

In 14:1–24 Jesus made it clear that the Jewish leaders did not know what was required in following God. They thought they were going to be in the kingdom, blessed at the banquet of God; but they are wrong. They were too proud. They lacked compassion. They did not bear fruit. This naturally leads to the question, “if they didn’t meet the standard, what is required to enter the kingdom?” Verses 25–35 give the answer.

**14:25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them,
14:26 "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.**

Large crowds were following Jesus and some were contemplating becoming His disciple. Thus Jesus gives the demands of discipleship. He gives the parameters of what it means to come to Him.

Generally speaking, the word “disciple” simply means learner or student. Rabbis typically had a small bevy of students who followed them as they moved from place to place. Jesus had a massive crowd of learners who followed Him. At the beginning of His ministry, “disciple” was used to describe people in many different spiritual conditions. Some were nominally committed; others were truly committed; some were just curious and had no commitment at all. In the widest range of the term, they could all be called disciples – they were all learning from Jesus, though each responded differently to His message. However, as Jesus’ ministry progressed the word “disciple” took on a truer, purer meaning. Eventually, in the Book of Acts it would become a synonym for a Christian. Here, in Luke 14, Jesus specifies what He deems as necessary for Him to call someone HIS disciple. In short, it is a message about what is necessary to be saved.

Not everything about salvation is in this passage. It doesn't say anything about who Christ is or talk about the necessity of faith. It doesn't speak about repentance, justification, or conversion. The emphasis is not the objective facts of the gospel, but the subjective attitude that must exist in the heart of the one who has saving faith (MacArthur). As Boettner says, the gospel “invitations are not, in the strict sense, general, but that they are addressed to the ‘weary,’ the ‘thirsty,’ the ‘hungry,’ the ‘willing,’ those who ‘labor and are heavy laden,’ and not to those who are unconscious of any need and unwilling to be reformed” (Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*).

It is a good thing to desire Jesus; however, it is not something that should be considered casually. Jesus said, “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.” Discipleship is fundamentally a call to absolute allegiance to Christ. He is to have priority over everyone and everything.

The call to hate is not literal but rhetorical. Otherwise, Jesus’ command to love one's neighbor as oneself as a summation of what God desires makes no sense (Lk. 10:25-37). The call to hate simply means to “love less” (Gen. 29:30-31; Deut. 21:15–17; Judg. 14:16). The image is strong, but it is not a call to be insensitive or to leave all feeling behind. . . Following Jesus is to be the disciple’s first love. This pursuit is to have priority over any family member and one's own life, which means that other concerns are to take second place to following Jesus (Lk. 8: 19–21; 9:59-62; 49–53; 16:13; Bock, 1285).

Matthew softens the remark's emotive force by saying, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

This saying also needs to be set in the culture of the first century. At that time many who chose Jesus would be disowned by his or her family; they would be declared dead by the family (see Luke 15:24). Therefore, if someone valued their family relationships more than Jesus, they would never come to God. What was true for them is also true for us. Although our families may not disown us, the mindset of being Jesus' disciple requires a willingness to be disowned. Jesus is firm; unless one is willing to forsake all else, including their family, they cannot be His disciple.

14:27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

The words "carry" and "come" are both present tense verbs indicating that Jesus is talking about a lifestyle of discipleship, not the decision to enter into it. A disciple is to constantly carry his cross and come to Jesus. Jesus demands that if anyone comes to Him, he must hate his own life (14:26) and carry his own cross (14:27).

To bear the cross meant one was on the road that ended in death. It means to follow in Jesus' sufferings. It is a willingness to bear the pain of persecution as a result of following Him. Those who want eternal life are willing to pay any price. This is the message that Jesus preached.

With a cost that high, one should consider if following Jesus is really worth it. In verses 28–32 Jesus gives two illustrations that teach the need of assessment. The first is in verses 28–30 where He uses an illustration of building a tower.

14:28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?"

14:29 "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,

14:30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Watchtowers were often built to guard a vineyard or to protect a house or city. Such towers could become quite elaborate and include a barn where produce or tools could be kept. The fact that there is a foundation (14:29) suggests that Jesus is talking about a substantial structure. Before building, a wise person would calculate the expense. To start the project and not have enough resources to complete it would only result in embarrassment and ridicule. In a culture that was governed by shame and honor, to be embarrassed publically would be unbearable and the building would stand unfinished, as "a monument to one's foolishness" (Bock, 1288).

14:31 "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?"

14:32 "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

The second illustration is about a king and his army. The emphasis is on examining the situation before acting. The King has fewer troops than the invading enemy. Before he engages in battle, he would be wise to consider his odds of winning as well as the cost of losing. Given the situation, it would be smarter to negotiate terms of peace for surrender than to head off into battle. To launch into battle without reflection would be disastrous.

These two illustrations are intended to cause reflection upon the cost of discipleship.

14:33 "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

A third cost of discipleship is in relationship to possessions. To be a disciple of Jesus one must distance oneself from the material attachment of the world.

Hating family, giving up one's life, and forsaking all possessions are all ways of saying that Jesus must be the total object of one's focus. From these illustrations it becomes clear that being a follower of Jesus is not measured in terms of how little one can give and still be a disciple, rather it is given in terms of how much God deserves.

14:34 "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned?"

14:35 "It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus then warned about the uselessness of salt that has lost its saltiness. In those days, salt wasn't primarily sodium chloride like it is today. Most salt came from the region of the Dead Sea and was collected around evaporated pools. It consisted of sodium chloride (salt) mixed with the impurities such as gypsum. When moisture hit the salt, it was possible for the actual sodium chloride to leach away and leave only the impurities. When that occurred, the "salt" lost its saltiness.

Following Jesus is of no value without totally committing one's life to Him; a superficial attachment is like salt that loses its saltiness. To be useful, salt must stay salty.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This simply means listen to this message. If you understand it, embrace it.