

The Cost of Being a Disciple
An Exegesis of Luke 14:25-35

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1. General Introduction

If one wishes to learn about discipleship, then the Gospel of Luke is a good place to look. Luke, as well as the other synoptic writers, has much to say about what it means to follow Jesus Christ and to make Him *kyrios*, "Lord" and "Master." The stated purpose of the Gospel of Luke is found in 1:4: so that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things which have been taught. J. A. Fitzmyer explains, "Luke writes from the period of the church and intends to assure Theophilus and other readers like him that what the church of his day was teaching and practicing was rooted in the Period of Jesus, to strengthen them in fidelity to that teaching and practice."¹ In Acts the story of Jesus and His Church is continued.²

The third gospel has traditionally been attributed to Luke, the beloved physician. However, there is no internal evidence that Luke wrote this gospel. Fitzmyer gives these clues about the author: (1) the author is not an eyewitness but probably a second or third generation Christian (1:2); (2) he is not a Palestinian native; (3) he is well-educated; and (4) "he differs from other evangelists in his desire to relate the story of Jesus not only to the contemporary world and culture, but also to the growth and development of the nascent Christian church." Fitzmyer also states that evidence for Lukan authorship comes from the title of the most ancient manuscript,

1 J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* Vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 9.

2 Acts can be seen a second volume, although radically different from Luke, as John Nolland points out (*Luke 1-9:20* [Dallas: Word Books, 1989], xxxiii). See Acts 1:1 which contains the significant *protos logos*, "first book," believed to be the Gospel of Luke.

P⁷⁵, which dates from 175-225.³ We know very little about Luke since he is mentioned only three times in the New Testament (Phlm. 24; Col. 4:14; and 2 Tim 4:11). The strongest internal support for Lukan authorship comes from the "we-sections" of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).⁴

There is great uncertainty about the date and place of writing of this gospel. Fitzmyer concludes that the best date would be after Mark's writing and after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, probably around A.D. 80-85. But the place is merely anyone's guess. The audience, moreover, is probably Greek Christians in a Greek setting since Luke is concerned with (1) relating the Christ-event to a Greco-Roman literary tradition, (2) the dedicating of the work to a Greek (Theophilus), and (3) his desire to relate salvation promised to Israel to Gentiles.⁵

Luke's Gospel is written about the events (peri logon, 1:4) of the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The central motif is the Christ event. Norval Geldenhuys says,

[Luke] wrote his Gospel not merely to write a beautiful story, to afford pleasure to his readers or to satisfy curiosity, and not even just for the sake of giving instruction. He wrote with the object of convincing, converting, saving and spiritually edifying his fellow-men The Gospel was written 'out of faith unto faith' in order to hold up Jesus as Lord and Redeemer.⁶

The passage at hand fits well with this central purpose. The Christ event did not bring peace on earth. So radical was the new reality brought in Christ that division even among family members would be the result (Luke 12:51ff). Luke is determined to hand down faithfully the radical call of discipleship. In Luke 14:25-35, Jesus explains that true discipleship is only for those who are willing to count and pay the high cost of following Him. This paper will attempt

3 Fitzmyer, vol. 1, 35.

4 For an extended discussion on authorship, see Fitzmyer, vol. 1, 35-53.

5 Ibid., 57, 58.

6 Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 42.

to exegete this thought as found in this passage with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the call and cost of discipleship.

2. Text

The following translation from the GNT³ will serve as our text.

²⁵Great crowds were walking along with him. He turned and^a said to them, ²⁶"If any one wishes to come^b to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even his own soul, is not able to be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me is not able to be my disciple.

²⁸For would not^d a certain one of you who wishes^e to build a tower first while sitting down count the cost and see if he has enough to complete the project^e? ²⁹So that the case would not be that^f when he lays the foundation and finds he is unable to complete everything, the ones who are watching might begin to ridicule him ³⁰saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

³¹Or would not^g a king who was going to encounter another king in war first while sitting decide if he is able with ten thousand to fight the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²But if he is not (able), while he is^h still far away he should send messengers and askⁱ for terms of peace^j. ³³Therefore, in this fashion everyone of you who does not give up all his own possessions is not able to be my disciple.

³⁴Therefore, salt is good; but if even the salt should be made tasteless, in what way could it be flavored again^k? ³⁵It is neither suitable for the earth nor the dung heap; it is thrown out. The one who has ears to hear let him hear."

Notes on Translation:

- a. Lit., "and turning." Verses 25-26 are one sentence in Greek but are split up here for English syntax.
- b. *Erchetai* is a present active indicative used as a present conative showing an act contemplated or attempted. The ei at the beginning of verse 26 supports this.
- c. *Thelon* is used attributively with *humon*.
- d. "Would not" comes from the context of the verse, particularly the *ouchi*, the meaning behind *thelon*, and the *tis*.
- e. Lit., "if he has (enough) unto completion?"

- f. Lit., "in order that lest."
- g. "Would not" comes from the context of the verse, particularly the *ouchi* and *tis*.
- h. *Autou . . . ontos* forms a genitive absolute.
- i. Lit., "sending messengers should ask."
- j. Lit., "the things toward peace."
- k. Lit., "in what way will (it) be made favorable?"

3. Context within Luke

This passage is found in a strategic location within Luke. Fred Craddock (and many before him) calls the section of 9:51-19:28, "The Journey to Jerusalem." He points out that 9:51 makes a significant break from what precedes it and sets forth what is to follow. In this section, Luke reminds us that Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem (9:51, 53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). Craddock adds, "Geographical references are puzzling and do not support movement from Galilee to Jerusalem. . . . Today students of Luke generally conclude that the journey is not geographical but is an editorial structure created by Luke." He adds that this section is particularly Lukan since it contains stories common only to Luke or arranged uniquely by Luke.⁷

Charles Talbert suggests a chiasmic pattern in 10:21-18:30. He puts 14:25-15:32 along side of 12:29-13:9. In each of these sections he sees four themes present in this order:

1. Transcendence of family loyalties (12:29-53)
 2. Prudent action taken ahead of time (12:54-59)
 3. Repentance (13:1-5)
 4. A fruitless tree is cut down (13:6-9)
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1. Transcendence of family loyalties (14:25-27)
 2. Prudent action taken ahead of time (14:28-33)
 3. Tasteless salt which is thrown away (14:34-35)
 4. Repentance (ch. 15).⁸

In the broad context, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51) begins with an encounter between

⁷ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 139-140.

⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 52.

Jesus and the man wishing to bury his father. The message is clear from the beginning: commitment to Christ is total and radical. This call to discipleship intensifies as Jesus journeys. He sends out the seventy-two with little but His words of instruction and promise (ch. 10). This call upon the would-be disciple takes on magnitude when Jesus says, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters" (11:23). The conflict of the cross becomes increasingly clear when Jesus pronounces the six woes upon the Pharisees and experts on the law (11:37ff). Great crowds trample to see Jesus (12:1), but little do they know what they are in for. Luke establishes Jesus as teacher and miracle worker. This establishment is far beyond the people's expectations. Jesus probably surprised many when He healed the crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:10ff), and when he visited the Pharisee's house (14:1).

The dinner at the Pharisee's house creates the opportunity for Jesus to teach on the inclusiveness of the kingdom and to tell the Parable of the Great Banquet (14:15). The point of this parable is that invitation to discipleship, that is, the kingdom of God, is open to all. No excuse (14:18-20) is valid enough for one not to enter the kingdom. The call continues despite those who refuse the invitation.

Fitzmyer points out that in 14:25ff Jesus shifts His thoughts from the inclusiveness of the parable's wide-reaching invitation to the specific conditions of discipleship. Fitzmyer adds, "Entry into the kingdom has its own conditions, and these Lukan verses stand in antithetic parallelism to vv. 15-24."⁹ I. Howard Marshall sees this section as taking up the theme of 14:18ff and developing it further, only with a different scene and audience.¹⁰

Some debate rages over the authenticity of this passage. Many such as Marshall see this passage as "probably a Lukan composition based on Q material, but also including material from

⁹ Fitzmyer, vol. 2, 1060.

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 591.

other sources."¹¹ David Tiede, on the other hand, concludes that since the parallels to Matthew and Mark are scattered and weak that Luke probably did not derive the structure from Q or Mark. He adds, "Perhaps the repetitions in the section would suggest a memory pattern, and the possibility of other written sources (such as 'L') can never be excluded."¹² Craddock designates these challenges to the authenticity of this section as: (1) the teachings repeated elsewhere in Luke, (2) the lack of internal unity in the passage, (3) the abrupt shift from the audience and content of the previous section and the shift from the private home to the public audience.¹³

In Luke's account, Jesus has brought up the subject of cross bearing and the radical call of discipleship several times before this occasion. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." And in 9:57ff, Jesus calls a man walking with Him to follow Him. The man is not willing to pay the price, but rather wants to say good bye to his family. The theme rings out that to follow Jesus is the highest goal for humanity. This theme is repeated in our passage, Luke 14:25-35.

4. Exegesis

4.1. Introduction and Setting, vs.25

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and the underlying theme to this is that Jesus is actually on His way to the cross. The great masses of people were following Him, but for what reason? Had they counted the cost of discipleship? Had they understood the demands of the kingdom of God? Jesus addresses several crucial issues in this passage that were very relevant for the "great crowds" following him. Verse 25 introduces these issues and sets up the scene for the great call to discipleship.

Luke begins this passage in verse 25 with a verb in the imperfect tense possibly showing

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David L. Tiede, *Luke* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 269.

¹³ Craddock, 180-181.

the continuous following of the "great crowds." This verb is a compound of *syn* "with" prefixed to *poreuomai* "I go." This is followed with *auto* in the dative case either because (1) the pronoun's case is attracted to the *syn* prefix, or (2) because the pronoun is a locative of place; the crowds were following Christ as He journeyed towards His goal of Jerusalem. Marshall says that this combination keeps the theme of Jesus' journey before the reader.¹⁴

In the second clause of verse 25, Luke uses a preposition (*pros*) plus a pronoun, an accusative of reference (*autois*), with a verb of speaking (*eipen*) instead of using the more common dative of reference (*tois autois*) (see 1:13; 4:36; 5:22; 7:24, 40; 15:3, 22; 22:15, 70; 23:4; 24:18, 44). This form is rare in the other Synoptic Gospels but occurs occasionally in classical and Hellenistic Greek. This has been called a "Semitism" since it is related to the Hebrew le- or el-.¹⁵ The introductory verse (25) is probably a Lukan creation possibly due to its vagueness.¹⁶ Furthermore, the idea that Jesus "turned" (*strapheis*) to address a crowd is a common occurrence in Luke (7:9; 9:55; 10:23; 22:61; 23:28). Craddock points out that since the crowds came to Jesus and since He did not call them, "one is to read what follows, therefore, as the response of Jesus to the enthusiasm of persons who seem totally unaware that he is going to Jerusalem and to the cross."¹⁷

4.2. Conditions of Discipleship, vss. 26-27

After Jesus turned, He spoke to the "great crowds" in very powerful words. Jesus via Luke was not one to hide the seriousness of the call to discipleship. In verses 25-26, Jesus lays out this call in words and phrases that show the actual cost of discipleship. A careful structural analysis of these verses will help us see this cost. These two verses are carefully structured and

14 Marshall, 592.

15 Fitzmyer, vol. I, 116.

16 Fitzmyer, vol. 1, 1060, referring to J. Jeremias, *Die Sprache*, 241.

17 Craddock, 181.

contain several parallels and reoccurring thoughts. The following structural analysis is a possible arrangement of these two verses.

A If anyone comes to me
B and does not hate his own father
and wife
and children
and brothers
and sisters
and still even his own soul

C is not able to be my disciple.
B¹ Whoever does not carry his own cross
A¹ and come after me
C¹ is unable to be my disciple.

There are three clear phrases in verse 26 (A, B, and C). These same phrases reoccur in verse 27 (B¹, A¹, C¹), but in a different order and in a slightly different wording. The blue circles represent the inclusiveness of the call. Discipleship is open to *tis* and *hostis*. The black circles show that this inclusiveness is a conditioned response of the individual. The words in squares show that Jesus is the primary goal of the would-be disciple. A and A¹ represent the direction of the call. B and B¹ represent the condition upon the call. C and C¹ represent the result of the unmet condition of B and B¹. In passing, it might be mentioned that verse 33 is very similar to verses 26-27, but this will be explored later.

An exploration of syntax and word meanings will help illumine the call to discipleship found in these two verses. All of the verb tenses in verses 26-27 are in the present tense. Since the call to discipleship is timeless, it might be justifiable to classify these verbs as gnomic presents. Although the reflexive pronoun *heautou* comes after the accusative of direct object *ton patera*, it could also go with the *metera*, *gunaika*, *tekna*, *adelphous*, and *adelphas* since all these

too are in the accusative case and form a complex direct object linked with the conjunction *kai* (hence, the above vertical line in verse 26). In verse 26, the *mou* is enclitic (the accent is found in *einai*, the same as in verse 27) and so the emphasis falls on *mathetes*.¹⁸

Two significant words in these verses are *misei* "hate" and *bastazei* "carry." First, one would tend to find Jesus' call to hate one's family a shock considering He called His disciples to love one another. *Misei* can denote ordinary human hatred. However, hating one's family was forbidden in the OT (Lev. 19:17) and was the same as shedding blood (Dt. 19:11). As O. Michel writes, *misei* in our context "is not psychological hatred but a total commitment that gives absolute priority to Jesus. It is to be understood pneumatologically and Christologically."¹⁹ Furthermore, Alfred Plummer states, The context and the parallel passages (Mt. 6:24, 10:37) show that the case supposed is one in which choice must be made between natural affection and loyalty to Christ. In most cases these two are not incompatible; and to hate one's parents *as such* would be monstrous (Mt. 15:4). But Christ's followers must be ready, if necessary, to act towards what is dearest to them as if it were an object of hatred.²⁰

Michael D. Goulder attributes Luke's use of strong language to his asceticism. Goulder adds, "Luke is nailing his colours to the mast: no commitment, no salvation."²¹ In another way, G. B. Caird says,

The semitic mind is comfortable only with extremes--light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate--primary colours with no half-shades of compromise in between. . . . Thus for the followers of Jesus, to hate their families meant giving the family second place in their affections. Ties of kinship must not be allowed to interfere with their absolute

¹⁸ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 364.

¹⁹ O. Michel, in Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 599.

²⁰ Plummer, 364.

²¹ Michael Goulder, *Luke A New Paradigm*, vol. 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 596.

commitment to the kingdom.²²

A second significant word in these verses is *bastazei*. The simple meaning of this word is "to bear," "to carry," or "to lift up." A person bears a burden (Mt. 8:17; 20:12). People carry such things as a pitcher of water (Mark 14:13), a child (Luke 11:27), and stones (John 10:31). Here and in John 19:17 it is used in reference to bearing a cross. As Plummer offers, here it is used figuratively (of the disciple) and in John literally (the actual cross of Christ).²³ The redaction critic might ask, would it have been possible for Jesus' listeners to understand the bearing of a cross, or would this reference to bearing a cross be the work of the evangelist Luke after the cross event and after the resurrection? In answering this, we must bear in mind that crucifixion and cross bearing was a common execution practice for the Romans before and during the time of Jesus.²⁴ Geldenhuys states, "About A.D. 6 the Romans crucified hundreds of followers of the rebel, Judas the Gaulonite; and for the inhabitants of Palestine crucifixion was a common spectacle both before and after that date."²⁵ It would be safe to assume that Jesus' audience understood what bearing a cross meant, but may not have understood the cost. Only after Jesus' own death would the true cost of discipleship be fully realized.

Verses 26-27 are unique and yet share common elements with other synoptic passages. Since these verses share elements with Matthew, it is believed that they come from the Q source. Verse 26 is a combination of Matt. 10:37, 16:24, and 19:29. These verses are also paralleled in the Gospel of Thomas 55 and 101. To what extent did Luke redact this passage and to what extent did he edit other sources? This is a difficult question to answer. Behind these passages there lies either a common tradition, a common document (Q), or a common memory of the

22 G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St Luke* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), 178.

23 Plummer, 364.

24 For a description of crucifixion, see M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

25 Geldenhuys, note #2, 400.

events which actually took place. Craddock offers that the *inclusio* of the refrains in vs. 26, 27, 33 "serves as a literary device for gathering sayings that otherwise would not belong together."²⁶ Goulder labels this Luke's *oratio recta*, the repetition of the moral.²⁷

All three synoptic gospels speak of bearing one's cross. Mark's passage (8:34-9:1) speaks of self-denial and does not mention family. Matthew's passage (10:34-39) is much closer to Luke's. For Matthew, devotion to Christ could mean for the disciple separation from family. Matthew speaks of being worthy of Christ through loving Christ more than the closest of family members. Luke is much stronger in his description of the call to discipleship through his use of the word "hate." Concerning the word "hate," Marshall says, "Matthew's form has toned down the force of the original (Lukan) saying in the interest of a comparison between the claims of family and of Jesus; Luke retains the hyperbolic form, which is an authentic part of Jesus' teaching."²⁸

Another significant difference in these passages is the list of family members. Fitzmyer believes that "Matthew's form is probably more primitive in its parallelism of father/mother and son/daughter. Luke has changed the second one to wife/children, added a third (brothers/sisters), and also the echo of 9:23 in vs. 27. . . ."²⁹ "Father and mother" is an OT expression and is pre-Lukan because Hebrew has no single word for parents.³⁰ The context within Matthew is Jesus' sending out the twelve disciples. Part of Matthew's list of family members comes from a quote of Micah 7:6. The emphasis seems to lie in the call to supreme love of Jesus even to the point of losing family members. Luke includes this theme but also emphasizes counting the cost before one undertakes discipleship. This theme will be explored in later verses.

26 Craddock, 181.

27 Goulder, 597.

28 Marshall, 592.

29 Fitzmyer, vol. 2, 1061.

30 Ibid., 1063.

These verses give the radical call to discipleship. They show the extent of the cost of following Jesus. In Luke's account, verses 26-27 set the conditions to discipleship. Craddock states, "What is demanded of disciples . . . is that in the network of many loyalties in which all of us live, the claim of Christ and the gospel not only takes precedence but, in fact, redefines the others. This can and will necessarily involve some detaching, some turning away."³¹ The masses who were following Jesus may have thought that He was about to bring the kingdom of God as they perceived it. He turns and by this drastic call weeds out those who do not wish to be His true disciples. Geldenhuys says, "He who wishes to follow Him must choose Him so unconditionally as Lord and Guide that he makes all other loyalties and ties absolutely subordinate to his loyalty and devotion to Him."³²

4.3. The Parable of the Tower Builder, vss. 28-30

Jesus then illustrates this call to discipleship through the use of two short parables. These parables drive home the point that discipleship is not to be entered half-heartedly, nor is it to be entered without serious consideration. The first parable describes a person desiring to build a tower. This person is motivated to count the cost of building this tower lest he be ridiculed when the project is left incomplete.

In approaching the first parable, it may be helpful to make several exegetical notations about syntax and word meanings. Jesus begins the parable of the Tower Builder with *tis gar ex humon*. *Tis . . . ex humon* is a "parabolic introduction in the form of a rhetorical question with a conditional participle."³³ This form is used in 11:11, 12:25, 14:28, 15:4, and 17:7. According to Marshall, this form is characteristic to Q and L. He says, "The effect of it is to address the hearers personally and force them to decision on what is being told to them. Its force is roughly:

31 Craddock, 182.

32 Geldenhuys, 398.

33 Marshall, 593.

'Can anyone of you imagine that . . . ?' and it establishes an incontrovertible fact of ordinary life as a basis for a spiritual lesson."³⁴ Verse 28, then, forms a negative rhetorical question that demands the negative answer, No one would not first sit down and count the cost of building such a tower.

Jesus connects this parable with the call to discipleship of verses 26-27 with the connective *gar*. Marshall offers that the force of the *gar* shows that "would-be disciples must be ready for the ultimate self-denial (vs. 26ff), for anybody who undertakes a task without being ready for the total cost involved will only make a fool of himself."³⁵ There is an interesting repetition of *tis* in various forms in verses 26, 27, 28, and 31. In verse 28, *tis* functions as the subject of the main verb *psephizei*. Then the adjectival clause *ex humon . . . oikodomesai* clarifies *tis*. The participle *kathisas* is possibly an adverbial participle of mode denoting the manner in which the action of counting the cost (the main verb *psephizei*) is affected, or it may also be an adverbial participle of time. The phrase *ouchi proton kathisas* is repeated in verse 31. This could be significant in that it lays stress on the serious consideration needed to before becoming a disciple. These words are key to understanding the two parables of this passage in their context. In verse 29, the *hina mepote* is an intensified negative particle. In this passage there are several infinitives used (vs. 29, 2; vs. 30, 2; vs. 31, 2). The main verbs from *archo*, *arxontai* vs. 29 and *erxato* vs. 30, need the infinitives that follow, *empaizein* vs. 29 and *oikodomein* vs. 30, to complete their meanings. According to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, it is a common phenomenon for *archo* to take the present infinitive to denote what one begins to do.³⁶ Also, a genitive absolute, *thentos autou* (aorist active participle of *tithemi*), appears in verse 29.

34 Ibid., 463.

35 Ibid., 593.

36 Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 113.

Several key words need explanation. The *purgos* or "tower" is "a farm building, apparently of some size, since even the foundation for it may take the builder's total resources."³⁷ A significant word in this context is the main verb in verse 28, *psephizein*. *Psephizo* comes from a root word meaning "little stone," "pebble," or "dressed stone." Stones were often used for calculations, and so over time, this word began to be used for counting and reckoning. It also took on the meaning of "to vote" or "to cast a verdict."³⁸ In Rev. 13:18, this verb is used for counting the number of the beast. The disciple needs to calculate one's stones as if he or she were going to build the foundation of a tower.

These two parables come from the L source since they are common only to Luke. According to Goulder, Luke's parable is not "an exposition of God's action, like the Marcan, and most of the Matthean parables, but an imperative, hortatory parable, challenging the would-be Christian to commitment."³⁹ Luke uses this parable to drive home the point of counting the cost of discipleship. Goulder points out, "Luke's characters do not always act quickly, with haste, or at once; they not only rise (*anastas*), they also sit down when occasion requires. . . ."⁴⁰ Concerning the placement of this and the following parable, Bultmann says, "Here the application is manifestly secondary, for it completely fails to express the point of the parable: self-examination before any undertaking; while on the other hand vv. 28-32 contain nothing of the idea of sacrifice of possessions which is found in v. 33."⁴¹

Jesus interjects a little humor in His call to prospective disciples through His telling of this parable. Any prudent person would first count the cost of building a project before he or she

37 Marshall, 593.

38 G. Braumann, in Kittel, 1342.

39 Goulder, 597.

40 Ibid.

41 Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. by John Marsh (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), 170-171.

began. The outcomes of not counting the cost include ridicule by others and having an unfinished project. Plummer says, "The lesson conveyed is not so much, 'It is better not to begin, than to begin and fail,' as, 'It is folly to begin without much consideration.'"⁴² Careful consideration is called for in this first parable. One wishing to build must not jump into the project with no foresight. Rather, one needs to sit (*kathizo*) and calculate for a while and determine if the cost is really worth it. One must calculate and consider carefully the resources of one's closest family. Is one willing to put family members in second place and Jesus Christ in first place? This is what this parable calls for.

4.4. The Parable of the King at War, vss. 31-32

The second parable also speaks of counting the cost, yet in a different manner. This parable about one king threatened by another king forms a transition between counting the cost and the call to give up all one's possessions by its insistence that this counting the cost of discipleship is on the same par as the price of an earthly kingdom. This parable brings out the seriousness of discipleship.

Exegetically, it is interesting that Luke uses *dunatos estin* instead of *dynatai*. This could be for emphasis. *Ta pros eirenen* is literally "the things pertaining to peace." Luke uses the preposition plus accusative to show reference. Fitzmyer says, "The implication is that the first king is ready to submit (or even surrender) to the second."⁴³ H. St. J. Thackeray sees this phrase as "a primitive and widespread Semitic phrase implying in certain circumstances unconditional surrender. . . ." This unconditional surrender links this parable to the call to say good bye to all one's possessions in verse 33.⁴⁴

42 Plummer, 365.

43 Fitzmyer, vol. 2, 1065.

44 H. St. J. Thackeray, "A Study in the Parable of the Two Kings," *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1913): 399.

Eirene "peace" is a state the opposite of war and disturbance. It is a translation for the Hebrew *shalom* which means much more than absence of conflict. It contains the ideas of well-being, wholeness, and everything in its proper order and relationship. In this context, peace would involve the avoidance of the coming conflict with the king who has 20,000 soldiers. The 10,000 soldiers would have to be exceptional fighters to win a battle against 20,000. The king would be taking a chance if he went up against the other king. Terms of peace might not be a bad alternative in this case.

In this parable a different word for counting the cost is used. *Bouleuomai* is found only in the middle voice in the NT and means "deliberate" or "consider." In Acts 5:33 it has the meaning of taking counsel. In Acts 15:37 Barnabas determines to take Mark with him which leads to the famous dispute between Barnabas and Paul. The king had to deliberate and determine whether his forces were strong enough. This was a serious decision that could result in the total loss of his kingdom.

This parable is unique to Luke. Short parables such as found here often come in pairs in Luke and Matthew. Goulder says, ". . . the suggestion of sending (*apesteilen*, Mt. 21:34, 36, 37; 22:3,4) an embassy to negotiate with a strongly placed adversary, is a repeated theme of both the Husbandmen and the Marriage."⁴⁵ This would not be a strong enough case to say that Luke borrowed his parable from the parables of the Husbandmen and the Marriage. Craig Blomberg sees this passage as climactic. The first parable is not as serious as the second, and this may be why Jesus' conclusion seems still more severe in verse 33.⁴⁶ More is at cost in the second parable. In the first parable, the costs to the builder are his resources and possibly his reputation if he does not complete his building. In the second parable, the costs to the king are his peace,

⁴⁵ Goulder, 598.

⁴⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990),

the lives of 10,000 soldiers and possibly his kingdom.

The central message of this parable is that the disciple must take the decision of becoming a disciple with great seriousness. The king had to take very seriously the threat of a king who had twice the fighting force as he had. Peter Jarvis says that these parables are not examples of self-renunciation, but to the opposite, self-assertion. "But at a deeper level, the man who desperately wants to get his tower built or his war won will throw everything he has got into achieving his object."⁴⁷ To be a disciple will entail one's total resources, a subject that Jesus addresses in verses 33. Caird summarizes,

The twin parables of the tower-builder and the king were not meant to deter any serious candidates for discipleship, but only to warn them that becoming a disciple was the most important enterprise a man could undertake and deserved at least as much consideration as he would give to business or politics. Nobody can be swept into the kingdom on a flood-tide of emotion; he must walk in with clear-eyed deliberation.⁴⁸

4.5. Application of the Parables, vs. 33

Jesus has laid out that the call to be His disciple takes supreme dedication to Him and careful consideration. In verse 33, Jesus drives home the parables with the drastic call to give up everything to be His disciple. This passage is arranged in a climactic sequence with verse 33 summarizing the previous calls to discipleship.

With *pas ex hymon* Jesus brings the crowd back into His call. He may have lost a few attentive ears with His parable about the warring king. No doubt there were probably very few kings in Jesus' audience, if any at all. This may be surmised since there is a lack of any second person pronouns or references in the second parable. The *houtos* shows the application of the parables. Fitzmyer points out that Luke uses the formula *houtos oun* for similar conclusions to

⁴⁷ Peter G. Jarvis, "The Tower-builder and the King going to War (Luke 14:25-33)," *Expository Times* 77 (April, 1966): 196.

⁴⁸ Caird, 179.

other parables (see 12:21; 15:7, 10; 17:10; 21:31).⁴⁹ There is a repetition in this verse of the formula given in verses 26 and 27: *ou dunatai einai mou mathetes*. With this statement Jesus sets out a negative condition. The condition of being a disciple is not one that requires a person necessarily to give something in return, an act which leads to works righteousness. Discipleship is not something that can be bought. This would be expressed in a positive manner without an ou. Rather, the condition of discipleship is met by what a person gives up, an act which shows total trust in the grace of God. Discipleship is a radical re-alignment of priorities. If a person does not give up those things placed higher than devotion to Jesus Christ is not able to be a disciple.

A significant word in verse 33 is *apotassomai*. This word occurs only in the middle voice in the NT. When used with persons this word takes on the meaning of saying farewell or taking leave (Acts 18:18; Luke 9:61; Mark 6:46). When used with impersonal objects as in our passage it means renouncing or giving up.⁵⁰ This word is a combination of *tasso* meaning "to determine" or "to set in place," and the preposition *apo* meaning "away from." One gets the idea of pushing something away from oneself, hence, saying good bye. One is to put all things away from one's self and draw Jesus in closer. The things one is to renounce are the *hyparchousin*, a present active participle. This word comes from the verb *hyparcho* which means "to exist," "to be present," or "to be at one's disposal." In Hellenistic Greek it is widely used for *einai*. As a substantival participle it means one's property, possessions, and means.⁵¹ In verse 33, a literal translation of the word in its context (*pasin tois heautou hyparchousin*) might be, "all the things which exist in reference to a person" (reflexive pronoun, *heautou*). "Possessions" might be a possible translation but misses the underlying meaning of the verb. This word is totally inclusive

49 Fitzmyer, vol.2, 1066.

50 Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, 100.

51 Ibid., 838.

of all one's possessions as well as all non-material things even including one's familial relationships (verse 26). Jesus goes the farthest in His call to discipleship in this verse.

This verse is very similar to verses 26-27, the main difference being the first clause. In verse 26, the first clause deals with family relationships. In verse 27, the first clause deals with bearing one's cross. As was mentioned, in verse 33 the first clause summarizes all of the above and deals with everything which pertains to one's person. Fitzmyer believes that verse 33 is a composition of Luke "in order to add a further condition of discipleship, his favorite idea of disposing of material possessions."⁵² Fitzmyer says that Luke has a two-fold attitude towards possessions:

(a) a moderate attitude, which advocates a prudent use of material possessions to give assistance to human beings less fortunate or to manifest a basic openness to the message that Jesus is preaching [3:11; 16:8a; 12:42; 8:3; 16:9]; and (b) a radical attitude, which recommends the renunciation of all wealth or possessions [6:35; 9:3; 10:4; 12:33; 16:13].⁵³

In verse 33 Jesus reiterates the message which He is trying to get across to the crowd that is following Him: discipleship is costly, so costly that it requires renunciation of all and a total dedication to Him. In this verse we have Luke's *oratio recta*, the repetition of the moral.⁵⁴ This moral is the call of total dedication of one's self to Jesus Christ. Robert Stein says, "One can only receive the grace of God with open hands, and to open those hands one must let go of all that would frustrate the reception of that grace. Jesus refers to this letting go as repentance."⁵⁵ How far is one to take this renunciation? Should we literally "hate" our family? Schweizer writes, "Of course not all are called in the same way to the same form of discipleship. But it is equally sure that there is no such thing as a totally middle-class discipleship where there is only

52 Fitzmyer, vol. 2, 1061.

53 Fitzmyer, vol. 1, 249.

54 Goulder, 598.

55 Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981),

preservation of one's heritage and radical renunciation can never flower."⁵⁶

4.6. Salt Illustration, vss. 34-35a

Following this radical call to become Jesus' disciple is found a short parable or illustration about salt. This parable is linked to the previous discussion with the *oun*. In the first phrase, Luke uses an adjective (*kalon*, standing first for emphasis) in predicate position with the noun which it describes (*to halas*). Then follows an interesting phrase. The laws of chemistry state that it is impossible for salt to be made tasteless. "Tasteless" is a translation of *moranthe*, an aorist passive subjunctive of *moraino*. *Moraino* in classical Greek meant "to be foolish." It has this meaning in Romans 1:22 and 1 Cor. 1:20.⁵⁷ The root word, *moros*, denotes deficiency, sluggishness, or mental dullness. When used in reference to humans it is used psychologically.⁵⁸ Hence, a person is a fool since he or she is deficient. The salt that has lost its flavor is deficient because it is not pure salt since pure salt cannot lose its flavor.

This short saying is found in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:50). Common among all three references is the idea of salt losing its saltiness. In Matthew Jesus applies the saying to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. He calls the disciples the salt of the earth. In Mark Jesus uses salt in a similar fashion in referring to the disciples, except this time the context is the causes of sin in one's life. Luke's reference is different in the respect that the parable is rather generic--no one is called salt. The salt serves only as an object lesson. Another significant difference in these passages is the last part of the saying. In Mark there is no reference to the salt being thrown out. Both Matthew and Luke mention the salt being thrown out. The salt in Matthew is thrown out to be trampled. Luke, however, gets graphic and states

⁵⁶ Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, trans. by David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 242.

⁵⁷ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, 531.

⁵⁸ G. Bertram, in Kittle, 620.

that the only use for salt is to be thrown out; it is not even fit for land (possibly as a fertilizer or weed killer) or even for the dung heap (fungi killer).

Did the evangelists redact this saying to fit their particular purpose? We may never know. Scholars take both sides of the issue. For example, Craddock states that verses 34-35 "may have been brought to this location by Luke as a final caution to unreflective enthusiasm."⁵⁹ Plummer, on the other hand, offers that this parable probably was uttered more than once and in more than one form.⁶⁰ Our concern at the present is how this saying fits into the context of Luke 14 and what it has to say about the call of discipleship (*oun*, verse 34a).

Salt is one of the most plentiful spices on earth. The question remains, how can salt lose its flavor? Palestinian salt was often obtained by evaporation from the Dead Sea. Marshall explains,

Since the water of the Dead Sea contains various substances, evaporation produced a mixture of crystals of common salt and carnallite . . . since the former crystallizes out first, it is possible to collect relatively pure salt by fractional collection of the first crystals, but it would be easy to mistake crystals of bitter-tasting carnallite for salt, especially if contaminated with fine clay, etc, which would also produce a stale taste. Carnallite, or gypsum out of which the salt content had been dissolved away, would be "salt that become tasteless."⁶¹

The central message of this short saying in this context is that the decision which the would-be disciple makes must stick like the flavor of pure salt. A decision made hastily is good only to be thrown out. Craddock says, Just as salt can lose its savor, so can an initial commitment, however sincere, fade in the course of time. Even with attention and with the nourishment of prayer, reflection, fellowship, and activity, commitments will be severely tested once Jerusalem is no longer a distant goal but a very present and painful reality.⁶²

59 Craddock, 181.

60 Plummer, 366.

61 Marshall, 596.

62 Craddock, 183.

4.7. Conclusion, vs. 35b

Jesus ends this section of teaching with the often repeated phrase, "The one who has ears to hear, let him hear." This phrase is made up of a present active participle used substantively (*echon*), an object of the participle (*ota*), a present active infinitive showing purpose (*akouein*), and a present active imperative (*akoueto*). Ears are meant for the purpose of hearing. This phrase could be redundant if taken literally. Rather, Jesus is speaking beyond the physical aspects of hearing. A person can hear but not listen. Jesus knew that when He quoted Isaiah's prophecy in Matthew 13:14: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." Those who heard the call of Luke 14:25ff had obviously heard Jesus' words unless of course they were deaf. The issue is whether they had listened, whether they had actually counted the cost of following Jesus.

5. Central Message and Corollary Messages

If there is any one central message to this section of scripture, it must center around the issue of discipleship and following Jesus. Each of the above sections adds a slightly different aspect to Jesus' call. In the first section we learn that even family ties must yield to the call of the kingdom of God. In the second section we learn that following Jesus means taking up a cross; it means being willing to put our lives at risk. In this respect it means total trust in Jesus Christ. The parables highlight this cost yet add that one cannot make this decision with haste. The decision to follow Jesus must be made with careful calculation. It should be noted that it is very difficult to count the cost of discipleship before an actual commitment. We do not know what the future will hold. Jesus wants us to be willing, though. The final section calls the would-be disciple to make a lasting decision which is surer than the flavor of salt.

The crowds may not have fully realized the cost involved in following Jesus. There was more

to following Jesus than merely trouncing across Palestinian hills and meadows. As Peter Jarvis says, "We should notice that Jesus was here claiming for Himself an allegiance which was reserved in the Old Testament for God alone."⁶³ Quoting J. Schmid, Fitzmyer writes, "Only the person who is capable of a radical and painful decision, to set all natural, human relations behind the connection with Jesus (cf. 9:59-62; 8:19-21; 11:27-28) and to give up life itself in martyrdom, can really become a disciple of Jesus."⁶⁴ The simple message Jesus told that day is that He desires unconditional surrender of one's entire existence to Him by means of a carefully made and lasting decision. Blomberg aptly states, "If people must carefully calculate their chances of success in major human endeavors, how much more so must they take seriously the results of spiritual commitments."⁶⁵

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this passage of scripture is timeless. It speaks to us in the twentieth century. For those who are disciples, this passage is a sober reminder of the seriousness of their decision. For those who are not yet disciples, it gives the cost of following Jesus--one's self. There really is no greater cost, and there really is no greater reward. Luke very powerfully calls his readers to follow his Lord. In a subtle way, he reminds them of the Christ event. He reminds them of the decision that Christ calls all to make. It becomes a matter of accepting or rejecting the Jesus bound for the cross.

63 Jarvis, 196.

64 Fitzmyer, vol. 2, 1062, quoting from J. Schmid, *Evangelium nach Lukas*, 247-248.

65 Blomberg, 281.

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