

The Final Days

Reading the Fine Print Luke 14:25-35



This Week's Message
March 17, 2024

*The Final Days –
Reading the Fine Print*

...whoever does not carry their
cross and follow me cannot
be my disciple.

Luke 15:27
(New International Version)

Sunday's Scripture Reading ***Luke 15:25-35***

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

²⁶"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.

²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸"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?

²⁹For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you,

³⁰saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

³¹"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

³²If 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.

³³In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

³⁴"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

On Sunday, I will continue the brief series of messages leading us to Easter Sunday. The title of the series is *The Final Days*, and in the series, we are studying some of the stories that take place in the final days of Jesus.

In Sunday's message, we will study a passage from Luke's gospel in which Jesus shares some of his most difficult words. They are tough. They are difficult. They are blunt. In these words, we find one of the central contradictions of our faith – it is at once easy and also very difficult. Jesus sometimes spoke of following him in terms of how easy it was. In Matthew 11:29-30, Jesus says, *come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* In comparison to Sunday's Scripture text, that is very encouraging language. It is language of comfort and ease.

So, when it comes to the gospel, which is it? Is it hard, or is it easy? Well, it's more of a case of *both and*, actually. There are some circumstances in which faith is comforting and encouraging, such as in times of loss or in

Questions to Consider –

* Are we too quick to downplay some – or all – of the more difficult of the teachings of Jesus? Do we have a tendency to overlook passages such as this week’s Scripture text, that is, the passages that ask so much of us? Does Lent make us more likely to think of and to reflect on those passages?

* For the first followers of Jesus, taking up their cross was a very literal image. For us, today, what would it mean to take up our cross? Is there anything at all that would compare with such a drastic image?

* Some of Jesus’s followers, perhaps, heard his words and thought, *I can’t make that kind of commitment*. Do we have a line beyond which we cannot – or will not – go?

* The so-called *prosperity gospel* – which teaches that God wants to bless us with wealth and material blessings – makes little or no mention of sacrifice, and certainly not the taking up of one’s cross. Does the *prosperity gospel*, then, give people the wrong idea of what is involved in the Christian faith?

the moments when life is challenging. There are other times, however, when faith is difficult and challenging. Those are the times when faith asks us to step out of our bent towards self-centeredness and to become more selfless. It is when we are asked to move out of the comfort of our own lives and into the difficulties of the lives of others, in order to offer a measure of encouragement and comfort. It is when we are asked to raise our voices on behalf of those who are victims of injustice and unfairness rather than minding our own business and taking the safe and easy route through life.

So, when it comes to the gospel, which is it? Is it hard, or is it easy? Well, it’s more of a case of both and, actually.

There is, in this week’s Scripture text, a certain level of absurdity in the words of Jesus (and please don’t misunderstand my use of the word *absurdity*. My use of the word is to denote something that is so incredibly in opposition to our normal, human reactions). When Jesus says, *whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*, his followers had a very literal understanding of his words. They had seen plenty of crucifixions, as the Romans were very liberal in their use of that form of execution, and the thought that they would be required to submit to such a fate would seem so outlandish that it must have appeared to the disciples that Jesus was trying to *lose* followers rather than *gain* them.

Our context, obviously, is quite different from that of Jesus and the disciples. We are not living under the heavy hand of an occupying power. We have rights and privileges that Jesus and his disciples could not have hoped to possess. Their lives were made extremely difficult by not only the policies of Rome but by the simple and unexpected whims of Rome as well.

That does not mean, however, that we do not have our own set of difficulties that are unique to our context. Our difficulties, generally speaking, do not present us with choices as stark as those that faced the disciples, but they are ones that require much thought and prayer on our part, nonetheless.

I hope to see you Sunday, as we talk about this and more, and until then, God bless you!