

True Christians Count The Cost

There are some who teach that a person can become a Christian, continue sinning as they desire, and still go to heaven when they die. They have been taught that they can pray for their sins to be forgiven and secure a trip to heaven, but not have to change anything in their lives except maybe attend church occasionally and say a prayer when they are in trouble. As we will discover in this study, that is not what Jesus taught. Other individuals ask to be forgiven because they fear hell, but they want to continue living as they did in the past. They have added Jesus to their collection of friends, possessions and toys, but nothing has really changed. Jesus is their latest acquisition. The truth is they are going to hell. They believe they have an insurance policy that guarantees they will go to heaven. People who become Christians humble themselves when they realize they are sinners in the sight of God. They are spiritual beggars who believe their sins can be forgiven because when Christ died on the cross He did everything that was necessary for them to be forgiven. As a result, they seek God's forgiveness. In their sorrow over their sin, they may even plead and beg to be forgiven as they offer their lives to Christ. In our study in Luke 14:25-35, Jesus gives us a series of parables to teach us how to know if we are going to heaven.

DISCIPLES MUST HATE THEIR FAMILY. In the previous two studies, Luke 14:1-14; 15-24, Jesus had just finished 1) a parable about proud individuals who thought they were going to heaven and 2) a parable about individuals who did not think they needed Jesus Christ in order to go to heaven. Now Jesus' next series of parables teaches us that we must love Christ more than anyone else. If we do, we will humbly submit and give our life to Him. Anyone who tries to humbly submit to Christ without loving Him will not be successful. Friendship with Christ motivates us to action. That is why Jesus' next parable is about loving Him.

own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

Luke 14:25-26 (NASB)

Notice that we are told large crowds were following Jesus. The crowds, *ochlos*, include more than Jesus' disciples. The

"large crowds" refer to massive groups of non-Christians who had been following Jesus. Suddenly, Jesus turned around. The Greek word for "turned" is *strepho*. The verb is a present participle, which means that Jesus had turned around to face



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them and remained turned while He spoke to them. It describes a dramatic action by Jesus. If you were walking in the crowd behind Jesus, and suddenly He turned, looked at you and started speaking, how would you feel? The moment

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his

would be dramatic. Perhaps you would be thrilled to hear Him speak.

The words out of Jesus' mouth must have been shocking! Jesus started by saying, "If anyone comes to Me!" In the Greek there are four different types of "if" statements. Here He uses a first class "if" which means that the "if" is true. That is, there will be some who will follow Jesus. Then He told the crowd what will be true of those who are truly His disciples. They will hate their family and themselves and follow Him.

The Greek word for hate is a strong word. It is *miseo*. The word means "to hate," "to detest," "to abhor" and "to reject." We should not try to soften Jesus' statement. He selected this word for a reason. He is trying to teach us that we must love Him more than anything else in our life, even that which is dearest to us. He is not literally saying that we must hate our family members. He is using a Hebrew superlative to drive home His message.

A good example occurs in Genesis 29:30-31.

So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years. Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Genesis 29:30-31 (NASB)

Notice that we are told in verse 30 that Jacob loved Rachel

more than Leah. Then in verse 31 we are told that God saw that Leah was "unloved." The Hebrew word for unloved is *sane*, which means "to detest," to abhor" and "to hate." That is, in comparison to Rachel, Jacob hated Leah. Yet, Jacob loved Leah — just not as much as Rachel.

It is also important to notice that Jesus and the apostles taught us to love our family. If we start with Exodus 20:12 we are reminded that God teaches that children are to honor their parents (does not matter how old they are). In

Matthew 15:4 Jesus taught that we are not to speak evil of our parents.

"For God said,
'HONOR YOUR
FATHER AND
MOTHER,' and, 'HE
WHO SPEAKS EVIL
OF FATHER OR
MOTHER IS TO BE
PUT TO DEATH.'"
Matthew 15:4 (NASB)

In Ephesians 5:25 husbands are told to love their wives and in Titus 2:4 wives are told to love their husbands. The Greek word for love in Titus 2:4 comes

from *phileo* which refers to friendship love. Wives are to treat their husbands as friends. Parents are to love their children (Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:4). That is, we are not to literally hate our family members. In Matthew 10:37, we are told that on a previous occasion Jesus used a different set of words to teach that we are to love Him more than our family.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy
of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not



worthy of Me. Matthew 10:37 (NASB)

Finally, in Matthew 6:24 Jesus told us that we will never love Him with all our hearts (Matthew 22:36-37) if we love someone else more.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

Therefore, why did Jesus use such strong language on this occasion? He probably did so to encourage everyone to listen! The Pharisees, the spiritual leaders of Israel, were not committed to God. They were serving themselves while claiming to be serving God. Jesus needed to correct their false understanding that a disciple could just add Jesus to their lives and continue living as they desire. Jesus' message to the Pharisees and the crowd was that He must be the most important person in their lives.

YOU WILL HATE YOUR LIFE. Then Jesus hit the highlight of His message: we must also hate ourselves. That is the message when He said, "... even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." We must hate our own life. I have a question for you: Do you love your sinful behavior? Think about past embarrassments, times when your pride was revealed, times when you lied, hated, or times you could not forgive others. Do you love the fact that you are not loving our gracious and loving God with all of your heart? Jesus' message is that in comparison to your love for Him, you will hate yourself.

Then He warned that if we do not love Him more than ourselves, we are not His disciples.

In verse 27, Jesus makes His statement stronger.

"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:27 (NASB)

Jesus is not talking about doing weight lifting or learning to run after Him while carrying something heavy. He is saying that a true Christian will die to themselves and live for Him. In Jesus' day, the Roman Empire slaughtered thousands and thousands of people by crucifixion. Flavius Josephus reports

that on one day three thousand six hundred Jewish men, women and children were crucified.¹ On other occasions eight hundred Jews were crucified² and two thousand Jews.³ It is understandable that the Jews knew about crosses



and crucifixions. Therefore when Jesus spoke of a cross, the audience would have been thinking about a wooden cross that the victim would have dragged to the place of his or her crucifixion. Here is one quote from Josephus that helps us understand that the Romans crucified all types of people and thousands of them.

... so the citizens fled along the narrow lanes, and the soldiers slew those that they caught, and no method of plunder was omitted; they also ... brought many before Florus, whom he

1. Flavius Josephus. War of the Jews. 2.14.9.

2. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. 13.14.2.

3. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. 17.10.10.

first chastised with stripes, and then crucified. Accordingly, the whole number of those that were destroyed that day, with their wives and children (for they did not spare the infants themselves), was about three thousand six hundred . . .⁴

Therefore, the people during the time of the Roman Empire knew about crucifixion. They knew that when someone carried a cross it was a sign that they were going to be crucified. Consequently, when Jesus said we are to carry our cross He was referring to an attitude of dying to self. He did not mean that we are to actually die, otherwise, we would not remain on the earth to do His will.

A real Christian will die to self and follow Christ. Are you a real Christian or a fake one? Who are you living for? The sign that you are a real Christian is that you will want to die to yourself and follow Christ. Are you following Christ? Are you faithfully in fellowship with and serving a body of believers? Are you faithfully attending church and worshipping with other Christians? Or have you invented some reason to be disobedient? How is your prayer life with God? Are you reading your Bible? My point is - for whom are you living?

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, He said that if we do not carry our own cross then we will lose our lives. He did not mean we would stop living. He meant we would go to hell.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:37-39 (NASB)

Also, Jesus is not saying that we become Christians by carrying our own cross. Earlier He told us in Luke 8:12 that we must believe in order to be saved. This helps us understand that Jesus is describing the attitude of someone who is a true Christian. A true Christian will humbly desire to die to themselves and live for Jesus. They will struggle to do this, but increasingly they will do this. That is what Jesus meant

by hating your own life. Anyone who loves their life more than Jesus will not obey Him. Such an attitude reveals they are not a Christian.

If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.

Maranatha. 1 Corinthians 16:22 (NASB)

And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." Matthew 22:37 (NASB)

Jesus' statement reminds us of the parable of the hidden treasure in Matthew 13:44 and the pearl of great price in Matthew 13:45-46. In the first parable, a man finds hidden treasure and in the second parable a man finds a pearl of exceptionally great value. In both parables the individual sells everything that he has in order to buy either the hidden treasure or the pearl. Once again Jesus wants us to understand that salvation is not something that we add to our life. Instead it requires total sacrifice.

TESTS OF DISCIPLESHIP. Then Jesus gave the crowd two illustrations that helped them and us understand His message.

"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.'" Luke 14:28-30 (NASB)

The illustration is about a man counting his money to determine if he can complete the building of a tower. The Greek word for "complete" is *apartismos*, and it was used on one occasion to the "completion of the audit."⁵ That is, this man determined if he had the money before proceeding to buy the materials and hiring workers to build his tower. The man wanted the tower and he was serious about it. He responded

4. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. 13.14.2.

5. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament. Hendrickson Publishers. 1930. p. 53.

voluntarily. It was his choice. The statement, “This man began to build and was not able to finish,” means that the man did not finish the project. Spiritually, Jesus is referring to someone who claims to be a Christian but eventually leaves Jesus. Matthew 13:18-23 tells us that this type of person leaves Jesus because of difficult situations, afflictions, persecutions, or the wealth and comforts of the world. Many so called Christians find church to be optional. Reading the Bible and praying “are a waste of time” or inconvenient. 1 John 2:19 gives us insight into this so-called disciple of Christ.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19 (NASB)



The second illustration is about a king who discovers that the army of another king is coming to attack and defeat him. Here is the second illustration.

Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. Luke 14:31-32 (NASB)

Notice the first king considered whether he was strong

enough. The Greek word that is translated as “consider” is *bouleou*. It has the meaning of “to deliberate” or “to make plans.” This reveals that the king seriously strategized if he could defeat the opposing army.

Then Jesus stated the purpose of the two illustrations.

So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Luke 14:33 (NASB)

It is important to realize that both illustrations are about seriously considering the likelihood of failure and success. The builder and the king had to consider the cost required for

success. Jesus’ point is that His disciples must also consider the cost because total sacrifice will be required of Christ’s disciples. This is a powerful principle that many Christians fail to understand. When a person humbly seeks God’s forgiveness and seeks to

be transformed, God will declare that individual to be more than forgiven. He declares them to have His righteousness and then He will transform them to become holy in conduct. God imputes His righteousness to the believer. Then God takes control of an individual’s life. God the Holy Spirit begins to transform the life of a Christian and continues doing so until the day they die. God will take total control of their life. This is the cost of becoming His disciple. That is the message of Philippians 1:6.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippi-

ans 1:6 (NASB)

God begins the transforming work and continues transforming every true Christian. Philippians 2:12-13 teaches us the same truth, but adds that God expects to work at our transformation while He is actively transforming us.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB)

When we fail by sinning, Hebrews 12:4-11 teaches that God will discipline us for our sins. He motivates us to become more righteous in our conduct. He wants our conduct to become more like the imputed righteousness that He has given us.

CHRIST'S DISCIPLES WILL NOT QUIT. Then Jesus concluded with an illustration about salt.

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. Luke 14:34-35 (NASB)

Some critics have claimed that this illustration reveals that Jesus was not God because He said that salt could lose its saltiness. They argue that salt is sodium chloride and after the sodium chloride dissipates, it is no longer salt. Therefore, it cannot lose its taste because it ceases to exist. But these critics reveal that they are not aware that even modern day salt is composed of sodium chloride plus some minerals. Also, they reveal that they are clueless about the customs of Jesus' day. At the time of Christ, salt came from the Dead Sea and it contained carnallite and gypsum.⁶ If carelessly processed it lost its saltiness. Consequently, the salt was useless. It is curious that Jesus used the Greek word *moraino*. The word is translated as "become tasteless" but the word is translated as "become foolish" in Romans 1:22 and "made

foolish" in 1 Corinthians 1:20. The literal meaning of the word is "to make foolish." It appears that Jesus used the word to not only refer to the salt becoming tasteless but also to make the point that those who do not count the cost of discipleship are foolish. Anyone who begins and then quits is foolish or tasteless. They are not a Christian. Becoming a disciple of Christ is a serious and final decision.

One must not think that such a decision is the result of our own will. It is the saving work of the Holy Spirit. The act of throwing out salt because it is useless reminds us of the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus says the good seed is planted by Himself. This means that Christ is responsible for the salvation of every Christian. Every true Christian is planted by the Holy Spirit and grows by the work of the Holy Spirit at the direction of Christ. Every true Christian will make a serious decision to follow Christ and they will remain faithful to the end because the Holy Spirit is living within the individual. This does not mean that there will not be moments of unfaithfulness, but they will be short in duration and fewer with time. But the pattern of a believer's life will be a continuing walk with Christ. In contrast, the seed that produces tares is planted by the devil and symbolizes non-Christians (Matthew 13:38). Since tares are useless weeds and are not good for anything, they will be destroyed. Tares are non-Christians that are like tasteless salt. At the end of the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus made this statement,

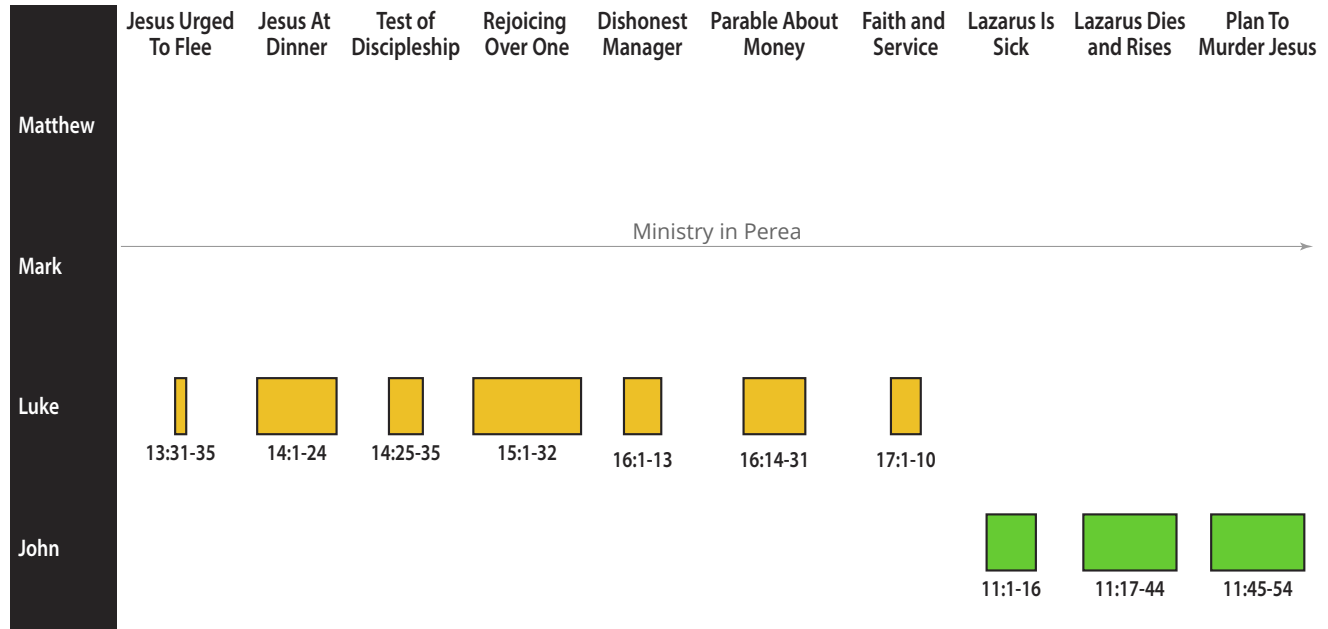
So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13:40-43 (NASB)

Jesus' final comment is identical to the comment He made at the end of the illustration in this study about the salt, "He who has ears, let him hear." That is, pay attention

6. Robert H Stein. Luke. The New American Commentary. B&H Publishing. 1992. vol. 24. p. 398.

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Perea - Fall of A.D. 32



and take it to heart.

CONCLUSION. The message of Jesus' teaching in Luke 14:25-35 is that true disciples understand following Jesus involves a permanent and radical change of life. True disciples recognize they sin and hate their sin. Upon understanding that Jesus did everything that is necessary to forgive his or her sins, they will repent and seek God's forgiveness. This is also the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). They will desire to become holy and are willing to let God take over their lives. Again, this is the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13-14; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13). That is the cost of being Jesus' disciple.

These true disciples have counted the cost of building the tower and defeating the approaching army. They move forward and do not quit because Scripture teaches that God the Holy Spirit takes control of a disciple's life and begins transforming them. The change will occur because God wants the change to occur (Philippians 1:6). Yet, Philippians 2:12-13 teaches that we are expected to participate in this transformation while God is transforming us. Scripture calls us to

obedience through illustrations, stories, parables, examples and direct teaching. God wants us to become righteous in our conduct. He wants us to be righteous as He is righteous (1 Peter 1:15-16). When we do not conform to His plan, He will discipline in order to move us in the right direction (Hebrews 12:4-11). Becoming Christ's disciple is costly, but it is also incredibly rewarding. We become joint-heirs with Christ. We are given rewards for service performed and we enter heaven when we die. Yet, God gets all the glory because He caused it all to happen!