

The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 14:25-35

Code: 42-196

We're coming now to the teaching of the Word of God and this is the high point of our worship as we bow before the very utterance that comes from the heavenly throne. Take your Bible, or there should be one in the pew if you didn't bring yours, and look at Luke, chapter 14...Luke, chapter 14.

For those who are visiting with us, we're so glad to have you. And when we meet together, we look into the Word of God to understand it. Our objective is to determine the meaning of Scripture and its application for our lives. We have now for many years been working our way through the gospel of Luke and telling the story of Jesus and His teaching. We have been so profoundly enriched by it. And we find ourselves in the 14th chapter of Luke at a time in the life of our Lord when He is moving from town to town and village to village and He is preaching to the people, doing miracles, healing. Always, He is calling people to follow Him, to become His disciples, to come after Him. And in paragraph after paragraph we hear the words of Jesus. In this particular one we have a very strong call to discipleship. And it is an example of how Jesus always called people to follow Him. In fact, the words that He gives here are found in many other places in the four gospels, very similar words or almost exactly the same words so we know this to be a constant pattern in His teaching. And His calls are extreme by any measure. You'll understand that when you hear what He said. Let me read it to you.

Luke 14, verse 25 introduces this message from our Lord. "Now, great multitudes were going along with Him and He turned and said to them,"...and here are His words..."If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you when he wants to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good, but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The extreme character of discipleship. The language is unmistakably absolute, definitive, severe, you might say. But this is not anyone speaking other than God Himself, God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ. He establishes the standards of discipleship. He determines the character of true repentance and saving faith. And it seems, when you study the words of Jesus, that instead of making it easy, He always seemed to make it hard. In fact, by most human assessments He makes it virtually impossible. We're good in our culture at making things easy. Simplify, simplify we're told. Make it as easy as possible. And this even finds its way into the church where we want to devise a gospel or a message that is easy to receive and easy to accept and easy to believe. This is not what Jesus did.

I came back yesterday from Mexico City where I had the opportunity to minister to what turned out to be about 4,400 pastors and church leaders. It was a great, great time. Luis Contreras, who is from our church and graduated from the college and the seminaries down there, he was my translator. He is a great preacher. I know because I hear him preach while I'm preaching (laughter). That's how we do it. He is my interpreter. And the best way to do it...I don't like to say something and then stop and say it and stop and say it and stop and, you know, like, I speak, he speaks, I speak, he speaks. I can't do that. I need to keep going. And he's the same. He needs to keep going. So he's adept enough. I get up in front and I just preach and they turn my mike down very low so you can kind of hear me in the distance. He's behind me preaching with all his heart, booming out over the whole place simultaneously with me just a second or so behind. The only challenge...the challenge for him...is to stay up with me. The challenge for me is to keep my train of thought while somebody else is preaching in another language over top of me (laughter). After it was over, Steve Green, the well-known singer, came up and he was scratching his head and he says, "How do you guys do that?" (Laughter) But it was a great, great time. I was sort of bombarded by many of the precious Mexican people who have known about our ministry, listened to our radio and read the books and translate it into Spanish and have the study Bible and things like that. And many of them came to me with a little book *Hard to Believe* in Spanish, which features this kind of teaching that we read about. And I was so blessed to know that it's in Spanish and many of them had it. They wanted me to sign it and we talked about it and it was a great encouragement. And I was thinking about that book and I thought, you know, the way I began that book is a great way to begin to look at this passage again. And so if you don't mind, I would like to quote myself (laughter). Now, I don't know if you have to put quotation marks around yourself when you're quoting yourself but here goes (laughter). Some of you will remember the book *Hard to Believe* and you might remember that this is how it began.

"The first role of successful merchandising is to give consumers what they want. If they want bigger burgers, make their burgers bigger. Designer bottled water in six fruit flavors? Done. Mini-vans with ten cup holders? Give 'em 20. You've got to keep the customer satisfied. You've got to modify your product and your message to meet their needs if you want to build a market and get ahead of the competition. Today, this same consumer mindset has invaded Christianity. The church service is too long you say. We'll shorten it. One pastor guarantees his sermons will never last more than seven

minutes."...that's sick (laughter)..."Too formal? Wear your sweat suit. Too boring? Wait till you hear our band. If the message is too confrontational or too judgmental or too exclusive, scary, unbelievable, hard to understand or too much anything else for your tastes, churches everywhere are eager to adjust the message to make you more comfortable. This new version of Christianity makes you a partner on the team, a design consultant on church life and does away with old-fashioned authority, guilt trips, accountability and moral absolutes. One suburban church sent out a mailer recently promising an informal, relaxed, casual atmosphere. Great music from our band and believe it or not, you'll even have fun. That's all great if you're a coffeehouse. It's Christianity for consumers, Christianity light, the redirection, watering down and misinterpretation of the Biblical gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable and popular. It tastes great going down. It settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch. It's custom tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true saving gospel of Jesus Christ because it's designed by men not God and it's hollow and worthless. In fact, it's worse than worthless because people who hear the message of Christianity light think they're hearing the gospel, think they're being rescued from eternal judgment when, in fact, they're being tragically misled."

Well, that's how I began the book and that really takes us to where we are in this text. The true gospel, the true call to follow Jesus is a call to self-denial. It's not a call to self-fulfillment. It is not Christianity light. It is not a man-centered, self-loving, psychologically defined message. The gospel is a call to sinners to submit everything to Jesus Christ. Simply, it is a call to find your life in death. It is a call to find your life by losing it, to gain it by abandoning it, to live it to the fullest by emptying it. There is no Christianity light in the Bible. There is no Christianity light in the teaching of Jesus. Our Lord's words, frankly, weren't very friendly; they were frightening. They weren't even comforting; they were threatening. They certainly weren't easy; they were hard. And His invitations to salvation, while motivated by love and motivated by compassion, filled with grace and mercy, offering forgiveness, peace and joy now and forever, were still demanding at what anybody would say is a very extreme level. There is no other way to define what we just read than extreme. This is clearly narrow gate evangelism. It calls for a severe alteration in life, which basically is a kind of death. It reverses and redefines everything that matters...how you view your closest relationships, how you view yourself and how you view everything you possess, all the people in your life, your own life and all your stuff. And Jesus says, if you don't hate the people who are closest to you and even your own life, and you're not willing to give up all your own possessions, you cannot be My disciple. This is an invitation to follow Christ. He says, in verse 26, "if anyone comes to Me." He says in verse 27, "come after Me." If you want to come to Christ, then come after Christ, follow Him and be one of His own disciples, that is My disciple, one that really belongs to Me, it'll cost you everything. It'll cost you everything. Jesus is not offering a makeover. He's calling for a takeover. Very different from the easy kind of Christianity light that we're so familiar with. Seems like people want to do whatever makes it easy. Jesus wanted to do whatever made it impossible. No one could ever accuse Jesus of giving anyone an easy way and, therefore, contributing to a false confidence, a false sense of salvation. He made extreme demands. They were not unwarranted. After all, He is God. He is the

Sovereign of the universe and He has a right to be adored and worshipped and loved and served and obeyed. In fact, the Old Testament tells us that the commandments are all summed up in one great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." And that's what Jesus is calling for, a dominating love, a surpassing love, a love beyond all other loves, a supreme love. And He is thwarting superficiality. Here we have, in this text, a sample of His call to salvation. For those of us who've been going through Luke for a long time, we've heard this before. This is not new. This is what Jesus preached from town to town and village to village and house to house. He's calling people to salvation.

Now, admittedly, the content of the gospel is not here. In this text, we don't read about Him claiming to be God, being God in human flesh, being the Messiah, the Redeemer. He doesn't talk about His coming cross and resurrection. All of those are components of the gospel. All of those are the historical realities of the gospel that must be believed. Here He's not talking about the objective content of the gospel; He's talking about the subjective attitude of the one who comes to the gospel. What is the kind of commitment that one must make to the Christ of the gospel? That's the issue here. And the extremity of it is obvious.

Now, last time I told you we're going to give you three points. We looked at one. We'll pick it up by way of review and then take the final two points. The first thing is this. Jesus says that becoming His disciple demands the abandonment of past priorities. Becoming His disciple demands the abandonment of past priorities. Our lives are basically summed up in three dimensions: the people in our lives, our selves and our stuff. That makes up our life...who we relate to, our own personal desires, goals, ambitions and the possessions that we have. And Jesus, as you remember, is saying you have to completely reverse your attitude toward those things. Verse 26, He says to this great multitude that was going along with Him as He was journeying, eventually headed for His death in Jerusalem, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters..." We'll stop right there for a moment and say this is such severe language. Is He talking about emotional hate, psychological hate? Is He talking about a bitter, angry, hostile attitude that would be contrary to everything we know about the fact that Jesus said we're to love one another? No. You have to understand that this is a kind of Hebraistic expression. You remember, Jesus also said this: "No man can serve two masters...he will love the one and hate the other." It's a way to indicate preference or loving one more and loving one less. And that's precisely what Jesus said in Matthew 10:37 when He said almost the said thing only He said there if anyone loves father, mother more than Me or wife or husband more than Me or brother, sister more than Me, he cannot be My disciple. So when you compare that passage, this is simply a way to speak of preference, loving one more and another less. It's what He said as well in the Old Testament repeated in the New, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." It does not mean that God literally, emotionally hated and despised Esau. It meant that His priority, His covenant, His promise, His love in that sense with all of the implications was given to Jacob and not to Esau. And Jacob, then being the preferred one. The Old Testament also says if a man has two wives, he'll love one and hate the

other and all it means is not that he will actually love one and despise the other emotionally but rather one will be preferred over the other. And that is what Jesus is saying here. You have to understand this, that while your priority may have been in time past the relationships around you and you did what those around you wanted you to do, your family, those that were intimately in your life, they were the ones who basically charted your course, because those relationships meant so much to you, those are all sublimated, those are all subordinated. From now on, you love Me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. What honors Me, what pleases Me, what I desire, what I will, what I command as the Lord of your life takes precedent over all other demands and relationships. He also said at the end of verse 26, this is not just true of the people around you, this is true of your own self view. You have to hate your own life. What does that mean? That you have some kind of morbid, suicidal attitude? That you're somewhat masochistic or self-destructive? No. What it means is that you consider yourself and your will and your ambition and your desire and your purposes as minor, miniscule, unimportant compared to your desire to do what honors your Lord. When you come to Me, Jesus says, you're not just adding Me to your life. I'm not just decoration. I'm not just the topping. I'm gonna take over. You will receive eternal life. You will receive a place in Heaven. You will receive blessing in time and unlimited and inexplicable blessing throughout eternity. Your sins will all be forgiven. Grace, peace, joy, fulfillment forever will be yours. But for that gift I want to take control of your life so that I may truly fulfill it, truly satisfy it and truly use it for My glory and your good. That's why Romans 8:28 says "All things work together for good to those that love God..." Why? Because God is working what is best for time and eternity in and through those who are His own. You're willing then to subordinate all relationships to the Lordship of Christ. You're willing to subordinate your own life. Literally, it's a kind of death. It's a kind of death. You lose your life to find it. You die to live. And that's exactly what He says in verse 27. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." The price for following Jesus in those days and in history in many places and even today in parts of the world, you name the name of Jesus Christ, it could cost you your life. The cross here is simply a symbol of death. It was a torture instrument used to execute people. It's not a mystical idea. It's a very concrete way to express martyrdom. Are you willing to give your life? Are you willing, not only to give up your desires, your ambitions, your dreams, your hopes, all the things that you think are your well-crafted purposes and plans, abandoning them to My sovereign authority, subordinating them to My will, but even to the point where it could cost you your life? Are you willing to say with the apostle Paul "for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain"? Are you willing to say that? Are you so eager to have your sins forgiven and the hope of eternal life that if it cost you even your life in this world, that's a small price to pay? Yeah, there are many people who would come to Christ if it didn't cost them their relationships, if it didn't cost them their dreams. You hear people today say, oh, you know, come to Jesus and He'll fix up all your relationships. He'll make your life happy. Come to Jesus and He'll fulfill everything you want, whatever you can dream, whatever you can scheme, whatever you think your plan and your purpose and your *raison d'etre* is in the world, Jesus will make sure you fulfill all of those dreams. Those are all deceptive lies. It's not about Jesus giving you what you want. You come to Jesus, He says, if it costs you all your

relationships? Would you come to Me, He says, if it costs you all your plans? Would you come to Me even if it costs you your very breath in this world? That's how you can determine how desperate a person is to be forgiven, how important Heaven is. The Christian gospel is not offering Heaven on earth; we're offering Heaven in Heaven. In fact, you can become a Christian in this life and it might cost you your family and it might cost you all your own dreams and desires. The Lord has something better. And it might cost you your life. But a far greater weight of glory is offered to you...eternal life. And even in this life, with the sacrifices, complete fulfillment, satisfaction, settled joy and peace in knowing that everything is in the hands of your Lord who is working it together for your good.

Well, then He talks about our stuff, doesn't He, over in verse 33. You can skip down to verse 33 because it kind of fits in this first point. "So, therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up all his own possessions." That's all that's left. Now, we've been stripped of relationships in terms of priority. We've been stripped of our own self-interests in terms of priority. And now we're basically dealing with everything we have. This is so definitive. No one...so, therefore, no one of you... That's absolute. That is without any caveat. "No one of you can be My disciple who will or does not give up all his own possessions." In what sense do you give them up? Well, how do you become a Christian? By selling everything you have and giving it away and becoming a beggar? Is that what He's talking about? Maybe there's some help with the Greek here. The original language in verse 33, "give up," apotasso, say good-bye to. That's exactly what it means, to say good-bye to. In what sense? Well, it's not calling for socialism, it's not calling for you to sell your house, sell your car, sell all your possessions in your house and go out on the street and beg. That's not what it's saying. What it's calling for is this. You become a steward of everything and an owner of nothing. What you're saying is, I don't have any relationships that aren't subordinated to your Lordship. I don't have any self-interests that aren't subordinated to your Lordship. It doesn't mean that I ignore my family, cease loving my family. I want to love my family and maybe love my family more. It doesn't mean that I stop my education, that I stop moving down a path to do whatever I can do and to be the best I can be in whatever field I choose to the honor of the Lord. It doesn't mean that I unload everything I have. It just means that all of that is subordinated to what God wants for me. I hold to nothing in this world, not the relationships, not my self-interests and not the stuff, not my money and my possessions. I am a steward of all of it and I want to discharge that stewardship before God. I want to take care of my relationships. I want to take care of my family. I want to love them. I want to take care of my life. I want to be disciplined. I want to be healthy. I want to be useful to the Lord in a physical sense. I want to make my mind and my body all that it can be to serve Him. And I want to use whatever He's given me, a house and a car and a bank account for the glory of His kingdom. But all of it is subject to His sovereign design. That's all He's saying. He's saying what would you be willing to give up. If I asked you for your family and they were going to become your enemies and hate you because you came to Christ like happens in Jewish families and Muslim families, would you come? And if you had plans and ambitions in certain things and I asked you to do other than that and My Spirit directed you to give your life in some service over here, would you be willing to do that? And even if I asked you to die in the cause, would you do that? And if I asked you to take everything

you have like He asked the rich young ruler in Luke 18, if I asked you to take everything you have, sell it all and give it to the poor, would you be willing to do that? It isn't that you're going to have to do that. I don't know what God's purposes are. God hasn't stripped me of everything and He hasn't stripped all of us of everything. But I do understand unequivocally that I am a steward of everything and an owner of nothing. And my priority is this: to love the Lord my God, to love my Christ with all my heart, soul, mind and strength beyond any love I have for my family, for myself or for anything in this world. This is what Jesus is asking. He's not asking you to sort of tack Him onto all your stuff and all your self-interests and all your relationships. And so that's the first point. Becoming Christ's disciple demands an abandonment of past priorities. Everything changes. It is a whole new life view. The apostle Paul, Philippians 3:8, says I looked at it all. When I saw Christ, I looked at everything in my past and, boy, there was some wonderful things. And I counted it manure...that's what he said...compared to Christ. And he said I ran to Christ to receive a righteousness not my own. And now all I want, he said, in Philippians 3, is to know Him.

The second and critical component in being Christ's disciple is this. Being His disciple demands not just the abandonment of past priorities, but the appraisal of present powers. You want to come to Christ, you say. You want to be a Christian. You want eternal life. As the rich young ruler came and said, What do I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, Let's talk about your sin. He said, I have none. He said, Let's talk about who's in charge. He said, Not you. That was the end of the discussion. Do you have it in you to make the commitment? Verse 28, Jesus illustrates this. "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'" Now, you've got to understand, the ancient Near East is an honor/shame culture. You just don't do things that bring shame on yourself. It's very important to protect your honor. And the point is, when you're going to do something as formidable as build a tower...this isn't the little shack, this isn't something alongside the house or an addition...we're talking about a tower. It might have been a watchtower because in ancient days enemies attacked by burning fields, sowing tares in the fields and so towers were often built in these great estates from which the people could protect their land. They were used sometimes as great grain storage places like we have silos today. This would be a rather large enterprise, not just a minimal kind of enterprise, but this man is going to build a big tower and everybody in the community is going to know it. And nobody would do that if was going to wind up with nothing but a foundation and everybody laughing at him. In fact, in verse 30, the expression "this man" in the original Greek is derogatory. It could be translated "this fellow," a kind of a scorn or ridiculing approach. Began to build and wasn't able to finish...that is a huge element of dishonor in the thinking of the ancient Near East. When you're going to build a tower, he says in verse 28, you're going to sit down and you're going to calculate the cost to see if you have enough to complete it. Otherwise you're left with a half-finished building and a permanent monument to your stupidity. That's a big issue in an honor/shame environment. You want to make sure...here's the operative word...that you can finish, that you can complete it. And then in verse 29, that you're able to finish it.

And verse 30, you don't want people to say you were not able to finish. The two times the word finish is used, verses 29 and 30, it uses the word ekteleo. Teleo is to finish. Teleo...Jesus said tetelestai, which is a form of that, on the cross. It is finished. It's a pretty final word. But when you add an ek to it, you compound its intensity...to finish, to finish to the very last component. You don't want your life exposed to ridicule. So what's Jesus saying? He's saying, look, don't come to Me on some emotional level. Don't come to Me because you're feeling some disappointment, you're feeling some confusion in your life, you have been left in the lurch in some relationship and you're looking for a skyhook. Don't come to Me to pacify you over some temporary matter. Don't come to Me with any kind of superficiality. I'm telling you, you must, first of all, be willing to abandon all the priorities of the past that have dominated your life so that it is a kind of dying in order to live. And you've got to assess the legitimacy and the integrity of the expression that you're making at this point to be sure you really have what it takes to finish this. Are you just responding to a moment's emotion? That's why, people, it's so dangerous to manipulate people to make superficial commitments to Christ. You don't ever want to do that. You don't want to do that with language. You don't want to do that with music. You don't want to do anything that manipulates people's emotion. You want people to commit to Jesus Christ who have carefully evaluated what is the true condition of their heart. What powers are really being activated? Is it emotional power? Is it temporary or are we talking about a passion that will run through every barricade to come to Christ? John Stott writes in Basic Christianity, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers, the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people," he said, "still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. This is the great scandal of Christendom, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which the Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin veneer of Christianity. They've allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion," he says, "is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism," end quote. I'm not talking about that. Jesus is saying assess whether you have what it takes to really take this action.

And He gives a second story in verse 31 with a little bit a different twist. The first one is a voluntary act. The guy sets out to build a tower. Here is an involuntary one, a man who goes to war. Obviously, his enemy is on the way to attack him. "What king," He says "when he sets out to meet another king in battle will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000?" This is a dilemma over which he has really no control. He realizes his enemy's coming with 20,000. What man, what king, what leader is gonna put his 10,000 in danger, in harm's way before he sits down and assesses whether or not there is a strategy or whether or not he is better armed, better equipped or has better knowledge of the terrain or whatever in order to win the battle so that he doesn't expose himself and everybody who's followed him to death? Anybody's gonna do that. And if he comes up with the conclusion that he

can't win, verse 32 says, while the other is still far away, he's going to send a delegation and ask terms of peace. He's going to send a delegation and say, look, we know you can defeat us so what do you want. There's no sense in spilling all this blood to get to the same end that we could get to by negotiating. So we lose a little of our freedom. So we have an occupation. At least we're alive. No king would go to battle and put himself and all those who were following him in danger if there was a way to negotiate a peace. And Jesus isn't giving allegories here and He's not giving complex stories; He is simply saying this. There are issues in life that are big enough to be carefully evaluated. You know, when you think about evangelism in the church today, it doesn't seem to be that that's one of them. It just seems that the preaching of the gospel is some kind of minor deal in your life where you pray a little prayer and that's it. Jesus is saying, all right, step back from this thing. You're looking at the reality that it's going to cost you your relationships as a priority, your self-interests as a priority and all your stuff as a priority. Now, back up and honestly assess whether you're operating on an emotional moment or whether you're operating because there's something gone wrong in your life right now, whether you're just kind of grabbing a skyhook, whether you're reacting to some kind of felt need or some perceived issue in your life or whether this is a momentary trauma or whether you are really able, whether you are at a point in your life where the power of your repentance and the power of your faith is enough to finish this commitment. Isn't that amazing? I mean, it really is amazing. Jesus doesn't say, hey, just pray the prayer; don't worry about it, which would be a typical way to approach it. He says don't even think of this until you know that what is going on in your heart will carry you to its completion. Step back. So when you evangelize somebody and you give them the gospel, you say, now that you understand the gospel, you understand the objective facts of the gospel, Jesus, God in human flesh, lives a sinless life, virgin-born, lives a sinless life, dies a substitutionary death for sinners, is raised from the dead, ascends to the Father, intercedes for us, comes again, you give them the whole layout of the gospel, salvation by grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone, now you know all that? Yes, yes, I know that. Do you believe that? I think I believe that. Oh, good, pray this prayer. No. Let's back up a little bit. Now, do you understand that He's saying you're going to need to love Him as Lord and He's going to take the priority over your family, over yourself and over all your stuff? You become an owner of nothing even relationships, even your own life, everything you possess. You become a steward of everything. At the discretion that God prompts, it is used for His glory and it may even cost you your life. Step back. Don't be in a hurry here. And assess whether you really have what it takes to build this tower, whether you've really assessed what this is going to cost you. That's all these little stories are intended to say, that when you come against something that is formidable and has massive implications for you or for all the people around you...for you, in the case of the tower, for everybody that is around you, in the case of the king...this has massive implications. You better back up and make sure you have assessed your present powers and is this faith the real deal. Is this repentance the real repentance? Jesus is halting people. He's putting the brakes on. You say, but you know, is this a human work? Is this something I've just got to figure out whether I can muster it up? The bottom line is it's not apart from your will. It's not apart from your assessment of your own commitment. But the spiritual side of it is

this. If the Spirit of God is at work in your life, nothing will stop you from making this commitment. You have nothing to fear in telling someone that. You have nothing to fear in saying to someone, I want you to think about this, I want you to consider the cost carefully. You have nothing to fear. What you're doing is stopping people from superficial non-saving delusion. You're backing them off and saying, let's find out whether this is really the work of the Spirit of God and what is happening in your life is not a momentary emotional thing, but what is happening in your life is the true regenerating work of the Holy Spirit producing an unrelenting repentance and an undying faith that will go through every barrier. You do all the important things in life by calculating carefully. This is the most important thing you'll ever do. This is more important than any tower you'll ever build, more important than any enemy you'll ever meet. And so the Lord says, you want to be My disciple, do you? Well, you have to abandon your past priorities and you have to assess your present powers.

Third point: Being Christ's disciple demands allegiance to future privileges, future possibilities, maybe, if you like that better, future potential. Lot of p's you could use there. Being Christ's disciple demands not just a look back and a look into the present to see if the real power is there to make this commitment, but it also involves a look into the future. And this is tucked into two verses at the end of the section, verses 34 and 35. And some people wonder how this connects. I hope I can help you with that. "Therefore" first of all tells us that it connects. The "therefore" is there for the purpose of connecting is. Verse 34, "Therefore, salt is good, but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown out..." And we'll stop at that point for now. Jesus says you need to look back if you want to be my disciple at the past. You need to consider the present and the powers, the true powers of your commitment. And you need to look to the future. And it's illustrated here by this salt. He says "salt is good." Let's talk about salt in the sense that salt is an illustration. Salt serves a function. Salt has value. Salt is useful. We all understand that. And salt is synonymous with preservation; is it not? I mean, in the ancient world, salt was used to preserve things before there was refrigeration. We still have meat being preserved, jerky and things like that. For years and years all the ships at sea carried salt in order to preserve the meat. Salt is a preservative. It has a function. It has value. It's useful. By the way, in Old Testament covenants salt was associated. You can read about it. Leviticus, chapter 2:13, in all the offerings in that chapter in Leviticus 2 where offerings were brought, salt was included. And salt was the symbol of a permanent loyalty to the covenant. Salt was the symbol of loyalty, preserving something. Leviticus, chapter 2 there associates salt with the Mosaic Covenant. Numbers 18 associates salt with a priestly covenant. Ezekiel 43 even associates salt with the new covenant symbolic sacrifices to come in the future. In Jewish history salt was associated with promises and covenants as a symbol of loyalty. Generally speaking, salt stays salt. Some people have said, well, this is a kind of strange statement, if salt has become tasteless, because salt doesn't. That's why it can preserve other things because its own nature is undiminished. Salt stays salt. If it didn't stay salt, then it wouldn't be any good to preserve something else. But the interesting fact is, while there were different sources of salt, there was at least one source of salt in Israel in ancient times that came out of the Dead Sea and it was the salt that was rather severely compromised with

gypsum. It had another name then, but it was gypsum, basically. And if it wasn't processed right, the salt that came from the Dead Sea that had that chemical sort of compound of gypsum with it, if it wasn't processed right, it could begin to diminish in its effectiveness as salt. And it would literally become tasteless. And then it couldn't do its job. It would cease being what it was. It would cease to be able to preserve. It would lose its potential. It would lose its usefulness. And once it did, in verse 35, then what do you do with it? What do you do with old salt? Well, I'll tell you one thing, you don't throw it in the garden. It'll just kill everything there. They wouldn't even throw it in a manure pile and that's a compost heap. That salt is a problem because once it's useless; it's really useless. If it can't do what it can do...and what it can do is very limited...but if it can't do what it can do, then it can't do anything. What's He talking about? He's saying, look...Jesus had already said this probably on a lot of occasions. You are the salt of the earth...right? And He even said if salt loses its taste, then what's its goodness? It has none. So what He's saying is this. What I'm asking of you is this. Put the past aside, assess the present power and commit to Me for long-term loyalty in the future and I'll use you for good. I'll make you a preserving influence for righteousness. You will be the salt of the earth. That's what He's asking. Basically, He's going to change the role you play in society. He's going to change the role you play in this world. All of the sudden you're going to be for preservation, for seasoning. Jesus is saying don't start in letting Me use you unless you intend to be faithful. I'm asking for long-term saltiness. I'm asking for long-term loyalty. And if you are at all corrupted by some spiritual gypsum and you're going to have a very short span, I'm not interested in those kinds of disciples. Like the ones in John [6:]66, you know, who followed awhile and then it says they didn't like what He said so they walked no more with Him. I'm asking that you abandon your old loyalties, that you assess your present powers and that you make allegiance to future usefulness to Me. I'm asking for lifelong loyalty, a commitment to continue being what I want you to be in this world. Because if you don't, then you're useless to Me. There's nowhere to put you. You're no good here; you're no good there. You just get...here's the key, verse 35...thrown out. That language is absolute. That language is final. Any temporary follower will be cast into judgment. Jesus talks about weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, fire, brimstone, all language that speaks of eternal judgment. Don't start following Me until you're ready to let go of the past, affirm that the repentance and faith of your heart will see this thing through to the full commitment and issue in a long-term life of loyal service, committing yourself to future privileged service to be salt in a decaying, rotting world. You're placing everything in the Lord's hands, past, present and future. Do we keep all these promises? Oh, look, our lives are filled with moments of failure; aren't they? Moments when family dominates over the Lord's will. Moments when self dominates over the Lord's will. Moments when stuff dominates over the Lord's will. There are times when we wonder whether our faith is all that it should be and whether we do have what it takes to finish. There are times when we begin, even as salt, to lose our influence because of sin in our lives. Moments of failure do not, however, invalidate the direction of the heart. And we grieve over those moments. We know they're going to be there as long as we're still in our human flesh but they don't invalidate the heart's desires. If this is what you desire, if eternal life in Jesus Christ is what you long for to the point where it's a total takeover of past, present and future,

then Jesus says you can be My disciple.

He closes with an invitation in verse 35. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This is an expression, kind of a colloquial expression used all over the place. Matthew uses it several times. Mark, it's recorded there. It's in Luke. All it simply means is listen to this message. If you understood it, embrace it. If you understood it, embrace it. Don't be like those who, when they heard it and understood it, rejected it and then judgment came upon them and seeing, they could not see and hearing, they could not hear, Luke 8:10. God is speaking. Jesus is speaking. This is His call to discipleship. If you have ears to hear it, if you can still understand it, then you better embrace it because the day may come when hearing, you will not hear.

Father, we come to you at the end of this great section of Scripture grateful for the truth that it conveys to us with such clarity and power. We know that this comes from You because this is a holy standard. It is above us and beyond us. It is impossible. The only way we could ever abandon the past, the only way we could ever experience the power to see this through, the only way we could ever be sustained in faithful, privileged service, loyal for a lifetime is by Your power. It is in the day of Your power that we become willing and able. Help us to know that only when the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, works in us the resolve and the will and the conviction and the repentance and the faith to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in this way can it ever happen. It is not according to us but it's according to Your power. Lord, we have experienced the power of the Spirit of God working in us causing us to rejoice in an abandonment, in an assessment, in an allegiance to the future, causing us to rejoice that You have done a work in us which is beyond our ability. We thank You for that work that You've done in us. We pray, O God, that You would work this work in the lives of others, that You would produce a true repentance and a true faith and a true devotion to Christ that will powerfully surge across all barriers, that we'll consider everything as loss, waste, manure, as Paul called it, compared to knowing Christ and receiving eternal life. We know You're not asking us to crank this up in our human flesh, but we know we must be willing as Your Spirit overpowers us in the direction of Christ. We pray, God, that You would do that in the hearts of those who are here today who have not come to Christ and maybe some who think they have come because they made some superficial commitment. May there be a true work, mighty work of Your Holy Spirit so that people are born of the Spirit. And we thank You in Your Son's Name. Amen.

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