

COMMITTED TO FOLLOW

(LUKE 14:25-35)

by

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Luke 14:25-35 records an event in Christ's later ministry in which He delivers amazing terms to a multitude of people following Him. At first glance, these terms seem harsh and are often misapplied by various writers today. However, by examining the makeup of the crowd, the context of the passage, and the passage itself, it is very clear what Christ was saying and to whom He was speaking.

Many believe Jesus was giving a new formula to His followers. It helps to see that this view is erroneous by realizing that the multitude to whom Christ was speaking was made up of a few believers, but mostly would-be disciples or curiosity seekers. The requirements that Jesus gave were first laid down in the Old Testament. Then they are explained in more detail in the New Testament. The immediate context reveals to the reader that the mistaken priorities of the Pharisees influenced Jesus' teaching that He alone must be first in the life of His followers.

Jesus is very explicit in what His disciple (follower) must be like by listing several characteristics. He must love Christ more than he loves his family, possessions, and even his own life. This is accomplished by a day by day self-sacrifice, which may lead to physical death for faith in Christ.

These demands are primarily directed to the unbeliever so that he may be informed enough to count the cost; the reason being to prevent lukewarmness, uselessness, and being a foolish spectacle to the world. Jesus illustrates this fact by using two stories and a metaphor. Christ was not telling the unbelievers that if their lives did not characterize these requirements, they must leave. Instead, if their lives did not characterize these requirements, they must stop professing to be true followers of His. All believers are disciples, but not all disciples are believers. So, those who want to be true followers need to count the great cost and be willing to live on His terms. Then, the unbeliever is ready to make a true decision for salvation.

The second group to whom Christ was speaking was the believers. This passage was directed to them for the purpose of review. This was meant to cause the believer to reflect upon His original decision to count the cost of salvation. All who were true followers needed a constant reminder of the type of commitment that they made to Christ, so as to cause them to keep following through in their service for Him.

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INTRODUCTION

For some time this writer has been concerned with the "easy life" approach to Christianity. Too often this approach has been communicated to the unsaved. This results in churches becoming filled with half-heartedness, uncommittedness, luke-warmness, and much apostasy.

It is true that many manuals are being written on the subject of discipleship. Yet, only a few will deal with the Luke 14:25-35 passage. And of those who handle this passage, not many take Jesus' words literally or in context.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this passage centers around the questions, "What exactly is Jesus trying to communicate," and "to whom is He speaking?" The answer to these two questions will in turn answer many other questions that have arisen today, such as: Is being a disciple synonymous with being a Christian? Are there two classes of Christians, one class who are average and the other class who are fully committed (disciples)? Should the unsaved be informed of what is really involved in being a Christian? What does it mean to count the cost, and who counts it?

Proposition

Luke 14:25-35 teaches that every true believer is a disciple by definition, and is commanded by God to be fully committed to Him. Jesus' main emphasis in this passage was to inform the crowd, who were mostly unsaved, just exactly what it meant to be saved (a disciple of His). It means full commitment to Jesus above anyone or anything. The minor emphasis was to remind the believer to carry through with the commitment he made.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXT

This chapter is an investigation of the general and immediate context of Christ's teaching regarding commitment on the part of a follower of God.

General Context

Before one tries to interpret Luke 14:25-35, he must first examine the idea of commitment in the general context of Scripture. Then he will be able to move into the immediate context of the given passage.

Old Testament

To interpret the New Testament correctly, one must first see it in the light of the Old Testament. For, the commitment to Jesus, as found in Luke 14:25-35, certainly was not a new proposition. The Old Testament Scriptures are saturated with statements concerning commitment on the part of a follower of God.¹ The Lord occasionally stressed the full commitment involved in following Him with a statement such as, ". . . with all your heart" (1 Sam 12:24; Jer 29:13; Joel 2:12).

¹Exod 20:1-17; Deut 6:2-9, 14-18; Josh 22:5; 1 Kgs 2:3; Prov 3:5-7; Eccl 12:13; Isa 1:19, 20; Jer 7:23; Mic 6:8.

In at least one clear reference, God stresses the definite choice to be made if one is to be identified with Him. The Lord spoke through Joshua to the nation of Israel, telling them to choose whom they would serve fully, either the one true God or the other gods of the pagan nations (Josh 24:14-15). The Lord wanted the people's all if they chose to follow Him.

These references are just a fraction of the material which supports the fact that God, from the beginning of Scripture, desired and required complete commitment on the part of those who followed Him.

New Testament

As one examines the general context of the New Testament, he encounters the Gospel accounts first.

Gospels

When moving into the Gospels, the authors are quick to point out that Jesus wanted the people of Israel to follow Him fully.¹ The people who troubled Christ the most were those who claimed to be religious and yet within were unsaved or uncommitted to God (Matt 6:24, 23). Jesus wanted a sharp distinction to be made between those of the world and those who were God's (Matt 12:30; John 3:20, 21).

Jesus explains to the people that following Him fully was not absurd. He told them over and over again that He

¹Matt 5:20; 16:21-26; 22:37-40; Mark 8:31-37; 10:42-45; Luke 6:46-49; 9:22-25; John 12:24-26.

was everything they needed. He was the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He also told them He was the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, and the true vine (John 6:48; 9:5; 10:14; 15:1). Then Christ verified His messages with sign miracles (John 6:9-14; 9:1-12; 11:1-44).

Whenever a lack of commitment or unbelief was evident on the part of the followers of Christ, He would rebuke them in order that they would grow in faith and commitment (Matt 16:23; Mark 8:10-21; John 6:66-69).

Epistles

The epistles also support the duty of a believer to fully follow Jesus. The apostle Paul often takes the believer's commitment for granted when he addresses them in his letters.¹ The writer of the book of Hebrews also addresses the commitment and perseverance of the believer to fully follow Christ (Heb 12:1, 2). The apostle Peter commands the believers to be what they ought to be, namely, holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). Especially in John's epistle, the realm of the world and the realm of Christianity seem to be very black and white in contrast (1 John 2:15-17; 3:9-10). So, John calls the believers to purify themselves and be all that God wants them to be (1 John 3:3).

The issue of uncommitted believers is addressed pointedly by Christ, when he calls them lukewarm, neither

¹Rom 12:1, 2; 1 Cor 6:19, 20; Eph 4:1; Phil 2:5; Col 3:1.

hot (committed to Him) nor cold (unsaved). Lack of commitment, therefore, makes God sick. From those who profess to follow, He desires either their complete allegiance or the cessation of their profession (Rev 3:15, 16).

These references to commitment are again only a fraction of all the references to obedience and full allegiance to Christ which are found in the New Testament.

Immediate Context

After looking at the general context of Scripture, one is able to look more carefully into the immediate context of Luke's Gospel.

Time of Event

The time in Jesus' ministry when the event of Luke 14:25-35 transpired was the Later Perea Ministry.¹ Jesus was headed for Jerusalem, which meant He was headed for the Cross. It is evident by the crowd following Jesus that they misinterpreted His purpose. They thought He was headed for worldly power, glory and an empire.² But Christ plainly stated again what it meant to follow Him (Luke 14:25-35).

Order of Book

It is clear that Luke wrote an orderly account of Christ's life.

¹A. T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1950), p. 131.

²William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 203.

καθεξῆς

Luke states in his prologue that his purpose for writing to Theophilus was to send a consecutive, logical account of Christ's life (Luke 1:3). The word καθεξῆς carries with it a definite order.¹ Other related meanings of καθεξῆς are "soon afterward (Luke 8:1), place to place (Acts 18:23), and point by point (Acts 11:4)."² Luke, therefore, is putting in order what belongs together and better helps Theophilus to understand Christ's life and ministry. This order will have a bearing upon one's interpretation of Luke 14:25-35, for the surrounding context of the passage will have a logical connection with it.

δέ

The post positive conjunction δέ can be used at least four different ways.³ The usage that would seem best to fit the immediate context before Luke 14:25, would be the explanatory usage. This usage would infer that Luke 14:15-24 is amplified by Luke 14:25-35, by translating the δέ as "now." Thus, the mistaken priorities of the Jews in Luke 14:15-24

¹Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 4th revised edition. Translated and adopted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 388.

²William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Luke (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 62.

³H. E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 244.

would be logically (in order) amplified by the correct priorities spoken by Christ in Luke 14:25-35.

Dinner with Pharisees

At first glance, it is striking that Jesus is found eating with the Pharisees at the close of His ministry, especially since they were opposed to Him. In Luke 14:1-24, the passage indicates that Jesus is at this dinner at the request of one of the leaders of the Pharisees (14:1). Later on, the passage seems to indicate that this one Pharisee is a believer (14:12-14).

Jesus uses this dinner occasion for a springboard of teaching. He instructs the Pharisees, using an illustrative story about the nation's rejection of their messiah (14:15-24). At the same time, He shows God's offer of salvation to the Gentiles (14:21-23). A key observation is the excuses made on the part of the Jews for not responding to God's invitation (14:18-20). It definitely was a case of "mistaken priorities."¹ These mistaken priorities of possessions, personal ambition, and natural affection were addressed by Jesus in the following section (14:25-35).

ὄχλοι πολλοί

As Jesus left the dinner and continued on in His ministry in Perea, great multitudes were following Him (14:25). The terms used to describe the crowds are ὄχλοι πολλοί. The

¹Hendriksen, Luke, p. 538.

words speak of a great multitude of people.¹ This crowd would definitely incorporate both saved and unsaved just because of the number of people involved. The fact of there being both saved and unsaved in the crowd will have an important bearing on one's interpretation of Luke 14:25-35.

Summary

As has been pointed out, the context, both general and immediate, supports the fact that God always has and is now in Luke 14:25-35 requiring commitment from those who profess to follow Him. Certainly, Jesus is not giving a new formula of what a true follower is, but the same requirements that were laid down in the Old Testament are expounded upon in this passage.

The immediate context of Luke 14:24-35 is very important. As has been pointed out by the usage of καθεξῆς and δέ, there is a logical flow through Luke's Gospel. Therefore, the situation with mistaken priorities in Luke 14:18-20 will shed light on the Luke 14:25-35 passage.

The make-up of the crowd which Jesus addressed will also influence one's interpretation of Luke 14:25-35. For Jesus is not just addressing the saved, but the unsaved as well.

¹Bauer, p. 601.

CHAPTER II

COMMITMENT OF A DISCIPLE

Moving out of the immediate context into the passage itself, one quickly finds the Lord speaking about a person who is named a disciple.

His Title

There has been a lot of discrepancy concerning the meaning and usage of the term disciple (μαθητής) in the New Testament.

Meaning

The word μαθητής is a general title used some 264 times in the New Testament.¹ It comes from the Greek verb μαθάνω, which means "to learn."² There is not much variation from this root meaning, for all of the cognates of μαθητής consistently relate, in one form or another, to learning.³ This learning process demands two essentials. One is that there is a teacher who knows more, intellectually and/or experientially, than the learner and the other is that

¹The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology, s.v. "μαθητής," by Dietrich Muller, 1:486.

²Ibid.

³Ronald Honeywell, "The Elements of Discipleship" (M.Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980), pp. 7-8.

the learner must be willing to learn the instruction of his teacher.

Learning is not always an intellectual pursuit of knowledge, but often the pupil (disciple) would seemingly adopt the character, lifestyle, and faith of his teacher.¹ It was the practice in Rabbinic Judaism, that "a man was welcomed by a rabbi as long as he was willing to accept the rabbi's teaching, be faithful to him, and perform the duties that were expected of a תלמיד." ²

Unlike Jesus, the common practice in rabbinical circles was that the initiative in discipleship lay with the disciple, not the teacher. There is no record in all rabbinic literature of a Jewish teacher in the pre-Christian era, who ever issued a call to a disciple.³ Because it was the disciple's initiative to begin with, to follow a certain teacher, it stood to reason that there was a certain amount of freedom on the disciple's part.

The μαθητής was closely afixed to the διδάσκαλος but was not his servant. He would in some way help to meet the physical needs of the διδάσκαλος. But the personal dignity of the disciple and a certain independence were still maintained.⁴

¹The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "μαθητής," by Dietrich Muller, 1:486.

²Timothy J. Coyle, "The Use and Meaning of μαθητής in the New Testament" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 34.

³Martin H. Franzmann, "Studies in Discipleship," Concordia Theological Monthly 31:10 (October 1960), p. 607.

⁴TDNT, s.v. "μανθάνω," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 4:418.

Therefore, there was little emphasis on the development of a personal relationship between the teacher and disciple. Even the word μαθητής, does not carry with it the extent of one's commitment to the teacher and to the instruction. Wuest states that, "A person may learn something from someone else and yet not put that knowledge into practice or make it a part of his life (Matt. 10:1; John 6:66)."¹ This is even exemplified in the case of Jesus' disciple Judas.

All that is certain about a μαθητής in any passage of Scripture is that he is a learner. But as to what kind of learner he is, whether or not he receives and heeds the instruction, is purely left up to the context of the passage.

Usage

When looking at μαθητής in different New Testament passages, one will soon note the various usages.

In the Gospels

Μαθητής is used in the Gospels as a title for both the saved and unsaved. For the saved, it was used to describe the twelve followers of Christ (of whom one was not truly a disciple in the specific sense).² John the Baptist's followers were also called disciples (Matt 14:12). There

¹Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 25.

²John 13:5, 10; Matt 10:1.

were also secret disciples such as Joseph of Arimathea, who struggled with the area of full commitment (John 19:38).

Jesus, at times, would inform would-be disciples, and true disciples of the standard by which His followers were to set their life and commitment by (Matt 16:21-26; Luke 9:22-25; Mark 8:31-37). As mentioned in Chapter One, this was not a new standard of commitment to God, but a more personal commitment to Jesus Himself.

This personal relationship to Jesus by His disciples was unlike the relationship encountered by other teachers and their followers. Jesus was calling them to follow Him not because of what He knew per se, but because of who He was, the Son of God.¹ The desired response of a follower of Christ is well described by Rengstorf,

In the gospels διδάσκω is seen to represent a significant part of Jesus' ministry. Yet the corresponding response on the part of the recipients of His teaching is not expressed by the use of μανθάνω. The reason for this is that Jesus' ultimate concern is not to impart knowledge, but to bring about unconditional commitment to Himself. Thus the desired response of the μαθητής is expressed in the gospels by ἀκολουθέω, "to follow," rather than by μανθάνω.²

For the unsaved, μαθητής was used to describe the followers of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; Matt 22:16). There were also disciples who were curiosity seekers with no commitment to truly follow Christ (John 6:64, 66).³ As

¹ TDNT, s.v. "μανθάνω," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 4:455, 447.

² Ibid., p. 406.

³ Another possible reference may be Luke 6:17.

mentioned earlier, context alone will tell the reader what kind of disciple he or she is, whether saved or unsaved.

Although the term μαθητής is used throughout the Gospels to refer to both saved and unsaved, Jesus seemed to be more specific and describe what kind of learner He wanted. He wanted a born again, totally committed learner. Coyle states,

Thus anyone who was truly a disciple of Jesus would have to be saved. By the same token anyone who would be saved would have to become a disciple of Jesus, for He never asked for or offered anything less to anyone.¹

After the Gospels

It is a very striking observation that after the Gospels, the term μαθητής is used thirty times in the book of Acts, and not at all thereafter.² Though being used mostly in the Gospels to describe the twelve followers of Christ, μαθητής is used in the book of Acts to describe Christians in general (6:1, 2, 7; 9:19). Rengstorf notes that a μαθητής is synonymous with a Christian in the book of Acts.³ Just because the term μαθητής gained a wider application, it did not mean that the commitment expected lessened in any way.

¹Timothy J. Coyle, "The Use and Meaning of μαθητής in the New Testament," p. 67.

²W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, eds., A Concordance to the Greek New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926), p. 611.

³Rengstorf, pp. 457-58. He states that μαθητής is used twenty-eight times referring to a Christian, one time referring to the disciples of Paul (9:25), and one time referring to the disciples of John the Baptist (19:1).

In the epistles, Paul, Peter and John never use the word μαθητής. Instead, they seem to expect from anyone who professes to be a Christian, that they be a fully committed disciple of whom Christ spoke about in the Gospels (Rom 12:1, 2; Col 2:6; Heb 6:1, 9; 1 Pet 2:1-17; 1 John 3:7-10).

So it seems that throughout the New Testament, the word μαθητής is used in at least three senses. One way the term is used is to describe a learner, not necessarily a Christian. Secondly, it is used to describe a believer who is not fully committed, by being disobedient to the Lord's commands, and is therefore hard to distinguish at times from an unbeliever. Thirdly, it is used to describe a believer who desires to be like his Master. This disciple strives to be fully committed and obedient to Christ and His Word (Luke 14:25-35). It is this last usage of the word disciple that Christ meant when He defined the type of follower that He desired and required.

His Relationships

Following the passage on mistaken priorities (Luke 14:15-24), Jesus quickly tells those following Him of the right priorities. He starts first with family relationships (14:26).

Jesus told those who wanted to be His disciples that anyone who hindered their full devotion to Himself was to be "hated," μισέω. The seeming contradiction exists when one examines the passages where His followers are to love their

families (Exod 20:12; Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20). Yet, here Christ tells them to hate their family members. The answer to this problem is found in the word $\mu\iota\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, and in its usage elsewhere in Scripture.

In place of the Old Testament term סָׁנְא , the LXX chiefly used $\mu\iota\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ in its modified sense of indifference to describe one thing in comparison with another (Gen 29:30, 31; Deut 21:15, 16; Mal 1:2, 3).¹ This type of comparison is called a "mashal," a type of paradoxical saying.² This comparative usage is also found in the New Testament (Matt 6:24; John 12:25; Rom 9:13). The New Testament passage that best defines the word $\mu\iota\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, is the parallel passage in Matthew 10:37. Here, Jesus is giving the twelve disciples specific instructions before sending them out to preach the kingdom of heaven (Matt 10:7). He tells them that they must love Him more than they love their families (Matt 10:37). The reason is because one's enemies are often from his own household, in the sense that they may discourage him from complete devotion to Christ (10:36).

Therefore, to $\mu\iota\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ one's family is to love them less in comparison with one's love for Christ. He must have first place above everything, including family ties (Col 1:18).

¹George Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, reprint ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1944), p. 293.

²Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 474.

The hardest of all relationships to maintain properly, is one's relationship to himself. Jesus knew that for a person to be truly His disciple, one would have to surrender himself totally to His lordship. This would mean that the disciple would have to μισέω himself in comparison with his love for Jesus. Paul said that "no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it . . . (Eph 5:29)."¹ Christ said that if one loved his life in this world, then he would lose it (John 12:25).

So then, whatever opposes or distracts from one's devotion and commitment to Christ must be hated in comparison to one's love for Him.

Christ must be loved supremely, or he is not loved at all. If we are not willing to give up all earthly friends, and if we do not obey him rather than all others, we have no true attachment to him. "Is not worthy of me," is not fit to be regarded as a follower of me, or is not a Christian.²

His Cross

Following the previous statement on self-denial (14:26), Christ amplifies this topic even further. He says that a person cannot be one of His disciples unless he is bearing his own cross (14:27). The word "cross," σταυρός, carries with it the idea of suffering, whether it be for public display, or disgrace, or describing the instrument of

¹For two examples of men who loved God more than themselves, see Job 2:3, 10; Phil 3:7-11.

²Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: Matthew and Mark, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 115.

torture and execution.¹ This type of execution was usually inflicted upon rebels, criminals, and slaves.² It was common knowledge to the Jews that the condemned man carried his own cross to the place where he was to die. To be sure, this was the lowest state of humiliation. Therefore, the act of crucifixion was well-known throughout Palestine.³

Certainly, this requirement would be a deterrent to those who were only curiosity seekers. It would be a discouragement to anyone following Christ who was not serious about being fully committed. Jesus, at different times in His ministry, informed His followers that they would not be above their Master (Matt 10:24; Luke 6:40; John 13:16). In John 15:20, He even told His followers, before His own arrest and execution, that the world would also persecute them. So the same fate that awaited Christ would possibly await those who identified themselves with Him (2 Tim 3:12).

When reading accounts about the early church, one soon discovers the believers undergoing persecution, suffering, and death (many times by way of a cross).⁴ The amount of suffering is never mentioned by Christ, for He allots more to some of His disciples than to others.

¹The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "σταυρός," by Colin Brown, 1:391.

²Ibid., p. 392.

³Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 400, recounts a situation in A.D. 6, where "the Romans crucified hundreds of followers of the rebel, Judas the Gaulonite."

⁴John 21:18-19; Acts 12:2; 2 Cor 11:16-33.

Therefore, in one sense, to bear one's cross means to live for Christ no matter what the outward consequences may be, whether shame, suffering, or even death.

In another sense, to bear the cross also carries with it an underlying theme of one's death to his own personal ambitions, will, and goals, when they conflict with what Christ desires. This is what it means "to die daily" (1 Cor 15:31). For no disciple can willingly go to his physical death for Christ unless he is denying himself daily (Luke 9:23). The use of the present tense of βασιτάζω supports that indeed, this self-denial and willingness to even die for Christ is to be an ongoing lifestyle. Bonhoeffer rightly states that, "Only when we have become completely oblivious of self are we ready to bear the cross for His sake."¹

The act of bearing one's cross is done voluntarily by each disciple. It is a matter of choice whether or not one denies himself and follows Christ (Matt 16:24-26; Rom 12:1, 2; James 4:7). A. B. Bruce concisely states concerning the matter of self-denial, that

According to this maxim we must lose something, it is not possible to live without sacrifice of some kind; the only question being what shall be sacrificed--the lower or the higher life, animal happiness or spiritual blessedness.²

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), p. 97.

²A. B. Bruce, The Training of the Twelve (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), p. 186.

It is a striking paradox that for a disciple to truly live for Christ, he must die to himself (self-denial), and be willing to accept whatever reproach the world inflicts upon him, even physical death.¹

His Possessions

The Lord, in verse thirty-three, gives another requirement in order to be His disciple. He informs him that he must forsake all his possessions. The word "forsake," ἀποτάσσειται, means to bid farewell to someone or something. The word occurs only five other times in the New Testament, and in each occurrence, it means good-bye or farewell.² When ἀποτάσσειται is used with an impersonal object such as "possessions," ὑπάρχω, it carries the emphasis of one being unconstrained by the things he owns. This does not necessarily mean he has to get rid of everything he owns, but he does need to recognize that Christ must have priority over all he owns.

Christ knew that the area of possessions can easily become a mistaken priority (14:18-20). He addressed riches, one area of possessions, in Mark 10:23-25, where He explained that riches can even keep one from receiving salvation. And again, in Matthew He states that no one can give allegiance to two masters, God and possessions. It must be one or the

¹Other paradoxes are Matt 11:11; 19:30; 20:27; Luke 6:38; Rom 6:22.

²Mark 6:46; Luke 9:61; 2 Cor 2:13; Acts 18:18, 21.

other (Matt 6:24). Calvin sums up the proper place possessions ought to hold in a disciple's life when he says,

Yet no man truly forsakes all that he possesses till he is prepared at every instance to leave all, gives himself free and unconstrained to the Lord, and, rising above every hindrance pursues his calling. Thus the self-denial which the Lord demands from his followers does not consist so much in outward conduct as in the affections; so that everyone must employ the time which is passing over him without allowing the objects which he directs by his hand to hold a place in his heart.¹

His Counting of the Cost

As Jesus addresses this multitude of people (14:25), He tells them that there is a cost involved in following Him (14:28). The word "calculate," ψηφίζω, is used only two times in the New Testament, here, and in Revelation 13:18 where it refers to calculating the number of the beast. The word ψηφίζω is derived from ψῆφος which means a pebble that was used in a jury to cast a vote,² so the verb form ψηφίζω means to count up and then cast a vote to resolve to do something.³ What the person is to count up is the "expense," δαπάνη (only used one time in the New

¹John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. 1, edited by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 475.

²Bauer, p. 892.

³Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, compilers, A Greek English Lexicon, revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, et al., with a supplement (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 2022.

Testament).¹ The phrase, "counting the cost," means that a would-be disciple is to be informed of what expense is involved in following Christ, and then vote on what he resolves to do. This interpretation will be expanded upon and supported in chapter three.

In determining exactly who counts the cost, one must begin by noting who Jesus was addressing. As stated earlier, Jesus was addressing a large crowd which consisted of saved and unsaved. Even one of the twelve disciples before Him was unsaved.

This writer believes Jesus had a two-fold purpose in addressing the crowd. The first purpose would have been to inform the unsaved of what was involved in following Him. It certainly was not, as most of the crowd thought, an easy road to world popularity and success. But instead, it was a solid commitment to a person, which would involve hardship, shame, and death to self and possibly physical death.

Maclaren well states that,

Christ sought for no recruits under false pretenses but rather discouraged then stimulated light-hearted adhesion. His constant effort was to sift the crowds that gathered around him. . . . He knew that the best way to attract is sometimes to repel; and that a plain statement of the painful consequences of a course will quench no genuine enthusiasm, but may turn a mere flash in the pan into a purpose that will flame through a life.²

¹James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), p. 137.

²Alexander Maclaren, The Gospel According to St. Luke, chapters 13 to 24 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), pp. 38-39.

Certainly, these would-be (unsaved) disciples needed to be informed of the cost and then make a decision whether or not they would commit themselves to Christ. Therefore, the unsaved must count the cost.

This writer does not see any difference between the commitment involved in being a true disciple (dealt with in this passage) and the commitment involved in being saved. For truly there is a cost involved in becoming saved. One must repent and believe (Luke 13:3, 5), turning from self-righteousness and sin to follow Christ as Savior and Lord. The identity of Christ as Lord is vital in one's understanding when the decision of salvation is involved (Rom 10:9-13). Christ said, "the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it" (Matt 7:14). This writer is not doubting what Christ has done on the cross, or inferring salvation is by works. He believes salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone who paid for the sins of the world (Eph 2:8, 9). But this writer is referring to the decision that every unbeliever must make if he is to partake of the gift of salvation (Acts 16:31). Since this decision to follow Christ, be a disciple, or be saved is truly the most important decision one will ever make in his life, then one needs to calculate the cost involved before making that decision.

Christ emphasizes the importance of this decision by using two common cultural examples of commitment to represent the decision of spiritual commitment (to be discussed

in chapter three). The key phrase used to relate the importance of the decision is "for who out of you," τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν (14:28). Jeremias explains that,

τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν in the New Testament regularly introduces questions which expect the emphatic answer "No One! Impossible!" or "Everyone, of course!" In English this τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν would best be rendered by "Can you imagine that any of you would . . ." (Matt. 6:27 par. Luke 12:25; Matt. 7:9 par. Luke 11:11; Matt. 12:11 par. Luke 14:5; Luke 14:28; 15:4; 17:7).¹

Jesus therefore sought for a definite decision from the would-be disciples in this crowd.²

The second purpose in addressing the crowd, would have been a review for the saved. Jesus realized that Christians, after they make their original decision to follow Him (are saved), often struggle with priorities day by day. So this passage would be a review for them of the place Christ must have in their lives each day. If Christ was not a priority in their lives, they would need to examine themselves to see if they were indeed saved.³ Christ demands from believers, that they be who they are, do what they said they would do, and serve and obey who they chose as Master (Luke 6:40; 1 Cor 6:19, 20; 10:31; Gal 5:1, 13, 22-24, 25; Col 2:6). Jesus does not only require the believer to continue to "count the cost," but also to pay it.

¹Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, second revised edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 158.

²Ibid., p. 103.

³Paul urged the Corinthians to take this test (2 Cor 13:5-7).

Summary

This chapter has pointed out that a "disciple," μαθητής, means a learner in the general sense of the word. Only context will determine the specific sense of what kind of learner he or she is. The term μαθητής is used in the Gospels to describe both the saved and unsaved alike. In this passage, Jesus used the term in a more specific sense to refer to a saved and committed follower (14:26, 27, 33). The term μαθητής is used in the book of Acts to refer to Christians in general, and then not used at all throughout the epistles.

The description of a disciple is made by Christ, when He states that a follower of his must "hate," μισέω, his family and even himself (14:26). Christ meant that a disciple would love his family and himself less in comparison with his love for Him.

A disciple must also bear a "cross," σταυρός (14:27). The meaning here is two-fold. One meaning is that a disciple would literally have to be willing to die physically for his faith in Christ. And secondly, the meaning of the cross carries with it a figurative idea of a day by day self-sacrifice. Certainly, it is a voluntary choice that must be made to deny oneself and follow Christ no matter what the outcome may involve.

Concerning "possessions," ὑπάρχω, the disciple must be unconstrained by them (14:33). There must be no competition between one's possessions, and his loyalty to Christ.

In order for the would-be disciple to "count the cost," ψηφίζω τὴν δαπάνη, he must first be informed of what expense is involved in following Christ (14:28). He then must make a decision to become a disciple of Christ's or not.

So, Christ had a two-fold purpose in giving this description of a disciple to the crowd. One was for the unsaved, so they might be informed of what it means to be saved (to become His disciple). This would require a decision of commitment. It, however, does not mean salvation is by works, but it better explains what the choice involves that the would-be disciple must make. It involves a heart that desires to fully follow Christ. The other purpose was a review for the saved. This was to remind them to carry through with their initial vote to follow Christ at salvation, and to keep Christ first in their lives day by day.

CHAPTER III

ILLUSTRATIVE COMMITMENT STORIES

To illustrate the decision of spiritual commitment, Christ gave two expanded similes and one metaphor from the first century culture. These stories were to show the foolishness of rash decisions made by uncommitted individuals. Although most of the details used in these similes and the metaphor have meaning, they find their true meaning in the light of the main point of the stories.¹

The Builder

The first simile that Christ used was a man who wanted to build a "tower," πύργον (14:28-30). These towers were often built in vineyards for protection (Matt 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 13:4). As mentioned in chapter two, the phrase τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν, "Can you imagine any of you," emphasized the fact that one needed to make an informed decision to which he would commit himself fully.² However, if an uninformed, rash decision is made, Christ gives the result. This person will be a foolish spectacle to all of those

¹A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 229.

²Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, p. 158.

around. The emphasis lies on the relative pronoun "this man," οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος. He is the fool because in haste, and ignorance, he started a project but did not complete it. This type of individual who makes half-hearted, ignorant, and hasty choices, is of no value to anyone.

To be a disciple of Christ, one needed to decide with soberness of thought, perseverance, and commitment in his heart to serve Him first no matter what the circumstances may be. Again, the principle of fore-thought was not new, but God has always desired it (Eccl 5:2, 4-5; Matt 5:33-37).

The King

The second simile that Christ used, involved a king making a decision to go to battle another king (14:31, 32). The main point focuses around the decision that the king makes and the result of the decision if it is too hasty. By the use of βουλεύσεται, "will consider," followed by an infinitive, it places the emphasis on the choice that one needs to make.¹ It is an individual choice made only by himself (middle voice).² Plummer states, "The lesson conveyed is not so much 'it is better not to begin, than to begin and

¹Moulton and Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, p. 115.

²R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 788.

fail,' as 'it is folly to begin without much consideration.'"¹
 Christ wanted the would-be disciples to be informed and committed in their decision to follow Christ. To the saved, Christ gave a review of what they ought to be doing in light of their original decision to follow Christ (at salvation).

Interpretations

Because there are many and various interpretations of these two similes, this writer will only present the three major interpretations.

The first view, and most common, is that the builder and king refer to the Christian. He is to count the cost. This view often deals with two groups of believers, one group who are average, and the other group who are elite (disciples). The tower represents the Christian life, and the battle represents the struggle between the Christian and Satan.²

The second view, and growing popular today, is that the builder and king refer to Christ. He is the one who has counted the cost. This view also deals with two groups of believers, one group who are average, and the other group

¹Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 365.

²Proponents of this view in one form or another are: Maclaren, Luke, pp. 39-41; Lenski, Luke, p. 788; Richard Chenevix Trench, Studies in the Gospels (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 255-56, 264; H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the Gospel of Luke (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1971), p. 481.

who are useful (disciples). The believer's duty is to stand by Christ until the building is done and the battle is won.¹

The third major view is that the builder and king represent would-be disciples who make rash decisions. This view deals more with the would-be disciples in the crowd rather than on the few who were saved. These rash decisions on the part of the unsaved would inevitably lead them to be a foolish spectacle, useful to no one.²

This writer holds to the third major view above for reasons stated in this thesis.

Salt Metaphor

Jesus uses a metaphor to describe an uncommitted follower (14:34-35). He begins with a positive statement, that a committed follower (seasoned salt) is good. The word οὖν, commonly translated "therefore," ought instead to be an emphatic "to be sure."³ It is definite, therefore, that a committed follower is like salt, having many useful purposes. A commonly held position is that salt has basically three

¹Proponents of this view in one form or another are: G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Luke (Chicago/New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), p. 178; Charles F. Baker, Understanding the Gospels--a Different Approach (Grand Rapids: Grace Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 177; Ivan H. French, "Discipleship, Follow-up and Nurture," class notes, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1980, p. 3.

²Proponents of this view in one form or another are few: Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, pp. 203-04; Calvin, Harmony, pp. 374-75; I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 495-97.

³Dana and Mantey, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 255.

characteristics: as a preservative; as an additive for flavor; and as a fertilizer to stimulate growth.¹ If a follower chooses to be uncommitted (tasteless), as a lifestyle, he becomes of no value (useless) to anyone. The word used to describe the uselessness of this kind of person is ἠωπαίω, "to be tasteless," or better, "to be the fool."² Just like the two similes, the result is the same for an uninformed, hasty decision about an important and serious matter. The person is foolish, and becomes a shameful spectacle to those around him.

Christ then asks, "with what will it be seasoned?" This is a positive rhetorical question that asserts a negative answer, namely, nothing can be done. The type person spoken of in this metaphor, is one who professes to follow the Lord, and after starting to follow (outwardly) he soon retreats from his profession and lives like the world.

You can tell such a man nothing that he does not know. You can show him no doctrine that he has not heard. He has not sinned in ignorance like many. He has gone away from Christ with his eyes open. He has sinned against a known, and not an unknown God.³

Christ does not want these would-be disciples to start out lukewarm (tasteless) or end up lukewarm (Rev 3:15, 16). Those, however, that profess to be saved and

¹Barclay, Luke, pp. 204-05.

²Smith, Greek Lexicon, p. 299.

³J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke, Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1875), p. 170.

yet have become uncommitted (disobedient) to the Lord as a lifestyle, ought to be considered, by all practical purposes, as unbelievers (Matt 7:16; 18:15-17; 1 John 2:4; 3:6, 9, 10, 24; 4:6). If this professing follower truly is saved, and yet is disobedient, he will have no assurance of salvation, and be of no real use to the Lord and to the church.

Summary

In each of these similes and in the salt metaphor, Jesus focused upon a decision that needed to be made. Christ wanted committed followers (saved) from the crowd of would-be disciples (majority unsaved). For this transition to take place, the unsaved needed to be informed of what the Christian's personal life was like, and also to make a sober, and committed decision to follow Christ fully. The saved, on the other hand, received a review of their original decision to follow Christ. The main point for the saved would have been, "Have I been committed to following through in my loyalty to Christ?", and if not, then "I must start to do again what I originally promised to do."

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Commitment has always been a requirement of God's for those who follow Him. In Luke 14:25-35, Jesus knew His hour had come to die. Because of this, He realized that the church needed, more than anything else, to be made up of committed followers. However, the crowd following Christ was made up of many would-be disciples (unsaved) and many curiosity seekers, and some true believers. They desperately needed to be informed of the commitment involved in being a believer. Because Christ never preached an easy road, but a narrow and difficult one, they needed to "count the cost." And in turn, they needed to make a decision to go fully with Christ (be saved) or stop professing to be a follower of His. This decision was not to be rash, but ought to take much fore-thought, and careful consideration of Christ's demands. Christ did not want to get rid of them. Instead, He wanted them to be informed, and make a decision to be fully committed to Him. The saved, on the other hand, needed a reminder to carry through with what they promised, namely, full allegiance to Christ.

All true believers are disciples of Christ. They are either obedient or disobedient to the Lord's commands.

Because these commands are for all believers to obey, not just for an elite group.

Today there is so much being taught about a wrong concept of Christianity, that preachers need to be proclaiming the whole counsel of God, which includes Luke 14:25-35. Truly, there seems to be a growing distinction between what God says is a biblical Christian, and what people say is a Christian.

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