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3:34

Be Prepared on the Journey to Heaven

Luke 14:25-33

- I. *The path is simple;*
- II. *but it is not easy.*

Life is full of things that are rather simple but they are far from being easy. Take one stick, take one small ball, hit the ball with the stick into a hole. How simple is that. Very simple. But it is not easy. Golf is a simple game but it is not an easy game. Much can be said about tennis and bowling as well.

Many handyman skills likewise may be rather simple but to the one who tries them they learn very quickly that to do them well is not at all easy.

Life is full of things that are rather simple but that doesn't at all make them easy. Today Jesus tells us about one of those--getting into heaven. Yes, the path, the way to heaven is simple, it is clear, it is even free. Contrary to common sense the path to heaven finds you. God reaches out and finds the lost and welcomes and calls them with the Gospel message.

The picture you want to have in your mind this morning of the Gospel account is Jesus being followed by a very large crowd consisting of every kind of people. Jesus had been preaching and teaching for some time and people who were highly educated in the Scriptures were in the crowd. People who were illiterate and of low means were in the crowd. The crowd was full of men and women and children, old people, younger people, well established people, people with no home or place. All kinds of people followed Jesus because Jesus came to save everyone.

The path to heaven is simple: Jesus is the path. Jesus taught: **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6). Jesus also taught the simple, powerful Gospel that simple faith alone is what saves. **"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."** (John 5:24). This is the simple beauty of the Gospel: a living trust and faith in Jesus saves. Not only is this not difficult but it is so simple that many reject its simplicity and power. Some believe there has to be more.

What Jesus teaches us is that salvation is simple and complete but the path to heaven is not always an easy one. Why? That simple living faith in Jesus is challenged and ridiculed and persecuted by the world, the devil and at times most viciously by one's own sinful nature.

Jesus tells us something today that may be misunderstood and the cause for some consternation. **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate**

his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26). What is Jesus saying here? First of all it is absolutely clear what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is not saying that people should literally hate their own parents and immediate family—that would be a blatant contradiction to the Fourth Commandment to honor one's father and mother. So then, what does Jesus mean?

What Jesus is teaching here is that there is a price, a cost that one will pay to be His disciple. You must remember that when Jesus was originally speaking these words He was speaking them to people of various religious backgrounds: mainly Jews but also Romans and others. What would happen if someone would become a follower of Jesus? Oftentimes it would bring strife and division within a family. This was especially so as Jesus was being ever more rejected and despised by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. To be a follower of Jesus meant turning one's back on family loyalties and traditions and that would exude a price, a cost.

What Jesus is teaching is that for many who would be His followers they must ultimately choose their loyalty either to Jesus or to their own family. In this sense to "hate" them is to place loyalty to them beneath and after their loyalty to Christ.

What is most important for us today is to capture the heart of what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying that nothing, not even one's spouse or parents can have a higher priority or loyalty than God. If this is true for these people in our lives then how much more true for other relationships.

Our day and age doesn't have exactly the same type of challenge as those original hearers of Jesus' message. For many of them an open loyalty to Christ was tantamount to treason against the family and in some cases parents would disown their children for exchanging their religious traditions for simple faith in Jesus the Christ.

What do we face today? In many instances I can think of children emotionally and spiritually blackmailing their parents to accept a lifestyle or a belief system contrary to that of the Bible. How often have I seen children threaten to in essence disown their own parents for challenging them for living with someone outside of marriage. How often today are children demanding from their parents and their church acceptance and blessing for living in a lifestyle condemned by God. Have you seen this? I know I have.

Often the Christian may feel like they are in a no-win situation. If and when they challenge a false belief or condemn an immoral lifestyle they are viewed as being unloving, narrow minded, and the current favorite label of the world today: intolerant.

The opposite behavior for the Christian is far more heavy to the heart and soul. Our silence, taken for tacit approval, and condonation opens the

door for criticism and guilt according to our own consciences simply because we know we are not doing our Christian duty.

I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever that on judgment day there will stand some people who had once been baptized, who had stood before the altar of God and made a promise of confirmation and who had been handed the Good News as a deposit who on that day of judgment will stand condemned because they threw it all away. You know who they will blame? Not themselves—their sinful hearts would never allow it. No they will blame me and they will blame you and they will blame the church and yes, make no doubt about it, they will blame God. Yet they will stand condemned and they will hear the words of Christ: **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** (Luke 25:41). As we struggle with these situations may we by the grace of God be able to utter the same words as those of the apostles: **“We must obey God rather than men!”** (Acts 5:29).

The path to heaven is simple but it is not easy. There is a cost to being a Christian and faithful to God. Jesus has promised us that the world is never going to give the Christian a fair deal.

Yesterday was the ninth anniversary of 9/11. Without getting swept up into the politics and the spin of today I do want to say a few words about the media circus surrounding the pastor in Florida who proclaimed that he was going to burn copies of the Koran yesterday.

My point here is not to get caught up in the emotions of the issue nor the constitutionality of such actions or anything like that. My own view on the matter is that the action of burning Koran’s and all the implications such an action would bring is foreign to the spirit of the message of Christ who calls us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. Having said all this my real point of the matter is what I and many others have viewed as a double standard by the media.

It doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense to me that a small church of less than fifty people in Florida could garner national media attention and outcries and condemnation from the media and government officials as being hateful and inciting violence yet the imam who is planning on constructing a mosque at or near the 9/11 crash site is welcomed onto one or more television news shows and allowed to voice his opinion that it would be wrong or even dangerous for America to NOT allow the mosque to be built.

Why does all this not shock me? Because there is a double standard in the media that is hard to miss. Often Christianity is not given a fair shake. This is the cost, the price for living as a Christian in a world of sin.

There is another price to be paid: the price of putting to death the sinful nature within us. Jesus said: **“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** (verse 27). The persecution

we face against the world at times seems insignificant to the division within our sinful hearts. To be a Christian disciple means giving up much of what the world promotes and celebrates. We are called to a higher standard.

Today Jesus asks us to count the cost to be a follower of the King of Kings. **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’”** **“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 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, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”** (verses 28-33).

Have you counted the cost of following Jesus? Have you counted the cost and the possible price you will pay within your family, your workplace, your neighborhood to have your allegiance and your heart first and foremost with Jesus? Have you counted the cost of self denial and self discipline it takes to attempt to remain pure in a world of corruption? Have you counted the cost the tremendous calling of Jesus who says “any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple?”

There is a thought I cannot overlook this morning. It is a thought I pray works its way into your hearts, your minds, your prayers this entire week. The cost of following Jesus is great. What, however, is the cost of NOT following Jesus?

I began this sermon by stating that the path to heaven is simple and so it is. But the path to heaven is not easy and often it is not fun, in fact, it is often far from fun. The path to hell is simple too. The difference is that the path to hell is quickly rewarded, is embraced and loved by the world and when we are honest with our own sinfulness, the path to hell is fun and pleasurable.