

Luke 14:25-35 The Cost of Commitment

Why is the church in our America losing members while churches in Africa and South America are growing? There are, of course, many factors but a major one is the lack of real commitment by too many people in America who call themselves Christian.

Read I Thessalonians 2:11-12

In Luke 14:25-35 Jesus addressed the issue of what it really means to follow Him, or as Paul expressed it, “**live worthy of God.**”

Read Luke 13:22.

Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to die on a Cross, but no one really understood that at that point in His ministry. Not even the disciples understood that, let alone the many others who heard Him teach. As far as they were concerned Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to confront the Roman authorities, perhaps as Moses had confronted Pharaoh. If so, that would mean that Rome would be overthrown, and Israel would once again be free. Once Rome was overthrown it would mean that Jews would be placed in positions of leadership. Many who followed Jesus in those days were less interested in His teaching than they were in watching Him perform miracles, perhaps being fed as He had done on occasion, and in being a part of the new Israel they were sure was coming. Too many make a commitment to Jesus merely as some form of fire insurance for when they die, with no desire to follow Him closely or make Him the Lord of one's life. A genuine commitment to Jesus should not only change one's eternal destiny but give to one the only truly worthwhile cause to which one's life can be committed here and now. Americans are looking for that type of commitment today and if they do not see it, they do not want to be a part of the church.

Read Luke 14:25-27.

Jesus, fully aware of what awaited Him in Jerusalem, told those who were following Him that being one of His disciples involved far more than singing nice songs and sitting in comfortable pews once a week but rather a life of self-sacrifice, a life in which anything that stands in competition to Him must be put aside.

Verse 26 seems at first to be not only a contradiction to other verses that talk of love but a bit unrealistic in any culture. Read Matthew 10:34-38.

For the most part the specifics of that statement do not apply directly to us but in many places around the world a commitment to Jesus means just that. In some parts of the world today becoming a Christian still means that your family will seek to kill you, thinking it is their duty. In those same countries one is automatically cast out of the family and loses one's job for making a commitment to Jesus.

But the commitment that Jesus spoke of in Luke 14 is applicable not only for those whose families disown them for becoming a Christian, but it speaks to us about anything in our lives that stands in the way of being sold out completely to God. In the statement about hating one's family, the message was not one of hate, but a statement in which any emotion for anything we have should fall so far short of our love for Jesus that in comparison it seems like hate. Jesus is either loved more than anyone and everything or the love we have for Him is of little consequence. The well-known statement that "*Jesus is either Lord of all or not Lord at all*" is totally true.

It may be family, which is often that which besides Jesus we love most, but it is certainly not limited to that. In fact, the cost of discipleship for us could be a habit, a hobby, or an activity, which by itself is great, but stands in the way of our total commitment to Jesus. There is no way anyone else besides you can tell if something you hold dear is standing between you and your walk with the Lord, standing between you and your service for the Lord, standing between you and what you know you should be giving to God. The one sure thing that Jesus said is that anything that calls upon us to love it more than we love God must be either re-prioritized or else eliminated completely from our lives.

Jesus then followed His general statement on the place He should have in our life with two short parables to explain His teaching on commitment.

First, He said that any man who makes a commitment in this life, such as building a tower, and cannot finish or follow through on it, creates an embarrassment. The tower illustration is not particularly relevant to our culture but in ancient times a man would often build a tower in the middle of a field where he could sleep during that time of the year when it was possible for his crops to be stolen or more likely destroyed by an animal. A half-finished tower was a public declaration that his field was not protected; sort of like going away and leaving a sign outside saying the door is not locked. Jesus said that such an action causes embarrassment. "*Who is embarrassed?*" The answer is obvious, the one who declares a commitment without making sure he would follow through on it. That is important to see. When any one makes a public commitment of faith, that is begins a faith tower in his life, and has not thought about the cost and therefore does not follow through, that individual will be embarrassed because the world laughs at or ridicules him and not God. If we declare on Sunday that we are building a tower of commitment, and then live on Monday as if we never knew Him, then our profession on Sunday and denial on Monday embarrasses us in the eyes of the world. That does little to help us convince that world that Jesus can and does make a difference and is, therefore, worthy of following.

Jesus shared a second parable. Read Luke 14:31-32. A man who makes a commitment to Jesus and does has not considered the spiritual warfare involved in that commitment is not only going to be defeated but will be laughed at for being so foolish. The world knows the standard that Christians are supposed to live and when we do not, our failure stands out. The embarrassment of claiming what we are not willing to try to live out will fall on us for pretending to be what we are not.

Read Luke 14:35 where Jesus summed up His first two parables

Too many Christians mis-understand the New Testament idea of discipleship. We too easily reserve that description for the 12 initial disciples or maybe the pastor and missionaries but in New Testament language anyone who was seeking to follow someone and learn from that individual was a disciple. If you truly make a commitment to Jesus you are, by biblical standards, a disciple of Jesus. The goal of a commitment to Jesus is to allow Him to enable us to make of our lives all we were created and designed to be. That is what disciples do. To do less is to deny the reality of one's commitment.

Making a decision to follow Jesus is the smartest decision one can ever make. A decision to follow Jesus gives one eternal life and no decision one makes is more critical than that. But the decision to follow Jesus should also include a decision to change how one faces each day. If our faith does not impact our daily living, then Jesus said He has reason to question our desire to be His disciple.

The two short parables that Jesus told, dealt with the shame that comes to us when the world sees a habitual inconsistency between the faith we claim to have and the way we live out that faith each day. Jesus wrapped up that teaching with an observation that was obvious to everyone in His culture. Jesus spoke about salt and reminded us that not only will a half commitment to Christ bring shame to us, it will render our testimony void. Read Luke 14:34-35.

If someone decides that half a commitment is all that is needed and excuses daily life by assuming that what is claimed on Sunday is sufficient, he discovers he has no spiritual impact on those who are watching. The failure to see real commitment in the daily walk of so many Christians is at least one major reason why the church in America is not growing. The world needs desperately to see the reality of our faith. When they do not see it, they see no reason to accept our Jesus. When they genuinely see us living out our faith it is hard to resist accepting.

Jesus ended His challenge in a most powerful way, He simply said in verse 35. **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."** And today Jesus would say to each of us, **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**