

No Small Print

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[0 : 00] So our reading this evening is from Luke chapter 14 verse 15 to the end. That's verse 35. Page 1048 in the Pew Bibles.

So Luke chapter 14 verse 15. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Jesus replied, A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, I have just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said, I have just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out.

Please excuse me. Still another said, I have just got married, so I can't come. The servant came back and reported this to his master.

[1 : 16] Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Sir, the servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room. Then the master told his servant, go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full.

I tell you, not one of those who are invited will get a taste of my banquet. Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them, he said, If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?

For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, This person began to build and wasn't able to finish. Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king.

[2 : 41] Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able, with 10,000 men, to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? 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, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. 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 heap. It is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

Amen. Great. Thank you, Jackie, so much for reading.

Good evening, everyone. My name is Andy Gemmill. I'm a member of the congregation here. It's great to be in Luke 14 with you this evening. Please, it will be a great help if you keep that part of the Bible open.

[3 : 48] We'll be mainly in chapter 14, but we'll be dotting around just a little bit. Why don't I pray as we start? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your life-giving words and the words of your Son.

And we pray, please, that you will open our eyes to see him more clearly, to understand his words. And we pray, please, that your spirit would so work in us that our lives are transformed as we hear what you have to say to us.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if you've ever reflected on how off-putting the public face of Christianity often is.

Think, on the one hand, of the notice board outside the average UK high street church with its rather less than exciting poster.

Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas, as though he's a kind of pet. Carpenter of Nazareth seeks joiners. Come in for a faith lift.

[5 : 03] Or the stunningly brilliant, don't let worry kill you, let the church help. Let the church help, sorry. Or the very common and slightly sad, all welcome.

They tend to sound rather desperate to have somebody, anyone, pay attention and come through the door. On the other hand, there's the various contemporary TV versions.

God wants to bless your life so super abundantly. And five minutes later, the inevitable, send your faith donation to this address and see how much God will bless you super abundantly.

So often Christianity seems either desperate to get your money or desperate to have anyone at all show any interest. What a massive relief it is, therefore, to see Jesus in action.

For he is so different from that stuff. Look at verse 25. Great crowds of people are following Jesus.

[6 : 08] For a start, he doesn't have to persuade people to follow him. You cannot keep them away at this point in the story. Second, and even more unusual, he doesn't hide anything.

There's no big appeal for money five minutes down the line. There isn't loads of small print kept to one side. Three times in this short passage from verse 25 to the end, he speaks openly with the strongest of negatives.

Look at the end of verse 26. Four very negative words. Cannot be my disciple. And again in verse 27.

Cannot be my disciple. And verse 33. You cannot be my disciples. These are not the words of someone desperate to feel significant in the world or to get your money from you.

These are the words of a supremely impressive person who knows exactly where he's going and what he's doing and what it will be like to follow him. He's just so refreshingly different.

[7 : 20] Let's set the scene then. Jesus is on a journey. Verse 25. Crowds are accompanying him. He's going somewhere. Three things to say about this journey to set the scene.

Number one, it's a very important journey. Back in chapter 9, Luke tells us that as the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Now folks, for us, Jerusalem is just another city. But in the Bible, Jerusalem is a city which has been right at the heart of God's love and God's activity for hundreds of years.

Just flip back to chapter 13 and verse 33. 13, 33. Here Jesus speaks of Jerusalem with huge affection but utter realism.

I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.

[8 : 26] How often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were not willing. Deep affection but utter realism.

He loves this city and he expects to die when he arrives there. Let me just say if you're new to the Christian message, warm welcome to you this evening.

It's great to have you. The death of Jesus is right at the heart of the Christian message. When you grasp how Jesus' death fits in, you're well on the way to understanding what the whole of the Christian message is about.

Because that's what Jesus is aiming for. He's going to Jerusalem explicitly to die there. It's not an accident. It's right at the center of his focus.

And so if you haven't yet quite got why it is that Jesus had to die, well, keep coming and keep looking. And keep asking that question.

[9 : 30] Why so intent on dying? He's intending to go there. So all the way through this part of the gospel, Luke gives little reminders like chapter 14 verse 25.

Great crowds accompanied him on the way. Second, the further he goes, the more people join him. In chapter 11, the crowds are increasing. In chapter 12 verse 1, a crowd of many thousands had gathered. Here, 1425, large crowds are traveling with him.

Why so great a following? Well, three reasons, I think. First, he's really impressive looking. He heals the sick. He exercises total control over evil. He even raises the dead.

He's so impressive. Who would not want to follow and see what happens? More than that, he's just the sort of person they were looking for. They look forward to the day that God had promised when God would send his king to Jerusalem and rule over the nations and rescue them from their enemies and change everything for them.

[10:42] He looks such a good candidate for that role at this point in the story. And more than that, on that journey to Jerusalem, Jesus himself has talked about a great victory celebration.

We heard it read about in the section just before this. A great banquet when God's king comes to rule over God's kingdom and do all those wonderful things.

End sickness forever. Remove evil forever. And death forever. And Jesus is looking so like he could be, could be that king.

He has the power. He has the words. He could be the one. He's talking about it. And so the crowds have grown. Third thing to say about the journey.

As the crowd has got bigger, Jesus' words of caution have got stronger and stronger. Now, please turn back to chapter 9, verse 57.

[11:45] Chapter 9, verse 57. There have been notes of caution in his teaching. A man said to Jesus, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus replied, how absolutely marvelous. I'm so delighted you've decided to take this wonderful step of faith. Well, not quite, is it? Foxes have holes and birds of the air of nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

I'm not going anywhere comfortable. Or look at chapter 11, verse 29. 11, 29.

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, I'm so glad all you good folk are here to share this experience with me. Again, not quite.

This is a wicked generation. It's not inviting that, is it? Notes of caution all the way through. And in our passage, this turns into a full-on warning.

[12:50] Look at 1425 again. Turning to the crowds, he said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

Strong, isn't it? But necessary. He's heading for a royal banquet. A great celebration.

A magnificent victory. But in between him and that great celebration lies a brutal death. It's as if his death reaches out to him down the road from Jerusalem.

And these people need to know that because it would affect not only him but them. And so do we need to know that. Because the shadow of the cross of Jesus reaches forwards in time to us.

And touches the life of everyone who's ever followed Jesus. Ever. These warnings are necessary. But folks, isn't it wonderfully refreshing that they're there?

[14:12] We're so used to leaders hiding things from us so as to remain popular. We're so used to having the less palatable bits of our insurance policies hidden in the small print.

But, I mean, you know you're supposed to read the terms and conditions, aren't you? And we can hardly even be bothered because, A, there's so much of them. And, B, they're so tiny you can hardly read them. And then one day somebody steals your hamster and you read the policy and find that actually hamsters are not covered.

And you have to go and buy a new one for money. And we all know how easy it is to be swept along with a crowd of others on a kind of wave of enthusiasm.

Only to find out that when the wave breaks, the things we hoped for don't materialize. So isn't it refreshing to come across a leader who does not do small print?

Who gets the difficult things out on the table right at the beginning, repeatedly, so that people hear them clearly. Who doesn't want anyone to be in doubt about what he's doing or what following him might mean.

[15:25] It's just wonderfully reassuring. Nothing worse than being misled or starting off with false expectations. Jesus is eager that no one should be in that position.

So, with that reassuring reality in place, let's look at the first section of our leg of this very important journey. If I can get my screen to behave, we will move on to that section.

Excuse me a second. Yeah, good, great. Okay, Jesus says there are two things. Two absolute requirements of anyone who follows him in this passage.

Everyone who wants to follow him needs to know these things. What makes a true disciple?

Number one, total loyalty. And this is expressed in shocking terms.

If anyone comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and life, that person cannot be my disciple.

[16:36] Now, folks, let me say, if those words were not actually on the page, you would never have thought they could possibly be in the Bible. Isn't Jesus supposed to be gentle and meek and mild?

And aren't Christians supposed to be pro-family? What on earth is he saying here? Well, it's a way of speaking. He is not saying that following him is like being a member of a religious cult. It's one of the classic features of religious cults that they try and cut you off from your family. But in the Gospels, Jesus rebukes people for not honoring their parents.

No, what he's saying is that he is to be the primary relationship for those who follow him. First loyalty belongs to him.

He's to be the most important person in the lives of those who follow him. Life following Jesus is to be life with him in charge.

[17:33] And he's not against family and friends. He's against rivals. And, of course, family and friends can be real rivals to following Jesus. Ask yourself, what's stopping me following Jesus more wholeheartedly today?

And I'd be very surprised if somewhere near the top of the list wasn't something like, if I'm keener as a Christian, that person who's close to me might not like it.

It could be a parent, sibling, boyfriend or girlfriend, even a child. It could be the best friend. It could be an employer. It could be someone in church.

It could be anyone. Often the biggest threat to following Jesus is our closest human relationships. Because we derive such a sense of security from our closest human relationships.

There are primary opinion formers in lots of ways. I know you won't believe this if you're 20-something this evening. But let me tell you that when you're 40-something, you will find yourself becoming day after day more like your parents.

[18:45] 40-somethings, is this not true? Did you not wake up one morning and find that you turned into your mother or your father? You know, gender appropriate. People have very important, very powerful effects on us.

And it can be very difficult to step out of line with their desires and concerns for us. Now Jesus is not saying we're to cultivate negative relationships here.

But he is saying that if you follow him, you'll find yourself sometimes at odds with those closest to you. I remember I became a Christian when I was 19.

One good friend at school simply didn't want to be friends anymore in the same way. Many of you will experience the same thing. You may, as you go on in life, find your parents unhappy with your career choices.

Or how you bring up your children. Or any number of things. Or your employers unsatisfied with your priorities in life and work. And that kind of thing. Jesus says, if you want to follow me, I'm going to be the Lord of everything in life.

[19:47] And total loyalty belongs to me. That's the first thing. Total loyalty. Second, death to self. Verse 27. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

When Jesus took up his cross, he put his own interests to one side and endured great difficulty to save us from our sins and their consequences.

It brought great conflict to him to do that. And he expects everyone who follows him to follow according to the same pattern.

To put their own self-interest to one side and be willing to have him in control. Which will bring conflict. Conflict with the world outside. Conflict with the sinful nature inside.

And of course for these disciples on this journey, it didn't actually involve much of that. For by the time it came to cross time for him, all of them had already deserted. Without actually much difficulty to them.

[21:00] All of the people in this huge crowd had deserted. He alone suffered the pains of the cross. He alone gave his life for the sins of the world.

All on his own. All on his own. He died so that we might be rescued from death and hell. No one was with him.

But the point he makes here is that everyone who follows him, everyone, can expect in some way to share something of the hostility and the inner turmoil of having to say goodbye to self.

That he himself endured. If you follow him in life, there will be things that come to you that you'll have to endure because they're very difficult. And there are things that will come naturally to you or have to put to death.

Because they're not appropriate. And if you're on the road to that great victory banquet at the end, you cannot escape the difficulties on the journey. So, what makes a true disciple?

[22 : 11] Well, of course, there are all kinds of people who have the label Christian. But he says there are really only two sorts of people. Being a Christian is a straightforwardly binary thing.

You either are one or you're not one. And it's characterized by these two things. Total loyalty to Jesus and death to self. So, let me encourage you with these words.

If you're finding it difficult to follow Jesus at the moment. If you're finding it is more difficult than you expected. Take heart.

Because that is a sign of being on the right road. If you were not finding it difficult in some way or other. You might want to wonder whether you were really on the right road.

Now, folks, this is really counterintuitive, isn't it? Really counterintuitive. You tend to think that if you're going in the right direction spiritually. Things will be easier. In many ways, that's such a natural assumption to make.

[23 : 14] But it is absolutely not what Jesus says here. Cross-carrying is the order of the day. And cross-carrying could not possibly be easier than non-cross-carrying, could it?

It could not possibly be easier. It's a sign of being on the right road. That you're finding it difficult in certain ways. So, two absolute requirements.

And then three vital considerations. Jesus speaks three little parabolic statements. And we're going to deal with these briefly. And they all emphasize how important it is.

How important it is to think hard about what following him will involve. So, here's the first. Verse 27. Don't follow Jesus lightly.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you've enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying, That person began to build and wasn't able to finish.

[24 : 18] Folks, this is a financial example. It's to do with resources. It's a parable about building. A bloke building a building. He's got great plans. But everyone knows that it takes more than great plans to pull off a great project.

I wonder if you watch any of you at Grand Designs. The great British dream home building nightmare program. Three things have struck me about Grand Designs.

Number one, it always takes longer than they think it's going to take. Number two, it always is miles more expensive than they think it's going to cost. And number three, it's always massively more stressful than they thought it was going to be.

They thought it was going to be fun, but it is not fun. And somehow the reality just proves to be bigger than the concept. And most of them don't seem to have watched enough episodes of Grand Designs to have learned that very basic lesson.

It's always like this. I think this example is about weighing up the cost of the thing in advance. What did it mean for Jesus to bear his cross?

[25 : 22] Well, it meant misunderstanding, desertion of friends, false accusation from enemies, an unjust trial, public humiliation, and being executed.

Now, because of the gospel's impact on our nation in the past, we live in a rather sheltered bit of the world, where Christians have felt so at home they've really been part of the establishment.

The grandeur of formal religion's role in the recent coronation is a really good example of that. But that's not normal in our world.

I looked up the Barnabas Aid website today. Here are headlines, May the 10th. More than 50 killed in Indian anti-Christian violence. Christian couple released from Iranian prison.

Two Chibok girls rescued in Nigeria. 25 worshippers held by terrorists at Kaduna State in Nigeria. Christian wedding photographer and Muslim couple accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.

[26 : 33] Six Muslim background believers faced death for apostasy in Libya. That's normal, and it always has been in our world. Don't follow Jesus lightly.

It's very easy to be attracted to him, isn't it? He's so attractive, but the cost of his cross-carrying was not attractive for him. Don't follow him lightly.

Don't just follow him because your friends are, or because it seems like a good idea at the time. Take a cold, hard look at cross-carrying. Don't follow lightly.

Second, on the other hand, don't resist him foolishly. Verse 31. Well, suppose a king is about to go to war against another king.

Won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? It's a parable about warfare. Imagine you're a king.

[27 : 37] A foreign king is advancing on your country. He has a much, much, much bigger army than your army. Before you decide to go out to fight him, it might be sensible to think about whether you have any hope of winning at all, or whether you'd be better off trying to make peace before he arrives on your doorstep.

The point of this parable is that we'd be mad to think we can resist the coming rule of Jesus by fighting against him. We'd be mad to think that.

Far better to ask him for the peace he offers while there's still time. It's about getting your head straight, facing reality. What a stupid thing it would be to resist this great king, to put up a fight. It's not a fight we'll ever win in the end. So, two stories. Put them together. Don't follow lightly. For goodness sake, make sure you've worked out what's going to cost.

But for goodness sake, do follow. You'd be an idiot not to. He came to offer peace before he comes in victory. For goodness sake, do follow.

[28 : 44] I wonder how you are at internet shopping. I think people tend to polarize with internet. I have people already shaking their heads ruefully. I think people, internet shopping tends to polarize people into the impulse buyers and the nerdy researchers.

The impulse buyers. I can buy things at the click of a button. It's so exciting. Or the nerdy researchers. You know, I need to weigh up all this. I'm talking about myself here now. I must weigh up all the data.

I'm buying a kettle. It's going to take a couple of months to sort out which kettle is the right kettle to buy. Anyway, this is the kind of parabolic setting here is don't be either an impulse buyer or a nerdy researcher.

Don't just do it. Don't just hit the button. But do buy the thing. Do buy the thing. Don't research forever. And the third one.

I think the third one just says keep going in the same way you started off. Verse 34. Salt is good. But if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

[29 : 54] It's fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap. It's thrown out. Loads of ink wasted in books and commentaries wondering what on earth Jesus is talking about here.

Salt for us is stuff you get in a sack and it's all nice and white. It's really straightforward. It's always salt. It doesn't lose its taste. I think the best way of understanding this is that salt back then is not like that.

It's mixed with a whole bunch of stuff. And if you leave it lying around for a while, it just, all the saltiness leaches out of it. And all you've got left is bits of grit and stuff which is not good for anything.

I think that's the point. If salt lost its taste, it would be useless for anything that salt is usually used for. In the same way, to start as a follower of Jesus but not continue to the end would be a total waste of time, wouldn't it?

To start on that difficult but ultimately magnificently rewarding route, to start on that and not to continue would be a terrible waste of having started out.

[31 : 04] Conclusions then. Being a Christian is an intensely personal thing. It means following a person. And the person is the greatest person.

A victorious king whose great celebration banquet is an absolute certainty. An absolute certainty. The way to the banquet is to follow him.

Notice the banquet is not accessed by ticket. You can't buy the ticket and put it on your shelf and just carry on with life the same as life is.

Like you can buy a ticket for a gig or for a meal or something. No, the price of entry to the banquet has already been paid. And there aren't any tickets. But to get in, you have to go through the door with the one who paid the price of entry.

It's the only way in. You've got to be with him, on the same road as him, following the same pattern as him, belonging with him.

[32 : 18] Then the door is open to you. That's the only way in. Total loyalties demanded. He has to be followed. And following him has a certain pattern.

Cross-carrying, that's the way he went. That's the way all his followers go. So, weigh it up. But do follow.

And if cross-carrying is hard from time to time, well, that's a sign that you're on the right road. For that was the road he took.

And he sits now at the right hand of God and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And his kingdom will have no end. It was the right road for him. It's the right road for us. So, keep going. And never, ever give up. Let's pray together. Just a minute to respond ourselves to what the Lord has said to us.

[33 : 26] And then I'll lead us in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Father in heaven, for the clarity of Jesus' words.

Thank you that he is the victorious king. Thank you that he put his own concerns to one side, his own comfort to one side, and endured such hostility against himself so that we might be saved. Thank you that he would have a great understanding of what it means to follow him. Thank you so much that he calls people to follow him.

Thank you so much that he calls people to follow him. Thank you so much that there are no false promises. Thank you so much for that, thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 37] Be a part of your logration. Thank you for your judgment, dearie. Thank you, Jesus. Amen. So, please help us, wherever we are. Either we're looking in for the first time. Whether we've set foot down the road, whether we've been on the road for a long time.

To take courage from Jesus' words and to persevere to the end. We ask these things in his name. Amen.