

similar, “those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”

In the same way that Jesus asks His followers to love Him more than they love their family and other relationships, He asks them also to love Him more than they love their own lives. And in the same way that in a few more chapters, we will see Jesus carry His own cross in order to lay down His life for our sake, He asks us to carry our cross and to lay down our lives in order to pick up His. Essentially, Jesus is saying that in order to follow Him and to be His disciples – we have to live as if our lives are no longer our own. And for all of the people that were hearing Jesus say this, they would have understood exactly what Jesus was requiring.

The Cross was a symbol of death, you knew exactly where you were heading if you had to pick up your Cross – and to pick up one’s cross was to die to oneself. That means that our desires, our goals, our plans, and all of our longings are in His hands, they are no longer in our hands. And although all of those things can be used by God in order to accomplish His purposes, we have to recognize that when He is our Lord, they can also be changed by God in order to bring us into alignment with His will for our lives. And in the same way, our possessions and our finances – although they are important and necessary in order to live, they are not meant to be the goal of our lives and they shouldn’t dictate how we live our lives.

So, Jesus is not asking us to not have goals or plans, or to give away all of our possessions and finances in this passage – but He is asking to be the Lord over them in our lives. And a good way for you to figure out whether YOU are living as the Lord of your life or if Jesus is the Lord of your life is to ask yourself these questions:

- If Jesus asked you to lay down a certain goal, desire, or plan for His purposes and His glory – would you obey Him?
- If Jesus asked you to give away some of your money, possessions, or time for His purposes and glory – would you obey Him?

Because the truth is that we can have the best intentions of following Jesus and drawing near to Him – but end up being far from Him because we are holding tightly to our own lives. This isn’t just an America issue or a 2021 issue – this is a human issue.

It reminds me of the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Matthew 19. This man, who has a lot of money, comes up to Jesus and asks what he can do in order to inherit

eternal life. He already says that he obeys the commandments that Jesus tells him to obey, but then Jesus challenges Him by saying this. Matthew 19:21-22.

So, in this passage, we see a couple of things. First, we see that Jesus is asking this man to not only be the Lord over His moral living, but also over His finances, desires, and possessions. Over his whole life.

And second, we see that although this man had intentions on obeying Jesus’ teaching, he wasn’t willing to count the cost – and lay down his life in order to receive the fullness of life in Jesus. And ultimately what kept him from drawing near to Jesus wasn’t his inability to work hard enough, or listen to enough podcasts or do enough bible studies to get closer to Jesus, but it was in his lack of desire to lay down the things that were holding on to him and keeping him from entering more fully into the Kingdom of God. And although Scripture doesn’t say anything more about this man, its heartbreaking to know that He chose created things over the creator. He chose temporal happiness rather than eternal joy in Jesus. And in the same way, when we allow for our desires, our feelings, or plans to outweigh what God’s Word says or what God’s asking us to do → we are settling for something that will not and cannot sustain us. It may be what seems best at the time, but it isn’t what’s best for us in the long run.

So, Jesus continues on by using two different analogies in order to describe the importance of counting the cost of being His disciple. And in both stories, Jesus is emphasizing the importance of taking into consideration one’s decision to follow Him with their lives.

In the first story, Jesus talks about a man who wants to build a tower but doesn’t end up having enough money to finish the tower. Instead, he ends up with a half-finished tower, and a lot of shame in a culture that is built upon honor.

And in the second story, Jesus talks about a king that is about to go to war. He argues that it would be wise for the king to first sit down and to figure out if he was able to even stand a chance against the other army – and if not, he might as well just ask for peace, instead of losing all of his men and having to surrender. So, in both of these cases – the inability to finish what was started and the inability to defend against an incoming attack result in shame and in surrender. And in both of these cases, counting the cost prior to building the tower or going to war would have allowed for a greater chance of success. And in the same way, Jesus is encouraging those who were listening, and us today, to count the cost of following Him and to do it with genu-

ine intentions. Because ultimately, if we don’t count the cost and understand the reality of Jesus not only being our savior, but also being our Lord, we end up living as a “Christian” but misrepresenting the truth of the Gospel. And I am sure that many of us have heard of or know of people that claim to be Christians, but actually live lives that bring confusion and pain to those who are trying to understand what the Gospel is and are actually ineffective in preaching the good news with their lives. And instead of representing Jesus to the world, they represent some sort of man-made and culturally acceptable form of Christianity that is contrary to Scripture. Jesus acknowledges this in vv. 34-35“34 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

As Christians, we are called to not only be the light in this dark world, but also to be the salt of the earth. And our “saltiness” and our “light” is not OUR goodness, but it is Christ producing His character inside of us and showing His power and love through us. But if our lives are lived merely through our own strength and merely by our own desires, then we end up being ineffective witnesses of the Gospel and live ineffective lives in the Kingdom – and keep ourselves at a distance from true intimacy with Christ.

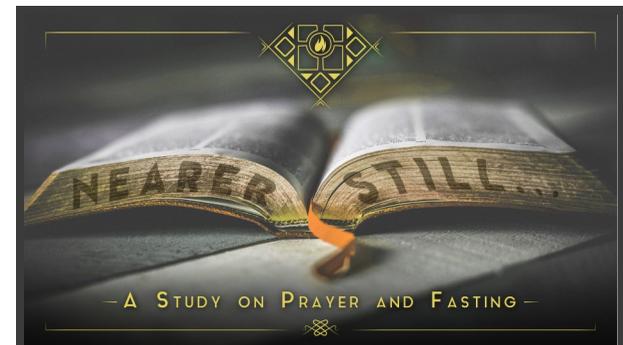
Conclusion:

What we are receiving and walking in direct relationship with is the one who knows our hearts, who created our souls, who causes the sun to rise and the waves to calm. And when we realize we are not missing out by living a life sold out to Jesus, that we are not shorting ourselves by being obedient to His Word over our own desires, when we fix our eyes on all that He is, we will give all we have to Him. Matthew 13:44-46.

When we truly recognize the difference in value between what Jesus is asking us to lay down, and what we can pick up in return, we would do everything we can to grab hold of it.

Because even if it doesn’t feel like it now, it will be worth it. Everything that we lay down in order to follow Christ more fully will be worth it.

- Is Jesus the Lord over your whole life? Or just part of your life?
- What relationships, desires, plans, or things do you need to lay down in order to draw nearer to Christ?



February 14, 2021

Pastor Jacob Shaffer



www.wcag.org

Nearer Still #6

February 14, 2021

Pastor Jacob Shaffer

Good morning! Today, we are going to be continuing to build upon the foundation that we have already set over the past month or so, as we have been intentionally focusing our time together on Drawing Nearer to God with our whole lives. And the truth is that sometimes that phrase, “drawing nearer to God” can feel so cryptic and it can be difficult to wrap our minds around how we are to do that in a practical way with our daily lives. And Scripture offers many different ways in which we can draw near to God with our lives: prayer, fasting, worship, obedience, meditating on His Word, lamenting, serving others, and much more. And we know through Scripture that drawing near to God with our lives isn’t limited to certain actions or moments in our lives, but it is actually allowing every part of our life to be lived and shaped for the glory of God.

So, even though we are in a sermon series focused on Drawing Near to God – the truth is that when this sermon series ends, our desire and goal of drawing nearer to Him shouldn’t fade away. Because this is the goal of our lives as Believers and as Disciples of Jesus – to draw nearer to Him as we follow after Him with our whole life.

And if you look in Scripture, one of the main differences between the crowds of people that surrounded Jesus when it was convenient for them or when He was performing miracles and His actual Disciples that eventually died martyr’s deaths for His namesake wasn’t their past credentials or their current religious performance – it was their commitment and allegiance to Jesus, even if it was flawed, and that they had a desire to draw near to Him with their whole life. Because to be a disciple of someone was to be a learner and follower of that person – to learn to live like they lived and to model their lives after their teacher.

So, drawing near to Jesus in this way was costly – not because of what they had to do to earn a relationship with Him, but because of what they had to lay down at His feet in order to walk in true discipleship and true relationship with Him. And the truth is that not everyone who saw the miracles that Jesus performed, who heard the truth that He spoke, and actually spent time with Jesus drew near to Him with their whole lives – and in doing so, didn’t draw near to Him at all. Because the truth is that Jesus isn’t just after part of our lives, He wants all of our life. And He hasn’t just come to be our savior, He has come to be our Lord as well.

Because it is only in right relationship with Him that we can find true life, and it is only in Him that we can find true joy. And 2000 years later, the same cost of following after Jesus is presented to us. And we are faced with the same decision – do we want to draw near to God with our whole lives or do we want to let Him lead us only when we want to be led and keep our distance from true intimacy with Christ?

Today, I want to read a passage in Scripture that both invites us into a dynamic relationship with Jesus but also challenges us with the reality of the cost.

Luke 14:25-35 PRAY.

If you go just a few chapters back, we know that Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem, where He will eventually face His death. He knows the suffering that He is going to face, and He knows the troubles that will arise for those who follow Him in the days to come.

Right in the beginning of this passage, we see that Jesus is travelling with a large group of people – people that were probably aware of all of the miracles that Jesus has done, have heard the rumors surrounding Him and probably wanted to see if what Jesus had to offer could help them in their own lives.

It is likely that amongst this group – that there were people that had different levels of interest in Jesus, different backgrounds in their lives, and different motives behind following Him, but regardless of their backgrounds or motives, the reality is that they were all still travelling with Jesus. They all still had access to Jesus and had the ability to draw near to Him with their lives if they chose to. And it is on this journey, where Jesus once again invites and challenges all people, He turns to the entire crowd, and asks them to lay down their lives, in order to pick up His and draw nearer to Him in discipleship.

So, we see that in v. 26 Jesus begins to address the issues that keep people from truly becoming disciples. And He is not referring to people becoming a part of His group of 12 disciples, but rather He is referring to people who would follow and identify with Him and His mission with their whole life. Not people that just say they follow Jesus or that they like the idea of following Jesus, but people that allow their commitment to Jesus impact the way that they live their lives. And specifically, Jesus begins with saying that if anyone comes to Him without hating their own father and mother and children and brothers and sisters – even their own life, that they cannot be His disciples.

So, right away – Jesus is openly acknowledging that following Him and being His disciple is costly! He doesn’t try to hide or water down the kind of allegiance that He is expecting from those who want to truly follow Him and draw near to Him with their whole life. Because ultimately, if they want to relate to Jesus in ways that a disciple would relate to Jesus, then they have to live their lives in ways that true disciples live – which requires complete allegiance and obedience to the one they are following. But it is really important to know that Jesus is NOT saying that you have to hate your family or yourself in order to truly be His disciple. In fact, Jesus says the Greatest commandment is to Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then also the second is like it - to Love your neighbor as you love yourself. And He even commands us in the sermon on the mount that in order to live a life more fully in the Kingdom of God, we have to love even our ENEMIES.

So, Jesus is not going back on His previous teachings, or contradicting Himself, but He is using hyperbolic speech to call true Believers to love Him even more than they love their own family and relationships. He is calling them to live their lives in complete devotion to Him. And essentially what “hate” is referring to here is to love someone less than you love another. And that is an extremely challenging call even for most of us today, because we all have someone that we love and value that we would do anything for – but for the people that Jesus was talking to, family wasn’t just the people they loved and valued the most – their family was their identity, their security, the way in which they operated in society. But the reality is that if they wanted to follow Christ and draw near to Him with their whole life – then their allegiance and obedience has to lie with Him more than it does with anyone else.

They have to be willing to obey and follow Jesus, even if those around them are trying to convince them to do something different or trying to get them to compromise in their desire to live for God. And if you have lived any amount of time as a follower of Jesus, you know that living in obedience to God’s Word is not the most popular way to live in the world.

People will try to twist Scripture, or they will read into it what they want it to say so that they can live the life that they want to live. Or they will try to convince themselves or other Believers to compromise on what God’s Word says because it must not be that big of a deal today, right?

But isn’t that the story that we see in the Garden?

Adam and Eve were given a command by God to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil – and what we see instead is that their perfect union with God is thrown out the window because they misplaced their allegiance and compromised their obedience to God’s voice, alone. And we see that they were shamed because of their disobedience! This is the first place in the Bible that we see humanity beginning to “cover themselves” and move away from the freedom and peace that they had while in the Garden with the Lord. They both were led astray and away from perfect union with God because of their misplaced loyalty and trust in the serpent’s voice rather than in God’s Authority in their lives. They allowed other voices to interrupt and lead them away from their complete trust in God!

And as humans, the reality is that we are far more susceptible to living our lives to please other people, or even ourselves, rather than to please God than we would like to think. And it’s not a bad thing to want to make other people or yourself happy, but it turns into a bad thing if you would rather make other people happy over being obedient to God’s Word.

The Apostle Paul addresses the Believers in Galatia for abandoning the true Gospel and draws clear lines to who he is obedient to when he says this in Galatians 1:10 *“I Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

So, in the same way when our allegiance to the Lord is divided between what His Word says, what our friends expect from us, what culture is telling us to do with our lives, and what our family wants us to do with our lives – then we can’t fully draw near to God with our whole life because we are living in partial obedience and in partial surrender. And to live in partial obedience and surrender to God is to live in complete disobedience. And the truth in the Garden, in this passage, and even now is that Jesus isn’t just after a part of our lives, and He doesn’t just want to be our Lord and Savior only when it also pleases everyone else around us.

But He wants to be the Lord of our life ALL of the time, and the cost is for us to lay down our relationships, our popularity, and status at His feet and to attach our trust, our identity, and obedience to Him alone.

Jesus continues on in v. 27 by once again amplifying the cost of following after Him by saying, “and whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” And He says later in v. 33 something