful discovery. He speaks of a **builder** and a **king**. Both had committed themselves to a

course of action without assessing the cost and discovered they didn't have the resources to complete what they had started. They both failed to finish and thus their respective ventures ended in humiliation and shame.

A) Why did Jesus give these illustrations? To be sure, Jesus didn't want the multitude to follow in ignorance. Out of love for them, He wanted them to know up front that the cost was high.

B) But there is another reason. Herein lies the important discovery that all who would follow after Christ will realize. **JESUS WAS NOT LOOKING FOR THOSE WHO HAD THE RESOURCES WITHIN THEMSELVES TO FOLLOW HIM, BUT FOR THOSE WHO KNEW THEY DID NOT.** This is not Jesus the Marine recruiter, looking for a few good men and women, who would count the cost and find within themselves the inner fortitude and mental toughness to go all the way with Jesus. In the first illustration, the builder, upon careful reflection, knew he didn't have the resources to complete the tower. The king, likewise, realized he didn't have the troops to win the battle so he made peace before the battle started.

Jesus' point is startling. In effect, he's teaching that people don't have the resources in and of themselves to be His disciples, any more than they have the resources to earn eternal life. Our Lord is not trying to get the multitude to muster up enough commitment to become His disciples, but to reckon with the reality that no one has the resources to follow Him from start to finish, **except by God's grace.**

Consider the Lord's own disciples. They had followed closely with Jesus for three years but had not been able to follow through to the end. **When the going got tough, the disciples didn't get going - they became disillusioned.** After Jesus' arrest, they all forsook Jesus, even Peter, who had assured Jesus that he was committed and would never

forsake Him. **If Peter, James, and John, the three closest followers of Jesus, could not follow through to the end, why would we dare to think that we could?**

CONCLUSION

Discipleship, then, is not following Christ's commands in our own strength, but with utter dependence upon Him, discovering that Jesus, by His death and resurrection, is all-sufficient. **Both the willing and the doing come from Him, not from ourselves.** The key element of discipleship is not our perfect obedience. Consider this, that even though we are justified in Christ, we are weak and inconsistent, falling short of God's glory and in need of daily forgiveness. Discipleship, like salvation, begins by recognizing the high standard required, and acknowledging our inability to meet it in our own strength. Thus, by grace we come to Christ empty-handed, looking to Him to do in and through us what we cannot do for ourselves. **Indeed, when it comes to discipleship, we simply receive what He offers, and do as He directs and empowers.**

Where are you today? Are you still trying to muster up the inner resolve and moral rectitude to be Christ's follower? Are you still trying to serve in your own strength? How's that been working for you? Are you frustrated? Defeated? Exhausted? Understand that Christ is your full provision. In Christ we have all we need. **The difference between a faithful follower of Christ and a fair-weather follower is simply the object of our dependence.** The confidence of a faithful follower lies not in his or her own performance-based striving. We have nothing in ourselves on which to depend. Someone once said, "**Nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling.**" Christ alone is the One in whom our sufficiency lies. **Not I, but Christ! We trust in Him alone – not as fair-weather**

followers, but as those who are brought along by grace, gifted with a righteousness that is not our own, forgiven and set free to serve with glad hearts. A-men.