WHAT THE GOSPEL DEMANDS
Luke 14:33

Well, if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Luke 14. Open with me to Luke 14.

We’re going to do something a little different today. Every once in a while we kind of come aside from our normal, our regular intensive study in one particular passage of Scripture just for some family time, for us as a faith family, and that’s what I want us to do today. And I want to share some things with you, as your pastor, that have been going on in my relationship with Christ. So let me pray, start us that way.

Father, I thank you for the privilege of leading this faith family. At the same time, I shudder at the thought of leading this faith family because I am so inadequate for the task. I’m not even adequate to lead my own family, much less this family of believers, and so God, from the very beginning, I express before them the depth of my need for Christ. I can do nothing without Christ; I am nothing without Christ. I pray that you would give me grace to communicate what Christ has been teaching me. I pray that I would speak nothing but truth from Christ. I pray for grace to communicate in a way that honors you and I pray for grace for this body of believers to hear in a way that honors you. Give us grace, we pray today, to hear your Word and grace to obey your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The All-Important Question...

I want to share with you some areas of disobedience that have been evident in my relationship with Christ. They are areas that I have confessed to my wife and my family, and need to confess to you. There are truths in Scripture that I have been avoiding and disobeying for the past months. I would probably even say past years, but more intentional disobedience over past months. And I want to be honest with you, I’m at a point that I would probably call it a crisis of faith, a crisis of belief point in my spiritual journey right now, and if I had to summarize what that looked like, it really revolves around one main question, and the question is, do I believe this Book? I mean, really.

I preach this Book. I love preaching this Book. I teach this Book, I study this Book, I try to hide this Word in my heart, but do I believe it, do I really believe it, because if I believe it, if this Book is true, then that has radical implications for my life. And it’s really the question I want to put before you, then as a result. An all-important question, do we believe this Book? When this Book says some of the things it does, do we really believe it? And Luke 14 gives us a picture, I think if we believe this Book then it has radical implications for our lives and radical implications for this church. Kind of a summary verse that’s going to drive much of the next eight weeks that we have together in the Word.
Luke 14:33, this is Jesus speaking. I want you to listen to what He says. You might underline it. “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” That’s radical, everything. Unless, lest we think that that just means stuff. Go back up to Verse 26. Jesus says there, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” That’s everything. And He says, you can’t call yourself a follower of mine if you don’t give up all these things. That’s radical.

This is a picture of demands of the gospel: give up everything you’ve got if you even want to consider being my disciple. That’s what this whole passage is about, which we’ll see next week. And so this question, do I really believe this Book has really kind of come in three main areas, and I want to put them before you, and I want to ask you the questions that God has been asking me and convicting me about.

Do we believe what this Book says about the church?

First question, do we believe what this Book says about the church? Do we really believe what this Book says about the church? And I want you to turn back just a few chapters to the left, Luke 9. I want to show you this. This is an amazing passage of Scripture, and we’re just going to hit on it real quickly, but do we believe what this Book says about what it means to follow Christ? Listen to this, there are large crowds at this point that are following Jesus and this is what happens. Luke 9:57, listen to what it says. “As they were walking along the road, a man said to him,” Him being Jesus, man said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:57-58). That’s kind of an interesting response.

“He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59-62).

Is that not amazing? Jesus seems to be talking these three guys out of following Him.

I’ve got to tell you this, just a side note. I remember when I first moved down to New Orleans, I went down there to study under a particular professor who became a mentor for me, Jim Shaddix, and Dr. Shaddix invited me, soon after I had gotten down there, to go to an event where he was preaching, it was a youth event. And he got there and he was preaching on this text, and he started the sermon. I’ll never forget, I was sitting there; he started the sermon and he said, “My goal tonight is to talk you out of following Jesus.”

And so then he preached the text and then at the end he gave an invitation for people to respond to Jesus and all these students came down to the front responding. And I was like “Wow, that’s pretty cool.” Like, so I was preaching at a youth event the next week and I thought, “I’m going to try it,” you know. So the next weekend, I get up and it was like word for word, my goal tonight is to talk you out of following Jesus. And then I preached the text and I got to the end and apparently I was more successful than Dr. Shaddix because there were birds chirping in that room. Nobody was moving. I remember sitting there afterward like what happened, I thought.

Anyway, this is the picture. It seems like Jesus is trying to talk these guys out of following Him. I mean this goes against our thinking. We think our whole picture today in the Church
is to do whatever it takes to get them in, whatever it takes, get them in. Jesus is saying let the dead bury their own dead, don’t even go back and say goodbye to your family. These are the kind of things I wonder, when the disciples heard, if their jaws were just on the ground. Whenever the crowds would get big He’d say things like “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood,” and all of a sudden the crowds would leave and the disciples are like, “What are you doing? Like, Jesus, we’re never going to get on the list of fastest growing movements if you don’t stop telling the crowds to eat you, this doesn’t work.”

But this is what He would do. What is He doing? Jesus is telling us what it means to follow Him. I want to put three questions in front of you, again, just real quickly, that I think we need to think about when it comes to being a follower of Christ. If you call yourself a follower of Christ, this is what’s involved. Question number one, will we choose comfort or a cross? Comfort or a cross? First guy, “I’ll follow you wherever you go.” He’s eager. Jesus says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

And we find out in Matthew 8, this is a religious teacher, religious leader. We find Jesus warning, Mark 12:38-40, Jesus warns about guys like these. Because what they would do is, the pattern was, you would attach yourself to a religious teacher in order to promote or enhance your position and your status and your career. And so you’d follow another teacher to help promote you to the next level, to climb the ladder so to speak. And so here you’ve got a guy who wants to follow Jesus as a means to an end. And this is a different picture, we’re not Jewish culture trying to attach ourselves to Jesus to become greater teachers or climb the ladder, but how often we’ve talked about this. This is the gospel we’re selling today. Jesus as a means to an end, “Come to Jesus so you can get forgiveness, and come to Jesus so you can get your best life, and come to Jesus so you can get heaven.” And none of those things are true. You come to Jesus to get God. You don’t come to Jesus to get stuff.

We’ve taken steps deeper. We come to Jesus so we can get a comfortable place to worship, and we come to Jesus so we can get activities for our kids to do, and we come to Jesus so we can get a good life in Birmingham, Alabama. No, you come to Jesus and you get Him, He’s the end. It’s not a means to anywhere. He is everything. We don’t want comfortable places to worship, we don’t want activities for kids, we don’t want to promote ourselves, we want Christ. And this guy...Here’s Jesus to say, “I don’t have a roof over my head, you come to me, I’m all you’ve got.” Do we want that kind of Jesus? Do we want comfort or do we want a cross, that’s where Jesus is going, Luke 9:51 tells us.

Second question, will we choose maintenance or mission? Maintenance or mission? Second guy, Jesus initiates the conversation with, “’Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:59-60). Now, there are scholars who debate this whole deal. Some people believe that his dad was about to die and he just wanted to go back, spend those last couple of days with his dad and then give his father a proper burial. Which is obviously something he would want to do, but even deeper than that was one of the highest of religious obligations, that a son honor his father. I mean you...This is just a no-brainer, a son does this for his dad. Others believe his dad had just died. All he wanted to do was go back and bury his father then he’d come.

First week I ever preached that part of the text, focusing on it, was the week that two days later my own dad passed away. And I remember thinking on what I had just preached on. I cannot imagine hearing the words from Jesus, “Let somebody else bury your dad, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” That just seems cold, doesn’t it? Does that seem, I mean, let’s be honest; that’s harsh. This is the Jesus we’re worshiping and He would say that.
What is He saying, what is He doing here? He’s saying that there is a responsibility and there is an obligation that supersedes every other responsibility and every other obligation in this world, even the thing you would most want to do or most need to do, you go and proclaim the kingdom of God, it’s far more important. Try telling Jesus that He’s too focused on mission.

“Jesus don’t you care about us? Talking about mission all the time.” People say, “Talk about mission all the time, what about us?” Jesus says don’t even bury your dad, go to mission. And the church will always—church as a whole, individuals and families—we will always face these two options, maintenance or mission, business as usual, status quo, or radical abandonment to proclaiming the kingdom of God. Will we choose maintenance or mission?

Third, will we choose indecisive minds or undivided hearts, indecisive minds or undivided hearts? Lord, let me just go back and say goodbye to my family, and He says no one who puts his hand to the plow looks back, you can’t even look back. Don’t even go say goodbye to mom. You see the indecision here. It’s the indecision that has; it’s the sinful indecision that has gripped me for these past months. Because when Jesus tells us to obey, at least in my own personal experience I find myself asking questions, “Well is it safe? Well, is it wise? Really? Is it the time? What will this person think or that person think? How will this look?” The reality is if Jesus has said it, then a follower of Christ does it, period.

I’m not saying we don’t want to be wise, but wisdom is found in obedience to Jesus not in the world. And indecision hampers us, hampers me, from radical obedience to Christ as opposed to an undivided heart. And what scares me is the implication of Luke 9:57-62 is that these guys don’t follow Jesus. He succeeds in turning them away. What scares me is the thought of what I would do if I was one of those three guys, because I look at what we have done with what it means to follow Christ today, and I wonder if Jesus would move on and we’d still be standing there and this haunts me.

What does it mean to be a follower of this Jesus? I mean really, what does it mean to be a Christian? What does Jesus expect of us, empower us to do? What is expected of a Christian in Birmingham? Not a lot really, not a lot. That bar’s pretty low. What’s expected of a follower of Christ in Luke 9? Everything. Luke 14, everything. There is an urgency here. Why? It leads to the second question, do we really want to know what it means, do we believe what this Book says about what it means to follow Christ?

**Do we believe what this Book says about the lost?**

Second, do we believe what this Book says about the lost, what this Book says about the lost? Now, what we’re going to do in the days ahead is we’re going to look—this whole series—we’re going to look at the Gospels, words from Jesus, but I want to take us outside the Gospels for just a minute on this one. People who do not know Jesus, people who do not trust in Jesus for salvation, do we believe what this Book says about them?

Do we believe 2 Thessalonians 1:7? Follow along:

*This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*

Everlasting destruction.
Revelation 20:15, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Earlier, same chapter talks about how the smoke of their torment rises up forever and ever and ever. It begs the question do we believe that? Do we believe that there is coming a day when those who do not trust in Jesus will be punished with everlasting destruction; door closed from the majesty of God forever? Instead, a lake of fire where the smoke of their torment burns forever and ever without end. Do we believe that?

Because if we believe that then that has radical implications for the way we live our lives and the way a church operates. And we’ve talked about this—6.7 billion people in the world today, the most liberal estimates would say about a third of those are Christian. And that’s people who claim to be Christian, socio-politically, socially, politically, this whole picture, not necessarily all true followers of Christ. But let’s just assume for a second even if all one third of the people in the world today who claim to be Christian, let’s assume all of them are actually followers of Christ, have actually walked down this road and said, yes, I’ll abandon everything in Luke 9 and Luke 14.

Even if all one third of them are Christian, that still leaves over 4.5 billion people, over 4.5 billion people including hundreds of thousands in metro Birmingham today on a road that leads to eternal hell; 4.5 billion people who today are standing under the judgment of God and are on a road that leads to an eternal hell. If that is true, if that’s true, if we believe that then we can’t play games in the church, and we can’t play games with our lives and our families.

To be honest, we can’t even think about what is best for our families because we need to think about what’s best for the glory of Christ among people who are going to everlasting destruction where the smoke of their torment will burn forever and ever. If that’s true it radically changes the way we live. If that’s not true, then we spend our resources on ourselves and we indulge ourselves in stuff around us. If this is true, you can’t do that, it’s impossible, not if that’s true, not if we believe that’s true and you abandon everything to make the gospel known among the lost. So do we believe, do I believe, what this Book says about the lost?

**Do we believe what this Book says about the poor?**

And that leads to the third question, do we believe what this Book says about the church, do we believe what this Book says about the lost, and third, this is the question that has probably pierced me in a whole new way—not probably, most definitely has. Do we believe what this Book says about the poor? And here are the facts. **Today, over a billion people live and die in desperate poverty, live on less than a dollar a day. Close to two billion others live on less than $2.00 a day.** For over a billion people what it costs you or I to buy French fries, over a billion people do not have for food, water, shelter, clothing and medical care today. The reality is most of our dogs and cats are living on more than $2.00 a day. And close to three billion people don’t have that much.

Let me bring it down to just today. **30,000 children today will breathe their last breath due to either starvation or a preventable disease.** Just try to put that...I try to think—30,000 Joshuas and Caleb’s today will not be alive when we go to bed tonight because they had no food, or no medical care for a disease that’s preventable. 30,000 of them. Bring that into our context, look at it from this perspective. If that were happening here...It’s almost a little bit appropriate—this was not the purpose—that many of our children are not in this worship service.
I want you to imagine with me for a second, if this were happening here that would mean that every single child 18 years old or younger in Shelby County, Alabama, every single child would be dead by a week and a half from now. They’d all be gone, all of our kids in a week and a half’s time, all of them gone. But here’s the deal, we don’t have to think about that. This is not before us.

We’re not even, let’s be honest, we’re not even inconvenienced by that kind of extreme poverty because those stricken by it are not only poor, they are powerless, they’re powerless. And we don’t have to see them; we don’t have to hear from them, we don’t have to have anything to do with them. Literally millions of them are quietly dying in relative obscurity and we can comfortably ignore them in our affluence, pretending like they don’t even exist. That sounds cold, but it is life here, isn’t it? Are we concerned when we drive through this community about not having food or water, shelter? No, we’re going to the store to get our kids, ourselves more stuff. We don’t have to think about these, these are not realities that are before us. We can pretend like it’s not even there.

Meanwhile, they do exist. The reality is they do exist and here’s what frightens me. I’ve been on a journey from cover to cover in Scripture and the reality is, God measures the integrity of our faith, and we’re going to unpack this more, but God measures the integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor. That’s all over Scripture, all over the place. God measures the integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor. He says to His people, Isaiah, clear picture, 56-58, and this whole picture of true fasting. God says, “You’re fasting, you’re doing all your religious exercises, it means nothing if you ignore the poor. Nothing, it doesn’t mean anything. You claim to know me, you turn a deaf ear to the poor, you don’t know me.” That’s what He says to His people all the time. He measures the integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor. No concern for the poor, no integrity of faith. They go together.

You take it a step deeper, though, and on a most serious note, not more serious note, on the most serious note, I think, that we could see in scripture, Jesus tells those with abundance that if they do not feed the hungry and clothe the naked, they go to hell. Those with abundance, if you do not feed the hungry and clothe the naked you go to hell. This is what Jesus teaches, the Jesus we’re worshipping, He teaches this. And we’re going to dive into these passages in the coming weeks, but let me just give you an overview here.

Old Testament, leading up to when Jesus says that, listen to Proverbs 14:31, “Those who oppress the poor insult their maker.” You insult God. Church, people of God, you insult your God if you turn a deaf ear to the poor. Proverbs 21:13, listen to this, “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.” What you’ve got in your notes is the way we live, what you’ve got in the Bible is the way God’s designed it. What He says there, if a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor; he too will cry and not be answered. You shut your ears to the cry of the poor—you pray—you got nothing. He doesn’t even hear you. You gather together every Sunday, not even heard Proverbs 21 says, if you’re shutting your ears to the cries of the poor, talking to yourselves. These are strong words. Proverbs 28:27, “He who gives to the poor will lack nothing,” great phrase, “…but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.” Cursed of God. Cursed by God if you close your eyes to the poor.

Luke 6, Jesus says this, Luke 6, these are Jesus’ words, Luke 6:20-25. It’s the beginning and the end of that passage. Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied” (Luke 6:20-21). “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you
who are full now, for you shall be hungry” (Luke 6:24-25). James 5:1 takes it even deeper than a woe, listen to this, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.” Can I remind you of something? We are rich, all of us, without exception. Even if you’re a 5-year-old, you’re rich. You have food, you have water, you have clothing, you have shelter— rich.

So we’re all rich and the Bible says, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.” Is this stern? It’s even stern. Matthew 19:21-23, Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions,” this is the passage we’re going to study in a couple of weeks, “…and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Now, did you catch that? We’re all rich and Jesus says it’s hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Put it together.

Jesus says it’s hard to go to heaven from Birmingham, Alabama. It’s hard for people here, including myself; it’s hard for us to go to heaven, very, very hard. It’s hard to get to heaven from Birmingham. Matthew 25:41 is where He says, and this is the passage, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). Jesus says to those who do not feed the hungry and clothe the naked, He says these words, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). You don’t feed the hungry or clothe the naked, then Jesus says to you, “Depart into eternal fire.” So maybe this is not just about other people who were concerned about fire, maybe there’s a concern that needs to be had in this room about eternal fire.

I don’t believe I’m overstating this, not based on the words of Jesus. Now, follow me here. We’re going to dive into this passage, but just suffice to say at this point, this is not a passage that is teaching, is undercutting the rest of Scripture, and saying anything different than that, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, period. We know that from Scripture, no question. But I want you to think back, remember we spent some time in 1 John, looking at the assurance of salvation, the fruit of Christ in our lives, and remember we talked about that? We said if the love of Christ is not in someone then there’s reason to question whether or not Christ is in someone. If the truth of Christ is not in someone, if they’re speaking lies about Jesus then there’s reason to question whether or not Christ is in them.

If someone is walking in disobedient, persistent sin and does not turn from that sin, what we talked about, remember, and I would even say again, if you were here and you were to come to me and you were living in willful disobedient sin against God and you were to say but I’m a Christian, I would look at you and I would say, based, I believe on the authority of Scripture in 1 John, amongst other places, I would say, “I do not know whether or not you are saved and it’s certainly not my place to determine that. At the same time, I would encourage you to ask very seriously whether or not Christ is really in you, if you are living in deliberate disobedience to Him. If there is deliberate disobedience in your life that is persistent, there is reason to question whether or not Christ is in you.” So bring that into this picture.

The Necessary Conclusion...

If this is what Jesus’ word says and we live with so much stuff, then there’s reason to question whether or not Jesus is really in us. This is huge. It’s a blind spot really. As I’ve
been thinking and praying I’ve seen that this is a blind spot, and here’s what I mean by that. You know, 200 years ago there were seeming men of God who were preaching the gospel, and they had slaves. And we sit here like how could you have slaves if you’re preaching this gospel? It makes no sense. It was a needed corrective. You say, of course, they shouldn’t have had slaves, not if they believe this gospel, not if they preach it. I wonder if 200 years from now, if Jesus has not come back, if they will look back at us and they will say how could they follow Jesus and have so much stuff. How could they know this gospel and live in such nice houses and drive such nice cars and have such nice clothes and things.

This is the blind spot that Christ has been opening my eyes and my heart to, and it’s come to this conclusion that I want to put before you in my life and I believe in the life of this church. It is time to get radical. It is time to get radical. You say, “Dave, what do you mean by that?” I don’t know what all of this means for my life and my family. We’re on a journey right now where we are beginning to identify some things, some major things that this means. But I don’t know what all this looks like in my life and my family, so I certainly wouldn’t go as far as to say I know what this looks like in your life or your family, or even what this looks like for us as a faith family.

What I want to do is I want to invite us to go on a journey over the next eight weeks, where we listen to the words from Jesus, the Jesus we claim to follow, but words that we obviously have ignored and I want us to listen to them. And I want us to consider together in our lives and our families what these words look like in action in our lives. I don’t think we could even begin to think through what this looks like for us as a faith family, until we’ve gone through this picture and where we’re saying, okay, what does it mean to follow this Christ, what does it mean to live radically for the lost, what does it mean to live radically for the poor.

If what this Book says is true...Now, the reality is, some of you, maybe many of you are not excited right now about this journey. We have a crowding issue here and this may solve it. I know that we live in a church culture that, let’s be honest, likes to enjoy our football on Saturdays and get through a nice easy Sunday so we can go on with the rest of our week and this is not tolerable with this Word. It’s not possible with this Word. God deliver us from artificial battles on Saturday that keep us from facing the real battles on Sunday morning.

And I know that there are probably people who will say, “I’m out. I don’t want to go on that kind of journey, I don’t have to go on that kind of journey. I can live my Christian life without that kind of journey.” That is an option. I would plead with you; I plead with you not to go there. But some of you may, and I want to be very careful here, because obviously what we’ve seen is that Jesus is, at some level, okay with that. And He’d say these things and the crowds would leave. He was left with 12 people, if that doesn’t scare me, the thought of like 12 people here next week. “Do you believe this Book, Dave?”

And I want to be really careful here because the last thing I want to do in saying that some may leave is to sound cold or insensitive, or some people might say unwise. I want to lead this faith family in this way, please hear this, not because I hate this church but because I love this church. And what frightens me—and it’s what I’ve seen, it’s what I’m repenting of. What frightens me is we don’t have to go this route. There are plenty of other routes before us to go; in fact, other routes that I actually believe would make us more successful in the contemporary picture of church that we have created. But in the process of being successful we would waste our lives and waste the church and we’d be successful here and in the world to come for billions and billions of years. We’d have realized how foolish we were.
And so, I want to invite you to go with me. It’s not...None of us likes to think about changes in our lives, changes in our families, changes in the church. None of us, including myself. And if we turn a deaf ear to 30,000 kids today who are dying of starvation or preventable disease, then we don’t need to make any changes. That’s fine, we can do this. But if we’re going to live for the sake of 4.5 billion lost people, including 100,000 in Birmingham and thousands and thousands and thousands of kids who are dying every day because they don’t have food on their table, then that means radical change in our lives, in our families and in the church. Again, I don’t know what all that looks like.

And so here’s what I want us to do. I want us to spend some time with the Spirit of God and the Word of God as individuals and families. And I know even doing this, some would say, don’t do this on a Sunday morning. People will get up and leave. Well, I know there is a tendency in which many people come here and think that there’s a show that will happen and once the show is over then we’ll leave, and I guess the show’s over at this point. And we’re going to dive into the Word.

And if you have come to encounter God, I want to invite you over the next few moments, what we’re going to do is, there are three different passages of Scripture. And what I’m going to do is I’m going to read each passage of Scripture. I’ll read one and then we’re going to have some time to reflect on that passage. And then I’m going to read another and we’ll have time to reflect on it. We’re going to do that with three different passages. And I want to invite you, these are all passages that we’re going to study in the weeks to come, but I want to invite you to listen to them and to begin to reflect on them and begin to pray through them.

So turn with me to Luke 14, turn with me to Luke 14:25. I’m going to read this passage and then give you a few moments to spend some time just between you and God. Then let me encourage you just to spend time in praying over that text.

So, Luke 14:25, read along with me, and I want you to picture yourself in the crowds, hearing this take place.

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus—[so you’re in the crowds]—and turning to them he said:—[so turning to you, He says]—If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

God, we pray for grace to consider your words honestly, humbly, clearly during these moments. I invite you to reflect and pray.
I want to invite you to turn over to Matthew 9. Let this be fuel for your time with the Lord this week. Matthew 9:35, this is another passage that we are going to study during this series. And here’s what I want you to do as we read these words, I want to invite you to picture Jesus’ demeanor—countenance. To try to picture what this looked like. These words, let them kind of come alive and see this. Verse 35, picture this, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds,” see his eyes, “he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” And listen to His voice, “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” With that picture in your mind, I invite you to reflect and pray through Matthew 9:35-38.

One final passage. Again I know that it was probably too much to encapsulate all those questions. Let me encourage you let this fuel your walk with Christ this week. Luke 18, though, I want you turn there with me. This is a passage we’ve already referenced. We’re going to spend a couple of weeks on in this series. We have talked about how all of us, without exception, are rich and so I want to invite you to put yourself in the shoes of this man, and I want you to, from his perspective, imagine this scene. You go up to Jesus, “A certain ruler asked him,” Verse 18, Luke 18,

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’ ‘All these I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ Those who heard this asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus replied, ‘What is impossible with men is possible with God.’ Peter said to him, ‘We have left all we had to follow you!’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus said to them, ‘no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life’” (Luke 18:18-30).

Based on that passage I invite you to reflect and pray.

Stand together as a faith family, stand together and a couple of things. One in light of what I’ve shared with you, I want to ask you for your forgiveness for my disobedience in some of these areas of my life, for turning a deaf ear to these truths and the implications thereof. And at that same time I want to ask you for your prayers for me, for my family. Hebrews 13:7 haunts me. “Remember your leaders,” it says, “…consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” So basically the picture is God sets up leaders in His church to be imitating, to be a demonstration of the Word, and I want to show you what this looks like in action and I don’t know all that that looks like, and so I won’t in any way claim to be perfect in that. That’s why I’m asking you to pray for me and for Heather and our family that God would give us great grace to know how to lead in this way, in a way that shows these truths.
And I want you to know that I’m going to be praying for you, and I want us to be praying for each other. There are no easy answers here. It doesn’t say, okay, well, this is how it looks in your budget to care for the poor and this is how it looks in your schedule to care for the lost. I think the whole purpose of this journey and these commands is designed to bring us on our faces before Christ, for Him to show us what that looks like. Because the picture is, and I don’t want you to forget this, He’s the goal. The goal is not even the lost or the poor; the goal is Christ. We want Christ, and He is the center that drives us. And that’s the whole beauty of this thing because when He’s the center, then anything that even begins to seem like sacrifice is no longer sacrifice, because the One who died on a cross and rose from the grave and ascended on high and has given eternal life freely to us, He’s the goal. And so nothing seems like sacrifice in light of Christ. So let’s fix our eyes and hearts on Him in prayer and say, “Christ, I want you to be the center of our lives, the center of our families and the center of this church and I want you to drive us and we want you more than anything else.

So God, we pray that you would make us a people…Take us one step deeper we pray, into a pursuit of Christ. Lord Jesus, you reign supreme, you are worthy of all worship and all praise and all honor and all glory. You are worthy of the worship of all people here, and you are worthy of 30,000 children today who don’t have food and you are worthy of the worship of 4.5 billion people who have not trusted in Jesus. And so we pray today, Christ be the center of our lives, be the center of this church, and be the center, in such a way that you take us on a radical journey with you where your glory is known by us and displayed by us in Birmingham and the world.

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