

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"If Anyone Comes After Me."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at chapter 14, verse 25.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

You may be seated. Let's pray.

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In college I went through Army ROTC, and after graduation I served as an officer. My military experience allowed me to have some familiarity with recruiters.

Used car salesmen have the reputation for being dishonest and saying whatever's necessary to make a sale. SOME military recruiters are a close second. Please notice I said some because I do think there are also some honest recruiters.

Military recruiters must satisfy what's known as "commission mission." Their performance is determined by the number of people they're able to recruit. As a result, they strive to make the military sound as attractive as possible, which creates a strong temptation for them to lie.

After looking at a few articles, here are the top lies I could find that military recruiters tell people:

1. There's a great chance you'll be stationed wherever you want.
2. There's almost no chance of you being sent to a combat zone.
3. You'll receive a large signing bonus.
4. They don't yell at you in boot camp anymore.
5. You can quit any time if you don't like it.

There are horror stories of people who were promised things before they signed on the dotted line, only to find their military careers ended up being considerably different than what the recruiter promised.

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I tell you all this, because after I became a Christian in my early 20's and started reading the Gospels, I saw that Jesus is the opposite of military recruiters in two ways...

First, He was honest:

1. He told people the truth.
2. He wanted them to know what to expect if they followed Him.

Second, it seems like He actually tried to DISCOURAGE people from signing up...yes, you heard me correctly! When you look at Jesus' interactions with people, you'd almost think He didn't want them following Him.

Look at **Luke 14:25**...

Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,

Notice it says **great crowds**. I can't say how many people this was, but I'm guessing if Jesus could miraculously feed tens of thousands of people, which happened on at least two occasions, we are talking about at least thousands of people again.

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Picture what this looked like, and let me ask you to think about something...

What would you expect many popular religious leaders to think at a moment like this with such a large crowd following them?

- *Wow, this is great. Lots of people are following me. I better make sure I don't mess this up and tell them something they don't want to hear.*
- *What wonderful, encouraging thing can I say that will cause them to want to continue following me, and hopefully tell their friends so they start following me as well.*

This is clearly not what Jesus was thinking. It seems like whenever Jesus had a large crowd following him, he said things that would make it a small crowd. Look at **verse 26**...

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

And it gets worse...

Luke 14:27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus recognized when the crowds were bloated and He needed to trim the fat. He could tell when people were following him for the wrong reasons:

- Sometimes they wanted to see a miracle
- Sometimes they want to be healed
- Sometimes they wanted to hear what he had to say
- Sometimes they were just curious

And I'm not even saying that these are bad reasons for people to follow Jesus.

But Jesus knew that their commitment was shallow. Once sacrifice or suffering was required, they would turn back.

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We are going to look at a few examples this morning of times Jesus said things that caused people to turn back from following him, so we can see what is involved if we follow him.

Also, I'm convinced that if Jesus said these things in his day that caused people to turn back from him, and they're recorded for us in Scripture, then we should hear the same thing in our day so that they can again turn away people with shallow commitments.

It isn't to say that we want people to turn people away from following Christ, but it is to say that there is value in separating the wheat from the chaff.

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So let's look at the first thing Jesus said that caused people to turn back...and this brings us to lesson one...

Jesus said, “If anyone comes after me,” they must (lesson one) sacrifice.

We aren't going to dig into verses 26 and 27 until next sermon, but the main point is following Jesus requires sacrifice.

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I'm not exaggerating when I say this...

I cannot think of anything that would sound worse to people than what Jesus said in these verses:

- Hate your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters
- Hate your own life

- Be willing to carry a cross to be crucified

If you wanted people to stop following you, what could you say that would do the trick better than this?

This is the opposite of:

- Prosperity preaching
- Health and wealth
- Or name it and claim

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Picture the typical easy-believism American church...

Can you imagine if the pastor reached the end of his sermon and instead of saying:

- Repeat this prayer after me.
- Say these words and you'll be saved.

He said, *"If anyone comes [after Jesus] and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be [his] disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after [Jesus] cannot be [his] disciple."*

How many people would respond to that invitation?

- How many people would raise their hands?
- How many people would walk down the aisle?

Not many!

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You say, "Maybe Jesus was only talking to the twelve disciples?"

There are times Jesus spoke to specific people:

- Sometimes He spoke to the religious leaders.
- Sometimes He spoke to the twelve disciples.

And sometimes he spoke to everyone, and this is one of those times:

- Notice the words **if anyone** at the beginning of **verse 27**.
- Notice the word **whoever** at the beginning of **verse 28**.
- Notice the words **for which of you** at the beginning of **verse 29**.

He couldn't make it clearer that he's addressing everyone.

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And I'd like to show you some other examples of Jesus speaking like this to those following Him, so you can see it's a theme.

Turn to **Mark 10**.

This is Jesus's interaction with the Rich Young Ruler...

Mark 10:17 **And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

How does this young man look?

- He looks zealous – he ran up to Jesus
- He looks humble – he knelt before him
- He looks respectful – he called him Good Teacher

- He looks sincere – he asked one of the most important questions anyone could ever ask: What must I do to inherit eternal life:
 - He is interested in spiritual matters.
 - He believes in God.
 - He wants to go to heaven.
 - There’s a lot to like about him!

Mark 10:18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

Jesus isn’t saying He isn’t good. Instead, He’s saying there’s only One who is good and that’s God, so if the ruler calls Jesus good he must also recognize He’s God.

Mark 10:19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”

The man asked what TO DO to inherit eternal life, so Jesus told him what to do: keep the law perfectly. Don’t break any of the commandments. This is what TO DO if you want TO DO something to be saved.

The problem is, none of us can do this, which is why we need another way to inherit eternal life, and that is by repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Christ...and this brings us to lesson two...

Jesus said, “If anyone comes after me,” they must (lesson two) repent.

Jesus presented the commandments to this man to help him see his sinfulness and need for a Savior, but unimaginably, look what he said...

Mark 10:20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

There are only two possibilities: either he was lying or he was prideful.

Personally, I think he was prideful. This is one of the best examples in Scripture of how pride can blind us. I think he really believed he had kept God’s commandments.

Since he didn’t see his sinfulness, Jesus said something that He knew would make it clear...

Mark 10:21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

Even though Jesus said something that is going to cause this man to turn from him, I want you to notice that it says Jesus **loved him**. This is touching. We could think that perhaps Christ only loves those who follow him, but right here we see his heart for even someone who loved his possessions more than he loved Christ himself.

In essence, Jesus said, “If you would come after me, repent of your covetousness.”

Part of this is descriptive and part of it is prescriptive.

- The descriptive part is we probably aren’t expected to sell our possessions. I say probably because if we’re as covetous as the rich young ruler, maybe we should sell our possessions.
- The prescriptive part is we must all repent, which looks different for each person, because we all have different struggles:
 - Jesus knew this man’s heart, and for him to repent, it required repenting of covetousness.
 - For us it could be anger, lust, or deceitfulness.

Look what happened...

Mark 10:22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Now let me ask you something...

Did Jesus know that what he said would cause this man to walk away?

Of course.

So, here's what's shocking...

Jesus said it anyway!

In a sense, this is the one thing you would expect Jesus NOT to say, but that's what He said, and He didn't change the message or water it down whatsoever. He knew what would produce his departure and he said it anyway.

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And it gets worse...

Mark 10:23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

This account is in all three synoptic Gospels and after the rich man walks away, Jesus turns to his disciples and warns them about the difficulty of rich people entering heaven.

In other words, Jesus didn't go after the man! He didn't chase him down. He didn't try to talk him into following him. He didn't say something like...

"You are so close. You believe in God, and you want to go to heaven. Do you really want to throw all that away for your possessions? Please rethink things. Your salvation is at stake."

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Next please turn to **John 6**...

Look at **verse 2**...

John 6:2 A LARGE CROWD was following [Jesus], because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 3 Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that A LARGE CROWD was coming toward him.

Here it is again: Jesus has lots of people following him. Twice we are told it is **a large crowd**. This is when he fed the five thousand, and these five thousand told their friends who told their friends who told their friends and then there was an even larger crowd following him.

But Jesus knew why they were and weren't following him. We don't have time to read the whole passage. Look at **verse 25**...

John 6:25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" 26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

It looks like Jesus is saying they didn't see the **signs** or miracles He performed, but of course they did. They saw Him miraculously feed thousands of people, which is they're following Him.

What He meant was, "You saw the sign physically, but you didn't see it spiritually. You didn't REALLY understand what I was doing."

Miracles are called **signs** because they point to something. They reveal a spiritual truth. When Jesus miraculously fed everyone physically it pictured how he wanted to feed them spiritually, but they missed it.

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So Jesus tries to redirect them to get them to see He is the true bread they should be desiring...

John 6:27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." 28 Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

Like the rich young ruler and so many who don't know Christ, they thought there were works they were supposed to perform to please God.

John 6:29 Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

This is an interesting response, because when we think of work, we think of doing something, but Jesus says the "work" we do is believing.

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Skip to **verse 41**...

John 6:41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

They are confused that Jesus said he is the bread that came down from heaven. He doesn't look like bread to them. He looks like Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary.

And they are about to become even more confused, because when Jesus identifies himself as bread, everyone knows what you do with bread. You eat it. Jesus couldn't possibly be saying that people should eat him. But look at **verse 51**...

John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone EATS OF THIS BREAD, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world IS MY FLESH." 52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

It sounds to them like Jesus is saying to eat his flesh. But they know he can't really mean that.

And he didn't mean it, at least not physically. We know he meant this spiritually. Christ must be spiritually consumed by us:

- The way physical bread is consumed and provides temporary physical life
- We consume Jesus, the bread of life, and he provides eternal life

And this brings us to lesson three...

Jesus said, "If anyone comes after me," they must (lesson three) spiritually understand.

Can you see the people's confusion?

All Jesus really needed to say was something like...

“I am not speaking physically. Of course, I don’t expect you to eat my flesh. That would be sinful.”

Instead, he actually caused greater confusion. Look at **verse 53**...

John 6:53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you **EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD**, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever **FEEDS ON MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD** has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. **55** For **MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD, AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK**. **56** Whoever **FEEDS ON MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD** abides in me, and I in him. **57** As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so **WHOEVER FEEDS ON ME, he also will live because of me.**

Be honest for a moment...

When I read these verses, didn’t you cringe a little?

The language of eating flesh and drinking blood is so strong it can make you uncomfortable.

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Instead of telling them he’s speaking spiritually instead of physically, he makes the situation worse by making it sound **EVEN MORE PHYSICAL...AND** adding that we are supposed to drink his blood too.

Keep in mind communion has not been instituted yet. Nobody’s minds can go to the elements of bread and wine and understand that’s what he means.

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Some years ago, I was reading about the early church and one of the criticisms was they were cannibals. That criticism came from Jesus’s words in these verses and his disciples celebrating communion. It was known that communion was a meal of Christians coming together to eat the body of Christ and drink his blood.

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Look at **verse 66**...

John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Jesus could have explained things in a less confusing, less offensive, and even less grotesque way, but He kept the message the same.

We know He didn’t make a mistake:

- He didn’t do this on accident.
- He didn’t regret that he said something that caused so many people to leave.

We must acknowledge that Jesus said what he knew would cause people to turn back from coming after him.

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The reason is that...

He expected true disciples to spiritually understand.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Jesus knew that no matter how he worded the message their understanding wouldn't be improved, because these truths must be **spiritually discerned**. Without spiritual understanding these words always sound like **folly** to the **natural person**.

Let's conclude with lesson four...

Lesson Four: Jesus said, "If anyone comes after me," they must (lesson four) take the hard way.

Go ahead and turn your Bibles to **Matthew 7**. This is the sermon on the Mount and the first large crowd Jesus addressed. We don't know exactly how many people were present, but the parallel account says...

Luke 6:17 [Jesus] stood on a level place, with A GREAT CROWD of his disciples and A GREAT MULTITUDE of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon.

If it says a great crowd and a great multitude with people from all these places, I'd guess thousands. Look at **Matthew 7:13...**

Matthew 7:13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and THE WAY IS EASY THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and THE WAY IS HARD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, and those who find it are few.

I know we are familiar with these verses. I want you to notice in **verse 14** Jesus said **the way is hard that leads to life**.

This is not what you say when you want people to follow you. Instead, you say the opposite, such as the way is easy.

But from the very beginning Jesus preached how hard it is to follow him.

Something we learn from Jesus is we do people a terrible disservice when we make it sound like following Him means a care-free life involving no sacrifice or suffering.

Paul asks an interesting question in **1 Corinthians 15:32**: "[Why suffer for Christ? Why not] **eat and drink, for tomorrow we die?**"

It's a good question.

If following Jesus involves:

- Repenting of things that we might want to keep doing
- Embracing difficult truths that are offensive to others and potentially offensive to us
- Choosing Christ over any other relationships in our lives, even when it might mean losing or damaging those relationships
- Denying ourselves those things that we enjoy
- Worst of all, picking up our cross to follow him

Why follow Him?

There are a few answers I could give you:

- Following Christ is the way to peace in life; true, lasting peace is found only in Christ
- Following Christ is the only way to be able to count trials as joy; the unbeliever can never count trials as joy, because he can't see God's good hand behind them.

And there are other answers I could give you, but I'm going to point out just one more, and it is in the middle of **verse 14...**

The way is hard, but it is the way that **leads to life**,

- This is the only way to receive forgiveness of sins.
- This is the only way to receive Christ's righteousness.
- This is the only way to receive eternal life.

And this makes it a worthwhile way.

These wonderful truths should provide all the motivation needed to accept Jesus's invitation when he says, "If anyone comes after me."

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.