

I'm going to do things a bit back-to-front today. We're going to start at the end.

Right at the **end** of today's reading, Jesus said: **He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

That's Jesus' way of saying, "What I just told you, is **really** important" – "This has been a hard teaching, but you **must** know this, and you must take this in". **He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

So, what was the hard teaching? Jesus gave a warning, that if we lose the essence of what it means to be a Christian, then spiritually, we are no good for anything – not even for the dung heap... And the warning came in the form of an analogy.

He said:

³⁴ **"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?** Probably a better translation would be: if indeed the salt is made tasteless, with what can it be seasoned???" ³⁵ **It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

Alright, if salt were to lose its taste, for what reason would you eat it? What seasoning could you sprinkle on it, to give it flavour again? More salt, perhaps???

You see, the main purpose of salt, is to either “season” our tucker, or to use it as a preservative (like salted meats/fish).

And the whole point is, “Salt cannot lose its saltiness (it’s totally against its character). But if it did, it would cease to be “salt”. And what good would that tasteless salt be???” If Salt, could possibly lose the taste that it has, what would you do with it? Even disposing of it, becomes a bit of a problem...

What do you do with your food-scrap? I’ll tell you what I do with mine. I dig a hole in the garden, and bury them. And it rots down into the soil, and it’s good for the soil...

But salt isn’t like that. Salt **destroys** the soil...

Now I’ve read some brilliant theologians (in their commentaries) teaching that apparently in Jesus' day, they used salt as a fertiliser; And they used salt to help the manure break down... That’s the problem with theologians. They’re not farmers/agronomists/soil-scientists...

If they were, they would **know**, that salt in the soil, is **bad**... Soil salinity, is what farmers put a lot of effort into avoiding...

I make my own corned meat. And the brine I make up, is mostly salt, and a bit of Quick-cure, and a bit of brown sugar... And I inject that into the meat, and then I soak the meat in the brine, for another 10-14 days... What do I do with the left-over brine? I can’t put it in the garden; I can’t put it in the compost heap – it’ll destroy the soil.

And that is the whole point.

If a Christian/Disciple of Jesus, loses the very essence of what it means to **be** a Disciple of Jesus, it's like salt that loses its flavour.:

- It is so improper; and
- It cannot be seasoned;
- It's not even any good to be thrown out on the garden;
- It's not even any good to be thrown out on the proverbial poo-heap;

That is literally what Jesus has said...

He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

"This is mighty important" – "This is a hard teaching, but you must **know** this".

A Christian/Disciple of Jesus, who loses the essence of **being** a Christian – who loses the very **flavour** of being what a Christian is, is worse than worthless – their fate is worse than getting thrown out on the proverbial poo-heap...

It's not about "being useless" – it's about becoming faithless, and the fate of the faithless.

So,,,, now we know that the stakes are extraordinarily high, let's come back to the beginning.

What's the difference between an evangelist, and a salesman? Well sadly, these days, ,, , probably not a whole lot... But there should be.

You see, a salesman, his job is to get a person to commit to a sale. And to do that, he'll

- *talk his product up; and*
- *tell you how wonderful it is; and*
- *how good-a value it is...*

And any negatives you might identify, he'll play it down.

“Nothing to see here...” “No, of course the noise in the diff isn't a problem – the sawdust will take care of that” ...

And some evangelists, work like a salesman. They'll give you all of these promises that make it sound like “becoming a Christian is so easy”, and they will never share with you, the true cost of following Jesus.

But you know what: as we read the Scriptures, it's pretty obvious that Jesus would make a terrible salesman. It's a miracle that anyone decided to follow Him.

Great crowds / many people, are starting to follow Jesus. And He turned to them... And He laid out for them the enormous cost that it is, to be His Disciple. And He made it very clear, that we should **count** that cost, and be ready for it (upfront).

And the words that Jesus spoke, leave absolutely no doubt, that our Lord demands “commitment” – “total commitment”, and not just numbers...

He begins with V26, and a lot of people today, might have trouble with V26, because they don't understand

“hyperbole”... “Hyperbole” is when you make an “over-the-top” statement, to make a point. For instance:

- I’m so hungry, I could eat a horse.
No you can’t.
- Robyn, this port weighs a tonne.
No it doesn’t.
- I’ve told you 1000 times, not to do that.
No you haven’t.
(oh well, actually Robyn may have told me 1000 times).

Alright, you understand what hyperbole is? It’s an over-the-top statement, to make a point.

Jesus said:

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.

That’s hyperbole. Jesus is saying, that to become a Christian/His Disciple, demands **loyalty** to Him, above all else. Obedience to God, takes precedence over every other relationship, and over every other responsibility that we have..

Jesus is **not** telling us to hate. It’s hyperbole”. The way of Christ, is to **love**, not hate. Back in Chapter 6, Jesus said “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you... Alright, it is quite normal for Christians to be on the

receiving-end of hate (and that's OK), but we should **never** be giving hate in return.

Now, strangely enough, I actually find V26, easier to explain today than I did, say, 10 years ago, and I'll tell you why: We used to have "thicker skins".

Have you noticed that our culture is changing. It's changing dramatically. A certain class of people, determine what is "acceptable", and what is "unacceptable". And our culture is beginning to embrace a new morality (different ethic). And if a person dares to speak against it (even if they do it gently), they may well find themselves being accused of "hate-speech"...

You see, once upon a time, to "hate", meant you were violently opposed to someone, and that you actually "**hated**" them and wanted to see harm come upon them. But now, if you disagree with a person, they may accuse you of "hate". And if you dare to speak against a certain code/morality/ethic/religion/behaviour, you may find yourself being accused of this new crime of "hate-speech".

You **don't** "hate them", but they may "feel that you hate them", because you reject what they believe, because God has shown you His way. Are you with me? You reject what they believe, (and if you can, argue convincingly against it), but you still love the person...

You see, when Jesus spoke, **He** was using "hyperbole", but now, if you dare to voice your disagreement with someone, and you reject their established moral, ethical, or religious framework, they will feel hated.

And when it comes to the closest of family relationships (even in Jesus' day), if you were to reject the family values/religion – the national religion, and started following this Jesus bloke, *“Why would you do that to us? You hate us! You hate your family – Turning your back on the way we brought you up...”*

And even today, when **one** person, in a family of **un**believers, becomes a Christian, (part of becoming a Christian, is to turn away from what we once believed, and to embrace a whole new life). And if I reject what my family holds dear, and if I embrace, what they reject, they will probably feel hated.

And particularly, if a person's family, is of a completely different religion: If they are Muslim; or Hindu; or Buddhist; or whatever, to repent of that religion and to turn to Jesus, can cause massive family hurt and division. And in some families, the new Christian may be rejected, or maybe even killed.

And so, Jesus was saying, that if you start following me, I demand your total commitment/allegiance. And be prepared: For those whom you love the most, they may accuse you of hating them, because you love me.

2.
Which brings us to the second point:

To be a Disciple of Jesus, is to be prepared to die for Jesus. Jesus used the phrase “[to hate even your] **own life**”. And

then said: ²⁷ **Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

Now these people had no idea that Jesus was going to be crucified. But they knew very well, what it meant to carry your cross. They lived, under Roman occupation. And Rome ruled them, with an iron fist. And under Roman rule, executions were public; painful; graphic; and they happened often.

It was quite common, to see a man (often scourged, beaten and broken), carrying a cross-piece of timber, to the outskirts of town. And they knew exactly what was going to become of him. And so, they understood very well, what Jesus meant....

To “bear your **own cross and come after me**”, is to follow Jesus, knowing that for many, it will mean torture; suffering; death...

Now, for you and I, this has hardly been our experience. We **haven't** suffered persecution (not like our Brothers and Sisters are persecuted in many nations)...

You know, we might talk about:

- a frustrating relative, as a cross I have to bear; or
- a worn-out knee; or
- living in a hot and dry part of the world, as a cross I have to bear...

Oh, how that cheapens what millions of Christians live with, every day:

- who every time they go to church, know they might be arrested; and
- every time they proclaim the Gospel they're breaking the law; and
- if it was found out that they were baptised, they would be executed...

There is nothing cheap about carrying one's cross to follow Jesus. And as our nation becomes increasingly anti-God/Christian, "carrying our cross" for Jesus, is becoming more and more a reality.

And some Christians are up-in-arms, and very surprised about this. I don't know why we're surprised. Historically, it is normal for Christians to be persecuted. And the fact that we have been in a period of history where Christians have **not** been persecuted, that is **not** normal. (Nice, but not normal).

And so, this is becoming more and more important for us to know. If I am not prepared to be persecuted – to die, any day – every day (for the sake of Jesus), then I cannot be His Disciple.

3.

Thirdly, we are to count the cost. We decide **now**, that the cost is worth it. There is nothing more valuable, than salvation in Christ Jesus.

In the street we lived in (just outside of Dalby), for years, there sat there, a 3-acre block of land, with a concrete slab upon it, and nothing else. The owners had decided to build a

house. And they got the concreters to come in, and they put down the slab,, and that's as far as they got.

They realised they couldn't afford to build that house that they'd hoped for. And so, for years, that slab sat there, unused. And of course, the block was difficult to sell, because anyone who bought it, if they wanted to make use of the slab, they'd have to design a house to fit it...

How foolish... – to begin building, and not working out before-hand if you can afford it....

And Jesus said, that's what it's like, to start out following Jesus, without being aware of the cost of **being** His Disciple.

Many of you will be familiar with the Parable of the Sower. Some of the seed fell on shallow/rocky soil. And it sprouted and it got going, and it was great – it was fantastic, but when the sun beat down upon it, it withered away... And Jesus said, that's like someone who hears the Word, and immediately receives it with joy, but when tribulation or persecution comes, on account of the Word, he falls away...

That's why we need to count the cost. And that is also why, an Evangelist isn't meant to be a salesman. The role of an Evangelist, is to preach the Good News of Jesus, and part of the Good News of Jesus, is to count the cost, and know that it's worth it.

In business terms, you'd talk about doing a cost / benefit analysis... And of course, in human terms – if we only consider this physical life, the cost probably outweighs the benefits... But when we open our eyes to eternity, and when

we open our eyes to the holiness we gain in the Lord Jesus, any physical cost, pales into insignificance...

4.

Which brings us to the 4th point: The cost of **not** following Jesus.

V³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

Now, the thing with parables, is you can apply them in multiple ways, and that's why they are such a great teaching tool. And when it comes to this parable, there's 2 clear ways we can look at it:

Firstly, we can apply it in the same way as "starting a building, and not being able to finish it" – you look foolish. This one just ramps it up a bit: "You start fighting a war, without working out, you can't win it". But, the consequences of not winning a war, are much greater. You not only look foolish – it means death and devastation...

And so, if a Christian starts out following Jesus, but then the persecution and hardships come along, and they lose faith, and go, "It's not worth it",,, that's devastating. To use the salt

analogy, a Christian who loses the essence of what “being a Christian” is (Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; Dedication to Him; A forsaking of all else, to follow Him) – to lose that, is to lose the essence of what being a Christian is. And like salt that has lost its flavour, not even good enough to be thrown on the proverbial pile of poo.

And the **second** way we can apply it, is a reminder of the coming judgment. What is the cost of **not** following Jesus?

The King is coming, and on the Day of Judgment, it will only be His faithful children, who are saved. And so we have a king coming, against Whom, we have no chance, of fighting against...

- Wouldn't you make terms with that king before the Day of Judgment?
- Wouldn't you want to be the one He's coming to save, rather than the one He's coming to conquer?
- Wouldn't you make sure that you are not an enemy of that King???

What are the “terms of peace” with Jesus?

- Believing in the Lord Jesus;
- Repenting of sin; and
- Total and lasting commitment to Him;
- A commitment that counts the cost, and gives up everything to follow Him. We commit to Him, everything that we have, and everything that we are,

5.

Which brings us to our 5th point: V³³ **So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

Now hang on a minute, Michael... I'm happy to fall out with my family (if need be), but now you're telling me to give up all my stuff..... There's gotta be a limit here somewhere...

Compared to Christ, possessions mean nothing... I mean, we've even talked about how commitment to Jesus means that our faith in Jesus, and our loyalty to Jesus, is more important than the most cherished human relationships...

And let me tell you, there's something twisted if a person finds it easier to lose a personal relationship for Jesus, than to forgo opportunities for wealth or possessions or whatever...

Possessions mean nothing.

To renounce all that one has, means open-handedness. When it comes to possessions, the natural, human thing to do, is to grasp hold of what you have, and to keep it for yourself. *If you don't believe me, you watch a little child, who hasn't yet learned how to share...*

The most cutest little baby, can be the most selfish, "No! Mine!" ...

But to become a Disciple of Jesus, means to surrender everything to Jesus... All that we have, is His. The Lord provides with what we need.

And as Disciples of Jesus, we realise that what the Lord has provided, is for Him; and for His purpose; and for His glory; and for His Kingdom... That's what it means to renounce all that we have. It's not mine. It's His. And we serve as stewards, of what belongs to Him.

any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

And thus we come to the end, where we began:

When you come to Jesus, make sure your eyes wide open. And this is critical. It is **really** important that you know this. The **essence** of being a Christian, is faith, and total commitment to Jesus. If we lose the essence of being a Christian:- Not even good for the proverbial pile of poo...

Back in the day, when I was a young fella: The common attitude towards Christians was, "They're weak". That Christianity thing: That's only for women and children, and weaklings...

Let me tell you, being a Christian doesn't mean you're weak, it means your strong. You mightn't feel strong, but the Lord will **make** you strong. You mightn't feel brave, but the Lord will **give** you courage. And it doesn't matter whether you are

a man or a woman, or a boy or a girl, in faith, we count the cost, and we follow Jesus,,,,, because that is the greatest blessing, to be with our Lord, in glory, in His Eternal Kingdom...

That's worth giving up everything else to follow Him.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
What a great privilege,
to be called to be Disciple of Jesus.

We are so unworthy,
but by Your grace,
You reach out, and draw us in.

And Lord, our eyes are wide open.

We know that the way of Jesus:

- is not popular;
- can be difficult;
- at times, dangerous; and
- may even cause those whom we love the most, to turn on us.

But as the Apostle Peter said,
"Who else would we follow?"

You have the words of eternal life;
You lead us, into truth and holiness;
You provide us, with what we need; and
You carry us, in times of need.

And Lord, we pray that You would:

- Strengthen our faith;
- give us courage; and
- help us to stand strong, in eternal faithfulness to You.

To God be the glory,
For ever and ever,
Amen.