

The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-33 NRSV

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

In this passage, Jesus (or the writer) was making use of a common literary/oratory device. The fancy word for it is hyperbole (ie. exaggeration).

This device was also used when describing the fate of the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus, in Luke 16:19-31. In this illustration, Jesus uses the fires of Hades to describe the pain and regret that the Rich man was experiencing in the afterlife. Obviously, in the afterlife we no longer have physical bodies, so literal flames would have absolutely no effect on us. The flames are not literal, but instead symbolize emotional pain and regret. On another level, the flames represent purification by fire, which would actually be a positive thing. That is the way the fires of God’s judgments are described in Zephaniah 3:8-9.

Another example of Jesus’ use of hyperbole is in Matt. 5:19, where Jesus said, “*If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*” Again, in the afterlife we no longer possess physical bodies. In 1 Corinthians 15:50, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.*” So, again, Jesus used the device of hyperbole to make a point in very graphic, memorable terms. He is not instructing us to gouge out our eyes or cut off our physical body members. Instead, He is telling us avoid temptations that cause us to stumble morally and ethically.

So, what are we to make of Jesus urging the crowds to hate their fathers, mothers, wives and children. It is **EXTREMELY OBVIOUS** here that Jesus was employing hyperbole to make a point. Jesus was not asking his disciples to literally hate their families, or pick up a cross and suffer crucifixion on a daily basis, or to literally hate their lives. Jesus came in order that we might have an abundant lives (John 10:10). The point Jesus was making is that Christian discipleship is going to cost you something. Sometimes friends and family will need to be “walked away from.” Sometimes there will be hardship and suffering for the benefit of those who need your help. Although, following Jesus can be costly, those costs are far outweighed by the benefits. The costs of discipleship cannot even remotely be compared with future rewards in Heaven. According to 1 Corinthians 2:9, *“eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”*