

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin with a question. What is the single most significant decision you've ever made? That's the easiest question to answer that you'll ever be asked. The answer is to be or not be a disciple of Jesus. That decision is what Luke 14:25-33 is all about and what I'm going to preach about on this first Sunday in our *Discipleship to Jesus Month*.

## **What Discipleship to Jesus Is**

Let's start with the word "***disciple***" in verses 26, 27, and 33. Jesus is talking about you and I being disciples of His. Two expressions in verses 26 and 27, "***come to me***" and "***come after me,***" help us define what a disciple of His is. It's an apprentice to Him.

You know what an apprentice is. It's someone who spends time with a person in order to learn and do what that person says. I was an apprentice to an attorney named Scott Rupert, for instance, when I was in law school. Thus, I went to the courthouse with him on several occasions to file a mechanic's lien. I watched him carefully as he went through the process of doing so. I also listened attentively to everything he said as he did. I did that for the express purpose of being able to file a mechanic's lien myself, which I eventually did. That illustrates what an apprentice is. It's someone who spends time with a person in order to learn and do what that person says.

There are different kinds of apprentices. We can be apprentices to attorneys, pianists, playwrights, bricklayers, welders, teachers, or Jesus. That's exactly what a disciple of Jesus is. It's an apprentice to Him. It's one who is with Him in order to learn and do what He says.

Now, consider a revealing fact in that regard. The word "disciple" and its plural "disciples" are used 269 times in the New Testament. It's safe to say that the New Testament is a book about disciples by disciples and for disciples of Jesus. "Disciple" was Jesus' word of choice and the New Testament's to define what our relationship to Him should be.

Most people, including preachers and writers, don't grasp that. I read two popular books, for instance. Most of you would recognize the authors if I named them. Both distinguish between becoming Christians and becoming disciples. Discipleship, in other words, isn't a condition of being a Christian. The idea is this. We can become Christians. We then have the option to become or not become disciples. Well, many if not most converts exercise that option and don't become one. They do make Jesus their Savior. They do not make Him their Lord.

That we can do that is the majority view today. But it's wrong. The New Testament makes it clear. Discipleship to Jesus isn't optional like navigational systems or sunroofs in cars are. It's necessary instead like steering wheels and engines are. It isn't something we can take or leave in our lives with God. It's something we must take. We don't become Christians and then disciples. We become Christians and disciples all at once. "Disciple" is our fundamental relationship to Jesus.

So, let's become one. He Himself tells us how to do so. It requires three things, each of which I want to explain to you.

## **Confidence**

The first is confidence in Jesus. No one will become a disciple of His unless he or she has confidence in Him. Having that is an indirect freedom. We must do something else first before we can have it, see Him as He really is. We must see Him as He really is in order to have confidence in Him. We need to do two things to see Him that way.

First, we must ask. Asking is the rule of the kingdom. So we emphatically and repeatedly ask Jesus to show us His competence and character. We ask Him to reveal to us who He is and what He can do.

We must do a second thing in conjunction with the first, build a vision of Him. I talk about building a purposeful and thorough vision of God in general. We should do the same with Jesus in particular.

We do that by studying and reflecting on what the Bible says about Him. I read the book of Colossians for instance and came across two

verses about Him. 1:17 says, *"In Him all things hold together."* 2:3 says, *"In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* After reading them, I learned and reflected on what they mean. 1:17 means Jesus is the glue of the universe who holds it together. 2:3 means He is the smartest person who ever lived.

We build our vision of Jesus also by studying and reflecting on His words and deeds in the gospels. I read what He did in John 2:1-11, for instance, and what He said in Matthew 5:27-30 and Matthew 20:24-28. After reading them, I learned and reflected on what they mean. John 2:1-11 means He has a practical mastery over atoms and molecules. Matthew 5:27-30 means He's the greatest logician who ever lived. And Matthew 20:24-28 means He's the humblest person who ever lived.

Anyway, do those two things faithfully – ask and build a vision of Jesus. You'll eventually come to see Him as He really is if you do – utterly competent and lovely, the greatest and best, the brightest spot in the human scene. You'll then have the confidence in Him that you need. You'll be assured that He's worthy of apprenticing yourself to.

## **Clarity**

Becoming a disciple of Jesus requires a second thing – clarity.

Look at verses 25-33. Jesus talks about counting the cost. Verses 28-30 are about counting the cost to build a tower. We should examine the gain and loss of building it and not building it. Verses 31-32 are about counting the cost to fight a battle. We should examine the gain and loss of fighting it and not fighting it. And finally, verse 33 is about counting the cost to be a disciple of Jesus. We should examine the gain and loss of being one and not being one.

Those who do that, count the cost, will have clarity. They'll see the value of building and not building the tower, of fighting and not fighting the battle, and of being and not being a disciple of Jesus.

Now, you and I don't have to decide whether or not to build a tower or fight a battle. But we do have to decide whether or not to be a

disciple of Jesus. So, we need to do what He says here. Count the cost. Let's do just that by examining two things.

First, we examine the gain and loss of not being a disciple of Jesus.

The gain is that we can live the way we want to. We can think, feel, and act independently of Jesus, without being accountable to Him. We can, for instance, do what we please with our money. We can live as extravagantly as we want to. Or, we can be sexually liberated. We can lust, fantasize, and fornicate as freely as we wish. That's the gain of not being a disciple of Jesus. We can live the way we want to.

But there's a loss as well. It's forfeiting pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy. I know an elder of a church who is angry and upset with another elder. I know a critical Christian that people avoid. I know a church business man who's jealous because his cousin's business is doing better than his. They illustrate the loss of not being a disciple of Jesus. It's forfeiting abundant life, fullness of love, peace, and joy.

Now let's examine the gain and loss of being a disciple of Jesus.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer tells us what the loss is in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. We have to forfeit some things that are normally sought in human life. I learned that as an attorney. What attorneys normally seek is to make as much money as they can. They do that by charging everyone the going rate, \$150 an hour. But I couldn't seek that as a disciple of Jesus. He called me to charge on a sliding scale, based on what people could afford. It's true. Disciples of Jesus have to forfeit some things that are normally sought in human life. That's the loss.

But there's a gain as well. It's having pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy. That doesn't happen all at once, at the moment of decision, but it does eventually and gradually happen. We live more and more abundantly as we follow Jesus. A man I know, for instance, testifies that he's no longer burdened by always having to get his own way. That's a crushing burden that almost everyone has. He doesn't though because He's a disciple of Jesus. The gain of discipleship is this and I quote Dallas Willard - abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout

by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. The gain is abundant life, fullness of love, peace, and joy.

Now that we've examined the cost of being and of not being a disciple of Jesus, we have clarity. We realize, according to verse 26, that being one is the single greatest bargain in life. He says there that if we don't hate our siblings, parents, children, and spouse, we can't be disciples of His. Many misunderstand what he means. A young mother once told me, *"If I have to hate my husbands and sons to follow Jesus, then I'm not going to."* That isn't what He means. We should love our families not hate them. This verse isn't about misery. It's about clarity. Anyone who thoughtfully counts the cost will see this - the superiority of being a disciple of Jesus over literally everything else in life, including siblings, parents, children, and spouses that love us.

We won't become disciples of His until we see that. It isn't because He won't let us. It's because we won't be able to. An analogy helps explain it. Suppose an algebra teacher tells me that I have to know how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide before I do algebra. She isn't saying she won't let me do it. She's saying I won't be able to do it. That's what Jesus is saying in verse 26. If we don't see the superiority of being a disciple of His over everything else, we won't be able to become one. We won't be willing to do the things it requires of us.

## **Choice**

Being a disciple of Jesus requires a third thing - choice. Confidence and clarity lead to choice. We see that He is the greatest and best. We also see that being a disciple of His is superior to everything else. And because we do, we desperately want and happily decide to become one.

Notice I said "decide to become one." That really is the crux of the matter isn't it? Why do people build towers, fight battles, or become disciples of Jesus. It's because they choose to.

That's a critical point. Most people in our culture today totally underestimate the importance of decision or intent. They just don't grasp its power and place. But Jesus did. He says here that we become a disciple of His by deciding to, by intending to.

In his marvelous book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law discusses "The Importance of Intention," which is the title of his 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter. Written 300 years ago, He asks some searching questions. Why do Christians use filthy language? Why are clergymen given to pride, covetousness, and worldly enjoyments? Why do women who profess devotion live in the folly and vanity of dress, idleness, and pleasures. It is, he says, because they don't intend to please Jesus in all things. He closes the chapter with these words: ***"Through the lack of a sincere intention to please God in all our actions we fall into such irregularities of life as by the ordinary means of grace we should have power to avoid; and that we have not that perfection which our present state of grace makes us capable of because we do not so much as intend to have it."***

What Law says may shock or even offend of us. That fact is that we aren't used to being spoken to so straightforwardly. But he was right. The crux of discipleship to Jesus is choice. We are disciples of His because we decide or intend *to be*. We are not disciples of His because we decide or intend *not to be*. So decide *to be*. Make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do what He says.

## **Conclusion**

I'm going to give you an opportunity to do that now. It's helpful to apprentice ourselves to Jesus in a solemn moment and to let others know that we've done so. Maybe you've decided to be a disciple of Jesus already but have never made it known that you have. Or maybe you've never decided to be a disciple of His and would like to now. In either case the altar is open for you to come forward to do that - to make public the most significant decision you've ever made.