

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"You Cannot Be My Disciple If..."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at chapter 14, verse 27.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word. Let's back up to verse 25 for context...

**Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "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. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

You may be seated. Let's pray.

We are in the middle of what I think is the clearest teaching on discipleship in all of Scripture.

Notice it says **great crowds** followed Jesus. While many popular religious leaders would try to make the crowds even larger, Jesus seemed to DISCOURAGE people from following Him.

Of all the statements He made that turned people away, we have reached the most shocking...

**Luke 14:27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

And this brings us to Lesson One...

Jesus said, "You cannot be my disciple if you won't (Lesson One) learn and then do."

Let me back up and get a little momentum into this lesson...

When I taught elementary school, I would stand up at the board and as clearly as possible I'd explain to students what they were supposed to do. Then I'd encourage the students to try to do it on their own. I'd walk around the room and look over their shoulders to see how they were doing. It quickly became evident that even though all the students heard the same instruction, they generally fell into two categories:

- Some students did what they were taught. They applied what they heard.
- Another group of students didn't do what they were taught. They received the same instruction as the other students, but they wouldn't apply it.

When I coached wrestling, I'd spend time during practices teaching new moves. I'd go over the move, teaching it step-by-step, then put the kids in twos and have them do it. Again, you'd have two categories of athletes:

- You had athletes who did what you said. The most exciting part about coaching wrestling is when tournaments took place and you saw the wrestlers perform the moves you showed them.
- But you'd have other athletes who watched you demonstrate the moves, but they wouldn't do it themselves.

I don't think I have to tell you which group of students and athletes did well.

The reason I mention this is we have the potential with God's Word to be like one of these two groups.

- We can hear God's Word and do what it says.
- Or we can hear teaching and think our responsibility ends at simply hearing.

It's great to listen, but we must go further and actually do. This is a common theme in Scripture:

- **Matthew 7:24 Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, AND DOES THEM, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.**

- **Luke 8:21** Jesus said, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God AND DO IT.”
- **John 13:17** If you know these things, blessed are you **IF YOU DO THEM**.
- **James 1:22** But **BE DOERS OF THE WORD**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

I mention all this because Jesus said as much in this verse...

Notice the words **bear his own**. This reminds us that discipleship involves more than simply hearing. We must be doers:

- Disciples are more than people who learn by means of lectures, sermons, and books.
- Disciples are people who learn by doing:

Since studying these verses my understanding of discipleship has changed. I've said before that disciple means student. Disciples learn, but a better English synonym would be apprentice:

- Picture students – whether in elementary school, high school, or college – and what do you think of? You think of students sitting at desks listening and learning.
- Picture apprentices. What do you think of? You think of hands-on. You think of people doing what they're learning, and applying the knowledge received.

If disciples were simply students, Jesus would've said...

*“Make sure you're listening to Me and paying attention. Watch me take up my cross and deny Myself.”*

But Jesus told people who wanted to be his disciples...

*“You need to pick up your own cross and deny yourself too.”*

I think this is important because:

- We can be tempted to be students, but not disciples.
- We can be tempted to be learners without being doers.
- We...
  - Go to church...
  - Listen to sermons...
  - Read Christian books...
  - Attend Sunday School or home fellowships...

So we gain lots of knowledge, but if we're going to be disciples, we must apply it too.

If we aren't, then our knowledge isn't helping much.

Next, look at the words **his cross** and this brings us to Lesson Two...

**Jesus said, “You cannot be my disciple if you won't (Lesson Two) suffer for Me.”**

This parallels the idea of hating our own life from **verse 26**. If you hate her own life, you're willing to pick up your cross to follow Christ.

We have so much familiarity with the cross that when Jesus said this, we miss some of the significance.

We must avoid understanding Jesus's words through our 21st century lens. We must understand how it sounded to his listeners in his day.

I want to help us do this by pointing out the differences between what the cross represents in our day and his day...

In our day, crosses are largely symbols of love and affection. They're reminders of what Jesus did for us:

- We put crosses in our churches.
- Many businesses that want people to know they're Christian will put crosses in their brand or logo.
- We hang crosses from the rearview mirror in our cars.
- We have crosses in our homes.
- We have framed pictures of crosses with beautiful poems and verses next to them.
- We wear crosses as jewelry or adornments. We put them on necklaces or keychains.
- We wear clothing that has crosses embroidered on it.

We love crosses. They're one of the most endearing and iconic images to us.

But do you think anyone did this in Jesus's day?

Definitely not.

It would be an understatement to say the cross's imagery has changed dramatically over the last 2,000 years.

When Jesus said disciples must pick up their cross, it would've been horrifying.

It would've made people think of a violent, excruciating, degrading death:

- People didn't put up pictures of crosses in their homes. That would be like having a picture of an electric chair.
- People didn't wear crosses as jewelry or adornments. That would be like wearing a guillotine around your neck.
- People didn't have statues of crosses. That would be like having a statue of a noose or a stake at which people were burned.

Instead, people despised just the thought of a cross.

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And believe it or not, the cross didn't primarily mean death. It primarily meant two other things: suffering and humiliation.

Rome could've killed people any number of ways. Crucifixion was chosen because it was the most unmerciful. It had been passed down from the Persians, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians, so by Jesus' day Roman executioners had perfected it to inflict as much pain as possible. The word excruciating is related to the word crucifixion. The cross was a horrible instrument that caused people so much agony, death became very attractive.

To make loyalty to Rome attractive, Rome said, "If you'll become a citizen, you'll never have to worry about being crucified." Even if people hated Rome, they were more inclined to become citizens simply to avoid the possibility of this death.

Crucifixion was intended to be a deterrent. When people were crucified, they were lined up on the roads heading in and out of Rome to communicate, "This is what will happen to you if you rebel."

To make crucifixion as public as possible, those being crucified had to walk through the streets carrying their cross for everyone to see. They were mocked and ridiculed. We are familiar with this because of Jesus's crucifixion, and it happened to others as well.

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So when Jesus made this statement that people had to **bear their cross** it would've been absolutely shocking.

Everyone knew it meant being willing to suffer for Him. He was demanding total commitment, regardless of what we must endure.

When people carried their cross it showed their submission to Rome, and Jesus meant it similarly, but instead of submission to Rome, it was submission to him.

If we want to be Jesus's disciple:

- We must freely give him authority over our lives.
- We must forfeit our rights in order to serve him in whatever capacity or circumstances he has chosen.

Our lives no longer belong to us. They belong to him to do with what he pleases.

It's as if Jesus said...

*"I'm going to die, and you need to be ready to die too! If you want to be like those people who abandoned Me, you can, but if you want to be one of My disciples, there's a cross for Me, and there's a cross for you! Whatever happens to Me, happens to you. I'm going to suffer, and you need to be willing to suffer. A student is not above his teacher."*<sup>1</sup>

Paul said it like this...

**Philippians 1:29 It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him BUT ALSO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE.**

There are several things we want as Christians:

- We want our sins forgiven...
- We want eternal life...
- We want to be in heaven...
- We want glorified bodies...

But we don't want to suffer.

Jesus is telling us that having all these blessings also means being willing to suffer with Him.

Let me show you a few verses in Mark's gospel that reveal this. Please turn to **Mark 10:35**...

Here's the context...

In **Mark 10:32-34** Jesus predicted His death for the **THIRD TIME**, but the disciples **STILL** didn't believe it.

Jesus is near Jerusalem, which means He's less than two weeks from His crucifixion, but the disciples were more excited than ever because what did they think was about to happen?

They thought he was about to:

- Become king...
- Sit on the throne of David...
- Overthrow Rome...
- Restore Israel to their Golden Years.

And let me ask you this...

As Jesus' 12 right-hand men, who did they think was going to be sitting next to Him?

They did!

So here's the point...

They didn't expect Jesus to suffer, and they didn't expect to suffer!

With that in mind, look at **Mark 10:35**...

**Mark 10:35** And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

Who talks to Jesus like this?

We know from the parallel account in Matthew’s Gospel that it was actually their mother who made this request.

They didn’t want to talk to Jesus like this, so they sent their mom to do it!

**Mark 10:36** And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” **37** And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

*“We’re heading to Jerusalem. You’re going to be king soon. We want the most glory with you!”*

Now this response from Jesus is interesting. He doesn’t tell them, “No,” like we’d expect...

**Mark 10:38** Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

He wanted them to know that if they wanted the glory, they also had to partake of the suffering. Baptize means immerse, so Jesus told them they had to be immersed in His suffering!

**Mark 10:39** And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink YOU WILL DRINK, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, YOU WILL BE BAPTIZED,

Except for Judas, the disciples did suffer. All of them were martyred except John, and he definitely didn’t get off easily. Church tradition says he was boiled in oil, and when he survived, he was exiled on the island of Patmos.

**Mark 10:40** but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

Why were they angry with James and John? Is it because they couldn’t believe James and John made such a selfish, prideful request?

No, it’s because they wanted to be the ones sitting on Jesus’ right and left and they didn’t like these two trying to take that from them.

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I wanted to look at these verses for two reasons:

1. First, they reveal what Jesus is communicating in **Luke 14:27**: suffering must precede glory.
2. Second, they reveal the mistake the twelve disciples made and that we can make: we want the glory without the suffering.

By telling us to pick up our cross and follow Him, Jesus is saying the plan is suffering and then glory.

If we understand this, we can have the right perspective and embrace suffering.

We can follow Jesus’s example...

**Hebrews 12:2** Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

Like Christ, we should endure the suffering by thinking about the joy that awaits us.

Now let me introduce the last lesson that I hope will tie up this section of scripture for us...

**Jesus said, "You cannot be my disciple if you won't (Lesson Three) get off the fence."**

I want to get a little momentum into this lesson by showing you some examples in Scripture that reveal this theme, and then I will explain the connection to **Luke 14**.

First, please turn to **Joshua 24**.

Do your Bibles have a title for this chapter, such as something about Joshua renewing the covenant with the nation?

In verses 1 through 13 Joshua recounted God's goodness to Israel. He mentions God:

- Making them a numerous nation
- Bringing them up out of Egypt
- Parting the Red Sea to deliver them from the Egyptian army
- Caring for them in the wilderness
- Bringing them into the Promised Land and defeating their enemies for them

Let's pick up in **verse 11**...

**Joshua 24:11 And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. 12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow.**

God gave them victory over all these enemies...

**Joshua 24:13 I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.'**

God gave them:

- land they didn't work for
- cities they didn't build
- and vineyards and orchards they didn't plant.

This would be a blessing for anyone throughout all of human history, but it was especially wonderful in the Old Testament when life was very difficult and people had to work for everything.

So what would you then expect Joshua to say to the people?

*"You better serve God. Look how good he has been. Consider all he has done for you. Why wouldn't you be faithful to him?"*

He does say this...but notice something else he says...

**Joshua 24:14 "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region**

**beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

Would you ever imagine Joshua even mentioning serving false gods, especially those of the Canaanites who were so evil they brought the Canaanites to a level of wickedness that warranted their destruction?

Why would Joshua do that? Is it because he wanted the Israelites to serve the gods of the Canaanites?

Not at all.

But he did want the Israelites to serve the gods of the Canaanites...versus sitting on the fence. He said...

*“Serve the God of Israel, or serve the gods of the Canaanites, but no matter what you do, don’t sit on the fence. It would be better for you to worship idols than be neutral toward God.”*

Think of it like this...

Serving the gods of the Canaanites is terrible...but sitting on the fence is worse.

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Turn to **1 Kings 18**.

This is Elijah’s famous showdown on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. Elijah knows he’s about to defeat them, and look what he says to the Israelites first...

**1 Kings 18:20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21a And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions?**

Basically, Elijah said, *“How long will you continue sitting on the fence?”*

**1 Kings 18:21b If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.**

Notice the words **then follow him**. Unbelievably, Elijah told the people to follow Baal if they wouldn’t follow God.

Now we know Elijah didn’t want the Israelites to follow Baal. Elijah’s primary ministry was to deliver Israel FROM BAAL WORSHIP. God largely raised him up for that purpose.

So why would Elijah say this?

The answer is...

Serving Baal is terrible...but being on the fence with the Lord is worse.

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Finally, turn to **Revelation 3**.

The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 that Jesus wrote letters to are known by certain descriptions, and here’s my suspicion...

Even if you don’t know the descriptions of the first six churches, you probably know the description of the seventh church. Laodicea is known as, “The Lukewarm Church.” Another way to say it is Laodicea is the church of fence sitters.

Look what Jesus says to them...

**Revelation 3:14** “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. 15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

There are two interpretations of these well-known verses, and you can find commentators on both sides:

- One interpretation is that cold water and hot water is good, but lukewarm is bad. We like our drinks hot or cold, but nobody wants lukewarm liquid.
- The other interpretation is Jesus is saying, “Be on fire for me, or have nothing to do with me, but don’t be lukewarm.”

I don’t know for certain which interpretation is right, but I do know this...

Both interpretations condemn lukewarmness. Jesus basically says...

*“Be hot or cold, but don’t sit on the fence.”*

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And to bring this back to these verses in **Luke 14** that we started few weeks ago, I’m convinced Jesus is trying to prevent fence sitters.

He says...

“You cannot be my disciple if you won’t:

- Hate your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters
- Hate your life
- Pick up your cross and follow me.”

Because if anything is going to get people off the fence, it’s this.

He was causing people to:

- Serve him or abandon him
- Be a sheep or a goat
- Be a wheat or a tare
- Be hot or cold

But he wasn’t letting anyone remain lukewarm.

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Jesus is asking us to make a choice: follow him or forsake him.

But don’t sit on the fence.

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Let me close with this quote from Charles Spurgeon...

*“Keep your eyes simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon [your] mind; when you wake in the morning look to Him; when [you] lie down at night look to Him. [Do not let] your hopes or fears come between you and Jesus; follow hard after Him, and He will never fail you.”*

I have a brief statement to make after the closing song, and then if you have any questions about anything I shared this morning, I will be up front after service, and I’d consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.



Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> Jesus is preaching self-denial. Listen to a parallel verse...

**Mark 8:34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF and take up his cross and follow me.**

He puts denying ourselves and taking up our cross together. This was a common theme in Christ teaching's. This is the kind of self-denial that results in obedience to Christ commands, service to others, and suffering for Christ sake.

We might hear Jesus's words and our minds quickly go to physical suffering, but there are plenty of ways people suffer for Christ that are not physical. Suffering can be emotional, mental, relational, or spiritual. For example:

- You're in a marriage that you would describe as miserable, but:
  - You made a commitment to God.
  - You know marriage is a reflection of Christ and the church.
  - So you stay in that marriage and:
    - If you're a husband you continue to love your wife.
    - If you're a wife, you continue to respect your husband.
- You have a child in your family that is difficult and hard to love. You can feel this child trying to sow discord and turmoil into your home. But you continue to love and invest in that child, because you're willing to suffer for Christ.
- You have a job you hate. The thought of it makes you sick to your stomach. You want to go in and tell your boss what you think of him. But you continue to do your best and remain faithful, because you're willing to suffer for Christ.