

It is easy isn't it this being a follower lark. I understand all you do is click a button and you are a follower. I'm talking about twitter here. I understand that Lady Gaga has 36.2 million, Barak Obama 29.2 and Christ Church Chineham about 50. It is easy to follow but of course it means very little you can switch on and off as you like.

In Luke 14:26 Jesus says "If anyone comes to me" and he means if anyone wants to follow me....what?

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? That is the question we are going to be asking over these next few weeks. To find the answers we are going to listen to what Jesus had to say to those around him. We will see it involves being willing to obey, serve, pray, forgive, love and share. These were the things that Jesus taught those who would be his disciples and if today we wish to follow Jesus they are things he would wish to teach us.

Today from the lips of the master we hear that if we would follow him then it means putting him first. So let's look at Luke 14.25-33.

1. Journeying with Jesus v25

"Large crowds were travelling with Jesus". In a sense this is a form of twitter. Here is Jesus on a journey and lots of people are following him, attached to his group. It all sounds quite jolly and nice. They were travelling but where to?

That's not a meaningless question because knowing the destination means understanding whether you want to make the journey or how you view the journey doesn't it? I mean the jolly boys' outing to the sea side is quite different from going off to war isn't it?

Actually even as I write that what comes to mind are grainy images of men going off to WW1 with songs and smiles almost as if they were going to the seaside and part of that was because they had no idea what they were going into.

Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51 "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." However, this was no holiday jaunt just a few verses earlier in 9:44 he had said, "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." Jesus knew he was headed to Jerusalem to die. That was the journey he was on and now as he looked around at this crowd he realised that not even those closest to him really had any idea where they were headed.

If we are or if we want to "follow" Jesus surely we need to know first and foremost where the journey is taking us don't we?

Jesus' journey as we see in Luke 9:51 ended in heaven. Now that is great and of course we would all like to end our lives in heaven. However, what Jesus knew then was that the path to heaven would

take him first to death on a cross. That was his journey. When he first met Peter and Andrew, James and John by the sea of Galilee and said, “Come and follow me” (Matt 4:19) this was what he was calling them to, to walk with him through death to eternal life. That is what he calls all his followers to. He calls us to enjoy with him life eternal but the path is often, as it was for Jesus, through suffering and death. This is explained more in these next verses.

2. The way of the follower v26-33

I think in these verses Jesus points out three things to the crowd round him and to us centuries later:

a. Jesus is Lord v26-27

As you read those words you may think that Jesus is not great at recruiting people. Only if you hate your Mum can you follow me! But then you might think hang on a minute didn't Jesus also say “love your enemy?” So you are to love even the mother-in-law and yet to hate your own mother – what? What is going on here?

What Jesus is saying here is simple and it is that following him means he has to be first so much so that our love and commitment to our parents as we obey the command “honour your father and mother” (Ex 20:12), our love and commitment to our spouse as we work out the Scripture that was read here a couple of weeks ago at Rob and Amy Butler's wedding “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), our love and commitment to our children as we “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4) seems in comparison with our love and commitment to Jesus to be almost nothing. Can you see what he is saying? He is not saying literally hate parents etc but that our love for him should be so much more than even these special relationships.

Why did he say that? Well Jesus knows us and our human hearts. If you have your Bible open at Luke 14, and I hope you do whether you are here this morning or listening on download, then just look across at 14:16-18. Here Jesus speaks of the invitation to heaven as if it were being invited to a banquet. But note people “began to make excuses” and the reasons they could not accept he invitation were to do with possessions, a field, some oxen and with human relationships. These things, good as they are, can get in the way of our commitment to Jesus. What Jesus was saying to these people and to us is that to follow him, to be his disciple, means he is first, he is Lord, before and over everything else.

Then, to show he meant everything, he goes on to the one thing that each of us counts more precious than anything else and that is me, not literally me as in Ian Bentley but me as in ourselves, v26 “yes even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Jesus was saying I am on a journey that leads to heaven and I want people to join with me but if you do then it can only be if you accept me as Lord and everything else, your human relationships, the things you have, the person you want to be and even your very life is worked out with him as Lord.

b. Count the cost v28-32

Jesus then tells two parables to explain that to respond to his call and follow him needs thinking about. He spoke of the man who wants to build a tower needing to think through if he has the money to do it or else he is going to end up with a half built folly and look a fool. Then he spoke of the King about to go to war who needs to sit down and work out whether he has the resources to win the battle. If he doesn't he won't just look a fool he will be defeated.

I think Jesus was here saying look I'm asking you who are in the crowd with me to think about where all this is leading and whether you are up to it.

He does the same to us as he calls us to follow him. He says if you follow me then I will be first and then he asks have you the resources to follow me as Lord and to follow me through suffering and pain and death and into eternity? And the answer isno!

Often I don't let Jesus be Lord in my life. Instead my desire for status, for possessions, for people to think well of me, for so many things that are around me and especially family get in the way. They stop Jesus being Lord, they stop me following him and they in effect become gods in my life and I know they do for others.

But do I have the resources either to start out on the path/build the tower/go to war or to continue on the path/building the tower/going to war and again the answer Jesus wants us to come up with is no so that we begin to realise our need for him to be Lord so that we draw on his strength and power as we seek to follow him.

What Jesus is doing in these verses is helping the people to see what journeying with him is all about. The soldiers leaving for WW1 had no idea what they were heading to, how could they, and so they did seem to set off as if were all a jaunt and were totally unprepared for what lay ahead. Jesus calls us to follow him but he wants us to be prepared for what it means and for what lies ahead. It means him being Lord in every part of our lives and what lies ahead may well be pain and suffering just as he went through pain and suffering but of course beyond that is "the crown of life" (Rev 2:10) But also to realise that this is beyond anything we can do on our own and to recognise that we can only do it in his strength.

c. give up v33

with all that has been said we might well think I'll give up. However, the conclusion for Jesus of all that he has been saying in these verses is "In the same way" or better so therefore "anyone of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple".

That is a summary of what he has been saying. The give up is simply another way of saying put me first before everything else.

As we have said that is hard and if we are to walk the way of Christ Jesus, if we are to follow him and truly be his disciples we will need his strength.

But you know some here may be saying I'm not sure this is for me. Some may think if this is what is involved I don't want to start and others may be thinking I'm not sure in the light of this that I want to carry on following Jesus. If you are wondering is it worth it because Jesus is asking so much then let me quickly say two things.

i. to lose is to save

Jesus speaks here about hating our own life, about taking up the cross which means as it were daily saying no to our selfish desires and preferring to do what Jesus wants. Elsewhere in Luke he speaks of losing your life. Listen to what he says, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:23-25)

Why did Jesus call upon this crowd to put him first in everything even before their own lives? It was because this is the way to eternal life. Yes we can be god in our own lives doing exactly as we wish, doing everything our way and in that sense saving our lives for ourselves but in so doing we cut ourselves off from Jesus and ultimately we lose our lives because we cut ourselves off from heaven. Conversely if we let Jesus be Lord then through him is heaven, the way to life, opened to us. It is a very stark choice Jesus was offering those in the crowd following him and which he offers to us.

ii. to give up is to get

but what Jesus was saying was not just about eternity. It was not just what has been described as "pie in the sky when you die". No Jesus was saying if you wish to follow me then let me be the leader, the one who leads, guides or shepherds you. In John 10 Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd and said "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10)

Jesus came to bring us the fullness of life and we get that by following him. He will enhance and bless our relationship with our parents, our spouses and our children if we will let him be Lord. He will bless us with good things to enjoy if we will let him be Lord. In short if we give up everything to him we will not be wanting and we will not regret it.

He asks everything from us but gives to us more than we could ever imagine and in so many ways. In Matt 13:44 Jesus said "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

This is what is at stake, the Kingdom of heaven, being God's child, a disciple of Jesus. To be his disciple we have to give up everything to him but that is a great joy.

Can you see that? Can you see that what Jesus is saying in Luke 14:25-33 is not negative but very positive? All the treasures of God are there for those who will give their lives to him and follow him.

3. Being Disciples

At the end of v34 Jesus said "He who has ears to hear let him hear". So what should we hear?

a. accept – Jesus is offering us the very best way of life. As the Good Shepherd he calls us to follow him that we might have life as God the Father intended for us.

b. submit – but to get that life we have to submit to Jesus as Lord. We have to repent of trying to run our lives our own way and let Jesus be our saviour and Lord. We have to give over our lives to him and ask him to help us in our relationships, in our work situations, in our view of ourselves, in our possessions. In every part of our lives we must submit to him as Lord because he is God, and because he has our best interests at heart in everything. However such submission to Jesus as Lord requires

C. trust - we need to trust in his goodness, that he will only do and guide us in ways that are for our best. We need to trust him especially when things get tough and we can't see why things are as they are or where he is leading us. We need to trust that he will help us when the other things tempt us and we want other things more than him. We need to trust that eventually we will be in heaven with him. We need to trust he is good and he is faithful – can you do that?

Can you accept Jesus as Lord of your life? Can you submit every part to him and say take control here, lead and guide me in this? Can you trust him for today and eternity?

"Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine and ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness!