

**“A Reality Check for Following Jesus”**  
(Luke 14:25-33 – Pentecost 16 – September 27, 2025)

Luke 14:25-33 – <sup>25</sup>Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup>And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup>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 – <sup>29</sup>lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup>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? <sup>32</sup>Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup>So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

Dear disciples of Jesus, whom He has called to faith and eternal life in His Kingdom:

Sometimes in life we need a reality check. A reality check is what we do when we take a serious look at our lives to see if our expectations fit with reality.

In our text, Jesus provides a reality check for all who want to follow Him. As He was on His way to Jerusalem, it says: “*great multitudes went with Him*” (vs. 25). Many Jews were going to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Among these pilgrims, some wanted to become Jesus’ disciples; but they had wrong expectations. They had seen His powerful miracles and teaching. They hoped He would be a Messiah to build a kingdom of power on earth. They hoped following Him would mean an easy life. But Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. Soon many who followed Him would turn away, disappointed that He was not the kind of king they had expected. Perhaps some would join their voices with those who cried out in Jerusalem: “*Crucify Him!*” (Luke 23:21).

At times, we may develop unrealistic expectations in following Jesus. We think that following Him should go the way we planned, that it should be easy; and if things don’t go our way, we get disappointed. So like the people in our text, we need “**A Reality Check for Following Jesus.**” We need to take a serious look to see if our expectations as Jesus’ disciples fit with reality, lest we be tempted to turn away from Him.

**1) There will be difficulties because we follow Him**

As we follow Jesus, He brings us to our first reality check point. The reality is, there will be difficulties because we follow Him. One of these is having to decide between love of people and love of Jesus. He said the multitude: “*If anyone comes to Me and*

*does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sister – yes, even his own life – he cannot be My disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (vs. 26-27).*

When Jesus speaks of “*hate,*” He is not encouraging harmful attitudes toward others or ourselves. He teaches us to love others as we love ourselves, including enemies who hate and mistreat us (Matthew 5:43-44; 19:19). But here, He uses the strongest possible language to emphasize that, if it comes to a choice, we must love Him more than all others, even more than ourselves. The reality is, Satan uses sinful influences of people around us, and our own sinful nature, to tempt us away from Jesus. When sin and evil start to come between us and Jesus, we will hate it as a stumbling block to our salvation.

Jesus showed what it means to hate such sinful influence, even in a close friend. When Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to Jerusalem to give His life on the cross, Jesus said: “*Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).* Jesus loved Peter very much, but He hated the evil influence Satan was working through Peter.

At times, we must choose between trying to keep smooth relations with people, by doing what they expect; or else faithfully following Jesus, even if others reject us. We love our family and friends. But if any would lead us away from Jesus and His truth, we will hate the sinful intrusion. We love Jesus more. Our blood relation to Him is stronger. He paid with His divine blood to save us from sin and eternal death and make us part of His heavenly family. Not even the closest earthly relation can replace Him.

In this regard, Jesus even speaks of hating our own life. When Satan pulls on our heartstrings, using the deceitful desires of our sinful nature to lure us away from Jesus, we will hate that evil intrusion too. We would rather die to ourselves in repentance and live by faith with Jesus, who truly satisfies our souls with His forgiveness and eternal life.

A reality check shows that, because we follow Jesus, we must expect difficulties. As baptized believers, bearing the sign of Jesus’ cross, Satan has us marked as enemies. As Jesus leads us in His truth, contrary to the falsehood of Satan and the world, we will feel a cross of opposition. We will feel the cross as we battle the sinful nature within.

But we would have it no other way. As we take up our cross and follow Him, in our weakness He leads us to rely all the more on His all-sufficient grace and strength, to say with ever more firm conviction: “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).*

## 2) We cannot count on our own ability and strength

This brings us to our next reality check point. We must rely on His all-sufficient grace and strength; for we cannot count on our own ability or strength to follow Him.

This is the point of His two illustrations: *“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’”* (vs. 28-30).

The Christian life is to be like a tower, a monument to God’s glory. But Jesus is saying: “Count the cost of following Me. Half-hearted, compromising discipleship will not bring glory to Me.” The reality is, we cannot finish the great task by our own ability. How often have we felt strong in faith, like we were building a towering example for others? Yet in time of temptation, we acted out in shameful words and behavior, giving a bad name to our Christian walk. Maybe a cross was laid on our shoulders, and we responded to hardship by becoming bitter, chafing against how Jesus was leading us. What a shame if our Christian walk ended up like an unfinished tower, a monument to our sinful folly rather than God’s glory. If we depended on our own ability and strength, our best works or merit, we would come up short: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

The same is true in the next illustration: *“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”* (vs. 31-32).

Discipleship means war against real enemies: Satan, the sinful world, and our sinful nature. These enemies are pictured by the 20,000 men. The 10,000 men point to our own inability to fight against such powerful spiritual forces. Jesus is saying: “Consider who your enemies are: the reality is, you cannot expect to win the battle by your own strength.” How often have we intended to fight the good fight, to follow Jesus faithfully? But when it came to standing up for His truth we stood silent, loving sinful man’s acceptance more than His. Like the disciples, boasting they would never leave Jesus, in the hour of trial we have fled from His side and fallen to the enemy.

Jesus does not want us to abandon building the tower or fighting the enemy. But the point is, we cannot count on our own ability and strength. He wants us to build on Him alone as the rock of our salvation, against which not even the gates of hell can prevail (Matthew 16:18). He wants us to fight the good fight of faith, trusting Him alone to give us the victory (1 Timothy 6:12).

### 3) Jesus alone remains our strength and salvation

This is why Jesus bring us to our final reality checkpoint. The reality is, Jesus alone remains our strength and salvation.

He concludes by saying: *“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple”* (vs. 33). As believers, we leave behind all that would separate us from our Savior. We despair of our own strength and resources to save us. We forsake all claims to our own merit or righteousness before God. We leave all that behind to follow Jesus in faith. We come to Him with nothing but sin and death; we depend on His grace alone for everything – for forgiveness, salvation, eternal life.

We look in faith to Jesus as the only one who has built the perfect building for us. In place of our imperfect love, Jesus showed perfect love to His Father who sent Him; He showed perfect love to all people, even His enemies, forgiving those who crucified Him. In place of our imperfect faithfulness, He showed perfect faithfulness to the truth in the face of opposition and death. Jesus’ life was a monument built to His Father’s glory. It is the monument of perfection that God counts to you and me.

And we look in faith to Jesus alone as the one who fought the enemy and won for us. By His death on the cross, He took all our sins and the condemnation that stood against us; all that was nailed to Him on the cross. In His cross and resurrection, Jesus disarmed the enemy, He conquered Satan’s power over us (Colossians 2:13-15). His resurrection proclaims the victory He won for us. For in Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, God forgives us all our sins and replaces that with His gift of eternal life!

It is good for us to have a reality check in following Jesus; and what a blessed reality it is! God has joined us to the life of His Son through baptism and faith. He has clothed in Jesus’ perfect life as His children, holy and without blemish. As we face difficulties in our daily walk with Jesus, He is here to strengthen us. In His Word and Sacraments, He gives us His forgiveness, life, and salvation. He puts His spiritual armor on us (Ephesians 6:10-18), that we may fight the good fight of faith as we take refuge in His strength and salvation. God sees our lives now lived by His Spirit in us, who leads us to produce the fruit of faith. He sees all the good He Himself is working in our lives, as one great monument to His saving grace and glory. And He will keep us in true faith until we glorify Him in the reality of heaven’s eternal perfection.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.