



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



A Costly Call

Study Scripture: Luke 14:25-33; Mark 1:16-32

Lesson 2, March 9, 2019

Key Verse

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:27

INTRODUCTION

'Terms of agreement' is a common sub-title in most agreements and contracts these days and it is more than coincidental that these are written in extraneous language, tedious to read and few ever read all the conditions and clauses in these documents. It is almost as if the authors would prefer you not know. Typically the pleasantries, and desirables are upfront for consumption but the harder parts are just about hidden. Jesus on the other hand would have all see and consider the whole picture of what is involved with being His disciple.

The section of our Study Text which deals with what we consider to be "pure discipleship" is very instructive, for Mark, whose gospel is believed to have been dictated by Peter tells us that when Jesus approached His disciples He touched something deep within them even though they did not exactly know for sure what He meant as He called them. What is very important is that Jesus spoke as a revolutionary to common people inviting them to seize opportunity to get into something big, groundbreaking, world changing, and completely new. They would learn that the days ahead would challenge their most cherished preconceptions, turn their world upside down, showing them by His power and His teaching that He was more than what they had hoped for.

This of course is extremely instructive for us as it introduces us to whom Jesus is. When Jesus called 12 men to be His disciples this was no accident. He had a much bigger deal

in mind than catering to the multitudes for He knew the mission that He had firmly fixed in His mind.

So note from the start that when Jesus calls you this is no accident. He has a much bigger deal in mind than you can imagine. It doesn't even seem that He expected that the multitudes will come to Him even if He called them. But He called these men as disciples and He also now calls you to be His disciples. So watch out and learn from the experience of the twelve disciples.

This is serious business. And so our Lesson Study today is on "pure discipleship" and what that means.

Our Study will skip over much of Jesus' life and ministry and we now have Jesus speaking to His close disciples and comrades who have stuck with Him despite their weaknesses.

As we study note the emphasis on the cost of receiving the invitation to participate in eternal life. There is a cost and it must be counted.

Note also that there is a great difference between "curiosity" which might lead a person to examine what Jesus is all about and maybe to such an extent even taste of the Holy Spirit, and "discipleship". As a matter of fact the disciple has to be prepared to be slighted and maybe even violently opposed. So discipleship is a serious matter.

In the second section of our Study found in Luke 14 Jesus was on His final trip to Jerusalem and a large crowd followed Him. His teaching and miracles prior to and along the way had convinced many that He would be crowned in Jerusalem and all would be well. Jesus had consistently called His hearers to follow Him and many were now 'following' Him but there were few disciples among the crowd.

Undoubtedly, many in the crowd considered themselves disciples and so Jesus moved to dispel their fanciful notions with a jolting message about the reality of being His disciple. There would be no 'fine print,' ambiguous statements or 'all will be well from now on' message.

Jesus used very strong language to inform His hearers and readers down to this day that to be His disciple meant that He Jesus must have priority over all that was dear to them and us; family, possession and even one's self and to the point of over one's very life. Jesus' criteria for discipleship is a sharp contrast to the 'if you believe in Jesus just say this prayer' gospel that is so popular today. Jesus is about to redirect expectation from easy glory to costly suffering.

The true gospel, the true call to follow Jesus, is a call to self-denial. It is not a call to self-fulfillment in the sense that the word uses that are; it is not a man-centered, self-loving, psychologically defined message. The gospel is a call to sinners to submit everything to Jesus Christ. Jesus language is unmistakably absolute, definitive and severe but note that

these are the words of God Himself, the Lord, Jesus Christ. He establishes the standards of discipleship. He determines the character of true repentance and saving faith.

The Lord's invitations to salvation, while motivated by love and compassion and filled with grace and mercy, offering forgiveness, peace and joy now and forever, were still demanding at what some would say is a very extreme level. His was clearly 'narrow gate' evangelism. It reverses and redefines everything that matters: how we view your closest relationships, how we view ourselves and how we view everything we possess.

Luke had just recorded Jesus' teaching about God's gracious invitation to enjoy the highly anticipated Messianic Banquet in the kingdom. It was free for all who would respond. Jesus taught elsewhere that responding meant believing on Him. Now Luke recorded Jesus' teaching that though salvation was free, discipleship was costly.

The second of today's two texts comes from the beginning of Mark's Gospel. His storyline begins with John the Baptist's preaching that all must repent and be cleansed by God to prepare for the imminent arrival of God's king (Mark 1:2–8). Jesus then appears in the storyline for His baptism. At that time, He is identified by a voice from Heaven as God's kingly Son (1:9–11). After His triumph over the Devil's tests (1:12, 13), Jesus repeats John's message of repentance, announcing that God's promised reign is very near (1:14, 15).

The coming of God's promised reign, His "kingdom," is central to Jesus' teaching. Mark's intent is to show Jesus as the Servant King who defeats Satan and sin and commands men and they obey Him. God's kingdom is the reestablishment of His rule over all creation, especially over rebellious humanity. The well-known words of the Lord's Prayer express this idea:

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

Jesus links His coming and ministry to the inauguration of God's kingdom.

The present reality of the kingdom is spiritual, as God reigns in the hearts of believers and this is a movement that will lead into the physical reign of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem during the Millennial Kingdom. Ultimately the millennial reign issues in the final Eternal Kingdom. It is in this light that Jesus calls the first of His disciples.

Mark's Gospel omits Jesus' early Judean ministry and any details of His temptation in the wilderness and picks up where He began to call Galilean fishermen to be His disciples, after His return to Galilee. Fishing was a major industry on the Sea of Galilee in Jesus' time. Fishing operations were organized into a large guild, and many fish were processed into a tasty paste that was sealed in jars and shipped all over the Roman Empire.

Fishing was hard work, and profits were constrained by taxes and guild regulations. But fishing provided a reliable income for hundreds of families in a place and time where life was an overwhelming struggle for most. To simply walk away from the fishing profession was unheard of.

Jesus' credentials having been established by John the Baptist, the Father's voice from Heaven and His defeat of the Devil now commands men with authority to follow Him. Let us hear the command and consider the disciple's 'job description' as our Study Text unfolds.

THE TEXT

Mark 1:16-20

Verses 1 – 15. Mark's gospel carries a sense of urgency and action with multiple occurrence of the word 'immediately' and he quickly recaps the ministry of John the Baptist. This culminates with the baptism of Jesus and His affirmation from Heaven. Then follows a note on Jesus' Temptation and then Jesus' return to Galilee and the start of His ministry;

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel...."

Verse 16. ... Sea of Galilee... a fresh water lake, seven miles at its widest and about thirteen miles at its extremities. It is variously known as Lake of Gennesaret, Sea of Chinnereth and the Sea of Tiberias. The Sea of Galilee supplied all of Palestine with fish. Fish was a main staple of the Jewish diet.

...Galilee... this area is the northern section of Israel and was far removed from the religious center in Jerusalem in more ways than one; sometimes referred to as 'Galilee of the Gentiles', (Isaiah 9:1-2 nasb).

... Simon and Andrew ... The Sea of Galilee was the scene of a thriving fishing industry in Jesus' day. Simon and Andrew were fishermen by trade. Fishermen on this lake did not enjoy high social standing, but their work required skill and was a stable source of income; while many others eked out a meagre existence off the land.

These two will become members of the twelve disciples, or followers, whom Jesus will later designate to be "apostles".

Simon (also known as Peter) will become the most prominent member of the twelve. His name occurs first in all four lists of the disciples in the gospels. Indeed, he is called "first" in Matthew 10:2. The name of his brother Andrew occurs in the top third of all four lists, also indicating prominence.

Verse 17. Come ye after me ... Jesus' invitation is blunt and brief but in view of who Jesus was, it had the force of a command. The challenge was to follow Him as disciples, as learners follow their teacher. The custom of Jesus' time was that students of Jewish religious teachers actually lived side by side with their teachers. That allows observance of actions as part of the teaching process. Jesus' invitation is to that kind of life.

Simon (Peter) and Andrew had met Jesus previously (John 1:35-42) and this is their official call to be permanent followers of the Rabbi.

The invitation to become fishers of men sets Jesus apart from other teachers. Since these fishermen used nets and fishing lines with hooks, we can see Jesus' image is one of gathering. It echoes the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who used the image of fishermen to promise that God would re-gather His scattered people after Judah's exile (Jeremiah 16:16). God's kingdom, Jesus has announced, is about to appear and these two men will join Jesus in gathering a people who are ready to live as loyal subjects under God's rule.

Thus, the invitation to become disciples of Jesus is an invitation to work to extend God's kingdom. And this is the most consequential work that one can undertake. It is a work that ultimately will extend to all nations.

Verse 18. ... and followed him... Peter and Andrew's response is as abrupt as is Jesus' invitation: they abandon their trade, their way of life and means of survival, and follow Jesus. Their lives will never be the same. But their lives will be not less but much more than before.

Their commitment to Jesus increased as time passed. Evidently Simon and Andrew believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they had much to learn about His full identity (John 3:22-30).

Verses 19, 20. ... James the son of Zebedee, and John ... a little further along the shore Jesus calls (commands) two other busy fishermen to follow Him. They immediately abandon family, profession and way of life to follow Jesus.

... their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants... the mention of hired men suggests that Zebedee owned a prosperous business that James and John left. It also shows that these brothers did not leave their father all alone; they were not being irresponsible. The main point, however, is the immediacy of their response to Jesus. This reflects Jesus' great authority over people.

James and John were Jesus' cousins (Matt. 27:55-56; John 19:25). However, they did not yet know that He was also God.

The foregoing events reveal much about discipleship. The nature of discipleship is joining oneself to Jesus in total allegiance. But note that there was something special in the appeal of Jesus to the heart. These men and expectation that Messiah would come but the proof had not yet been given to them in full measure. But yet when they heard the voice of Jesus they responded immediately.

This makes us wonder what it is in the call of God that makes some people hear the voice of the Spirit and respond while others do not. The parable of the King and his banquet is a good reminder that even when something great has been offered by a mighty Ruler many will make excuses and not respond positively to the invitation of the King. It boggles the mind why people can be so blind and behave casually to what is good for them. Men can

be so wrapped up in the cares of the world, the pleasures of the world and their lust to make more and more money that they will give up their life. The heart and its state is the first step in discipleship. But note what Jesus states.

The purpose of discipleship is announced by Jesus in His call to Simon and Andrew: 'Come after me, and I shall make you become fishers of men' (1:17).

Plainly, discipleship has 'mission work' as its purpose. Striking is the universal nature of the mission Jesus envisages."

Jesus' authority is striking but then again He is the King!

One writer reminds us of the urgency of Jesus' call and the immediately response of the fishermen. We want the application to our lives:

"Jesus demonstrates amazing authority because he is able to call men out of their regular occupations and make them his disciples. Who else could interrupt somebody in the midst of their livelihood and say, "leave it. I've got a higher calling for you" and get a response? We know from John's Gospel that Jesus had already met Simon, Andrew, James, and John several months earlier. They had already come to trust him, so this was not their initial call to saving faith, but it was their initial called to discipleship.

Jesus' promise to transform them from fishermen to "fishers of men" could have been unsettling for these two sets of brothers because in the Old Testament the image of fisherman is a metaphor in prophetic literature for gathering people not to save their lives, but to punish sin in their lives. In Jeremiah 16 there is an oracle of judgment against the sin of the nation:

"Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen." declares the LORD, "and they will fish for them ..For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes". (Jeremiah 16: 16, 17).

Jesus is calling these disciples to be messengers, "agents of reconciliation" as Paul calls them. They are going to bring a compelling message to others that will change life beyond recognition-resurrection life, life in the Spirit".

And in another account we are told:

"Mark's account of Jesus calling his first disciples confronts each one of us today if, in fact, we too claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. We are not only to repent and believe his gospel, but we also have to be ready to leave and follow him in obedience. This story ought to shatter our comfortable world of middle-class discipleship. These men weren't called to be eavesdroppers and onlookers. And we are not called to be pew warmers at church, to give of ourselves casually, thoughtlessly. We are not called to just be involved in the occasional Bible study, or to help out sometimes because Servant Sabbath (my opinion) or (Servant Sunday) make us feel guilty. Jesus is call to "follow me and I will make you 'fishers of men' has powerful implications; he is calling as to a lifelong process of transformation.....

Some of us might hope that Jesus would offer a less rigorous category like "auxiliary discipleship"-- the promise of the same benefits and rewards, but a discipleship that would allow us to pursue whatever we want to pursue. The problem is that we would end up trying to love God and mammon (the biblical catchword for "stuff). James refers to this

perspective as “double mindedness” (see James 1:8)-- trying to listen to God and listen to the world at the same time to define issues of mission, safety, time, ministry, security and priority. Eventually, my mammon speaks louder and louder and God seems to speak softer and softer and we end up with the fatal delusion that our real needs are physical, which often leads to a self-centered concern for material security”.

It appears that all four men were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:7, 10). James and John had also come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:35-42).

Work was honorable and fishing was a lucrative vocation. Note that this family had hired servants; this was no trivial sacrifice on the part of these men; they were giving up plenty. These two events serve as an illustration of what Jesus demands for discipleship in the following study text.

Luke 14:25-33

Our first text though the second in time, from Luke’s Gospel, occurs in the period of Jesus’ ministry when He was on His final trip to Jerusalem. The crowds that joined Him had high expectations and the belief that He was God’s promised King spread. His presence must mean political freedom and economic prosperity for Israel. The crowd simply wanted to benefit from His ministry, so Jesus begins to address the crowds to confront them with the real nature of His kingdom.

Verse 25. And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them.

... And there went great multitudes with him: The crowds were growing as Jesus continued teaching and performing miracles on His way to Jerusalem. Expectation that Jesus was God’s Promised King spread. His presence must mean political freedom and economic prosperity for Israel. So Jesus began to address the crowds to confront them with the real nature of His kingdom.

Verse 26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

... If any man ... (anyone) a wonderful word! Jesus’ invitations are to "anyone," "everyone," "as many as," and "whosoever"! However, there are also demands and requirements.

... come to me... this is the personal requirement for salvation. Faith in Jesus is the key to forgiveness and a personal relationship with God. We were created (Gen. 1:26-27) to know Him and fellowship with Him (Gen. 3:8). Life without Him is futile and empty (Mark 8:36).

... hate not his father, and mother, and wife ... Jesus began with the list of family relationships that people most cherish. These were not merely valued by His audience, they were rightly regarded as sacred. Faithfulness as a child, spouse, parent, or sibling is demanded by God’s law. Added to this list is one’s own life, one’s very existence. Yet

Jesus says that to be His disciple the one who follows Him and learns from Him how to live the godly life must hate all these!

... hate his own father ... This is a Hebrew idiom of comparison (Gen. 29:31,33; Deut. 21:15; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). It is obvious that this cannot be taken literally because of Jesus' statement of honoring father and mother in Matt. 15:4, which reflects the Ten Commandments. In any case we know what the Biblical use of the word means because it is written that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (Genesis 29: 30), and then the next verse says that "The Lord saw that Leah was hated". So we know that the word here means "to love less" and the meaning is different from how we would phrase it in modern language.

This section speaks of 'death to self' (Gal. 2:20) and earthly priorities. In the Near East commitment to family eclipsed every other commitment, but Jesus must become the believers' first priority (Luke 12:49-53; Matt. 10:34-39).

... his own life also... Jesus sets the pattern of ministry (Luke 9:23; 17:33; 1 John 3:16).

This is how Jesus makes His point. Important as such relationships are, following Jesus is even more important. Those who follow Him must do so with the understanding that nothing else can be allowed to interfere. To be a disciple is greater than any other value or relationship.

... he cannot be My disciple... One writer notes: "This point is emphasized in Luke 14:27 and 33. It is difficult to balance the grace of God so clearly demonstrated in the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) with the radical call to a complete sacrifice of self in Luke 14:25-33. Both are true. Grace initiates and provides, but receivers must make a life-altering, priority choice! Followership (Luke 14:25) is not the same as discipleship. Just as in the parable of the soils, germination is not the same as fruit bearing!"

Another writer notes: "Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay a price. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus."

Verse 27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

The cross is so familiar in Christianity that we often forget its significance for Jesus' audience. The Roman Empire used death by crucifixion as a way of asserting its absolute power over subject peoples. Crucifixions were public spectacles of torture and terror, making examples of those who dared to defy Roman authority. Anyone who carried a cross was marked as a defeated enemy of Rome, about to feel the full effect of Rome's wrath.

Jesus used the image of cross-bearing because of His own impending death by crucifixion. But His cross will not mean defeat. By giving His life willingly, surrendering to His enemies and letting them do their worst, Jesus will pay sin's price. In what is known today as the substitutionary atonement, Jesus will give His worthy life on behalf of the unworthy. One writer clarifies:

"His Cross. Jesus chose this phrasing instead of saying, "The cross" or "A cross". The idea is that there is a cross suited to each individual, and one person's experience of the cross may not look just like another person's experience of the cross.... but Jesus made it clear that the one who bore his own cross would follow the life and pattern of Jesus. Jesus here recognize that that He would bear His own cross; that He would go before".

Those who follow Jesus as disciples, do so to join Him in the work of God's kingdom, establishing God's reign in the world. As they do, they must carry out that work as Jesus has modeled: by giving themselves sacrificially in service to others (Luke 9:23). They, like Jesus, must trust God to provide and vindicate.

The cross we bear does not refer to issues of inconvenience or painful circumstances that normally come our way in this fallen world. Rather, the cross we bear is what characterizes the life of one who follows Jesus. We live not to serve self but to serve others as the Lord did, holding nothing back (Luke 22:24–30).

Verse 28. In the remaining verses Jesus gave two parables to illustrate His message and give His hearers and us pause with regard to what it means to truly follow Him. One has to do with an impulsive builder and the other with a thoughtful king.

... intending to build a tower ... here Jesus used a comparison to impress on His hearers the nature of such a commitment. A tower, which might be used to guard a plot of agricultural land or even a town or city, was especially costly. It required careful accounting to be sure that one had the resources to finish the structure. Jesus urged His followers to listen carefully to His teaching, to understand the cost that He will pay and that they in turn will pay as well.

Verses 29, 30. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Near East culture was one of honor and shame. An incomplete tower was not just a material failure. It was also a cause for public shame and mockery. The failed project would become the basis for cruel jokes and ridicule. A tower in Jesus' time was a means of protection, a projection of power. By contrast, a failed tower was an expression of shame and weakness.

Verse 31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

Jesus now provides a second comparison, also about assessing costs. Here a king faced a battle against an adversary with an army double the size of his own. Can the king with the smaller army prevail?

In this comparison, the answer seems clear: only under the exceptional circumstances can an army defeat an adversary twice its size. A proper assessment of the situation suggests only one possible course of action (next verse).

Verse 32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

The outnumbered king has only one choice. He cannot take the risk of battle. He can only send his representatives to meet his adversary a great way off, long before their armies meet, to sue for peace on unfavorable terms. That choice is humiliating, but it is far better than defeat and death. This illustration includes the challenge of facing reality.

Verse 33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

This statement brings Jesus' comparisons to bear on the audience. Like a person building a tower, they must understand the true cost of following Him. Like a king facing an army of overwhelming force, they must be prepared to pay a cost that seems like defeat but is in fact the way to life.

That cost is all that a person has. No possession, no status, no relationship, no home, no identity, no dream can measure up to following and serving the Ruler of God's kingdom. Nothing or no one else can give the life that He gives. It is a hard choice, the supreme choice, a choice that comes at great cost. But it is the only choice, no matter the cost.

CONCLUSION

- Let us therefore understand that it is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple. We can be like a camp follower without being a soldier of the King. We can also be a hanger-on or a "groupie" without pulling one's weight. This was in the church at a great disadvantage because the very many is done dark as to photos of Jesus mean that they are so few real disciples.

The account of the calling of these first disciples clarifies that repenting and believing the gospel

(v. 15) should result in abandoning one's former life to follow Jesus from then on. This is the appropriate response that Mark commended to his readers with these disciples' example.

Jesus indeed brings God's promised rule, but He warns us that God's victory is achieved in weakness, lowliness, and suffering.

Call to Discipleship

While we might not expect to receive a calling from the Lord as dramatic as the first disciples, yet like them, we share in His mission of advancing the promised reign of God. Jesus calls us to be His instruments so that God's will can be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Actually, if we were to consider how we were first introduced to Jesus we would discover that our call was quite dramatic.

Jesus' call demands of us our all. His call challenges our fundamental relationships, even as it compels us to love our family and friends more than we ever have before. The call demands that all our possessions and time become secondary to God's agenda to advance the kingdom.

Some think of the word Christian to be a term for those who confess Christ, while the word disciple is reserved for those seriously committed to following Him. The New Testament knows no such distinction. To confess Christ as Lord demands a counting of the cost of that confession. The cost is everything, but the result is participation in the eternal, victorious rule of God Almighty.

Let us give the requisite consideration and commit to be Jesus' disciples today!