

March 10, 2019

## Lesson 15: A Costly Call

Scripture: Mark 1: 16-20; Luke 14: 25-33

### Context:

The lesson today focuses on two scripture passages in which Jesus calls those who will follow him. The first account comes from the Gospel of Mark and gives an account for Jesus recounting the first of the twelve disciples, two sets of fisherman brothers. They literally leave their work throwing behind their nets and their family business to follow Jesus.

The second passage comes from the Gospel of Luke. We move from hearing individual disciples who are called to follow Jesus to large crowds that have begun to follow them. Yet in this passage, the full details of following Jesus are revealed.

At this point in Luke, Jesus is beginning to make his way towards Jerusalem. Yet one must wonder if people know what will await them in Jerusalem. As the crowd swells, the image is that of a parade. Yet Jesus says to his volunteers to think about what they are doing. To follow him will mean they have “to hate” their family. The word “hate” in its Semitic translation means to turn away from, to detach oneself from the other.<sup>1</sup> Essentially the crowds would have to completely leave their families to follow Jesus. It is not to have violence towards their families or themselves, but to turn away from the normal expectations of familial love.

To help drive the point home, Jesus uses two parallels from two different contexts to make his point. The first is a rural allusion in which a vineyard owner builds a tower in a vineyard from which the farmer can protect crops from thieves and animals.<sup>2</sup> The second pictures a pair of royals sitting down in a fortress to look at their supply of soldiers and determine matters of peace and war. Both rich and poor must have the same decision to make when it comes to time, property, and life itself: does this cost more than I am or willing to pay?<sup>3</sup> Jesus uses the allusions to make a point about discipleship and what it costs in following him.

Jesus wants people to think about what going to Jerusalem means. It does not mean they will popular. They certainly will not gain any money in doing so. They even may lose their lives in being associated with him. This large crowd is given a choice of who they will follow and what they will give up if they choose to follow him.

As we discover with the twelve, following Jesus means you leave things behind. You leave the family business behind. You leave your family behind. You leave your old thoughts and teachings behind. You leave your whole life behind and it comes with a cost that you may never recover. Jesus makes clear that following him is not for the faint of the heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, “Luke,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 182

## **Application**

If today's scripture lessons make you squirm in your seat, then it's a good thing. This passage about following Jesus and being his disciples involves costs that are pretty high, even for today's world. When Jesus invites people to follow him, he does not promise a life of prosperity, popularity, or power. Instead he reminds people that following him may even cost people the things that are most dear to him.

In American society, the gospel can be hard to hear even in places with many worshipping believers. Even within our churches, we have taken discipleship and made it into a membership model. If you join a church, you have a place to be married, buried, and have your kids be baptized. It has become about a checklist than something that is alive and constantly involving.

When I think of people who follow Jesus, I think of people who just don't come to church on Sunday and check off their boxes of attending worship or a class and then go home. I think of people who live a life of worship and a life of hospitality. They live a life of opening up to Jesus and obeying Jesus. They live a life of service and a life of generosity. Notice that I said life.

Living a life means taking something and it becomes a part of your very being. Take for example the person who lives a life of worship. Let's walk through what that means from Sunday to their time throughout the week. It means that they see worship as more than coming to listen to a praise band sing. They participate in that worship service on Sunday morning and then live out the lyrics of the song. When they hear the song "God is On The Move," they will hear that line: "or dares to speak the truth to set men free," they will see themselves in that story and speak up when they see someone at work being mistreated. It is a life in which worship goes beyond the walls and into the daily lives of the individual.

Every day, those who are followers living these lives seek to be mature disciples of our Lord even recognizing that it might cost them. Yet they see the bigger picture of being a Christian and that the reward isn't when they die, but each day they have to live and breathe. It is an ongoing life, one that isn't static and always changing. You never get to a point that you're done with becoming a disciple of Jesus.

At times we have to take our pulse and figure out where we are on that journey. Often in our churches we can get attached to rituals, traditions, and even relationships that may not actually challenge us or help us grow in our discipleship. We become stale, sometimes clinging to the past and the way that things have always been. If not careful, we stay at our membership status and stop becoming a disciple.

There are ways though that Jesus calls us to be disciples of him. We are called to look at where we are on our walk with Christ and evaluate if we are being a spectator or a disciple. Do we lead lives where we follow Jesus wherever we are sent? Do we challenge systems or practices that are self-seeking or harm others? Do we choose comfort over challenge? Am I helping to disciple others or am I being a consumer just content to sit back and watch without contributing anything? These are the kinds of questions that followers of Jesus are encouraged to consider and to think about in their daily walk.

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