

“Taking Faith Seriously”

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Luke 14:25-35

SERMON

READ LUKE 14:25-35

Everything about this passage says that when we are serious about following Jesus makes life hard. Choosing to follow is costly. Choosing to follow is difficult. Choosing to follow Jesus means that life will never be the same again. Other people might place a target on you. Some people might exclude you, and others might publicly ridicule you.

Choosing to be serious about following Jesus is a risky endeavor!

In Jesus' day, there was urgency in his message. Jesus was at this time a literal target of the religious leaders who were doing their best to trap him theologically in order to discredit him to his followers, or worse yet even to arrest him physically and dispose of him — which they ended up doing.

I've heard this speech of Jesus described as if he was the leader of a great expedition through the

treacherous mountains to bring medical relief to villagers who had been cut off from the rest of civilization.

As the expedition leader, Jesus was saying “If you want to come any further, you'll have to leave your backpacks behind. From here on the path is too steep to carry all of that stuff. Once you leave it behind, you probably won't find it again. And you better send your last email and text message to your family, because you won't get reception out there in the wilderness.

This is a dangerous road and it's very likely that some of us will not make it back alive.”

Counting the cost and being deadly serious about what this expedition will require of us is crucial.

Following Jesus is a costly endeavor. It will require everything from us. After all, Jesus asked his followers to pick up their crosses and follow him. Everyone knew that carrying a cross was the last road they would walk before being crucified.

However, the crowd to whom Jesus was speaking probably did not fully understand that he was heading to his death.

Essentially, Jesus was saying to them, “I want you to think about what you are doing and choose if you really want to go with me all the way.”

It talks about hate in this passage, and there has been quite a bit of commentary through the years about this notion that before someone can truly follow Jesus, they will need to “hate” their father, mother & wife, husband, as well as their children, brothers and sisters. Jesus goes even beyond this to say that one even needs to hate their own life before following him.

This certainly is troublesome. We can hear the response, “What about the love you have been preaching?”

The message to love and not hate goes all the way back into the deepest stories of faith from Genesis. Is everything now changing due to the urgent and critical moment that Jesus’ movement is facing?

Many have said that Jesus must have meant something different, because “hating” doesn’t fit for Jesus — it doesn’t jive with his other teachings of love.

They are right. In this passage, there is no sentiment as we might think of hating another person. To

“hate” in this Jewish cultural context meant to **turn away from or to detach oneself**.

This understanding makes much better sense in light of the urgency that Jesus was communicating. If anything stood in the way of the this expedition they were on, it very likely would prevent the whole thing from succeeding. They were in reality on a life or death mission.

This road that Jesus was inviting his disciples to travel with him would require their undivided attention, and full devotion. Nothing could hinder this work.

This campaign that Jesus was running had raised the stakes for everyone. He wants them to know what they are getting into and seriously consider the cost.

Jesus uses two examples in this passage. The first was about planning well when building a tower. In Jesus’ day the most important building was the Temple in Jerusalem which was at that time in the process of being rebuilt. This project was started by Herod the Great and continued by his heirs.

But the project wasn’t completed and the people were wondering if it ever would be. And even if it was completed, Jesus had already

spoken about its irrelevance, so what was to be its purpose? Actually, it would very soon be destroyed and laid waste for all to see.

So, when Jesus used the example of building a tower and being stuck in the middle of a project because pre-planning wasn't done, all they would need to do was turn and see the incomplete walls of the Temple Mount to understand what he was saying.

The second example Jesus used was connected to the Temple in some significant ways. He spoke about an army going to war, and the importance of evaluating the opposition and considering if they could win the battle or not and then planning accordingly.

This example would also have resonated for the people of Jesus' day. Most people in that society were living a peasants' life under the oppressive rule of Rome.

Occasionally there were uprisings when groups attempted to overthrow the government for the sake of justice, but their sticks and clubs and lack of training were no match for the gilded war horses, sharp swords, and strategic military training of the Roman soldiers who summarily squashed every rebellion.

However, there continued to be rumblings about the next uprising, so when Jesus spoke about considering the cost, they knew what he was talking about.

In addition, Jesus had spoken long and hard about peace being the higher calling versus war, and yet still his closest followers didn't get the point and were still talking about coordinating an uprising to gain back their freedom and their land.

So, Jesus was using these examples of counting the cost and creating the context for a dangerous expedition.

They, as Israel, have a job to do. Their job and responsibility, given by God from ancient times is to be the salt of the earth — to be God's witnesses to peace and love for the sake of the world and all creation!

But their attention has been on so many other things, like political battles they can't win, and building temples that are irrelevant.

At this crucial juncture as Jesus was heading toward the cross, they run the risk of losing their saltiness, their relevance, their importance, and being worthless to the current generation as a people of faith.

Jesus was saying that they need to take their faith seriously and step up to truly be God's people! The world needed them!

Perhaps this message is just as relevant for us today. Right now, the state of the Church is in peril. Like in Jesus' day, we have an emergency!

Churches are closing throughout the world at an increasingly rapid pace. Data from multiple studies show the percentage of the population proclaiming faith has been steadily shrinking for the past four decades.

- In the 1980s church membership declined by 10%, and then another 12% in the 1990s, and then further in the 2000s and since.

- From 1992 to 2015, the percentage of US adults who attend a church or synagogue dropped from 70% to 59%.

- A few years ago, it was reported that 4000 churches around the world were closing every year compared with 1000 new churches being started.

- At least 65% of churches are currently shrinking in size.

- All of the statistics demonstrate that more and more people feel

that the importance of religion and the relevance of the church are getting less and less.

- Those who declare no faith at all are also continually increasing.

- Also, those who think that religion can address everyday problems in people's lives are decreasing.

(references: <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>)

We are in the middle of an emergency.

What is the cost of following Jesus?

What needless towers and un-winnable wars are taking up our attention, time and money and distracting us from our call to follow God today? Are we now representing God as salt in the world?