



Series: The Way of Jesus

Sermon: Part 3 | Are you sure you want to follow Jesus?

Date: March 24, 2019

EASTER is 4 Weeks Away! See that card you got? You've got ONE. If you are newer to Mercy let me explain why we only gave you one. This is not for you to put on your fridge. This is an Easter Square. You give this Easter Square to the person you know that is far from God but close to you. Here's what I'll tell you: 82% of un-churched people say they would accept an invitation to go to church if they were invited. YET, only 2% of church members have invited someone to attend with them in the last year. That's a national stat. Let's change that. We talked about tear off the roof faith last week. One simple obstacle for people is not knowing where to start. And you can remove that with a simple "come with me!" So, invite your one. Here's exactly what to say: "DO YOU HAVE PLANS FOR EASTER?" Most likely they are going to say "I don't know right now." Maybe someone will say "Well, I really want to go to church but I just am waiting on someone to invite me." But I doubt it. So get your expectations right. But then you say: "I'd like to invite you to COME WITH ME TO my CHURCH Easter Weekend." I have this Easter Square. It's for you so you can remember.

You can invite to Friday, Saturday, Sunday. You pick, maybe all 3.

But don't stop there. We have 1600 of these. Let's give them all out. Restaurant Servers, Baristas, Neighbors, you name it. Somebody may be an invitation away. I've had multiple people recently tell me they found us through google. Now listen, that's cool with me. Glad the internet is working in our favor. My Easter challenge to us humans: to do a better job inviting than google.

Ok we are in week 3 of our series The Way of Jesus. Talking about what it looks like to walk in the way of Jesus. To be a follower. And today we look at what I believe is one of the hardest things Jesus ever told his disciples. And I believe, not surprisingly, it is a mission critical teaching for Mercy Church. It might just be really difficult for you to hear today, but I believe if we are going to be disciples, and that's what Jesus says we are, then we need to hear it.

Way I heard one guy describe this teaching: It's kind of like hard candy. If you just crunch down on it, it will hurt your teeth. But if you sit with it for a while, you'll find some great stuff in there.

Luke 14.25-33. We are going to take this passage apart and really sit down in what Jesus says. Then I want to show you some implications for us as a church right now.

There are no degrees of commitment to Jesus. You are either all-in, or all-out.

25 Now great crowds were traveling with him.

Let me set the scene since we've jumped from Luke 5. Main thing is that Jesus is now on his journey to Jerusalem. He's set his face towards Jerusalem and now everything in Luke's gospel is pointing towards Jesus going to die for the sins of the world. And he's got this big crowd really impressed by the miracles he's done. They are fans. Not just casual fans either. Like, really impressed fans. Traveling with him. What a moment! If you are a church growth strategist you are thinking...sweet, we've got some real momentum now Jesus! And he looks at this crowd and drops this bomb:

So he turned and said to them: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, and even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

What in the world is he talking about? Let's dive in here. First, what does he mean by hating your family? This trips pretty much everybody up. Some of you are like...I COULD NEVER. Why would he say that? Some of you are like...hate mom & dad...no problem. Already there. Thank you next.

Ok, first lets be clear: Jesus in using this word HATE does not mean hate in the way of cursing them. Jesus says consistently we are to love our family AND even love our enemies.

- Mark 7 – Teaches about how important Honoring father & mother is.
- Ephesians 5 – Apostle Paul tells us we are to love spouses, and love children.

And it has been the experience of countless people through the last 2000 years that when you begin to really follow Jesus you start to love your family and wife and your children more, not less. So nobody who is a student of the bible really thinks he meant that you should make an exception with your parents and hate them.

Here's what this means...he's creating a comparison between our love for him and our love for anyone else. He's saying that our love for him should be so primary and so much greater than our love for anything else...that our love for anything else would be like hate in comparison to our love for him.

If you've ever been in love with someone, you know this feeling. Like when I first fell in love with Courtney. It wasn't that I all of the sudden started to scorn and dislike all other women. It's just that no other woman did anything for me. I had the Ferrari of women. When you have the Ferrari, the world of Hyundai sonata's just doesn't impress you.

Jesus is saying THAT is how WE, his followers, are to be towards him. He is to be the one object of all our desires. And our...listen to this word...our **commitment** to him is to be so absolute that our commitment to everything else, even GREAT things like family, pale in comparison.

Can we just acknowledge for a second how audacious this is!? Sometimes people talk about Jesus like he was a good teacher. Listen, no good teacher DEMANDS love this absolute. In fact, can we just take a second to kill the Jesus as a good teacher idea entirely? He doesn't leave room for that does he? This is him absolutely claiming to be God. Only two options for us to view him: God...or crazytown.

I want to show you 3 things about being a disciple that Jesus is confronting us with in this passage. 3 things that are pretty confrontational but lead to the wonderful life Jesus has for you. I'll finish with what this means for us as a church.

First: **Discipleship is total surrender**

Guys look at what he is saying. He is saying NOTHING comes before him. Not your dreams for your legacy, not your dreams for your children...NONE of the really great and important things in your life are to come before Jesus. In fact, they aren't to even come CLOSE to your commitment to him.

A lot of times people will approach Jesus as something they will get around to. You know, when they settle down. And I've seen way too many people leave Jesus when they went to college because they didn't sense a need for him. Then, 8-10 years later they have their first kid and they are like...yeah maybe I need Jesus now. OR something rocks your life and you need help. And Jesus is a means to make you feel better so that you can then go on with life. You just kind of add him in to a corner of your life and you feel a little better.

Listen: Jesus meets you where you are. That's true. BUT, he's not the hallmark channel. He is not here as your means to an easier more pleasant life. No, he says if you want to come to him he has to be the point and purpose of your life. In fact as you read verse 26

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, and even his own life — he cannot be my disciple."

What you see is Jesus saying you DO NOT USE HIM to get a better family, a better marriage, or better children. You don't use him TO GET YOUR BEST LIFE NOW. That's using him to serve your ends. Quite the opposite...you use every part of your life to get more of him! HE is the end.

WHICH MEANS: if you ever have to choose between serving Jesus and serving your family, you always choose obedience to Jesus. Which I know is not easy to hear.

- John Bunyan – Put in prison for preaching the gospel during a time when it was illegal to do so. And they said you can get out by denying the gospel. He said it was like pulling flesh from his bones. Because he knew the hardship him being in prison was causing his family. They were in severe poverty without him. Yet he said "But I must do it. I must do it."

Look at the image of the cross he uses in verse 27. The image of a cross. A cross is something a criminal carried. A criminal who was condemned to death. Which is Jesus saying...you are no longer a free person when you follow me. And the criminal condemned to death doesn't get to

say “man, this is hard. I thought this would be good for me, but its too much.” Nope. Doesn’t work that way because discipleship is TOTAL surrender to Jesus’ authority.

That’s why he uses the two illustrations in the following verses. I want to look at 31-33 and then we’ll come back to 28-30

31 “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

Pretty simple concept right? If you, as a king, are on the brink of battle, you gauge the enemy forces. And if the enemy forces are too strong, you don’t send troops into the battle to lose. You surrender. Make peace. And what most commentators say Jesus is saying here is that YOU are the king with 10k & God is the king with 20k. And when you realize you can never win against God you settle for peace...and the only peace God grants is absolute surrender. So You can either make war against God, or you can come to God with total surrender. In other words, following Jesus will cost you everything; not as much as not following Him will cost you, but it costs you everything.

The image of the kings at war is sending the same message as the message to take up your cross. Jesus doesn’t say “take up my teachings and follow me. Take up my moral code.” He says “take up my cross.” Take the place of a condemned criminal.

In short: Jesus refuses to work as your spiritual guide designed to make you a little more of a moral person. he comes as your master, your KING. And he calls for your absolute surrender.

This is why when we do baptisms we ask 2 things

- Savior – believe he’s done everything necessary to save you
- Lord – willing to go wherever he tells you to go & do whatever he tells you to do.

Because a false discipleship is one that thinks he can be savior and not lord. Which I think leads right to the next thing about discipleship. So I want to bring in verses 28-30. Take a look at this:

28 “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

This is pretty easy to understand right? But remember its coming RIGHT AFTER saying...you gotta deny everyone, even yourself. You gotta take up a cross & follow me. What he’s saying here is...you need to make sure you are ready for that.

In short, **Discipleship is Costly.**¹

If you were going to build a tower, you would make sure you had enough money to complete it. Because you don't want to get into it and realize you can't afford to finish. The point is...you need to think about it.

John Stott -

The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers, the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish, for thousands of people still ignore this warning of Christ and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.

Brothers and Sisters, we must count the cost of following Christ. I mean take up your cross...it's a call to personal sacrifice just like the sacrifice Jesus would make. THINK about how this landed on ears at the time. The cross was not the ornament it is today. It was an execution device. And a slow execution device at that. Can you imagine a presidential candidate giving this kind of stump speech?

Today is a new day! Come join my cause! Strap yourself into your electric chair & prepare for a slow painful death you can believe in! LET'S GOOOOO!

Jesus Christ will not be used. He will not just fit into your life. He is not just safe, but he is good. Everybody feels like there are two levels of Christian. There is the normal run-of-the-mill Christian, and then there is the really devoted. But with Jesus, there is none of that. Everybody has to take up the cross. This is the fine print. It is not optional. It is not an upgrade. You can't say well "I'm a Christian, but I'm not into all of that...sacrifice stuff"

It's crazy. But to walk in the way of Jesus means your life, just like his, is characterized by costly sacrifice for his mission & generosity towards the lost. My old pastor showed me something that was really, really helpful in breaking me free from that nominal, half-built tower Christianity. He said a lot of Christians think of Jesus as the spiritual governing power that they have to pay spiritual taxes to in order to live a somewhat trouble free life.

we are in tax season right now. When you pay your taxes you are doing your civic duty. Very few of us **love** the government with all our hearts, live our lives for it, and wipe away tears of joy as we pay our taxes to it...thanking The sweet IRS for the opportunity to be involved in this

¹ This section, "Discipleship is costly" is owed in large part to J.D. Greear and his sermon on this passage in 2009 preached at the Summit Church. His call to sacrifice impacted me and my future greatly and it is my hope the same impact comes through in this section. Anything good in this part, I owe to him.

great pursuit. No, we pay our taxes because we want to be good Americans and we want to avoid jail. And in the same manner we know good Christians tithe, live morally, & come to church....these are our spiritual taxes we pay Jesus so he will bless our lives.

But what we are seeing today is that Jesus is calling us to something all together different. He's calling us to a life where HE is the ultimate end. His mission is the goal. He's saying our lives are actually to be spent pouring ourselves out to others. It's a totally different mindset & totally different lifestyle.

Instead of spending your life thinking how much do I have to do to keep God off my back, you spend your life asking what more can I do to help the gospel go farther faster around the world? How can I leverage everything else to reach people and help people who will never pay me back? See how upside down this is!?

So what does this look like? Can I be honest I don't have this all figured out. And I recognize that as we grow older sometimes the Lord blesses us with increased wealth. There's places in the bible that show God blessing hard work & proverbs talks about the wise man building wealth. BUT, I know I know I know that being a follower of Jesus means living like he lived. Which was costly. It was sacrificial.

So what I know is that we must live for his kingdom and not ours. Which means in its simplest form: The question I have for you is who is the main character of your story? Is it you or Jesus?

Simple way to put it but the answer is everything in your life. Just think of your favorite movies, shows, & books. There is a main character who is supported by...supporting characters. And the point of the supporting characters is to advance the story of the main character. Favorite movie: Star Wars. I want to be luke skywalker. And the world tells you all the time a thousand different ways that your life is all about your personal fulfillment. About you as the main character. And Jesus comes along and says YOU AREN'T the skywalker of your own story. This is a little nerdy I get it but it makes sense right. AT BEST you and I are Chewbacca. We are support characters in his story.

That's what carrying your cross means. It's what hating your own life means. It's what counting the cost means. Are you ready to give up your life, your dreams...to let him be in charge? If he's in charge listen to what this means: It means he decides where you live, where you work, what kind of car you drive, what kind of clothes you wear, what kind of house you buy. Have you ever made decisions that way?

Listen when you examine your whole life under this new filter...man it will change you. For some of you, it means you will finally be free from the pursuit of the American Dream. I'm telling you it is the biggest lie and it is in direct conflict with Jesus' teaching in this passage.

- American Dream – Good schools, good jobs, good home, good wealth...good life...COMFORT & SECURITY.

Jesus says HIS glory is your new dream. And for some of you, that means you will do what Julie & Jay ellis did, and what Catherine Mitchell did, and you will quit your job and move to an unreached people group to share the gospel. Because if Jesus' call on us is to spread this great news of his love, and 3.14 Billion people don't know the gospel, then more of us should probably be moving our lives. How can we say we carry the cross and this story not be more common? This is why we take short term trips. College students this is why we do city project. To give you the chance to deny yourself & see what it would look like to live for God and his purposes.

For Some of you this may mean you will not go yourself, but that you radically increase your giving to God's mission. Where are the believers who reverse the american dream narrative? The ones who downsize homes, cars, and vacations to give more to God's mission.

Here's the next thing I want us to see about the discipleship Jesus calls us to, and this one you may not see at first glance, is that **discipleship is emotional**.²

Notice the words Jesus uses. He could have used any number of words to communicate that. He was in charge, yet he chose to speak in terms of hate and love. That's intentional. And very important for us and in fact sets this whole teaching today into focus.

See Jesus doesn't want your begrudging obedience to him. In all things, he's after your affections. He wants your love. That's why when he's asked what is the greatest commandment, he replies with LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, & strength. One of the common ways he refers to his church in scripture is as his bride. Now, think if I were to go to my bride Courtney on date night...husbands you should regularly date your wives ok...but think if I go to her and say hey babe, I got the sitter coming 3 hours early. Take your nice dress, go to the spa cause I got an appointment. I'll meet you there to take you out. I meet her with flowers. Then we go out to a really good dinner with the best chicken parm money can buy. Cause I know my date. She's gonna be like...why you going so next level tonight? If I were to say well I need some things and I know I have to put in all this work to get them. And You know, this is what good husbands do I guess. I'd rather not be doing this...in fact I'd rather be with other girls...but good husbands are monogamous. So, here we are.

Do you think she will feel treasured and loved by me? Gonna call me a great husband? No. Because my heart isn't in it.

Listen, John 3.16 says for God so LOVED. Loved you. That he sent his son. And Jesus...he says as I have "loved" you so you must love one another. The word that can best capture God's feelings towards you is love.

And he says the best thing for you, is to abide in that love. When he demands complete obedience to him, He's not trying to burden you with a rule book. He's trying to actually show

² This insight owed to Tim Keller. Such a wonderful observation that helps us understand Christ's call is a call to the heart!

you the way to true life. The one calling you to follow him is the one who gave up his life for you.

If you came in here carrying a pretty heavy burden already, you could be thinking...MAN, this is isn't the hope I came in here for. But listen, it actually is. What Jesus is saying is that when you lose all these other things...when all those start to fade into the background, then you will be able to see Christ & his love for you more clearly. See everything else you look to for love, acceptance, and identity...everything will let you down...except Christ. Because you were made for his love. So the most loving thing Jesus can do is say "put those down & focus on me." HE becomes your greatest treasure and there, in his love, you will finally find the peace you were looking for.

Let me close with what this means for us as a church, for me personally, and then for you Listen our clear vision as a church is to see a gospel awakening in our city. And to facilitate it as much as we can.

- This area is crazy strategic for reaching the world. It's growing at an absurd pace and that is only going to increase. They project Charlotte Metro area will DOUBLE in size by 2040. So in 20 years, 2.4 will become 4.8. That's Atlanta. We have a chance to reach these people with the gospel.
- And this passage tells me that this awakening is urgent. Which means a couple of things. It means when things like Easter come up, we've got to fast & pray for our ONE. We just cannot wait. Jesus says go, so lets go.
- It also means we need basic facilities to facilitate this awakening. Our independence campus needs to find a permanent home to be a hub for ministry in the community. Our two campuses each exist less than HALF a mile from a major high school. We need to take big steps to engage middle & high school students and their families & that is a world more possible with facility space & staff. So we need renewed URGENT prayer that God would give us a facility for our independence location. Nothing fancy, just something we can use to mobilize people for ministry from.

For me as your pastor, this passage hit me that I MUST preach the bible fearlessly even when it is offensive like today's passage is. You guys, we could preach easier messages around here. CERTAINLY could draw crowds that way. But I stand before God for how I pastor you and I have to be more concerned about him. So do you. Which means you need to be ok with messages like this where fewer people come back around next week.

Think about Jesus. He had a large audience...was GOD...and managed to whittle his church down to 100 or so. And those 100 changed the world. So, it clearly isn't numbers of listeners that he was after. It was followers.

- "One clarification... a lot of you in here are spiritual seekers. Not sure who Jesus is. Do I need to leave? No... not talking about you. **I'm talking about people who know Jesus is Lord, but just want to accessorize their lives with Him rather than really follow Him in total, costly, emotional surrender.** If you're not sure you're ready to follow, you are welcome here, and you take all the time u need to figure that out."

Lastly what does this mean for you. It means you gotta step off the sidelines and engage in the mission. Here's what I see right now at Mercy. I see a young church FILLED with a handful who are BOUGHT IN. and Ya'll make me so hype. But then there are a lot kind of sitting on the sidelines watching. And now is the time to jump in. And I say this because if nothing else, God called me to be a pastor who makes disciples in a local church. Here's where we are. Let me talk to members for a second.

- Right now about 320 people here are covenant members. That's who I'm talking to. The rest of you, your step is to go to starting point today and figure out how to get off the sidelines. But listen members: About 50% of members are serving in a ministry team here on the weekend. Kids team especially is in need of team members and we have half our members not serving. Now is the time. About 45% of members give financially in a way that shows you are invested in what God is doing here at Mercy. That's real talk.

Listen God has provided Mercy Church. The past year has been amazing, the past 2 months...I don't even know how to describe it. We finally made room to grow and the Lord is bringing people far from him! It's great! I feel like the Lord has honored the sacrifice of a few.

But now is the time. You cannot be a spectator in God's kingdom. Jump in. We need to get our teams together & running well by easter. Greet people or serve in KIDS so we don't have to turn families away because we lack team members. LOSE your life for his sake.