

[New Testament Themes, Part Two]

[Speakers in the audio file: Tim Mackie]

[Musical Introduction (0:00—0:08)]

Hey eHey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie and this is my podcast, *Exploring My Strange Bible*. I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 20 years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith, and I hope this can all be helpful for you too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at BibleProject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[Musical Break (0:55—01:00)]

All right, well, this is episode two of a six-part series. It represents a number of teachings I did a number of years ago at Door of Hope Church, when I was a pastor there. We challenged the whole church to read through the New Testament in 90 days, and we did it together, gathering every weekday morning to just read it aloud to each other and explore some of its main themes.

And then on Sundays, Josh White and I—the other teaching pastor—we would do our teachings based off of wherever we were in the read-through, in the 90 days. And it was a super fun experience—really powerful. This was a message that I gave—a teaching based on Luke chapter 14—some of the very challenging sayings that Jesus gave about counting the cost of whether or not you are really going to be down for following him.

So it's exploring the balance of both Jesus's incredible, generous grace—inviting anyone *and* everyone into his communities—at the same time giving them a stiff challenge of the great cost and sacrifice that's going to be required.

And I think many of us—we have a difficult time balancing those two. Like, the overwhelming generosity and grace of Jesus that was balanced by a real challenge, and a call to follow and make sacrifices. And how do those two go together?

And that's what we're exploring in this teaching called “The Committed Community.” So I hope this is helpful for you. It was super challenging for me. Holy cow, Jesus is so intense. But anyway, there you go. Let's dive in.

[Musical Break (2:36—2:40)]

Today we're exploring what it means to be a community of “costly discipleship.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer—he was a German theologian—he famously said that when Christ calls a man, he “bids him to come and die.” [Laughs] That's good news. Luke 14, verse 25—Surgeon General's warning: This is like having a very, very, very stiff drink, reading these verses right here, so get ready.

Verse 25, “Now great crowds accompanied him. And he turned, and he said to them, ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

“For which of you, let's say you're desiring to build a tower, will not first sit down and count the cost about whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he's laid a foundation, and then he's not able to finish, everyone who sees it is going to begin to mock him, saying, ‘This guy began to build, but he's not able to finish.’

“Or what king, when he goes out to encounter another king in war, is not going to sit down first and deliberate whether he is able, with 10,000, to meet the one who comes against him with 20,000? And if he's not able, then while the other is still a great way off, he's going to send a delegation and ask for terms of peace.

“So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It's of no use, either for soil or for the manure pile. Rather, it's just thrown away. If you have ears, you should listen.”

[Laughs] Who feels great about themselves? You're just like, “Oh my gosh, what is this?” This is so crazy. So we like Jesus' sayings about grace, and—while they're very challenging, we like—some of us—you know, this thing about “love your neighbor and so on,” and “forgive those” . . . whatever . . . “persecute you,” and that kind of thing. Those are challenging sayings of Jesus, but they're more palatable to us.

But when he comes out of the gate and he says things like this, we get nervous. We start to squirm. You know, you can just imagine—especially Peter through the Gospel of Luke; he comes along and he corrects Jesus when need be; kind of “helps” him have “good theology” or whatever, I don't know.

You can only imagine—it's not recorded—but what Peter would respond in a scenario like this, of course. He's like, “Jesus, man! This is just not a good way to recruit converts.” I don't know what he thinks Jesus needs, but this is very challenging. And I think many of us, we squirm in our seats when we hear Jesus talk like this, and he meant for us to squirm, for sure. The language he chose is very powerful.

But I also think at least some of our squirming is because we have come to Jesus with some pretty fundamental misunderstandings about who he is and about what he came to do and what he's calling us to do.

And so what I want to do is move towards that, and, kind of, clear some of the debris away, so we can hear what Jesus is saying by also hearing what he's *not* saying. I think many of us, we at least first squirm, and just, kind of, think of it like this—we could frame it differently. Many of us, we get frustrated or we squirm in our seats when we hear Jesus talk like this because we think in terms of our modern culture.

So let's just say for example—let's, kind of, pretend that we're in an election season. [Laughs] Right? And let's say you're being inundated with, just, political rhetoric and messages and speeches and stump-speeches from politicians and so on, and all of it is towards gaining a hearing, of course. They want you to vote for them.

So let's say you've already seen through the different views of, whatever—you picked out your politician. You go to here—you go to YouTube. Go to listen to one of their speeches or something, and you hear your favorite politician. He steps up, “Vote for me!” And you're like, “Yes, I want to vote for you.” He says, “If you vote for me, likely things are actually going to become difficult for you. You're going to experience severe hardship. You may lose everything you have. You may even lose your own life. So vote for me.”

And you're like, “What? You know, this guy's crazy. He needs a new speechwriter. That's what he needs,” right? But we'd be like, “No.” You would never do that. Why? Because the office—in theory—the office of a politician is the office of a civil servant, in theory. So I, as the voter, I have a vision of “the good life”—my vision of what it means to me to have a good life, personally, and for my community to have a good life. I'm going to vote and support the representative that best fits my vision of “the good life.” And he will, then, serve that vision and represent it for me in government, or what have you. In theory, that's how the system is supposed to work, right?

And so if I hear a politician speaking like *that*, that violates the whole terms of the relationship—because the whole point is—no, you don't see. I'm actually voting for you so that my life can get better. So what do you mean my life is going to get worse if I vote for you? Then I'm just not going to vote for you, because I'm not asking you to do something different. I'm asking you to represent and serve my vision of "the good life."

And I think many of us—actually, *most* of us, at some point—in coming to Jesus or our faith journey, actually view Jesus like a politician that we have voted for. We invite Jesus into our hearts or into our lives, because we have some problems. We have some areas of our lives that we want him to deal with, or we think "need religion"—whatever. And so we invite Jesus into our lives; we invite God into our lives to answer our prayers, to give us comfort, to work out our problems, and so on. Right?

And you know you're viewing Jesus like a politician, of course, because when your life falls apart, and when your prayers aren't answered, or at least they're not answered in the way that you want them to be, and you're faced with all of the same disasters or situations that you were before you invited Jesus into your life, then all of a sudden you get jaded. And you're like, "I voted for you. I've been praying to you." You know? "I even gave money to the cause, or whatever, and this is what I get from you? This is it? This kind of life?"

And that's how you know that, actually, you're viewing Jesus as someone who's coming along underneath you to serve your vision of "the good life." And when Jesus says something like this, he makes it very clear that that's actually not the terms of this relationship. That what he's calling us to is not to represent and serve *my* vision of "the good life," but just the opposite.

When we hear those words, Jesus is much more—he's like a skilled mountain guide who has a group of people up in the Rockies, and he knows this terrain. And he can see down the valley; he can see a treacherous snowstorm forming, and it's moving up the valley. And he says to this little group here that he's taken up into the mountains, he says, "You need to follow me. If you follow me, things are going to get very hard. Likely you're going to face difficulties and hardship. You may need to lose a whole bunch of your gear, because we need to travel fast and quick, and some of you may even lose your lives. You need to follow me."

And see, if we're in that kind of snow, then the same exact speech all of a sudden has a very different meaning, because the mountain guide, he's not, like, serving his own self-interest. He actually has *my* best interests in mind. He knows this terrain much better than I do. He has my long-term well-being in mind at the expense of my short-term comfort.

And so he actually *may* be calling me to do things that are very difficult and that are dangerous—and that I might not even survive, but they're actually *so that* I can have true life. Perhaps Jesus is much more like a skilled mountain guide who's trying to rescue me from a storm that's coming than he is like a politician. And if he's like a skilled mountain guide, then actually he has every right to say things like this to me, because this is precisely what I need to hear.

So what we're going to do is dive back into these verses and work through them. But I would just encourage you—what if we were to read these same sentences, not as if Jesus is a politician trying to get our support, but as if he's a skilled mountain guide who's trying to give us true life? And he's trying to save us from going down the wrong valleys and the dead-end canyons, so that we can actually experience the gift of life that he wants us to have? You guys with me? You tracking with me?

So let's dive back in here, and let's put on a different set of glasses and let's see the power of Jesus' words here. Verse 25—just a basic statement that is, itself, really illuminating—verse 25, “Now great crowds were accompanying him”—or some of your translations have “were traveling along with him,” and so on—and he turns to the crowds and then he just unleashes these really crazy, intense sayings, and so on.

So he's talking to the crowd. What we're doing is we're tracing not just, like, the meanings of words and of the verses and so on, we're actually looking at the “architecture” of these books, and the flow and the context. And so whenever you're reading the teachings of Jesus: *context, context, context*. Who's he talking to when he says this? Why is he saying this now?

And so this center section of Luke, from chapter nine to chapter 19, Jesus is on a journey. In chapter nine, Jesus “set his face towards Jerusalem.” He knows that he's going to die there and be raised there, to accomplish the great act of redemption. And so you'll occasionally just get these little notes from chapter nine forward: “as they were going along the road” or “as they were traveling here.”

Turn back a page to chapter 13 with me—chapter 13, verse 22—and you'll see the setting of where Jesus is. Chapter 13, verse 22, “Jesus went on his way through towns and villages; he was teaching and journeying towards Jerusalem.” So as he's going and journeying and teaching, he's going from town to town, right? And so he's performing miracles. He's healing people, giving very powerful teachings, and so on.

And as he's going, he's gathering crowds—as he announces the kingdom and brings it into being. And so these crowds—back in chapter 14, verse 25—these crowds are some of the many thousands. And you can just imagine: Jesus is touring from village to village; town to town. He has this huge crowd. Here's the thing about the crowds is that: this same crowd that's around him, they have all kinds of agendas for Jesus. They think

he's sensational. They're excited. He's a powerful teacher; he's healing. So everybody's attracted to Jesus.

Does that mean that everybody in the crowd actually “gets Jesus”, is actually a follower of Jesus and grasps his true identity and what he's come to do? Not at all. Because the same crowd that's all excited about him is going to be even more excited in chapter 19, when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and they're going to actually say that he's the Messiah.

And then they're going to become very disillusioned as he waltzes into Jerusalem and, instead of kicking out the Romans and starting a revolutionary war, he's going to do this weird thing in the temple, and stop sacrifices from being offered. And then he's going to offend all of the Jerusalem leaders of the temple, and then he's going to claim he's the son of God. [Laughs] And then this same crowd of people that's around him right now is going to be the crowd that shouts, “Crucify him,” in front of Pontius Pilate.

To be “in the crowd” does not mean that you're a disciple. And this is a very important distinction. And so Jesus often, when he had crowds around him—this happens all the time in this section of Luke—he'll see a crowd, and then he'll just say, like, some of the most offensive, like, hard sayings you could possibly imagine. Why? Because he's trying to *sift* the crowd.

He knows that “a crowd” is not the same thing as “a church;” and that an attendee in a crowd is *not* the same thing as a devoted disciple. He's sifting—he did this intentionally, not because he's a jerk, but because he's a skilled mountain guide. And he wants people to take this seriously. What's happening here? The stakes are very high.

And so, to the crowds, he turned and said this—let's just look at the first sayings again, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever doesn't bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my . . .”

Well, I want to address a few things. Some that are probably tripping us up as we read this. Jesus' clear goal is to sift the crowd from what kinds of people? Who does he want to target, and force people to make a decision? What am I going to be? What's the key word here? *Disciple*. Disciple.

Now there's a religious word, if you've ever heard one. I guess in, kind of, “church-ese” or whatever, that word gets thrown around quite a lot. Outside of church subculture, I don't think we really use that term that much. Do we? I don't know. Do you say somebody has disciples? Maybe if they're, like, a really skilled bike mechanic or something? [Laughing] Do they have disciples? I don't know.

Actually, the word we use more often is the word “apprentice,” which, much more gets to the heart of what Jesus is saying. So you know I’m kind of a Greek geek like this, and so on, so I’ll teach you the word here: *mathetes*, there. *Mathetes*. It comes from the Greek word, literally, just, “to learn.” That’s its primary meaning: “a learner.”

And actually, “apprentice” or “adherent” is much, much more to the heart of what Jesus is saying. You don’t just like *happen* to become a *mathetes* of somebody. You have to *want* to. You have to then *intend* to. And then you have to *do something* about those intentions, right? It can be a great desire of mine that, like, hunger ends all across the world. All that’s going to be is *sentiment*, unless I actually make an *intentional* choice to do something with that desire and sentiment.

People might have all kinds of desires: “Oh, Jesus is so great. That’s cool. I totally want to be associated with Jesus. I’ll be in the crowd.” And Jesus is like, “Yeah, that’s great, but I’m actually not looking for crowds. I’m looking for people who *intend* to follow me.” And that means making a *choice* to become an apprentice, and to model my life after the teachings and the example of the Master and of the Teacher. Jesus is sifting disciples, the *mathetes*, from the crowd here.

And what’s the first thing he goes after here? And this is probably what trips most of us up is: why he tells you to hate your family and hate yourself. Some of you wondered this when we read this the first time, right? This is the first thing that pops out to us, of course. “If anyone comes to me and doesn’t hate”—hate who?—“father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister—even his own life.”

Now, Jesus constantly used shocking, “get your attention” kind of language here. And so everything that I’m going to say to try and put it in context here—I don’t want to take away from that. He means to like, draw—you know, make you “do a double take.” *What? Did he just say that? Whatever.*

So the words “love and hate,” even if you think about this in English, when you and I use the words “love and hate,” these are relationship words. They have their origin in relationships. “I love him; I hate her.” But even in English, just think about it, we don’t use those words *literally* all the time. In fact, if you think about it, most of the times you use the words “love” and “hate” are probably non-literal, you know what I’m saying?

So “I love pizza.” And if that means the same thing as—some of you have heard me say this before. If “I love pizza,” if that word “love” means the same thing as when I say “I love my wife,” my marriage is in deep trouble. [Laughs] Right? Deep trouble.

So actually, “I prefer and like to eat pizza;” I’ve said marriage vows and committed my life and love and affection to my wife. That’s night and day difference—the same English word for both of those. “Love” is actually one of the most, I think, unhelpful words in the English language, because it can mean about a million different things. And the same

with “hate.” I *hate* lima beans—whatever; but I *hate* a person. Well, it's kind of the scale's a little, you know? So even we use those words non-literally.

And it was the same in Jesus' time and culture and so on, but they use them a little bit differently in non-literal language. So Jesus does not mean *emotional hatred*: “If you're going to follow me, go have the most intense fight with your family and say, ‘I can never love you as much as I love Jesus,’ and then walk away and never talk to them again,” or something. Like, what? Of course he doesn't mean that. He does not mean that.

“Love” and “hate,” in Jewish cultural lingo, in Jesus' time, was a way of talking about devotion and allegiance. If I say “I love” one thing, it means that my ultimate devotion and allegiance is *to* it; and in comparison to that thing—I might have a secondary allegiance—but in comparison to that great allegiance that I have for this, it's like I hate that thing, or something.

Jesus actually talked like this on other occasions. Luke chapter 16—one of his most well-known sayings—he says, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other.” And then what's the parallel—how does he parallel, unpack that? He doesn't say, “And then you'll go yell at one and go hug the other.” What does he say? He says, “He will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve God and money.”

So what does he mean? If I want to follow Jesus, you have to get your money out of your pocket and be like, “I hate you. [Laughs] I hate you. I hate you, money.” No, of course not. Money's not bad. People are bad and do bad things with money, but some people are good and do good things with money—money's not the issue.

But in comparison of allegiance, my allegiance to Jesus needs to be much higher. Do you see what he's saying here? So in comparison to my allegiance to Jesus, my allegiance to family and tribe needs to be completely secondary to my full allegiance and devotion to Jesus—and not just family and tribe, even to our own lives.

You've heard this before, or whatever; some of you have seen the little drawing, like, “To whom should I give my allegiance?” Well, God's always at the top, and then family, and then church, and then other people, and then the poor. You draw a nice, little, neat chart—something like that. That's kind of a caricature that Jesus is saying here.

Because again, if Jesus is a politician, for him to say, “If you want to be my disciple, your ultimate allegiance needs to be to me, above all other allegiances.” If he's a politician, like, that's just the height of arrogance, isn't it? Really? *How full of himself must he be to assume this?* [Laughs] Or he's really insecure to say something like this. So what's happening here?

Or is it that he's a skilled mountain guide, and he knows that, actually, if I give my allegiance to *anyone* other than him, I'm in deep trouble; and that I'm going to go down false trails of allegiance that are going to bring me *nothing* but grief; and that it's actually *only* in my allegiance to Jesus that all those other allegiances find their true place and that I discover true life. Is it possible that that's what he's saying?

Look back at the passage here. He names two things that are actually complete opposites here, and we're just going to camp out here for a few moments. I think this is really—as I've kind of meditated on this—this is one of the more profound teachings of Jesus that there is.

So he says there's two things that need to get demoted, in terms of allegiance. The first is family and tribe: father, mother, wife, children. But then, brothers and sisters. So family. What Jesus does here is profound. He names the two great idols of human history—and an idol is a good thing in our lives, but that we exalt to the place of “ultimate thing.” And in those things, we find our purpose—our identity, our significance, our life-fulfillment—but these are things that are not God. And they ultimately cannot give us meaning and significance and identity. They'll inevitably let us down.

Josh riffs off Tim Keller all the time, and I'm doing so right now, too. Just to get it out there. If you haven't read his little book, *Counterfeit Gods*, you need to. I think we have some out there on the bookshelf, right? But these are good things, but things that are not God. And if we give our allegiance to them, they will break our hearts and ruin our lives.

And so he names the two great idols of human history. First is family and tribe, but then the other is the exact opposite. Family and tribe, and then what's the last thing he names? Yourself; your own life. Think about Jesus' context here. It's first century. It's a very traditional, patriarchal kind of context. When he says *family* and *tribe* and *household*, he doesn't mean American definition of family, which is like nuclear family—mom, dad, and kids, or whatever.

He means *household*. He's talking about grandpa or great-grandpa, who's the patriarch over the whole household. There's a household estate. Everybody in the family—*everything* is about allegiance to family. And everything you do is about increasing the honor and the well-being of your family. This is, like, many traditional cultures around the world.

Who you marry is set under your allegiance to family—you're going to marry the person who can bring the greatest wealth, honor, or prestige to your family. What you do for a living—you're not going to move away from your family. That would dishonor your family. Actually, you take up the family business, and you do your best. You don't go live in

some other part of town. You build your house onto great-grandpa's house or whatever—and this is very common in many, many cultures around the world.

And there are many benefits to living in that kind of culture, too. Right? Because the family provides its own sense of identity and belonging and community. Its own safety net for when some people in the family have financial disasters, or whatever. But also when the family gets exalted, it's often at the expense of the individual. And so she marries some dude she totally doesn't love. And John has to take up the family business, when he hates putting horseshoes on horses, or whatever—he wants to go write computer software, or something. You know? And so the family gets exalted at the expense of the individual.

And so Jesus waltzes into that kind of culture, and he says things like this. It's just like throwing a grenade into a room. And he told some people to *leave* their families—like the 12 disciples—to leave them; leave families and come follow him. We don't hear much about the families of disciples. Some of them were married, and we know some of them brought their families around with them. It's not entirely clear, but what Jesus was asking people to do in his setting—that exalted family at the expense of the individual—was very, very scandalous.

But Jesus knew that exalting the family to find the ultimate *place* of finding meaning and identity and fulfillment—he *knows* that it will break your heart. It's a false canyon, and that as a snowstorm comes, you'll be overtaken. Why?

So even—think of the way that a Christian specifically in, kind of, evangelical subculture—the way that marriage and family is sometimes exalted. You would think that we've just forgotten that the two major key founders in the Christian movement were both single. [Laughs] Yeah, like Jesus. And that often gets totally ignored in Christian subculture. And marriage gets exalted to this *place*—and this happens in our culture at large here. It becomes the ways in which people find meaning in life.

How many of you have met parents—and you may not be self-aware—how many of you *are* parents, right, and whether you realize it or not, you've actually come to find your whole sense of self-worth, your sense of value and identity in your role as a parent? How many of you are children of parents like that, right?

And so here's what's going to happen is: that whenever the kids grow up and then eventually disappoint their parents—they're humans, right? And that will happen, and they'll begin to make choices different from the parents or maybe even bad choices, and so on. Yes, that will break any parent's heart, but a parent whose identity has become so involved in their role as a parent, it will break them. They can't live through the guilt and the remorse anymore, because their whole sense of worth . . . right?

Think about the way marriage is perceived among so many in our culture. The desire to be married; the idea that there's this “right person” out there. “If I can just find that person then—then I wouldn't be lonely ever . . . anymore. I would always be accepted for who I am . . .” and so on. [Laughs] And some of you who are married are going, “Yeah, right.” Right? Because you know—you know when marriage is idolized like that, you're asking your potential spouse to do something for you that they can't *possibly* do.

It's like going to 7-Eleven, down the corner, and expecting them to have Stumptown coffee there or something, or Water Avenue coffee. It's like, “No, what did you expect?” They're going to have horrible coffee; it's 7-Eleven—you know what I'm saying? So that's marriage. [Laughs] That's family.

And then they bring Jesus into it, and then they think, “Well, I prayed to Jesus to give me a great marriage and to make my kids love him, and so on. And He didn't answer my prayers.” And “I tried that Jesus thing, and He didn't deliver. I voted for Him. I gave to Him, and He didn't come through for me.” And it's like, *what?* This is a fundamental misperception from the very start. Jesus was actually trying to *warn* you not to give your full allegiance to family and tribe and marriage.

And so look what else he does: He deals with the idol of family and tribe, and then he swings to the other pendulum, which is your own *self*. “If you don't hate your own self in comparison to your allegiance to me . . .” So some cultures that have exalted family at the expense of the individual swing the other direction, of course. And they exalt the liberty and the fulfillment of the individual at the expense of family.

Can you think of a culture like that? I can think of that culture, right? Where people, like, “Proximity to family? Yeah, you know, holidays . . .” “I'll fly back for holidays or whatever.” And what you end up with is a culture of people who—they move around. They're very mobile. They move everywhere, right? They gravitate, especially, to urban centers, because that's where you're most likely to find other people who are looking for the same things.

And you end up with people who are—they're not rooted. They're detached individuals, and they're just kind of cruising around looking for whatever it is will go fulfill my highest allegiance, which is to find self-actualization and fulfillment.

And so I'm kind of . . . “float from relationship to relationship. I'm going to float from job to job, or whatever. I'm going to float from church to church—whichever church gives me my individualized ‘spiritual experience’ that I happen to prefer during that season of my life. And then I'll move on to the next one, because it might not meet my needs anymore . . .” and so on.

And you end up with a culture of people who actually *can't* find fulfillment, but are perpetually looking for it. And Jesus says, “If your greatest allegiance is to family, it'll

break your heart. If your greatest allegiance is to your own self-actualization or fulfillment, you're going to break your heart.”

Because there's no job or music career or art career that's going to be *good* enough to give you what you're looking for. You might get there—you'll get three-quarters of the way there, and then you'll stick with that job for a while, and then you'll reach your 40s and get disillusioned and jaded with life. You know? This is how it works. This is many of our stories.

And Jesus *knows* this. He knows that if your greatest allegiance is to anything *other* than Him, it's a dead end. He addresses this huge crowd and He tries to sift, and He says, “Some of you have exalted family and tribes. Some of you are exalting your own self-fulfillment. You *can't* be my disciple. You *won't* be able to make sense of anything—what I'm asking you to do—if that's your greatest allegiance.”

And Jesus is not a politician. He's a skilled mountain guide. And he speaks to our hearts, and he challenges us: “Do you actually intend to take a different path than many in our culture around you? Are you willing to give up this dream of self-fulfillment, or this dream that, somehow, family and being married is going to meet all of my deepest needs?”

Am I willing to give those things up in allegiance to something? In allegiance to the one who—Paul the Apostle, in such powerful language—Galatians 2:20, he said he grounds his sense of worth and identity “in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” And see, there is a sense of identity and meaning and rootedness that no one can take from you.

Because it actually doesn't matter if your marriage falls apart. It doesn't matter if your job falls apart. The Son of God loved you and gave himself for you. You can take that wherever you go, of course. In fact, you can take that to the grave, and Jesus believed you can take that *through* the grave, out the other side into new life. Right? There's no spouse that's going to go through the grave with you; and there's no job or no art career that's going to go through the grave with you. Jesus can, and He's promised to, if you'll be his disciple.

And Jesus knew this would be difficult—for us to avoid the idols of family and tribe and of self-fulfillment. And so he said this won't “just happen.” You don't just “happen” to become a disciple of Jesus. [Laughs] You know what I'm saying? You don't drift into discipleship, right?

You drift into just, like, laziness or apathy, right? That's what the whole Hebrews series was about. Hebrews, in a word: you drift into apathy and sin. You have to *intentionally* become a disciple of Jesus, which is why he says what he says next.

Verse 28, he says, “Which of you, desiring to build a tower, is not going to sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he's laid a foundation and isn't able to finish, everyone who sees it is going to mock that guy, saying, ‘Man, this guy began to build a tower and he wasn't able to finish it. What a chump.’”

“Or what king going out to encounter another king in war, won't sit down first and deliberate if he's able, with 10,000, to meet the one who comes against him with 20,000? And if he's not able, then while the other is a great way off, he sends his delegation and he asks for terms of peace. So therefore, if any of you does not renounce all he has, he can't be my disciples.”

He tells two little stories here—two little parables. They may be familiar to you. I would encourage you—they were familiar to me until I started reading them closely and realized I'd actually never really understood them.

So he has these two little parables. And the theme is on . . . what? Counting the cost. If you're going to start something—and clearly he means “if you're going to intend to be my disciple”—you better sit down and do the math first. “Do you realize what this means? Do you realize what you're committing yourself to? This is not going to be easy.”

It's like the skilled mountain guide: “It's going to be difficult. It's going to be hard. It may cost you everything you have. It might even cost you life. So follow me.” And Jesus is like, “You need to think that through.” You don't just *happen* to become a disciple of Jesus.

But here's what's interesting, and here's what never hit me before. Of course, Jesus means “sit down; be intentional about it.” Don't just sit “among the crowds” and think *that* makes you on good terms with Jesus. You need to make a choice. Be intentional; count the cost.

But notice in both cases—the guy counts the cost; the king deliberates—and both of them come up short, don't they? That's the whole emphasis of each parable. If the guy were to sit down and think through, and count the cost, he would see that he doesn't have enough. And the king would sit down and deliberate, and he realized, “Holy cow, I've just got 10,000 and I need at least 20 or 25 to do this thing.”

So Jesus tells you to “count the cost.” But then he also tells you that no matter what calculator you use to count the cost, you won't be able to do it. Do you see that? It's just right there in the parables. Both parables are about *failure* after counting the cost.

Once you count the cost of intending to follow Jesus, you inevitably come to the conclusion: “I don't have what it takes to become a disciple of Jesus.” And that's the

conclusion he wants you to draw. [Laughs] So this is a real winner. Shall I pray now? Amen. You know? *What? What?*

So Jesus—he did this a number of times in his teaching. I think he actually really believes this. He's calling people to make a decision to follow him, but yet he's fully, well aware that we've only got 10,000 men against 20,000. "I'm helpless. What can I do?"

He did this on another occasion—he's going to do it in just a few chapters here, in Luke chapter 18. Look at what happens here, and I think this is what he's doing, right here, in Luke chapter 18—sorry, I sprung that on you. Jesus said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. You know, it will be easier for a huge, fat camel—with the humps, you know?—to go through the teeny tiny little eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God."

And we all feel great about ourselves. Right? And so those who heard this, of course, their natural response is like, "We're done for." Like, who can be saved? And Jesus is like, "Yeah, you're right, it's impossible. It's impossible for you. What is impossible with people is, however, possible for God."

So what's he getting at? When you sit down and do the mental math of whether or not you're actually able to follow Jesus, you *will* come to the conclusion: "I can't do it. *I can't do it.*" And that's precisely where Jesus means you to be. Because that's precisely where the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me, and moves towards me in my *inability* to actually follow Him.

Because here's the thing, man. I mean, some of us estimate ourselves too highly. We actually do think we can follow Jesus. And so we actually think you can forgive people who don't like you and who are lame towards you at your job or whatever. And you actually do think you can sustain a whole life of giving everything you have to the poor, and you do think you can pray and fast for seven days every year—or maybe fast once a week. You think you can keep that up.

[Laughs] That's because you're in your 20s. And some people can make that last for a while. And then you get to your 50s, and you're like, "Yeah, that whole thing about retiring in Florida . . ." and so on, and . . . "that's—wow, that would be pretty cool." You can't sustain it. That's a recipe for religious burnout leading to hypocrisy. Or it's a recipe to become, just, a rigid, religious moralist. And you will inevitably begin to look down on people who don't follow Jesus as—"because I counted the cost and I gave up everything to follow him; how about you?" You know?

And so then you end up with a community of people who are just super excited about their accomplishments for Jesus. And that's precisely *not* what Jesus is getting at here. And so some people exalt *family and tribes*. Some people exalt *self-actualization*. Some people exalt their religious performance, and give their allegiance to that.

And Jesus says, “If you actually count the cost and you sit down and deliberate, you realize you don't have what it takes. You don't have what it takes to do the right thing, from the right heart, all of the time, for the rest of your life.”

It's *precisely* when you and I realize, “I *can't* follow Jesus—and, if I'm honest with myself, half the time I don't even want to.” If you're humble, and you just come to the cross and you say, “That's where I am, Jesus,” Jesus' response is, “Okay, now we can go somewhere.” That's disciple-material, right there. Do you see what I'm saying here?

This is so brilliant what Jesus is doing. It's only when you realize you can't truly become his disciple that you're actually ready to be his disciple, which is why he ends with what he says next here: “Salt is good.”

Jesus is always like this. He's talking about really heavy matters—like heaven or hell; the kingdom of God—and then he starts talking about birds and flowers, or something like that. He always does this. So people are like, “I have got to give up everything to follow you?” And then, “Salt . . . had a dinner, put salt on it . . . I don't get it; what is he talking about?”

“Salt is good. But if salt has lost its taste, how will its saltiness be restored? I mean, it's of no use. It's of no use for soil, for the manure pile. It's just going to be thrown away. How many of you have ears? You should listen.” And then he's just done.

Salt—I think this is what he's getting at—Jesus called his disciples, in the Sermon on the Mount, he calls his people: “You are the”—what?—“of the earth”? Salt of the earth. And he paralleled that: salt of the earth/light of the world. So “no one puts a light under a basket . . .” and so on. “Let your light shine.” And what does it mean to be “salt” and to “let your light shine”? He says, “Let people see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” The phrase, “good works” in the New Testament means acts of love, of sacrifice, of generosity in my community, in my relationships, and so on.

And so, that's a good thing; salt is good. You can actually only be salty, of course, once you recognize that you actually can't be salty, in and of yourself. It's only when you confess, “I can't be salty, Jesus,” that he'll begin to work with your soft, humble heart and empower you by the Spirit to make you salty. Salt is good. Salt enhances flavor. Salt is a preservative, and so on.

And so this became Jesus' image of his disciples out there in the world, people who recognize, “I actually don't have what it takes to follow Jesus, but he's met me in that place, and, in my humility and my brokenness he loves me; he gave himself for me. Now I can begin.” Because what I do is now not about pleasing Jesus, or honoring my family or self-fulfillment, it's just simply responding to the love that Jesus has shown me. And when I fail, you know? I get up on my feet. “Forgive me, Jesus.” Here we go again. And you just, you get up and you go again.

The journey of being a disciple: grounding your identity in the love and the grace of Jesus for you—that "I don't have what it takes, but He includes me in His family of disciples anyway." If you can begin to root yourself in that place every single day, it will begin to overflow.

And so here's the thing, like take your job, for example. So in the self-actualization, self-fulfillment idol, of course, your job is all about you. Your job is the place where you find meaning and fulfillment. It's where you're going to improve your resume; at least make enough to provide for your needs, or your family, if you have one; but then, of course, you want to get ahead or whatever.

The workplace becomes a whole bunch of people competing, with their own idols of self-fulfillment, and so on. But see, once I'm freed from that, and I realize Jesus is calling me to live differently in my workplace, I don't actually want to, and I don't think I'm actually capable of it—so it begins there. And then you humble yourself, and you ask Jesus to empower you, and you finish Galatians 2:20, which says, "I have been crucified with Christ," and so actually in my day-to-day life, it's no longer me who's living. I've given that up. I've given up thinking that I can actually follow Jesus. He says, "it's not me who's living, it's Christ living in me, and the life that I do live, I live by"—what?—"by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

So then I enter into my workplace, and it's not about me, because my sense of worth and identity is grounded in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. And so now, the workplace is just one more set of relationships where I can respond to this love of Jesus and be His disciple. And where I can actually serve others for their well-being, regardless of what I get out of it. And I can actually work and be the hardest working employee of all because I want to honor Jesus, who gave me life and breath and a body and a mind, so that I can actually work for him, and so on.

And then you find, paradoxically, the more you're trying *not* to be religious and "do" religious, moral performance, the more freely you're able to follow Jesus, you know? And actually do it successfully. And then you fail, of course, and then feel horrible. And then you remind yourself that Jesus loves you. Do you see what I'm saying?

That's how disciples become salt, because you get a workplace—you just get, like, one grocery store, you know, where you have, like, 15 people who are disciples of Jesus, and meeting and encouraging each other to "count the cost", to own up to our inability; and to ground ourselves in the love of Jesus, and you will begin to find that place full of more flavor and full of more preservative of Jesus—salt and light.

But if I call myself a Christian, if I want to associate myself with Jesus and, kind of, "hang out in the crowd," but I'm actually—none of that's happening inside of me—and, in fact, how I actually live at work is just, like, everybody else who has the idol of self-

fulfillment, then I'm like, "What's the point?" It's like salt that's not salty. Why are you calling yourself salt then?

And Jesus is not trying to be a jerk, he's just saying, "Name what you actually are, and that will help you." It will help you know what you are. Are you a disciple of Jesus or are you not? It will help you to know that, so that you can actually take the next step that's necessary. Because if you're not, you need to become one. And if you are one, you need to humble yourself, again, before the cross, and allow Jesus to do something in you so that you can become salt and light.

There may be different things that you and I need to fill in here, about things that we need to hate. For you, it might not be family or tribe and self-fulfillment. You might have some other thing you need to fill in here—something that has a hold of your heart and your allegiance, and you need to give it up, because you can't find life there.

And some of us need to give it up tonight, because it won't just *happen*. You have to *choose* to. You have to choose to trust this Jesus who's guiding us through the mountains. He has our best interests in mind—not our comfort, or even short-term happiness. He has *life* in mind for us, but we have to trust Him. He may call us to difficult things, so that we can embrace life [that is truly life.]

[Musical Break 42:30—42:35]

Hey guys, thanks for listening to the *Exploring Strange Bible* podcast. I hope these teachings and resources are helpful for you. If you find this podcast helpful, spread the word. Tell some friends about it. You can go on iTunes and write a review, if you find it helpful and—cheers. We'll see you guys next episode.

[Musical Finale 42:53—43:13]