

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *He Said What? The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: Loving Jesus should be so intense it makes everything else look like hate.

Introduction: Years ago, John MacArthur published a book called *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Its subtitle asked this question, “What does Jesus really mean when He says, ‘Follow Me’?” MacArthur contended that there’s more to salvation than believing that Jesus died for your sins. It involves a person commitment to Jesus as Savior and as Lord. This book set off an intense debate over what some people call “lordship salvation.” The subject was not anything new. Some years earlier, the great preacher A.W. Tozer published a book dealing with this same issue. His title was more straightforward than MacArthur’s; the title of his book was *I Call It Heresy!* Still, it raised the same question MacArthur raised: is a person truly saved if he has never acknowledged Jesus as Lord of his life? Can you really call Jesus your Savior if He is not your Lord?

Is that really true? On the one hand, the Bible does indeed say we are saved by God’s grace. We can do nothing to earn our salvation, and we can do nothing to lose it. On the other hand, when we accept Jesus into our lives, we become His followers. That means He calls the shots in your life, and you live to please Him. Make no mistake: that’s not always easy. Jesus often warned people to think twice before they chose to follow Him, because He was not calling them to an easy way of life. That’s one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. On the one hand, we’re saved by God’s grace. However, once we do accept Jesus, we become His followers. That is a life-changing commitment, and it can cost us everything we have.

I. A surprising declaration.

- A. Jesus made a comment that undoubtably got people’s attention.
 1. He said you cannot be his follower unless you “hate” your family. This seems to contradict His other commandments.
 - a. He commanded us to love one another, and He said love was the chief characteristic of His disciples (John 13:34-35).
 - b. The Bible commands us to honor our parents, and to love our wives and children.
 2. Jesus was using a common expression of the Near East.
 - a. The Bible says Jacob “hated” Leah (Genesis 29:31), but it just means he gave preferential treatment to Rachel.
 - b. We should honor our parents and love our families, but we must love and honor Jesus even more.
- B. Jesus said one must also “carry His own cross”.
 1. In Jesus’ day, the cross was an instrument of capital punishment.

- a. When people in Jesus' day saw someone carrying a cross, it meant that person was about to die.
- b. People have tried to soften this statement, but its meaning is quite clear: if we are to be followers of Jesus, we must be willing to give our lives for Him.
2. How could Jesus make such demands?
 - a. If anyone else demanded that level of commitment, he would rightly be labeled arrogant.
 - Can you imagine a pastor saying something like this? Suppose he stood in his pulpit and said, "You must love me even more than you love your wives and children. You must honor me above your own parents. You must be willing to die for me if I instruct you to do so." People would quickly brand that pastor as a dangerous cult leader!
 - b. Some people argue that Jesus never claimed to be God, but here He claimed prerogatives that belong only to God.

II. A sensible illustration.

- A. Jesus used two illustrations to drive home His point.
 1. A man building a tower.
 - a. He was probably building a watchtower for his vineyard.
 - b. If he began construction on the building but was unable to complete it, he would be a laughingstock.
 2. A king preparing for battle.
 - a. Before a king went into battle, he would send out scouts to gauge the strength of the opposing army.
 - b. If his own army was not big enough to defeat them, he would either retreat or try to negotiate peace terms.
- B. What was He trying to teach us?
 1. He was telling them to count the cost.
 - a. We're fighting a spiritual battle.
 - b. Building a tower costs money, but following Jesus can cost you your family, your friends, or even your life.
 2. It all boils down to one word: commitment.
 - a. "Commitment" has become a lost word among today's churches.
 - b. Jesus is not our servant; we are His servants.

III. A sobering observation.

- A. Jesus used the illustration of salt.
 1. In biblical times, salt was an important commodity.
 - a. It gave flavor to food.
 - b. It was used to preserve meat.
 2. Jesus warned about salt that lost its flavor.
 - a. In Jesus' day, salt was usually harvested from the Dead Sea or from salt mines.
 - b. If salt had too many impurities, it would lose its flavor.
 - c. Salt that lost its flavor was completely useless. It was not even fit for the manure pile (manure could be used as fertilizer, but salt would contaminate it).
- B. Why did Jesus give this warning?
 1. Some say He was warning about losing your salvation.
 - a. Jesus said no one could take us out of His hands (John 10:27-29).
 - b. We are saved by God's grace, and we are kept by God's grace.
 2. More likely, He was warning against half-hearted commitment.

- a. Jesus warned that no one could serve two masters.
- b. Half-hearted commitment is no commitment at all.
 - “A man who is faithful to his wife most of the time is not faithful at all. A man who is faithful to his country most of the time is a traitor. There’s no such thing as part-time loyalty to Christ. It is all or nothing.” - Vance Havner

Conclusion: When I was a senior in college, a group of us history majors took a trip to Parker’s Crossroads. In December of 1862, Confederate cavalry under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest were in this area when they were surrounded by Union troops. Forrest was taken by surprise, which was very rare for him. He divided his troops and attacked in both directions. It was a daring move on his part, but it worked. He managed to escape the battlefield with only a few casualties. If you’ve read much about the Civil War, you know that Nathan Bedford Forrest is one of its more controversial generals. To this day, historians disagree whether he should be regarded as a hero or a villain. Be that as it may, as we stood on the battlefield that day, one of my professors made an interesting comment. He said, “Most generals say, ‘There’s the enemy, men; go get ‘em!’ Forrest always said, ‘There’s the enemy, men; follow me!’”

Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to serve Him. He accepts nothing less than wholehearted commitment. That commitment can often be costly. He calls you to deny yourself and take up your cross. However, Jesus did not say, “Take up your cross and go get ‘em.” He said, “Take up your cross, and follow Me.” Yes, the way can often be difficult. But always remember, our Lord is right with us, and He is leading the way. As long as we keep our eyes on Him and follow His leadership, we never have to worry. In the end, He will prevail.

Ken Jones is the senior pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia. He holds a B.S. in history from the University of Tennessee at Martin and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary