

Luke Chapter 14 v 25 - 35

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Date: 09 February 2020

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. Welcome. Welcome to our visitors from York and anyone else. Good to see you've braved the storm to get here this morning. Well we're here to worship God, aren't we, this morning.

I want to read a few verses from Psalm 34. The words of King David. He says this. I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips.

I will glory in the Lord. Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. And I don't know what your week's been like, but for King David, he was in a real period of trial in his life and he was running away from his own people, from King Saul.

And he'd taken refuge in a Philistine city and he'd ended up running away from there as well. And yet in the midst of these he says, God is my refuge. And today, whatever we're going through, God is our refuge, isn't he?

[1 : 09] Whatever we're going through in life, we come before God and we praise him. He is our refuge. So we're going to start by praising God together. Come people of the risen King who delight to sing his praise. Come up on the screen behind me. Let's sing.

Come people of the risen King who delight to sing his praise.

I'm just going to commit the service to God in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning and we want to remember your goodness to us.

We thank you that you're a good God and you are our Father. Though we're sinners, you've forgiven us, you've delivered us, Father. And often we don't come with hearts that feel like rejoicing, Father, but help us to remember that there's so much to rejoice in.

Help us to rejoice this morning, we pray. And as we've just sung the shifting shadows of the earth, Father, and so often our circumstances feel like that.

[2 : 30] They're changing constantly, Father, but we thank you that you are our rock, you are our refuge, you are our strength, Father. And so we pray this morning that you'd take our eyes from the earth and from our circumstances, Father, and that you'd lift our eyes to you this morning.

We admit that we come with unbelief, with doubts and fears. Yet we ask that you'd help us to remember you this morning. We thank you that you are faithful, you're our deliverer, Father.

And we pray this morning that you would show us yourself, Father. We pray that you'd show us your glory. We pray that you'd show us who you are. And as David prays, that those who turn their eyes to you, those who look to you are radiant, Father.

We pray that we would come out of this place radiant, that we would be able to rejoice in you, Father. So glorify yourself this morning. Speak to us this morning, we pray. Amen. Amen. We'll come to our reading now, and we're continuing in the Gospel of Luke.

We'll be in Chapter 14. So page 104.8 in your Bibles. And the heading is The Cost of Being a Disciple.

[3 : 49] So Luke 14, verse 25 to the end of the chapter. Amen. Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said, If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

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

For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able, with 10,000 men, to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000?

If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

[5 : 18] Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap. It is thrown out.

Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. Good morning. To see you.

Thank you, Joel, for leading us so helpfully in our worship and introducing us to that children's talk, to our theme and thought this morning.

Please would you turn back then to Luke and chapter 14, the last part of Luke 14. And we are going to look together at these words of our Lord Jesus as he speaks particularly to the large crowd who were following him and turns to them.

And we are included in that sense in the words of Christ. Christ. To us. I'm sure you've come across the expression, the real McCoy.

[6 : 25] I don't think we use it as much as we did, but when people use the phrase, the real McCoy, they're talking about something being genuine. The true article rather than a copy or an imitation or something else.

The real McCoy is that which is reliably authentic. And the origins of this phrase are very much lost in the mists of time.

There's all sorts of possible McCoy's that might be referred to as the real McCoy. One of them was an American inventor in the 1800s who may be the source of the saying.

He invented particularly an automatic oiling system for steam engines. That might be interesting to you, Martin. And his particular automatic oilers were highly prized.

And so people wanted the real McCoy on their engines. But it probably goes back to a corruption of the name McCoy, the Scottish name McCoy, where some centuries ago there was a great dispute amongst the clan McCoy as to who was the rightful leader.

[7 : 34] And was he the real McCoy or the false pretender, as it were? And that name McCay became McCoy. There's several other possible reasons as well.

But there's no real one source for this saying. There's some confusion over it. The real McCoy.

I want to ask you the question this morning. Are you the real McCoy? Are you the real McCoy? Are you the genuine article? You see, when Jesus turns to this crowd, these probably thousands of people we know at other times, he fed 5,000 and 4,000 and more besides.

So we can guess that there are a great number, a large crowd. He turns to them and he's very clear and speaks to them quite bluntly and plainly about the real McCoy.

That is to say, the true disciple of his, the true follower of his. We're told that people were traveling with him, but he says to them, yet such a person cannot be my disciple.

[8 : 41] Whoever does not carry up their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Later on in verse 33 as well, In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

So Jesus is talking about the real, the true, the genuine disciple. Christian. We live in a world where we are surrounded by fake.

Fake news. Imitations. Falsehood. We don't really know who we can trust when we pick up the telephone and we're told that we've been involved in a car accident and told that we can claim insurance back from that.

We don't know who is genuine when we get an email promising us that we've got a tax refund waiting. How can we tell the fake, the false from the true and the genuine?

Of course, if we get it wrong and we find ourselves sort of drawn in to believe this story or this email or this message or whatever it may be, it can be very costly.

[9 : 49] People have been cheated and conned out of a great deal of money. And so we're very careful, aren't we? Usually when people phone us in that way or send us an email in that way, if we feel there's something fishy about it, we'll make some investigation.

We'll ask some questions before we commit ourselves to something which may cause us a great loss. But how much more should we be sure about what is real and fake when it comes to those things which are more valuable, more important than money and finance?

See, Jesus here is talking about being cheated out of something far more important. Being cheated out of our immortal soul, our eternal destiny.

That's why his words are so very forceful and strong and even startling. This isn't a matter of life and death. This is a matter of heaven or hell. One of the great sadnesses for anybody who is a Christian is the sadness of knowing another person who's professed to be a Christian or seemed to live as a Christian for a little while but then proves to be someone who is not a Christian, who turns their back on and disowns Christ.

The technical word for this is apostasy. To apostatize, to turn away from, to say and to live as a disciple of Jesus for some time, for a while, but then to deny him and to admit that of never believing in him.

[11:28] That's why Jesus is so very concerned that those who are following him, those who are giving him honor in one sense and listening to his teaching, are very sure that they really are true disciples.

And that carries on throughout the rest of the New Testament. The letters of Peter and Paul often regularly call upon their readers to test themselves, to check themselves, to be sure and have that confidence and assurance that they really are the real McCoy when it comes to the Christian faith. So Peter, in his second letter, early on in the letter, says, Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you'll never stumble. And Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, 2 Corinthians 13, Examine yourselves, he says, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ is in you? Unless, of course, you fail the test. We will go to lengths. We will be careful about our money. We will be careful about who we trust. We will be careful about what we accept as real or fake when it comes to the things of wealth or possession and so on.

[12:45] How much more so must we be very certain and sure that we are the genuine article, the real McCoy, that we really are disciples and followers of Jesus.

So Jesus turns to this large crowd. He knows people's hearts. Amongst the crowd, of course, are his disciples. But he knows that amongst this large crowd, there will be many there who are following him for the wrong reasons or giving lip service, we might say, saying that they are walking with him and trusting him and believing in him, but really they are not genuine disciples.

And that is the same in any large number, in any crowd, in any congregation, in any church meeting, even like our own this morning. Some of us here are not real Christians.

Now some of us would hold our hands up. Perhaps we say, well, I know I'm not a real Christian. I'm not pretending to be a real Christian. I'm here because I'm thinking about Christian things and I want to find out the truth about Christian things.

I want to be certain about this Jesus. Some of us are very clear and open about that. But some of us, I think, that might not be the case. For some of us, we might think that we really are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and followers of his, yet the reality may be that we are not.

[14:05] Other people take us as we are. We think that we are, but we may not be so. Therefore, it's vital, it's essential that we know whether we are true or fake, real or false, genuine or imitation.

In Joel's children's talk, he talked about the people at the Olympics winning the medal and biting it to see if it was genuine. But my illustration was thinking about the cowboy films, which, of course, I loved and loved to watch when I was younger.

And there would always be that part where they'd get a gold coin, wouldn't they? And they'd put it in their teeth. Is it a real gold coin? And perhaps you, what are they doing? Is it supposed to taste differently? Well, real gold, especially quite pure gold, wouldn't be bent, wouldn't leave an impression in the teeth.

But a fake coin, which may have been made of lead and covered with a thin veneer of gold, of course, would be much softer and would bend. They would test the gold.

And Jesus wants us to test the authenticity of our faith. He's asking these people, these followers, his disciples included, I want you to check and test yourself, examine yourself, to see whether you really are going to be one of my disciples or not.

[15:27] And these tests that Jesus placed before them are valid tests for us as well today. There's two very simple tests. The first test is this. It's a test of our love for Christ.

A test of our love for Christ. Some people would think, and if you were to go out into the street and ask people, you know, what is a real Christian like? And they might say, well, a real Christian believes certain things of Jesus.

A real Christian believes certain things about the Bible and about God. Well, somebody might say, well, of course, a genuine Christian, a follower of Jesus, is seen by what they do. They go to church, and they pray, and they read their Bible.

They're someone who never swears, and they live a good life. A real Christian is somebody whose life shows that they are disciples of Jesus. And both those answers are valid, but they're not the test that Jesus brings here.

The test Jesus brings here is not a test of our belief, not a test of our practice, but it's a test of our heart. He says the chief evidence of when a person is following Jesus is a heart test.

[16:33] Not an ECG, maybe some of you had that, electrocardiogram, but as I've called it, an LJF. Loving Jesus first.

Loving Jesus first. And Jesus' language is shocking, isn't it? Verse 26, If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

Hate. What has Jesus got to do with hate? What has Christianity got to do with hate? Jesus' language is strong because he wants us to sit up and take notice. He wants to get our attention. He wants us to be astonished by what is required of every one of his followers. And he makes no apology for upsetting us or for using this type of language.

It's the sort of language that Jesus spoke that got him executed because he was blunt and he was plain and he was clear. It's the kind of words that cuts the heart of us all. If anyone comes to me and does not hate, simply put, the test is this.

[17:49] Who do you love before and above everyone else? Including yourself. If he says, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be your disciple.

If you cannot say, dear friends, sincerely in your heart that Jesus is the one that you love before and firstly, before anyone else, then you are not his disciple.

It's as black and white as that. Faced with the choice between your family and what they want and what pleases them or doing what Jesus wants and pleasing him, who would you seek to please? Who would you put first? Who would you follow? Who is in the primary place of your heart? You see, if you act against your family, if you do what displeases them, they may well take that to be a hateful action.

Certainly, that's the case for many people who come to faith in Christ from other religions. Their family will believe that they hate them. Because they have turned away from Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism and turned to Christ.

[19:13] But for you and I, the choice may be not quite so strong, but it may be the same thing. We may be pressured. We may be called upon. We may be expected by our family or those that love us and that we love to do certain things which we know are not what God wants us to do.

They're not what Jesus wants in our lives and who are we going to please firstly and foremostly. But then, of course, it gets a whole lot more difficult when we ratchet up the temperature where Jesus says, even your own life.

There are a lot of people as we know in our world today who will do whatever they want and go against their family and hurt their family and harm their family and love them because this is what's for me.

I want to please myself. This is my choice, my action. This is my decision. But Jesus says, even yourself. We're not to love ourselves before our family.

We are to love Christ before our family and love Christ before ourselves as well. Faced with pleasing yourself and doing what you think is best for you or Jesus, who do you choose?

[20:32] And when Jesus goes on to say in verse 27, really to qualify that, whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple, he is being very plain and clear. Everybody in Jesus' day and probably today as well, many of you know that the cross meant death.

The cross was the preferred instrument of execution within the Roman Empire. It was reserved for the most rebellious, awful people and any symbol of the cross meant one thing, death.

So Jesus says, whoever does not or is not willing to die by following me cannot be my disciple. It's a test of our love.

Do we love Jesus Christ above? I'm not talking about feelings. This isn't about feeling. This is about love in action. This is about love in decision, love in choice.

Love is not simply feeling, is it? You love somebody, then you sacrifice. You give up. You put them before everything and anyone else.

[21 : 48] Now perhaps as you read that and you hear that and again it's a shocking language of Jesus here. You may say, well why? Why does Jesus say this? Why does he make this test so hard?

Why is it even necessary? Why can't we just come to Jesus and make him a part of our lives and a sort of a 50-50 basis with our family?

Why can't there be some compromise, some negotiation in this matter? Why is this test necessary? Because, dear friends, it's an impossible test to pass.

It's an impossible test to pass. You and I cannot pass this test until we have known the transforming power of Christ's love first.

You see, sometimes people when they think about becoming a Christian, they think about, I've got to do this right first. I've got to get my life right. I've got to make my life good. I've got to sort out the problems.

[22 : 49] I've got to be the perfect person before I become a Christian. And that's completely the wrong way around. We come to Christ with our sin and our failings. We come to Christ with our foolishness.

We come to Christ with all the baggage that we've got in our past. And we come to him and he transforms and changes us. So what is impossible for the person who does not know Christ becomes a reality of the person who does know Christ.

And it's the love of God for us in Christ that transforms us. John, in his letter, writes to the Christians, 1 John 4.10. He says, this is what love is like.

This is real love, genuine love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

It's only when we recognize that Christ has carried the cross on our behalf. Only when we see what love took him to Calvary. Only when we see how much we are loved of God and experience that love, as the Bible says, being poured out into our hearts by God's Holy Spirit, then there is a transformation in our heart.

[24 : 01] So that actually everything and everyone is put into the shade by Jesus and his love for us. And it's not a forced thing.

This test is not a matter of force. It's not a matter of me summoning up within myself some determination that I will love Jesus more than my family. It's not that it's completely natural to the believer.

It's completely supernatural to the work of God. it's impossible for you to love Christ before everybody else until you have first experienced the love of Christ for yourself and then you, yourself and everybody else does take a step down from the throne of your hearts.

Experiencing God's love alone can make us true lovers of God. the second test comes in verses 28 through to 33.

The first test was our love for Christ. What is our love like? How highly and greatly do we love him? And that can only come from experiencing love. The second test is our value of Christ.

[25 : 19] How much do we value him? And that's clear from how Jesus sums up these two parables doesn't he? In verse 33. the parable of the builder and the parable of the king he says in verse 33 in the same way as these two people those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

So the question then becomes what do we value? What are we willing to lose that we might gain Christ? Already we've been challenged by Jesus about loving him and following him and being disciple of him means giving up our family in one sense giving up our own self our own plans our own purposes our own will our own desires so what is he talking about what can be more valuable than family and loved ones and our own lives it's clear from what Jesus says here that the true Christian the disciple of Jesus is someone who's first considered Jesus of such supreme value that they are willing to give him all of their life see becoming a Christian is not a one-off event as we might have been led to believe you don't become a Christian by making a once for all payment as it were to

God following Jesus is an everyday every moment commitment which carries on to the very end of this life and into eternity some people and perhaps you may be one of them might say that to become a Christian you become a Christian because you're baptized either as an infant or even as an adult in that moment you've become a Christian you've entered into following Jesus some people may think that becoming a Christian is you pray a particular prayer the sinner's prayer or some other sort of prayer or you come forward at a meeting when you're invited to come and give your heart to Jesus there's a one-off commitment to Jesus and you're covered for the rest of life a bit like taking out a life insurance policy you pay it off once and for all and then you're sorted for the rest of your years but Jesus says here being a disciple of his being a follower of his becoming a Christian it's not something that can be entered without seriously counting the cost seriously weighing it up weighing up whether we can carry this on to the end you see that in both those parables you've got first of all somebody who's a builder they're putting an extension on their house and building a tower don't know whether you've thought of putting an extension on your house I doubt you're probably going to put a tower on it you may put an extra kitchen or a bathroom or whatever it may be here's someone they lay the foundations and they're excited about this prospect about this finished object this extension this tower whatever it may be but then they run out of money they hadn't bothered before they started the building work to count the cost to see whether there was enough in the bank or whether they had enough finances to finish it I'm sure that you've seen buildings like this around Whitby and other places there's sort of a concrete block sort of a structure there and it's got no roof and windows on it and it's there like that for months or years they've started but they've not finished it's somewhat embarrassing as Jesus say everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying this person began to build and wasn't able to finish this is a matter of embarrassment becoming a

Christian this is a matter of eternal destiny this is a matter far far more serious see the person who trusts that the prayer that they prayed 20 or 30 years ago means that they will get into heaven is in for more than a little embarrassment on judgment day the person who's trusting in the fact that when they were a child they were baptized or when they were a child they were confirmed the person who's trusting that they came forward at a meeting several years ago and put their hand up or prayed a sinner's prayer the person who is trusting in something that's happened to them in the past as a one-off event that will get them into heaven and they are on a false footing according to Jesus not me but I agree with Jesus like a king who goes to war with without a big enough army dear friends we shall face a devastating defeat at

[30 : 23] God's hands do you notice that suppose a king is about to go to war against another king won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 to oppose the one coming with 20,000 of course he's not he'd be stupid to go into a battle where he's completely and hopelessly outnumbered dear friends you and I must get on good terms with God our king before the day of battle battle in heaven's courtroom when the accusations and the judgment of God falls upon us and we think that we've got enough on our side to be able to counter him those people who say when I get to heaven I'm going to give God a piece of my mind they are so foolish when I get to heaven I'm going to tell God of all the good things I've done I'm going to tell God about my church attendance my charity giving

I'm going to tell God about how many times I prayed and read the Bible I'm going to tell God about my baptism I'm going to tell God about my church membership I'm going to tell God about how I was an elder in this church or a church officer or how all of those things are going to be purposeless and empty you're going against God with nothing and he has got the weight of his justice and law which says again and again dear friends that we must seek terms of peace with him and that's the amazing thing God has provided a way for us to make peace with him this test is extreme to the limit isn't it because ultimately what Jesus is saying and what the Bible tells us is this unless today in your life you are committed wholeheartedly to loving and following Jesus Christ then you are not a Christian you can't fall in and out yes there are times we must be honest that our love is not as hot and as warm and as passionate as it once was there are times yes when we get caught up with the busyness and all the things that take our time and draw our attention but ultimately when the test is applied this is why we need to examine ourselves today as we are sitting here with everything else of the world pushed to one side can you say in your heart of hearts

Christ is my most valuable possession and I would not lose him for anything whatever the world has to offer again it's an impossible test you see you can't say that sort of thing except that you are a

genuine believer you can't say that sort of thing except that you've been transformed by the beauty of Jesus Christ so that as you've gazed upon him and considered him and looked at what he's done for you in his life and death as you see him as your great redeemer and the one who came from heaven to earth for you when you see him as he truly is then everything else is put into the shade and his beauty and his loveliness shines through and you value him and you say I must have him I can't do without him every moment of my life he is my everything and so Paul as he talks and shares about his own heart he says to the

Galatian Christians the life I live in the body the life that I live now the life that I live in this world the life that I live I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me my whole life is his everything every part see when when you meet with Jesus love it's the same as love isn't it we're talking about love you know what it's like those of us who've been married and are married you know what it's like that person who you fell in love with you couldn't imagine that you could give yourself so wholeheartedly to one person until you met them you thought you knew what love was like you thought you knew what it was to be in love perhaps you had a boyfriend a girlfriend or something else like that and you thought yeah I'm in love this is great but then it all falls apart and it collapses and you're broken hearted but then at last you meet that one you couldn't imagine what it was like to so be in love with someone that you would willingly die for them and gave your life for them well that's what happens with Christ until you meet with

Jesus dear friend until you experience him only then will you gladly willingly joyfully say all my life is yours now and forever you are so amazing it's impossible until you meet with Christ you can't be a real disciple if you do not value Jesus above everything else so Jesus concludes here doesn't he this little saying salt is good but if it loses its saltiness how can it be made salty again it's fit neither for the soil nor the manure heap it's thrown out real salt is salty you know when you when you you're there cooking aren't you and sometimes you might mistake the sugar for the salt and you shake your finger and you go and dip it in oh yeah that's yeah that's definitely salt it's got a taste hasn't it it strikes you dear friends as a

[36 : 14] Christian you're either salty or you're not and you may look granularly you might look a bit like salt may look a bit like a Christian but one taste proves whether you're real salt or you're saltless salt and if you're saltless salt then you're no good for anything it can't save you you can't enter heaven you can't know God you can't know your sins forgiven dear friends we can't afford to ignore the words of Jesus no matter how painful they might be he says there whoever has ears to hear let him hear that's quite a tamed down version he's saying if you've got ears open them if you've got ears then listen up you can't afford to ignore what Jesus is saying you can't afford to put it to one side you can't afford to say well it doesn't matter whether I'm a genuine Christian or not I'm pretty certain

I'm going to be okay you can't afford to be I'm not sure 95% maybe are you Christ's you see it's not just staking your reputation upon what happened to you or what you think of yourself you're staking the whole of eternity on shaky ground a prayer a thought a self belief I want us dear friends to take a moment now in the quietness of our own hearts to do what God's word tells us to do to examine ourselves and if as we examine ourselves we are honest enough to say Lord Jesus I know that I do not love you in the way that I should Lord Jesus I know that I do not value you in the way that I should therefore I pray please come and take complete possession of my heart of all my love and from this moment Lord cause me help me enable me to love and to value you as I should let's bow our heads in prayer may God the Holy

Spirit search our minds and hearts just as you looked out over that crowd Lord Jesus so you look out over this crowd just as you knew every one of their hearts so you know ours too we ask oh Lord that you would search our hearts and reveal to us whether we are false or true whether we are fake or real Lord you put these tests before us not because you want to humiliate us or ridicule us or to destroy us rather you put these tests before us because you want us to know and have the assurance and the confidence that we are loved of you that we are forgiven of our sins that we are your disciples this test is so that we might cry to you and say yes Lord

I failed the test but Lord I know that you are the one who has passed the test for me for by your holy life and righteousness Lord Jesus you did what I could never do by your death and resurrection you paid the price I could never pay and thank you that by trusting in you putting all my faith in you so I become the inheritor of your righteousness I become the one who is right in God's eyes because your righteousness is given to me my failings are covered by your blood and your righteousness

your goodness and your faithfulness and thank you that in Jesus God's beloved son I am accepted and loved and saved oh Lord pray that even today none of us oh Lord would stop our ears to your word that none of us would run away from your Holy Spirit but each of us oh Lord may openly gladly willingly once more entrust ourselves to you take my life oh Lord let it be consecrated given over committed to thee amen to you the to you you like you to