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Good morning. Our reading today comes from Luke 14, yeah 25 to 33. "Now great multitudes went with him and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, in his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it? Lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able, with ten thousand, to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be my disciple." Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you have called each of us to be disciples and we want to obey your call. Please help us to understand what this means. Please help us to understand what you've called us to and why. In the name of your son Jesus we pray, amen. Well, as I mentioned last week, I and a few other people from this church went to a conference on discipleship a couple weekends ago at Quaker Haven. Now specifically that conference dealt with how church membership relates to discipleship. And as the speaker was speaking, he gave us lots of great points, but I found myself trying to kind of step back and put myself into his shoes, maybe if someone who hadn't heard these things before. And I just sort of asked myself a lot of fundamental questions about discipleship. And a lot of the questions I didn't really have a good clear answer for. And so I've just been studying up on those answers and since Keith is about to start a whole series on discipleship through the book of Luke, I figured that this would be a good time to just maybe some lay some basic groundwork about what he'll be talking about over the next couple of months. And so I basically for my slides up here, I've kind of just wrote down the questions that I had. And then I'm just going to go through those questions and talk about the answers. So the first question is, what is discipleship? Well, we've all heard of the 12 disciples and you've probably heard me speak on the Great Commission where Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. And if you're like me, you probably toss out the word disciple without thinking about it too much. But I realized that when I tried to just really just give a nice clear definition on it, I wasn't so clear. And I was like, I think I can identify it if I see it, but I need to work on understanding what it really is. Well, obviously a disciple is one who learns, but that's also the definition of a student. The difference between a disciple and a student is that a disciple is someone who embraces the teachings of the one that they are learning from. I've been a student of several computer teachers in my life, but I've never been the disciple of any of them. I was never so certain of the veracity of what those men were saying that I just embraced their teachings wholeheartedly to the point where I felt compelled to pass them on to others. If there was someone in my computer field who was, you know, great enough in their knowledge to deserve disciples, well the odds are that I probably wouldn't have access to that person, and I would have to be a disciple through their books or their Facebook posts or their tweets or something. You don't need physical access to a person to be their disciple, but you do need access to their teachings or their writings or whatever. If you go to the art store, you can sign up for painting lessons for people who are trained in the Bob Ross method of painting. Remember him? I got happy trees and happy clouds. But you know, learning from these these artists who know his methods is not quite the same as learning directly from Bob Ross himself through his books or watching his videos. And these teachers, they know it's not quite the same thing, and so that's why they advertise themselves as having trained directly under Bob Ross. So in other words, follow them because they are direct disciples of the man himself. They're the next best thing to learning directly from him. In biblical times, if you wanted to be someone's disciple, you just packed up and followed that person around. You'd leave your life behind. You would eat where they ate, sleep where they slept, and if they accepted you as their disciple, they would probably give you responsibilities, which was typically to go out and pass along their teachings. And all of these things are things we see of Jesus and his disciples. So a disciple is more than a student. It is someone who embraces the teachings of their master and makes those teachings part of their life, and they reorient their life around this new truth they've discovered. So next question, what is discipleship in Christianity? Well, there's really no special answer to this question. Discipleship in Christianity means you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. Now, of course, Jesus isn't walking around somewhere on the earth anymore, where we can go find him and follow him. And so disciples of Jesus learn from him primarily through his teachings, which is the Bible. Now, primarily through the Bible, that's important. It is true that you have the Holy Spirit within you, and one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to teach us. However, our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, which means that nothing that the Spirit teaches us today will ever contradict what he has said in the past through Jesus and through the disciples. And there are sadly some people out there calling themselves Christians, some that even call themselves Quakers, who have said, "Whatever I feel inside me, if it feels good, then it is from God, and I can believe it, and I can trust it." But this is not true. You still have your corrupted flesh with its sin nature. You still have your fallen mind, and you can still be deceived by deceiving spirits. Not everything that comes from within you is from God, and so whatever we believe we hear the Holy Spirit whispering in our hearts should be checked against scripture to make sure that we are drinking from the right well. The same goes from what we hear from our teachers, even what you hear from me. If I say something that you think is contradictory to scripture, then absolutely you need to question it and check it out for yourself. So we are disciples of Jesus as we learn from his word, as we learn from the Holy Spirit, and as we learn from other Christian teachers. But in addition to that, we must not only be hearers of the word, but doers. Discipleship is not merely an academic process. Remember what I said, the disciple embraces the teachings they receive. It is not enough just to agree that prayer is a good thing. You must embrace prayer and make a constant habit of it. Pray without ceasing, the Bible says. You must not just believe that forgiveness is a Christian virtue. You must embrace forgiveness and live a life that constantly strives to forgive those who wrong you. And you can go through all the Christian virtues and all the Christian teachings and do the same thing. Don't just believe X, do X. That's what it means to be a disciple. A disciple has faith, not just in the salvation sense, but a life that always chooses obedience to Christ because they are convinced that Christ is a rewarder of those who keep his commandments. A disciple has hope and refuses to allow present circumstances to diminish the joy of what our future holds. A disciple has love, not just like the world does, but a love for enemies and a love for strangers and a love for those who cannot repay. Charity, modesty, temperance, these virtues are the adjectives that describe a Christian disciple. Next question, isn't what you're describing just called being a Christian? Well, yes and no. As Pastor Keith pointed out last week, the term Christian was originally a pejorative. It was a term used to slander the believers in Christ. What we call Christians actually sums up two groups of people mentioned in the Bible. Those who are saved and those who are disciples. And those two groups are not mutually exclusive. They can and should overlap, but they are technically two groups that we unfortunately lump together when we say Christian. Next question, are you saying there's a difference between salvation and discipleship? Well, yes, that is what I'm saying. And as I say it, it sounds almost like heresy. And this is absolutely one of those times when you should, after I'm done, flip through your Bible and find out for yourself whether this is true or not. But if it's true, and I really believe it is, then this was a real eye-opener for me when I started to understand it. It's something that never clicked with me before, but once I began to understand it, so much of what has been blurry for me in Christianity has come into focus. We've probably already all heard that if someone wants to be saved, they should repent and believe, maybe say a sinner's prayer and then that's it, they're saved. But we also have all of these teachings about how to be a Christian. So why do I need to be a Christian if that precious grace appeared the hour I first believed? What is the relationship between salvation occurring immediately when you believe and yet striving for the rest of your life to live better and better? Well it all makes sense when you realize that there's a difference between salvation and discipleship. Here are some statements of comparison that I found from some Christian resources on the internet. Christ's invitation to salvation is "Come unto me." His call to discipleship is "Come follow me." Salvation is about the cross of Christ. Discipleship is about taking up your own cross. Salvation is free and without price to us. Discipleship is costly and must be counted. Salvation takes place in an instant. Discipleship is a lifelong process. Salvation involves Christ loving me. Discipleship involves me loving Christ. So do you see? Salvation is by grace through faith and that is not of yourself that no one should boast. But discipleship involves great personal effort and sacrifice. Great personal effort and sacrifice is something completely different from by grace through faith and not of works that none should boast. When God decides to save you he places faith in your heart to believe in Jesus. It's not something you did but something God did. But when you choose to be a disciple, if you choose, you made the choice and the effort on your own. Next question, what's the relationship between salvation and discipleship? Well your salvation, if it is genuine, should lead to discipleship. Specifically, the faith that saves you, the faith in your heart, if it's a saving faith, it will draw you towards discipleship. It will draw you to obey the command of Jesus when he says follow me. Faith is not just a decision you made, it's a gift from God with with power to transform you. But as it transforms you it will place into your heart a hunger for righteousness, a hunger to imitate God as dear children, and that is discipleship. So next question, so you should be saved first and then become a disciple? Well not necessarily. Think about what Jesus did. As he began his teaching ministry he went to each of the men that we call the 12 disciples and he said follow me. And those men at that point became his disciples. And after they followed him for a while and they listened to his teaching and they observed his miracles, and finally one day it clicked. God revealed to them that this was the Son of God, the Messiah, and at that moment they believed in him and they were saved. So they were disciples first but they became believers later. And I think actually for many of us it was probably the same way. I feel like it was for me. We were raised in churches, raised in Christian families, and our parents made us disciples. They said do this, don't do that, act like a Christian. And we learned how to act like Christians. But at some point or another the idea popped into our head. Hey wait, do I really believe all of this God stuff? And then you chose. So I think many of us, if we're being honest, were probably disciples first and then later once we understood the choice we chose to become believers. But other people around the world, especially in countries where there isn't a strong Christian presence, they meet a Christian for the first time, they see his lifestyle, they see there's something different about him, and they ask what's different about you, and they hear the gospel, and then they choose right then and there. They want to believe in this before they've ever learned anything about how to be a Christian. So they become saved before they become disciples. There was a time in the Bible where many of the people who were following Jesus, people you might call the general disciples, they didn't care for some of the things he was saying. And so they just left, they turned around and they left. Discipleship does not always lead to salvation. And there were plenty of people who perhaps, there are plenty of people who perhaps due to family pressure or the fear of hellfire will tell you, "Yes, I am a Christian," but you can plainly see by their lifestyle that they're certainly not a disciple, and that certainly should cause us to doubt the legitimacy of their faith, but only God sees the heart, so don't go throwing accusations around. Another example, if you look at all the people who call themselves Christians, you will find that the divorce rate among those people is the same as the rest of our country. It's about 50%. But if you look at the people who go to church, read their Bibles, tithe, pray, and actually have a life that reflects the beliefs they claim they have, those people, the divorce rate is much, much lower. This again shows that not everyone who claims to be saved is actually a disciple. So next question, well what's the point of being a disciple if it's not tied to my salvation? Jesus calls you to follow Him, which is simply the point. Discipleship is you living life the way it was meant to be lived. Discipleship is the most rewarding thing you'll ever do with your life because it is the meaning of life. You see, Jesus is our Creator, and when we were designed, it was according to His plans and purposes, and discipleship is us living according to His plans and purposes. It's living the way we were created to be. It's like following all the little rules and stuff in your car's owner's manual. You rotate the tires, you change the oil, you flush the radiator. Your car is at its best when you follow those rules, and your life is at its best when you are a disciple. But discipleship isn't easy. Don't misunderstand. Lazy is easy. Discipleship takes effort. Discipleship is costly, again just like taking care of your car. It takes a lot of time and money and effort to maintain your car the way it should, and discipleship even more so. Jesus calls you to live sacrificially, which is a word that comes from the idea of killing something on an altar. He calls you to be vulnerable when you go into positions where you can be hurt, taken advantage of, and betrayed. He calls you to follow Him and look where He ended up on the cross. But that wasn't the end of His story, and whatever difficulties we face as disciples won't be the end of our story either. Eternal life is the result of your salvation, but eternal rewards are the result of discipleship. Remember how the Bible says to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven? That's for real. Discipleship, pouring out your life for Him, results in eternal rewards, a better eternity. The life that I have in heaven won't be the same as your life in heaven. I know, I'm not saying it'll be better or worse or whatever, that's up to God. But don't miss out on the eternal rewards just because you're down here chasing temporary riches or comfort or pleasure. The Bible says that there are crowns to be distributed to the faithful, so set your minds on that. Next question, "Gee whiz Matt, I've learned a lot. You're the best." Well thanks, but that's not a question. Next question, final question, "How do I respond to what I've learned here today?" Glad you asked. This is important. This is, rubber meets the road time, all right? The first thing that you can do to respond to what you've learned here today, stop fretting that you've lost your salvation just because you've been an imperfect disciple. Stop fretting that your salvation is messed up just because you messed up your discipleship. Your effort didn't earn your salvation. Your effort will not disqualify your salvation. You've been called to discipleship independently of your call to salvation. Just because you mess up the former doesn't mean you've messed up the latter. So the first thing you can do is just have peace that your salvation is secure. Take a deep breath and say, "My salvation is secure," and just enjoy the peace that comes with that. The second thing you can do with what we've learned here today, acknowledge the healthy hunger in your heart towards discipleship. You are not automatically a disciple. You are not automatically a good person. You do not automatically stop making mistakes, but there should be a desire within you, sometimes strong maybe right now, sometimes faint like when we're out in difficult times, but there should always be a desire somewhere in you that calls you to be imitators of God as dear children to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Realize that that hunger is placed there by God and accept it as a gift from Him, a gift that is a calling to the life you are meant to live. The third thing you can do to put this into action, consciously commit to becoming a better disciple. Make a plan. Take some steps. Buy a Christian book. Keep a journal. Pick a Christian virtue and spend time nurturing that within yourself. Change your thinking from, "Man, the Christian life is so difficult and such a drag." Change it to, "I'm actually about to experience real life for the first time." Remind yourself that God rewards those who faithfully obey Him. Remind yourself that you are storing up riches for eternity. That's a very long time eternity. Much better investment than working for this temporary life. So commit. The fourth thing you can do with what we've learned here today is encourage one another. All of these people here are trying to do the same thing as you, and they're all messing up, just like you. So encourage each other. Encourage these people. Forgive and give grace when they make mistakes towards you. Remember that we've all been there. Even the ones who seem like spiritual giants compared to you, they'll still mess up at least every once in a while. So learn to be a team player, just like you are on a team, and cheer each other on. And then finally the thing we can do with this truth is go make disciples. Jesus calls us to go make disciples, but you can't do that unless you are a committed disciple first. Disciples make disciples. When you've gone all in with your walk of faith, when you're holding nothing back in your Christian life, that's when people stop and take notice. When the rains come down and the floods come up and your house continues to stand, people will take notice. And when they ask why, you can say follow Jesus. After all of that, if what I'm saying strikes no chord in your heart, if you've been at this Christian thing for a while now and you just cannot find that hunger within you, if you have no interest whatsoever in becoming Christ like, then you might actually have a problem. And I encourage you please to come find one of our pastoral care team and have them talk with you about it and to pray for you. But for the rest of you, for those of you who yearn to be more like the one who has saved you and called you into this life, then accept the call of Jesus to follow him. Become a disciple and it will be the best thing you ever do with your life. Precious Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have not only called us into this glorious new life, but that you equip and empower us to do so successfully if we will just learn to walk in faith and to trust you to make time every day to renew ourselves in your strength. Please open our eyes Lord to the way we have been living and how it may differ from the way you want us to be living. Give us the strength and the courage and the wisdom to become the disciples that you have called us to be. Give us boldness and courage Lord. In your name Jesus, Amen.