

INTRODUCTION

I love music and I admire those who can play musical instruments. One form of music I like is classic music played with piano. If you know something about piano the top brand well-known even among the best artists is Steinway & Sons. The company was founded by a German immigrant named Henry Steinway in Manhattan, New York, in 1853. Henry and his sons made pianos by hands one at a time. The craftsmanship was passed down from the masters to their apprentices and from one generation to the next. To this day it still takes a full year to make one Steinway piano by hand. My sons once had a piano recital at a local Steinway gallery. A statement written on the wall caught my attention: “The piano by which all others are judged.” It says a lot about the quality of Steinway pianos. If you want to pursue excellence in just about any field you use the highest standard to set your goal. As Christians we learn from Jesus. After Jesus saved us He expects the best of us. While salvation is a one-time conversion sanctification is a life-long process. We can never be perfect in this life but we can become more like Christ.

The gospels tell us that everywhere Jesus went He drew a large crowd. People brought their needs to Him - sickness and demon possession, etc. After Jesus performed the well-known 5-loaves and 2-fish miracle to feed five thousand people all the more people were attracted to Him. In today's term, Jesus had a lot of fans. Jesus never worried that He did not have anyone swarming around Him. His utmost concern was that they came for the right reason. In our passage today in Luke 14 Jesus called for followers from among the crowd. There is a major difference between walking alongside with Jesus and following Him. Even today, Jesus is not looking for fans, but He is asking for followers. True believers of Jesus Christ have to be true followers.

EXPLANATION

1. 邀请 The Call

A. 次序的调整 A Priority Change

Jesus tells us what He requires in true followers. First of all, Jesus calls for a priority change. In **verse 26** Jesus 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.” You heard it right, yes, Jesus did use the verb hate. Did Jesus ask us to cut all our family ties when we decided to follow Him? Some of you may think of the Fifth Commandment, in which God asks us to honor our parents. Also, Jesus tells us to love rather than hate people. For example, Jesus says in **Luke 10:27** that all the commandments can be summarized into two: ... “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” If God requires us to love even our neighbors, then it is a given that we should love our family members. However, more than likely, when we declare that we have decided to follow Christ the first group of people who show objection are our family members that are non-believers. Even Jesus' family members misunderstood Him!

Soon after Jesus began His ministries and chose His twelve disciples His family members expressed disapproval. **Mark** tells us in **3:20-21** – 20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” People closest to us may not fully understand our decision to follow Jesus. Many of the brothers and sisters sitting here came a long way from your home country. You may first came here for education, then along the way you heard the gospel and accepted Christ. Your parents, spouse and relatives may disagree with your decision. They may think that it is okay to visit a church as a means of exposure to the American cultural. But it may be too religious to become a believer. Parents of single children may wonder who is going to pay tribute to them after they pass away. Two weeks from now we will have our spring baptism. Some brothers and sisters are hesitant to take the step forward to testify that they are already believers because they know that their parents may not show their support. No matter what opposition you may face, we have to be mindful that a follower of Christ has to make priority change in our lives. We should not love anyone more than we love God. We love our family members because we love God. I often encourage students who are believers that they have to show greater care to their parents. By achieving good grades in school they prove to their parents that spending time in church would not negatively affect their performance in school. For the married people, showing more love and patience to their non-believing spouse demonstrate that their faith in Christ makes them a better spouse.

Among the various human relationship Jesus mentioned He added that a true follower has to hate “even his own life.” The person we love the most in this world is ourselves. We do not need anyone to remind us to take good care of ourselves. We eat well, dress well and buy the best stuff we can afford. Do we love ourselves more than we love God? Some Christians may feel that they are too busy to read the Bible and pray every day. But they can still find time to watch their favorite drama series. They may feel too busy to attend weekly church meetings. But they can still find time to go on vacation. When we decided to become Christ’s followers we have to make some priority changes in our lives to love Jesus more than anyone.

B. 主权的转移 A Sovereignty Change

True believers of Jesus Christ have to be true followers. Jesus does not only call for a priority change in His followers He also calls for a sovereignty change. When we accept Christ we acknowledge Him as the Lord of our life. In other words we turn over the sovereignty of our life to Jesus. Jesus explains in **verse 27**: “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” What does it mean to carry one’s own cross? Before the Romans crucified a criminal on the cross the convict had to carry his own beam to the location where he would be nailed. That piece of wood he carried would become part of the cross on which he would be hanged. Therefore, to Jesus’ audience carrying one’s cross could only mean one thing – to die on the cross. But don’t think that Jesus was asking His followers to commit suicide. Let me refer you to **Luke 9:23**: Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” A key word in this verse is “daily.” We do not just die once and for all, we have to die daily to ourselves. For whose sake is Jesus asking us to bear our cross every day? It is for Him! Paul illustrates the same truth in **Romans 12:1** when encourages us: Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Christians should see ourselves as living sacrifices to God. In our hearts we must be ready to submit the sovereignty of our life to Jesus. In the following context in Romans 12 Paul gives us examples of how the life of a living sacrifice looks like when he talks about the use of spiritual gifts in the church, love for fellow believers and love for those who persecute us. In every aspect of our life Jesus becomes our Master and we become His servants. We may still be doing the same things in daily life. But whatever we do is for God's glory. When we make a decision we ask ourselves what the Lord would want us to do. Many of you may have watched the "Cross in China" video series. You may remember a sister who worked as an accountant. After she became a Christian she realized that it did not please God to hold two sets of accounting records for the company. She faced a dilemma. She could remain silent and no one would notice that she is a Christian. But if she spoke out her boss might fire her. Finally, she decided to do the right thing in God's sight. She told her supervisor that she is a believer and she could no longer help the company keep false records. To her surprise, instead of being fired she was transferred to another department of the company where she did not have to deal with the company's account.

Following Christ calls for a change in our sovereignty. We now belong to Christ. It calls for self-denial. Brothers and sisters: what is your cross? Contrary to what you think, your cross is not your spouse, your in-laws, your roommate or your boss whom you have a hard time to deal with. Your cross may be the old self you still try to cling on to and would not let go. We Chinese know that the most important piece of muscle on our body is our face. When people offended us we bear grudge for the rest of our lives and we fail to extend forgiveness. When we hurt other people we do not want to admit it, let alone apologizing for it. Our cross could also be an old habit or a character trait which we are reluctant to change. You say to yourself: I was born that way and I don't think that I need to change. Perhaps you always like to put yourself ahead of others, and you ignore the opinions of your coworkers. Perhaps you are too blunt in your speech, and you fail to consider people's feeling. Perhaps you are a smart and capable person, and you find it hard to submit to other's supervision. When we become Jesus' followers we submit our sovereignty to Him. Whatever God says in the Bible we will obey.

2. 代价：慎重的考虑 The Cost: A Reality Check

True believers of Jesus Christ have to be true followers. Jesus wanted the crowd to examine their hearts to see if they were willing to commit themselves to follow Him. He wants us to calculate the cost. Jesus uses three parables to help His potential followers to do a reality check.

In the first parable, Jesus asks in **verse 28**: "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?" The answer is a definite yes. Otherwise, it will be a half-done project that is of no use. Worse still, it would become a joke to others. The second parable begins in **verse 31** when Jesus asks: "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?" The answer is again a yes. Any wise king would calculate his manpower before sending his troop to a war. If he understands that he will be outnumbered, he may as well send some representatives to sign a peace treaty with his enemies. Otherwise, the whole country would suffer because of the mistake of one person. Therefore, the moral from the two parables is the same: don't make a decision until you have thought it through.

Jesus tells a third parable in [verses 34-35](#): 34 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.”... In Jesus’ time people used salt as a flavoring agent in cooking the same way we use salt for. Besides, salt slows down deterioration of food just like how we prepare salted fish. In addition, a small amount of salt added to animal dung can slow down fermentation so that it can be used as a fertilizer later. Salt can also be added to animal dung as a catalyst before it is burned as a fuel. At that time salt had a lot of impurities. When the sodium is leached out, then the salt would lose its value. Jesus wants His followers to be useful in the world. We are to add flavor to the world by displaying God’s glory. By upholding God’s standard we are preserving the fallen world from further decay. If Christians lose their “saltiness” then we would be ineffective for God’s purpose.

Jesus hits home with His concluding remark in [verse 33](#): “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” Jesus tells us that we have to make up our mind and be ready to give up everything to follow Him. Is Jesus telling us that we have to literally sell everything before we can be His followers? In [Philippians 3:8](#) when Paul testifies his determination to follow Christ he says: What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. Paul makes a comparison of what he cherished as valuable before and after he determined to follow Christ. He understood that there was no price too high for him to pay for the sake of following Christ.

My wife can testify that when I bought my current car I loved my car more than my life. If she bumped into something when she opened the door my face may turn gray. She warned me that if I did not change my attitude God would surely discipline me. A few years had passed and after several minor issues I finally realized a few things. I grew old and so would my car. I could not keep it new forever. But more importantly, the car does not belong to me. God gave it to me for His purpose. Fast forward for a few years we bought my wife’s current minivan. That time I was very clear that the car belong to the Lord. Once someone was moving. I went to help and I also left the minivan to another brother to complete the moving. When I got home my wife commented: “You really have a great faith by allowing another person to drive our new car.” I responded: “I thought you told me not to put too much focus on our belongings.” Though we know in our head that we have to give up everything to follow Christ in reality we still have reservation about our “everything.” Many of us came to U.S. and would like to make our home here. But what if the Lord sends you back to your home country because He has crafted a niche for you to witness for Him? Are you willing? Some of the single people have waited all these years for your future mate. Your parents are losing their patience. Finally, this special person shows up in your life. Every qualification is beyond your expectation, except the fact that this person is not a believer. How would you choose? You invested time and effort to accomplish so much in your career. What if the Lord asks you to forsake all your achievement, go to the seminary to be equipped to serve Him as a full-time worker? Perhaps the calling is not on you, but on one of your children. How would you respond? No matter what decision God puts in your life the key issue is whether or not you are ready to give up everything to follow His guidance.

CONCLUSION

True believers of Jesus Christ have to be true followers. Jesus does not ask us to believe Him first, then perhaps somewhere down the road we make a further decision to commit ourselves to Him. The moment we are willing to believe in Him we are His followers already. We submit to our Master and follow His example. What kind of example our Lord set up for us? It is a model of self-sacrifice. According to the Christian tradition today is called "Palm Sunday." When Jesus entered Jerusalem on His way to the cross He was welcomed by a large crowd. They laid palm branches on the path and cheered for Jesus as if He were a triumphant King. They shout: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Ironically, a few days later the same crowd cried out: "Crucify Him!" Jesus did not give it all just for us. Jesus gave it all to God the Father by submitting to His will, to the degree of death. Contrary to the beliefs of some seeker friends becoming a follower of Christ is not to get what we want. It is for God to get what He wants from us. Are you willing? To our brothers and sisters I hope this message serves as a good reminder to you. You are already following Jesus. It is time to get real with our Lord! Are you ready to give up your desire and preference just to please Him? It is a moment by moment decision.