



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Three Life-changing Questions

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Jesus calls us to practice sacrificial discipleship.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:25-33

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, verses 25 to 33.

Starting at verse 25:

Now great crowds were traveling with Him. So He turned and said to them:

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and 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, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.’

“Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000?

If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be My disciple.

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

Some years ago, I read an article about a Worship Service in a New York City church.

On this one Sunday in question, the pastor introduced a guest preacher. This man had been a successful broker on Wall Street, earning a six-figure income—a huge income at that time. I'll have to admit that I found myself wondering how it must feel to have an annual income somewhere north of a hundred thousand dollars. My income has never been that high...ever!

But the man had felt a call to the ministry. He had felt that he couldn't spend the rest of his life worrying about debentures—so he had quit his job and had gone to seminary. Recently graduated, he had received an appointment to a church in a small Pennsylvania town.

When I read that story, I was torn. Part of me was glad for this person who had made some genuine sacrifices for Jesus. That's what Christians are supposed to do. I had made that point often in my own preaching. Now, in this article, was a man who had taken that seriously—had committed his life to Christ in a serious way. He seemed happy about his decision and the course of life on which he was embarked. I was confident that he would be a good pastor.

But on the other hand, part of me felt sad for what the man had given up. His life, working on Wall Street and living on the Upper East Side, seemed glamorous beyond measure. And a six-figure salary! A six-figure salary is somewhere between a hundred thousand and a million dollars a year. Even at the low end of that spread, he was making twice as much as he would earn as a pastor. So there was a part of me that was grieving for what the man had given up.

But he wasn't grieving. He was happy—joyful—looking forward to the life that he had chosen.

It wasn't that the man was naive. He had just spent three years in seminary, trying to live on the small stipend that churches pay student pastors. He knew what he had left behind, and had a pretty good feel for what lay ahead—and was delighted to be doing what he was doing. The Lord had blessed him—had replaced the big salary and glamour with something that gave the man even more pleasure.

Jesus says that sacrifice is an essential part of discipleship. He says:

"If anyone comes to me,
and doesn't hate his own father, mother,
wife, children,
brothers, and sisters,
yes, and his own life also,
he can't be my disciple".

Jesus wasn't calling us to hate our family. The New Testament was written originally in Greek, and the Greek word that is sometimes translated "hate" was *meseo*. *Meseo* has a range of meanings. It can mean "hate"—or it can mean "disregard"—or it can mean "to be indifferent to."

We also need to understand that people in Jesus' day often used hyperbole to make a point. Hyperbole is exaggerated, dramatic language intended to get our attention—to stop us in our tracks—to cause us to ask, "What did he say?"

So Jesus calls people to *meseo* father and mother—to hate them—or to disregard them—or to be indifferent to them.

Here's what I believe Jesus meant. He meant that we need to put God and Godly things above the most precious things in our lives—father, mother—wife, child—brother, sister. We have Godly obligations to all those people, but our first obligation is to God.

Jesus was driving home the point that being his disciple is serious business—that true discipleship means putting Jesus above everything else.

So Jesus says:

"Whoever doesn't bear his own cross,
and come after me,
can't be my disciple".

In Jesus' day, a cross wasn't a lovely piece of jewelry that one wore on a chain around one's neck. A cross was a cruel instrument of torture. A person who was carrying his cross was on his way to his death.

Then Jesus warns us to count the cost of discipleship. He says:

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower,
doesn't first sit down and count the cost,
to see if he has enough to complete it?".

Jesus' point is that we should give some thought to what it means to be a Christian before taking the leap—because Jesus has high expectations of his disciples.

The book, *Stories for the Soul*, tells the story of Jim Denison, who went on a mission to Malaysia for a summer. While there, he worshiped at a small Malaysian church. One Sunday, he noticed an old suitcase sitting near the wall. When he asked about it, the pastor pointed out a teenage girl who had been baptized that morning. He said,

"Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian
she could never go home again.
So she brought her luggage."

"So she brought her luggage!" What a price to pay for her decision to follow Jesus! What a commitment! She gave up her family to become a Christian.

When I read that story, I wondered what had become of that girl. Was she condemned to live on the streets living hand to mouth? Did anyone help her? I hope they did. If following Jesus for that girl meant leaving her family, Jesus surely intended for the members of that congregation to take care of her.

When I read that story, I thought, "By bringing this girl into that congregation's midst, Christ was testing their faith. He was giving them a chance to do something wonderful for him. I wonder if they were equal to the challenge."

There's a movement abroad today by people who want a very different kind of Christ. This movement is called the Prosperity Gospel. Proponents of the Prosperity Gospel emphasize that Christ wants to make his followers wealthy.

Some years ago, a billboard for a Benny Hinn revival promised "Business Breakthrough: Special Prayers for Your Business & Finances." Today, Hinn acknowledges that he went too far. He says, "Today, the idea is abundance and palatial homes and cars and bank accounts. The focus is wrong.... It's so wrong." Benny has asked forgiveness for his extravagant living when he was younger.

The Prosperity Gospel is a movement that started in the United States and has spread throughout the world. People find it attractive, because it promises material rewards for discipleship. It tells people that following Jesus will make them rich.

But Jesus said:

**"So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has,
he can't be my disciple".**

I don't believe that Jesus meant that literally—any more than I believe that he wanted us to hate our fathers and mothers. This is another example of hyperbole—exaggerated, dramatic language intended to get our attention.

But Jesus clearly meant that we cannot be his disciples if we allow the God-space at the center of our lives to fill up with love of money. Jesus clearly meant that being a Christian involves making some sacrifices.

How that works out in our lives differs from one person to another. There is no standard template. For one Wall Street broker, it meant giving up a prestigious job to go to seminary and serving a small-town church in Pennsylvania. For one Malaysian girl, it meant bringing her suitcase to church.

We don't talk about sacrificial discipleship very much today, but we should. Jesus clearly thought sacrifice was important. In fact, in Jesus' mind, sacrifice and discipleship were inseparable. As the song from the musical "Oklahoma" says, "You can't have one without the other." You can't be Jesus' disciple without making some sacrifices.

So I would like to leave you with three questions this morning. I don't expect you to stand up and answer these questions, but I would like for you to reflect on them this week.

I believe that Christ has something important to do with your life. It might be big, like becoming a missionary—or it might be teaching a Sunday school class or helping with the youth group. But I am hoping that these questions will help you to find your calling—and to fulfill it.

So here are the questions:

FIRST QUESTION: What have you given Jesus lately? What have you given him this week? This month? This year? What have you given Jesus lately?

SECOND QUESTION: What COULD you be giving Jesus that you aren't giving? Is Jesus calling you to spend more time strengthening your devotional life? Is he calling you to help the hungry and the homeless? Is he calling you to work with young people in our church or community? What could you be giving Jesus that you aren't giving?

THIRD QUESTION: If you were to put Jesus first, how would that change your life? What would you START doing? What would you QUIT doing? How would putting Jesus first change your life?

So take those questions home with you today, and ponder them this week:

- What have you given Jesus lately?
- What could you be giving him that you aren't giving?
- If you were to put Jesus first, how would that change your life?

If the answers to those questions suggest that you should move in a new direction, trust Jesus and set out on the journey. I won't promise that it will be easy, but I am confident that it will be blessed.

As I close today, here's the story behind the hymn, "Take My Life, and Let It Be".

Frances Havergal (1836-1879) was an unusual woman. The daughter of a minister, she mastered Greek and Hebrew to read the scriptures in their original languages. Having grown up in England, she traveled in Europe and enjoyed skiing in the Swiss Alps—an unusual recreation in the nineteenth century. She was also an accomplished singer who sometimes sang with the Philharmonic.

Havergal was a Christian all her life, but at age 36 experienced what we might describe as a conversion experience. A little book entitled *All for Jesus* made her aware of the incompleteness of her own devotion, and she rededicated her life to Christ.

Soon thereafter, she spent five days with a small group of people, some of whom were not Christians, and others of whom were lukewarm. She spent those five days witnessing to them and praying for them, and was delighted to see her prayers answered. By the end of that week, all ten people had devoted themselves to Christ. That night, too excited to sleep, Havergal sat up writing this hymn, "Take My Life and Let It Be."

Her devotion to Christ took many shapes. For one, she quit singing in secular venues and devoted herself to Christian music. For another, she donated her collection of jewelry to a missionary society to raise money for mission endeavors. But those were merely minor notes in the symphony of devotion that was Frances Havergal's life.

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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