



# Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.  
1286-46  
Luke 14:25-35  
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December 4, 2005

## “Christaholic” or Disciple?

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

The holidays seem to be a time when a lot of people decide to come to church. I speak from personal experience because I grew up in a home where we usually made it to church on Christmas and Easter. Of course, this kind of flimsy commitment irks most pastors. Many of us take rather desperate measures to keep people in the seats on the Sundays *between* Christmas and Easter. But others aren't quite so nice. One pastor noticed throngs of unfamiliar people at his Christmas service, and just to chide them a little bit he decided to announce for their benefit the date and times of the upcoming Easter services! It wasn't exactly what those folks wanted hear. That's one way to weed out a crowd!

Throughout history there has been a problem with people who consider themselves Christians but their faith is really more a matter of convenience than commitment. Even among those who make it to church most Sundays, there is a great divide between those who are there just because it makes them feel good and those who are there to worship the Lord regardless of how they feel. Calvin Miller calls this the difference between Christaholics and disciples. He says, “Disciples are cross-bearers; they seek Christ. Christaholics seek happiness. Disciples dare to discipline themselves, and the demands they place on themselves leave them enjoying the happiness of their growth. Christaholics are escapists looking for a shortcut to nirvana. Like drug addicts, they're trying to “bomb out” of their depressing world... Christ is not a happiness capsule; he's the way to the Father. But the way to the Father is not a carnival ride in which we sit and do nothing while we're whisked through various spiritual sensations.”

Jesus had to deal with this same divide. In Luke 14, as Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, he noticed that there was a large crowd of people going along with him. This is a preacher's dream, right? But Jesus never really got excited about a crowd; he was actually rather skeptical. So Jesus turned to them and said something designed to weed out those who weren't truly committed.

**“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 own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he**

**cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 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.” 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. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. 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”** (vv. 25-35).

### **I. You can't be a disciple unless you put Christ above all else.**

This is pretty intense, isn't it? Can you imagine Jesus being here this morning saying this? Imagine him coming up here and saying, “Listen, I'm really glad you're here, but I want you to know that just because you're here doesn't mean you're my disciple. You can't be my disciple unless you're willing to put everything on the table—your family; your life; your stuff.” What would you do? It's very clear what Jesus is saying: you can't be his disciple unless you put him above all else. Notice that Jesus says there are three things, that unless you do them, you can NOT be his disciple. And by the way, “disciple” is just another word for follower. A Christian is a disciple. This is not talking about becoming a super-Christian; this is talking about being a Christian.

**A. You must put him before your family:** First, he says unless you put him before your family you cannot be his disciple. He uses some very strong language here and many are confused by it. How can he tell me to hate my parents when he says to honor my father and mother? How can he tell me to hate my wife when he also tells me to love my wife as Christ loved the church? How can

he tell me to hate my children when he says that children are a blessing from the Lord? How can he tell me to hate those closest to me when he tells me to love my enemies?

So what does he mean? Jesus used this word “hate” in comparative terms. Here, to “hate” them means to *love them less* than Jesus. The idea is that our love and loyalty to him are to be so great that when loyalty to him clashes with loyalty to them we put him first. Jesus lived in a culture where loyalty to family was considered your highest obligation, so to them it would seem like you hated them if you put Jesus first. Now there IS kind of a paradox here: the best way to love your family is to hate them because your greater love for Jesus will cause you to love them with an even greater love! Do you follow me?

But there are those who fail to follow Christ and hide behind their love of family as an excuse. The book of Numbers tells the story of when the people of Israel were right on the edge of the Promised Land. God told them that it was their land and they should go in and take it. So they sent out spies and they came back and said, “It’s a beautiful place, but there are giants who live there and they’ll devour us if we go in there.” Caleb was the only one of the 12 spies with faith enough to say they should still go in. But the people of Israel said, “**Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder...**” (Nu.14:3). Do you see what they’re doing? They’re being faithless and disobedient and hiding behind their concern for their families as an excuse. Who can argue with that? Everyone is supposed to congratulate them on how devoted they are to their families! But Jesus says, “Unless you put me before your family you cannot be my disciple.”

#### **B. You must put him before your own life:**

The second statement he makes is that unless you put him before your own life you cannot be his disciple. At the end of v.26 he speaks of hating your own life. And then in v.27 he says you have to carry your own cross and follow him. What does that mean? Again, a lot of people misunderstand this. We struggle with some illness or with a difficult marriage or an irritating mother-in-law and we say, “This is the cross I have to bear.” But that’s not what Jesus is getting at here. To take up your cross evoked images of a criminal forced to carry a crossbeam upon which he would be publicly executed. In Jesus’ day, if you saw a man walking down the street carrying that crossbeam you would know that he was as good as dead. His life had ended. If Jesus were speaking today he would tell us

to climb on the table and get ready for a lethal injection. How do we do that? Certainly Jesus is calling us to be willing to die with him, but there is more. He’s calling us to daily take the position of one who is condemned to death. He’s saying you can’t be my disciple unless you abandon your right to control your future; to fulfill your own earthly hopes and ambitions; to control your own destiny. It’s like you’re dead to this world.

C. S. Lewis put it this way, “Christ says ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.’”

That’s so foreign to how I live. I still get my feelings hurt if I don’t get the recognition I deserve. Someone condemned to die could care less. I still want to plan my future. Jesus says, “For the rest of your life, you’re taking a walk. On your back is the crossbeam on which you’ll die.”

**C. You must put him before your possessions:** By the time we get to the third statement we’re prepared for anything. In v.33 he says you cannot be my disciple unless you give up all your possessions. He’s not telling us to sell all of our possessions, like he told the rich young ruler. The idea of “give up” means to relinquish control so you become a steward, a manager of whatever he gives you. We need to hear that at Christmas time. Isn’t it a tragic irony that the celebration of the birth of Christ has become not just clouded but obliterated by shopping and sales and profits and trinkets? Will you and I make a commitment that this Christmas we’ll not lose Christ in all of that?

We have to put him first. We have to put him before our families, our possessions and our own life. It’s like when you go to one of those auctions. People say you have to be careful—you don’t want to scratch your nose at the wrong time. Most of all, you have to make sure you know your upper limit price. You see, the great danger for us is that we walk into the Christian life with an upper limit price. Jesus doesn’t allow us to set that. He said there is no limit; you have to put him first, above all.

But Jesus doesn’t just leave it at that. In classic fashion he also gives us a few illustrations of why that is so important.

## **II. A disciple will count the cost beforehand.**

The first one is in vv.28-30. A farmer sets out to build a tower in his vineyard so that he can keep watch for thieves or animals that might threaten his harvest. But before he starts building he has to make sure he has enough money to finish the project. The last thing you want is to lay the foundation, run out of money, and not be able to finish. You would be the laughingstock of the community!

Lynn and I often take walks around our town and we've noticed how this can happen. Several years ago we discovered an enormous house that looks like a retreat center. It's huge! It had a construction fence around it and it was clearly a work in progress. We were excited to see what the finished product would look like. So every once in a while we go by there to see how it's developing, but it still looks exactly the same with the same fence around it. Every time we go by we think, "Man, that guy really blew it. He couldn't finish what he started!"

Jesus says, "Before you even start down this road of following me I want you to make sure you know the cost and you're willing to pay the price." We don't do this very well. We want so badly just to get people into the church. We tell them how wonderful it is to be a Christian. We try not to offend them. We try to make it real easy for them to just come; we don't want to put too many demands on them. Jesus says, "Tell them up front that it's not going to be a cakewalk. Tell them up front that there will be time when they will have to let go of something they dearly love. Tell them to think about it before they decide. Because the last thing I want is for someone to start and not finish."

## **III. A disciple will surrender to the demands of Christ.**

The second illustration is similar, but it has a slightly different point. He talks about a King who is thinking about going to war. If he's smart he'll sit down and try to figure out if he has the resources to win the war. If he discovers that he has only 10,000 men compared to 20,000 that the enemy has, he will send out a delegation and try to make peace, which of course would mean that he surrenders to his terms.

The first illustration said we must sit down and think whether we can afford to follow him. But this one says we must sit down and think whether we can afford to refuse his terms. Jesus is saying that being a disciple means surrendering everything to Christ; relinquishing control of everything. That's why he follows this by saying in v.33 that you have to give up all your possessions.

What strikes me about this is that the cost of NOT surrendering is far greater than the cost of surrendering. If

that King decided to go to war, shorthanded as he was, his army would have been destroyed. But by surrendering, he saved their lives. That's a smart King! It's a smart person who surrenders all to Christ because if you don't you will end up losing even more. You think you're giving up a lot; but in fact you're gaining so much more. You see, in both illustrations that's why you sit down and reflect, because in reflecting you can come to a point of clarity not just about the cost but about the superiority of what we receive.

## **IV. A disciple who does not count the cost is useless.**

The third illustration is in vv.34-35. At first it looks like this comes out of nowhere. All of a sudden he's talking about salt. He says that salt is good unless it loses its taste. The salt back then was not always pure, and the sodium chloride could be leached out of the impure mixture so that what was left had no taste of salt. It was useless. It couldn't help fertilize the land or decompose usefully on a pile of manure. How do you like that image? If you're like impure salt you're not even worth putting on top of a pile of manure! You may as well just throw it out.

What is he saying? He's saying, "If you set out to be a disciple of mine and you're not willing to live in the way I've just laid out for you; if you're not willing to put me before your family and your self and your stuff; if you're not willing to count the cost and surrender everything, you're like salt that has lost its taste."

I was working out at my gym this week watching Oprah. And she had this gospel singer on who I guess is really big. He has all these gold records and he's what's "hot" in gospel music right now. But he wasn't on Oprah to talk about music. He was on Oprah to talk about his addiction to pornography. He told about how it started when he was a young boy and how it got worse even after he got married and became a star. But he kept saying that he felt like a hypocrite because deep down he really wanted to live out his faith and he knew what he was doing was wrong. He told about how he hit bottom. One day, he threw a bunch of his magazines and videos in a dumpster because he wanted them out of his life. But that night as he lay in bed he found himself craving it again, and so he got out of bed, drove to the dumpster, and rummaged through all the garbage until he found his magazines and videos. He said at that moment, as he lay in the garbage, he realized how bad it was. It was then that he began to get help and he began to get clean.

Jesus is saying that when you claim to be a Christ-follower but you aren't growing to be more like Christ, you aren't yielding areas of your life to him, you

aren't making hard choices to deal with your sin, you would never really know you're a follower of Christ by the decisions you make about your time and your money, then you may as well be in the dumpster; you're useless. The good news is that as long as you're alive you can change. You can get help. You can repent.

Jesus isn't impressed with crowds of people who claim to be his followers but don't really accept his demands. He would much rather have a few people who will lay it all on the line; who will fiercely pursue him; who will ruthlessly judge the sin in their lives; who will look to serve others rather than always asking what's in it for me.

I was thinking how next week we're going to highlight some of our Sunday morning ministries where we need help. We need ushers and greeters and people to set up communion and be on the prayer team and work in the sound booth. It takes a lot to pull this thing off each Sunday. But so many people just say, "Well, I don't have the time. That would mean I would have to make it a priority to be here because people would be counting on me. And I might actually have to be nice to people. And this is my one day off." But if that's your thinking, you need to rethink why you're here. Have you really heard what Jesus is saying?

## CONCLUSION

Maybe that's why Jesus says, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" I think Jesus knew that not everyone would be able to hear this. I'm sure that some of you will make this your last Sunday at CPC. Because you don't like this. It's just too much.

I have two cups of salt here. Imagine this small one is good salt and this larger one is bad salt. What if I take this good salt and pour it out. I look at it and say, "Hey, that's good salt. I can use this. I can sprinkle it on my eggs or my steak and it will taste good." But what if I took this bad salt and poured it over the good salt because I wanted to have a bigger pile. We would say, "What a waste of the good salt. Now the pile is good for nothing." All I can do is call my friends over and say, "Hey, look at how big my pile is. How big is your pile?" This is what we do in churches. I've done this. I meet with other pastors and tell them about our church and they ask how big it is and I tell them and they say, "Man, you have a big pile!" That's how many pastors view success. And we have all these books and seminars today telling pastors how to grow their pile.

We focus on the size of our pile, but Jesus isn't impressed by big piles. He's quite content to weed out the Christaholics so that he could have a group of people who may love their families and enjoy their homes and care about their careers but when push comes to shove they would gladly give them all up in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. Don't get me wrong. I'm glad you're here. Jesus is glad you're here. And we're all a work in progress. But before you go any further, it's important that you ask yourself, "Is he first in my life? Has there ever been a time in my life when my love for him was so great that it appeared as if I hated everything else? Would anyone know by seeing my life that I've really counted the cost?"

*\*Thank you to Frances Chan for the idea of two piles of salt.*