

January 2, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *What the Gospel Demands*

Luke 14:25 – 35

Here we are at the beginning of another year and my prayer for myself and for Summit Christian is that we would continue to live in the light of Christ's return – that we would live in such a way that we would impact our world with the gospel of Jesus Christ – to the end that we would shake the nations for the glory of God. I pray that we would be finished with trivial pursuits that in the end have no eternal value. I pray that we would not be seduced by the fatal devotion to security and comfort in this life but instead would risk everything for the glory of Christ and the triumph of the gospel. I pray that we would not waste the time we have but instead redeem the time and make much of God in the world. I pray that should any of us be called home before this year is done, that the stories of our lives, the way the gospel was lived out in us, would serve to inspire the next generation to even greater pursuits. More than anything, I want the gospel to take such solid root in our lives, that this year would mark a real turning point for us as individuals and as a church.

So this year is all about the gospel – what is it, what does it say to us, how should we live as those who have been called by Christ, **how do we live out the gospel in real life?** That is, what does the gospel tell us about how we should live as fathers, mothers, children – as teachers and students and electricians and pilots and insurance salesmen and soldiers? What is it we should be about in everyday life? How should the gospel impact our plans, our ambitions, our decisions? What does it say about raising our children, about our relationships, about our work and our leisure, about our investing and our giving?

To do this, we are going to walk through the gospel of John this year; however, to begin, we are going to start in Luke's gospel to see what the gospel demands of us. I think too often people have only seen what the gospel offers in terms of sins forgiven, the wrath of God appeased, holy living, and the gates of heaven opened. And the gospel is certainly all that and more. But I believe we have neglected to a large degree the demands of the gospel that Jesus Himself sets out here in Luke and in fact in all the gospel accounts. And I think it is this neglect that has led to a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves; particularly here in America. I believe we have bought into the lie that the gospel is just about making me better and making my life better and making it so that I can go to heaven and stay out of hell.

But Jesus has a lot more to say about following Him. Let's read Luke 14:25-26: *Now great crowds accompanied 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.* Luke 14:25-26 It is always interesting to me how throughout the gospels, the writers record how great crowds always seemed to follow Jesus around. On the surface it seems like His ministry was prospering, at least by the standards we put on successful ministry. But it was always at times like this that Jesus took the opportunity to do the counter-intuitive thing. In fact, whenever big crowds gathered, Jesus always seemed to say things guaranteed to make them disappear.

In the gospel of John Jesus tells the crowd *'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you'*. You can almost picture the disciples groaning and saying, 'Not the eat-my-flesh-and-drink-My-blood speech! No one's going to follow You now!' And in fact at the end of that little talk only twelve guys were left. And here in Luke you can hear them saying, 'Not the hate-your-father-and-mother speech! You won't get big numbers that way! Give them the love-your-neighbor speech!

But Jesus was never interested in crowd appeal. He wasn't trying to market Himself to the masses. He was laying out the radical demands of the gospel. And here in Luke He was zeroing in on two issues that keep us from obeying the gospel: **idolotry and self-love**. If we make our family our god, Jesus says, we cannot be His disciple. And if we pursue our own happiness instead of His joy, we cannot be His disciple. **The gospel demands that we love Christ more than anyone or anything else**, and Jesus starts with the things that are most dear to us, our families and ourselves. And He makes this hyperbolic statement to press home the point that the gospel demands that Christ be ultimate in our lives and our love for ourselves and our families should seem like hate in comparison to our love for Him.

Jesus talks in the same way in Matthew, using hyperbole to make a point with maximum impact, when He calls for true believers to cut off their hand, or gouge out their eye if that hand or that eye is causing them to sin. I don't believe He had in mind a heaven full of one-eyed, one-handed people. ***What He was saying was that we need to fight sin with the passion and intensity that causes us to radically amputate those things in our lives that lead us to sin.*** Or when He likens the chances of a rich man entering the kingdom to a camel going through the eye of a needle. He did not have in mind a peculiar gate that a camel could only go through on its knees – such a thing was unknown in His day. ***He had in mind that particular love of money that would keep you out of heaven because it leaves no room for loving God.***

So in the same way here, if we make our families our gods, or we live to please ourselves and make ourselves happy, we cannot be His disciples. I don't believe He said this in the sense that He won't **allow** us, but rather in the sense that we won't **want** to be His disciples because we are too busy with our families and our pursuit of our own happiness. Let me be clear here – I am not saying, and Jesus is not saying that we shouldn't care for our families and that we shouldn't love ourselves. In fact the Bible says that the person who doesn't care for his family is worse than an unbeliever. And it instructs men to love their wives even as they love themselves and that the older women are to teach the younger women to love their husbands and love their children. ***But Jesus makes it clear that if we make our family ultimate or make self-satisfaction ultimate, we are not really disciples of His at all.***

Time and time again I have seen this thing play out in real life. A dad or mom comes to me for counsel for their son or daughter, absolutely devastated because now at 16 or 17 they've announced that in spite of going to church all their lives and attending youth group, they don't want anything to do with church or with God and mom and dad don't know why. But the answer is very simple. For 16 or 17 years mom and dad have demonstrated by their living that God was not ultimate, other things were. Sports were ultimate, or school, or friends, not God. For 16 or 17 years mom and dad taught them that good grades were first, or making the varsity basketball team, or social events were primary and God was secondary.

I don't mean they sat down and had study sessions on this; it was just the way they lived. There was no real instruction about the things of God at home, they were expected to get all that at youth group; church was fairly optional, especially if social events or sports events got in the way. And in mom and dad's own lives, God and church came second, perhaps a close second, but second nevertheless, because they were always pursuing their own happiness first. ***The goal of the gospel is to make much of Christ in this world and the next, and the gospel demands that Christ is ultimate in our lives.***

### **The gospel demands that we continually sacrifice what we want for what Christ wants**

*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple.* Luke 14:27 Too many people have embraced the proposition that the gospel calls us to a one-time decision, and having made that decision, the rest of our lives is spent making ourselves happy and living for ourselves. But the gospel demands, and enables us to turn from our sin, take up our cross, die to ourselves and follow Jesus, wherever He calls us to go. The gospel beckons us to die to ourselves and to believe in God and trust Him. It is the death of our ambitions in favor of His, the relinquishing of our short-term happiness in favor of His eternal joy. ***When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.*** Dietrich Bonhoeffer

There is this belief in our culture, especially our Christian culture, that happiness is a God-given right. That is a lie. Christ did not come to make us happy, He came that we might have joy, and have it abundantly. Happiness is that feeling you have when everything in your life seems to be tracking – the weather is nice, the sun is shining, the Seahawks are winning, you're healthy and fit, your wife respects you and your kids obey you and life is good. But suddenly the curtains come down and the clouds come in and with one sentence your wife destroys your universe and the kids are determined to disobey everything you say, and the doctor gives you the bad news about your health checkup. Happiness, in other words, is fleeting. Joy is eternal. Jesus endured the cross – ***for the joy set before Him.*** Acts records that the disciples endured the beatings for the sake of Christ's name – ***rejoicing in it.*** Happiness doesn't last – joy is eternal. Happiness can be snatched away in an instant – joy can never be taken away.

When the bodies of Alan Gardiner and his companions who went to Patagonia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to share the gospel with the inhabitants of that land were found on a lonely deserted island, having perished through starvation and disease, Alan's diary was found beside him. His words bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness, and a fierce dependence upon God: ***'Lord, at your feet I humbly fall, And I give you all I have, All that your love requires. To lack is best, For all is yours, Take care of me in this hour of test.***

**Do not let me have the thoughts of a Complainer. Make me feel your power which gives life and I will learn to praise you while carrying your cross...** It also bore the record of unreasonable, unconquerable joy **'Poor and weak as we are, our boat is the very Bethel [house of God] to our soul, for we feel and know that God is here. Asleep or awake, I am, beyond the power of expression, happy.'** And his last entry testified to the eternal joy he had in God that transcended his circumstances. **'I am overwhelmed with the sense of the goodness of God'**.

I have heard too many Christians excuse their disobedience to Christ on the grounds that God wouldn't want them to be unhappy. Marriages are torn apart because one party or the other, or both are miserable and unhappy and God certainly wouldn't want them to be miserable or unhappy. Don't get me wrong – I am not advocating misery and unhappiness. What I am advocating is **relentlessly pursuing joy by taking up our cross, dying to what we want in favor of what Christ wants**, because eternal joy is found in the demands of the gospel, and we will never be happier than when we are pursuing Christ.

### **The gospel demands that we count the cost to follow Christ**

*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.* Luke 14:28 – 32

Jesus is saying a couple of things here. First He likens following Him to a construction project. And He says there is work involved here. To be a disciple of Christ involves the discipline of work. It is not that we get saved and then somehow work our way to heaven though. We are saved by grace through faith, and we live out the Christian life by grace through faith as well. But He is talking about the very nature of being a Christian. If you are a believer, then you have signed up for a lifetime of discipline in holiness. We are by nature slothful and lazy, especially when it comes to spiritual disciplines. But it is by applying ourselves to prayer, and reading the word of God, and meditating on His promises, and worship and gathering together with the saints, and pursuing God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength, that we build lives that reflect the glory of God.

Eugene Peterson observed that: **It is not difficult in our world to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.** Eugene Peterson

The Christian life is one of endurance. Jesus said that it is the one who endures to the end that will be saved. **Endurance is simply a long obedience in the same direction**, and the life of faith is the life that endures to the end. There are many who start out well, and end badly – they didn't count the cost. When it came down to it, they were unwilling to pay the price to keep following. They said yes and got busy with religious activity and modified their behavior, but their hearts were never engaged, their souls were never transformed, and eventually they just chuck it all because life got tough.

Jesus also likens discipleship to battle. And you need to know that the Christian life is a battle. It is a daily battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus is saying: 'Consider ahead of time whether or not you are willing to become My follower'. It will take everything you have – and more. And if you are not willing to fight the fight of faith, don't start down that road. There are those who start down this road without acknowledging the fact that it will be a battle and then they meet the circumstances that are as intimidating as the king with twenty thousand against their ten thousand and they compromise and sue for peace and leave the fight. Be assured though, that if you do choose to fight, the battle is the Lord's. That is, we fight, not in our own strength – we would lose, no doubt about it – but in the strength of His might, as Paul tells us in Ephesians. The gospel does not promise easy roads and comfortable beds – **but it does promise that for those who embrace the gospel with heart soul and mind, Christ will triumph over all your enemies**

## The gospel demands that we say goodbye to our stuff

*So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce [say goodbye to] all that he has cannot be My disciple.* Luke 14:33 The word **renounce** here has the meaning of saying goodbye. The gospel calls us to a radical abandonment to Christ that few of us have really considered or thought deeply about. For many Christians the gospel is a message once heard and responded to, but it has made little practical difference in their lives. If our lives are not manifestly changed through the gospel, we have not really heard the message. The message Jesus shares through the gospel is '**Leave everything and follow Me**'. When He called His disciples, He didn't talk to them about God's wonderful plan for their lives – He said 'Peter and John, leave your nets, leave your family, follow me. Matthew, leave your comfortable tax office, follow Me'.

Jesus is manifestly not saying that we don't need to work anymore. That isn't the point of Him saying, Leave it all and follow Me. The point is that we live with His call as the priority in our lives. The distinctive characteristic of disciples of Christ is their peculiar abandonment to the cause of Christ in the world. **That is, those who are Christ's disciples, are those who risk the security and comfort of the stuff of this life for the sake of the gospel.**

C.T. Studd was such a man. Born in the 1860s into English high society, C. T. Studd was the epitome of the young English Victorian gentleman. A gifted athlete, C.T. was the LeBron James of Cricket in his day. But while he was at Cambridge, God burdened his heart for the gospel and he said goodbye to fame and fortune in the sports world and headed to China. Upon coming into his considerable inheritance at the age of 25, he gave away ninety percent of the money to the work of God in the world, keeping only ten percent for himself. When he got married soon after, to Priscilla Livingstone Stewart, he presented his bride with the remaining money from his inheritance. But she told him, "**Charlie, what did the Lord tell the rich young man to do?**" "**Sell all.**" "**Well then, we will start clear with the Lord at our wedding.**" And they proceeded to give the rest of the money away for the Lord's work.

What I believe Jesus is saying to us in this is not that we all should abandon our jobs tomorrow and go somewhere – **but that we should live with the realization that He might ask us to do just that.** And so our lives should reflect the fact that we have already said goodbye to our stuff and we are living in such a way that our stuff is not a hindrance to the call of Christ to go and make disciples. We have given the kingdom of God priority and turned over the security of our lives from salaries and 401K's and IRA's to Jesus. What this should cause us to ask ourselves is this: Do we really believe that Jesus is so satisfying and so rewarding that we would leave all we have and all we own and all we are in order to find our satisfaction in Him? Do we want Him so much that we abandon everything else to experience Him? Is Jesus worth more than our stuff? What is it that keeps you from following Christ fully? What do you need to commit to the cause of Christ so that in the end you won't find that you have wasted it?

## The gospel demands real gospel living

*"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* Luke 14:34-35 Salt has two outstanding qualities – it both seasons and preserves. Real followers of Christ have a seasoning and preserving effect on the world around them. Jesus called His followers the salt of the earth – preserving the culture around them from moral and spiritual decay, and injecting the seasoning of love and hope and joy through the gospel.

But it is possible for believers to look like salt and yet have none of its qualities. We are used to buying refined salt off the shelf at a supermarket, but in Jesus' day, salt was usually obtained from evaporating the water from the Dead Sea, and it was a long way from refined. It was often mixed with greater or lesser concentrations of other salts, and it was possible for all the good stuff (Sodium Chloride) to be leached out in the process so all that remained was stale and useless. In the same way, Jesus says, it is possible for people to look like Christians, act like Christians, go to church, attend Bible studies, worship, sing and pray, but not be salty at all. The gospel demands real gospel living.

So what is Jesus saying to us?

I think He is saying that **the gospel demands that we love Christ more than anyone or anything else** – that our love for Him is ultimate and every other love pales in comparison;

I think He is saying that **the gospel demands that we continually sacrifice what we want for what Christ wants** – that we relentlessly pursue joy by dying to what we want in favor of what He wants;

I think He is saying that **the gospel demands that we count the cost to follow Christ** – that we understand that to embrace the gospel is to embrace endurance and warfare;

I think Jesus is saying that **the gospel demands that we say goodbye to our stuff** – that we live in such a way that our stuff is not a hindrance to the call of Christ to go and make disciples and we risk the security and comfort of the stuff of this life for the sake of the gospel;

and finally I think He is saying that **the gospel demands real gospel living** – that we live in such a way that we impact the world around us for the triumph of the gospel in the world.

*Our good and gracious God and Father,*

*We thank you this morning for Your great mercy and limitless grace and abundant blessings You have showered upon us. We thank You for Your word to us that is life and light and grace. We thank You Lord for all the ways in which You have shown Yourself faithful and kind to us this past year, and we pray that we would continue to live in the light of Your soon return – living not for ourselves but for You – impacting our world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grant that we would be finished with trivial pursuits and fatal devotion to security and comfort in this life, but instead risk everything for Your glory and the triumph of the gospel. Help us to redeem the time and make much of You in all we are about. Let every other love pale in comparison to the love we bear for You, and relinquish short-term happiness for eternal joy. May we be those who have counted the cost and said goodbye to our stuff, living salty lives to bring You honor and glory. Make us a people whose greatest delight is You, who live to share Your joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious and powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*