

Wholehearted
Pastor Carlos Sibley
Sunday, January 8, 2017

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 14. Have you seen the headlines of the Sunday paper? What about the back page? Have you seen the back page of the Sunday paper? I know several of you would look at me and say, "Pastor, I haven't taken a paper in years." I'm not talking about the **Athens Banner Herald** paper; I'm not talking about the **AJC** or the **Wall Street Journal** or **USA Today**. I'm talking about what we commonly refer to around here as the "Sunday paper." Our Sunday paper, this piece that you get when you come around here has a headline, and here's the headline: "We glorify God by making wholehearted followers of Christ." What about the back page? The back page of the Sunday paper has two paragraphs there; it says:

"More than a place, Watkinsville First Baptist is a people on mission to glorify God by making wholehearted followers of Christ. There could be 100 reasons for how you ended up here today, but we are genuinely glad that you decided to join us. Our hope is that through your experience with us today, you will see ordinary people who have had their lives completely changed by Jesus.

We are not perfect, but we see the effects of Christ transforming our lives to be more like him. Together, we hope to learn what it means to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, strengthen families within our church body, impact the thousands of college students who move through our community, and take the good news of Jesus to the world."

Three times: "wholehearted followers of Christ" - from front page to back page- wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ. Why this word **wholehearted**? It's biblical, but it's also personal. It's personal to us as a church because it's biblical. Several years ago, we took a journey through the Old Testament book of Numbers. Just by show of hands, I wonder how many of you were here a few years back when we went verse by verse, chapter by chapter through the book of Numbers? Hold your hand up high. Seven of you. How many of you were not here when we went through Numbers a few years ago? Hold your hand up high. We're talking about a series of messages that that go back five, six years ago. Seven? I don't know, I've forgotten now. It was a long time before a lot of you got here apparently, but in that study of Numbers, the word **wholehearted** captured our hearts.

We saw in that study of Numbers that Caleb, this Old Testament hero- Caleb was blessed by God, affirmed by God; he was rewarded by God because of what God said about him. He said, "...because you have followed me wholeheartedly." And when we saw that, we began to see that it wasn't just in Numbers, but it was scattered throughout the Old Testament and it was scattered throughout the New Testament that a follower of God - a follower of Christ- is someone who follows wholeheartedly. Wholeheartedly. And we just began to say, "That's our mission.

That's our purpose as a church- it's to make wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ." And that's what we seek to do in our decision-making and our ministry in our life, in our worship when we gather here; when we go out from here- wholehearted followers of Jesus Christ. What does that mean? It's more than a pretty font on the front page of the paper; it's more than a statement in a paragraph.

Jesus speaks a lot about what it means to follow him, and what it means to follow him is what he describes as being wholehearted. Jesus wants you to know what it looks like, what it feels like, what it means to follow him with your whole heart. In Luke chapter 14, these words of Scripture speak about following Christ. When you look at these verses, the first thing that jumps off the page to me is that Jesus was drawing crowds. Crowds were gathered all around him. Wherever he went, the crowds were following him. He was about 30 years old when he started his public ministry, and as he journeyed through these different towns in the region of Galilee along the Jordan River, he set his course toward Jerusalem. And he would go toward Jerusalem and end in Jerusalem where he would die on a cross. And all along that way, crowds gathered. He was attracting crowds.

When you look at what he talks about related to following him, if you're a marketing major you'd say, "That's no way to keep a crowd." He was attracting crowds, but he also was saying things that were thinning the crowds. He uses words like **hate** and descriptions of death and renouncing your possessions. He uses those kinds of talking points to identify what it means to follow him. What was he doing? The first thing Jesus was doing in defining following him was that he was aligning the crowds' strongest allegiance. "I pledge allegiance to the flag." When you think about that word **allegiance** it's about what we are devoted to and how our decisions are going to be guided. In this culture that he was writing to, and certainly in our culture today- when you start talking about who our allegiance is to, it doesn't take very long at all for us to move directly to our family, allegiance to our parents, allegiance to our spouse, allegiance to our children, even allegiance to self.

Today, when you think about crowds surrounding Jesus, you're part of that crowd. All over our city today, crowds will gather around the name of Jesus and people that are talking about Jesus. There will be crowds at Prince Avenue Baptist today. There will be crowds at Athens Church today. There will be crowds in downtown Athens at different churches today. As Jesus begins to define what it means to be a follower of him, what you find out is that just because you're a part of the crowd around Jesus doesn't mean that you're a follower of Jesus. And in this room, this is a crazy crowd for a day that's 19° outside and feels like 10. I believe that there's another crowd of people in the sanctuary right now at the same time. But just because you're part of the crowd doesn't mean that you're a follower of Christ. It doesn't mean that you're following him wholeheartedly. You see, you can be a part of the crowd and not be a disciple. You can shop at Lifeway and not be a follower of Christ. You can attend conferences and not be a follower of Christ. A few days ago, 55,000 people gathered in the Georgia Dome around the message of Christ. In Indianapolis over Christmas,

thousands of people gathered around the message of Christ- conferences I'm sure that I don't know about around the globe where people gathered as a crowd, and Jesus would say to the crowd; Jesus would say to this room today; Jesus would say to the sanctuary today: "Let me tell you; let me align where our allegiance must be if you're going to be a follower of Christ." And he jumps right in; he says, "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." I put it in writing this week and said, "Why would Jesus have us to hate the initials of FMWCBSS?" Our father, mother, wife or brother, sister, children or self?

Certainly you read this, if you have any surface reading of Scripture you know that that Jesus is not a promoter of hate. It was Jesus that was asked, "What's the greatest commandment of all?" And he says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Jesus loved his father. He says, "And here's the second- love your neighbor as yourself." And as you look at this, you say, "Why would he use this word **hate**?" Jesus is aligning our allegiance. He's saying, "When it comes to following me, what it's going to feel like is that you love your parents less than you love me. You love your children less than you love me. It's going to feel like you love your wife or your husband less than you love me." Why? Because you have to make some decisions that won't be guided by what your parents say or guided by what your children want or what your spouse says.

First, it starts with this surrender, this devotion to say first and foremost: what is Christ in my life? Who is Christ in my life? Where is that alignment? My degree in college required that I take organic chemistry. I'm sorry for even saying the word here today. Dr. Childers was the professor. He had a reputation before ever going in, and we walked into the class; it seemed like there were about 300 there that first day. That **first** day there was about 300. Dr. Childers came out with his long beard and baldhead and he weighed about 90 pounds it looked like, and he starts going through the syllabus and he just describes what the demands were for that course. And after that first day, I began to realize- here's what's going to happen in this quarter. Unless I hate intramural basketball, unless I hate Thursday night parties, unless I hate spontaneous trips to the beach, unless I hate long night discussions with friends, I'm going to fail chemistry.

Now there was never a time- well, by the way, I failed chemistry that first semester. Actually, I dropped it the first semester. I failed it the second semester, and I passed it the third time I took it. That may reflect a lot on the way I follow Christ over the years now that I think about it. You see, I never hated basketball. I never hated spontaneous trips to the beach. But when it came to success, when it came to what was right, when it came to passing and making the grade, it had to seem like chemistry became number one. Christ is saying to us, "In your life of following me, it's going to feel like you hate these things that you really know you love. And I just want to get your allegiance lined up from the very beginning. You've got to go with me first."

The second thing Jesus was doing is that he was alerting the crowd to their strongest affection. What would be their strongest affection? It's what our strongest affection is- it's self. That's where the greatest battle is, it's with self. And God knows we love our self, so that's why he would say, "The second of these is to love your neighbor as"- what – yourself. Because he knows that we look out for self, care for self. And Jesus says in verse 27: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

We use sometimes bearing our cross as a sense of like carrying a burden. "I've got this big sore on my foot and it's just a burden I've got to bear right now." Or "I've got this really difficult job and it's just a burden, it's a cross I've got to bear right now." You may know exactly what you mean, but when Jesus was talking about bearing a cross, it meant death. It was a picture of death. For Jesus to bear his cross would mean for him to go to Calvary and die and to pay for our sins. And he's saying, "To follow me, unless you're willing to die, unless there is going to be a crucifixion in your life of yourself, you can't follow me. You can't be my disciple." Jesus was alerting the crowd of people that were gathered around that you've got to get him in the right place. Your ultimate affection can't be for self and your ultimate affection has got to be for him, and that means death to desires, death to ambition, death to self.

Listen. Stay with me. This is not a single place where he refers to this in Scripture. In Luke chapter 9, Jesus speaks of this. Luke chapter 9 verse 23, he said to all-this word **all** is just a reference again to this crowd of people around them- "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" He is alerting the crowd; he's sounding the alarm to us that when we are going through this life that our strongest affection cannot be self, it must be him. And the only way that can happen is for us to die to our self. Every morning when I wake up, there must be in my house, there must be in my life: a death, a funeral. But the glorious news of that is that there's also a resurrection. There's also a resurrection. "For I am crucified with Christ, yet I live because Christ lives in me."

In our papers, we open them up and you look online- every single day in the paper there are obituaries. Every day- obituaries, deaths. Every day! Resurrections? Not so many. It would be kind of cool, wouldn't it? What if the AJC started running a resurrection page? In our life spiritually every day: "Lord, I die to myself. I die to myself, I'm crucified with you." That's what it is to follow Christ. Jesus was saying, "You've got to bear your cross; you've got to die to self and let me live through you." Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and I will give you the desires of your heart." How does that happen? It's when you die to self. You start delighting in him. His desires become your desires. That's where your joy flows from! There's never been a more joyful person than the person who is seeking after the desires of the Lord. They've become his desires. Jesus says, "Unless you carry your cross, you

cannot be my disciple.”

Third, Jesus is accounting for the heart’s strongest attachments. Look at verse 33: Jesus is accounting for the heart’s strongest attachments. Verse 33, “So therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Three times he says cannot be my disciple, cannot be my disciple, cannot be my disciple. What is he doing? What is he saying? What are we attached to in this world? Are we attached to our truck? Are we attached to our home? Are we attached to our coins? Are we attached to our shed? Are we attached to our tools? Are we attached to our antiques? Are we attached to our carpet? Are we attached to our pets? Are we attached to our cabin? Are we attached to our lake? Are we attached to our rod? Are we attached to our gun? Are we attached to our makeup? Are we attached to our rings? Are we attached to our watch? Are we attached to our career? Are we attached to that name on a plaque? What are we attached to? He says, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” He’s speaking of our possessions. He says here's what it looks like to follow me: you let go of those things. You leave them. Let them go so that they don't grip you. They don't hold you and you don't hold them.

This occurs again in Luke chapter 18. The rich ruler comes to Jesus in Luke 18 and the ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Luke 18:19:

And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’”

Please as you look at this, just know that Jesus is getting into the heart and mind of this rich ruler, and he’s just walking around in there just wreaking havoc. And he says, “Let's go to the Commandments. Let's see how good you are. You call me good?” And he gives him this list, and the rich ruler speaks up; he says, “All these I've kept from my youth.”

In verse 22, Jesus presses deeper and harder. It says, “When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” How did he respond? It says he got sad.

“But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” Wealth? Was it wealth that would keep him out of the kingdom of God? No, it was his attachment to wealth. It was his affection to his wealth; it was his alignment with his wealth. It was the things of this world that he was not willing to put behind his devotion to Christ. And Jesus got in there and showed him where his love was, where his attachments were.

And as I think about these three things: the relationship with family, or dying to self and our possessions- don't think that I'm making some kind a call this morning for you to go home and put everything you've got on the community Facebook page for sale, okay? We're not about to heap it all up in a pile and auction it off. If that were the case, we would have to sell it to unbelievers, wouldn't we? He says to be a believer you can't have those things. Jesus certainly is going to where our attachments are, and I'm telling you, just because I stand before you as a pastor today doesn't mean that I read these verses and it comes easy. I wrestle again and again- "Hate your mom?" It's funny this week; I thought I would like to advertise the title of this message as "Throw Momma From the Train."

Unless you hate your father and mother- I just wrestle with those things. Our children? You see, following Christ is going to bring us into the situations where we make decisions where what we're feeling is that we can't say, "First, what about the kids?" We can't say, "First, what about mom and dad?" We can't say, "First what about my career?" We can't say, "First, what about what I want?" and follow Jesus. We have to say first and believe first and live first this- I will seek him first, I will trust him first. I will die to myself first. I will let go of my possessions first.

Now, there are two illustrations that Jesus uses here to cement what he's talking about. He uses the illustration in Luke 14 of building a tower, and he uses an illustration of going out to fight a battle. The first illustration is where he's saying, "Count the cost." And he turns to this crowd suddenly in this walk toward Jerusalem; he turns to them and says, "Count the cost. Who builds a tower and without considering the cost then you get into it and you can't finish?" People are going to think you're a fool. People are going to make fun of you. He's saying, "As a follower of Christ, do this- take some time. I know you're in the crowd, but count the cost so that when you get out there following me you don't stop short."

He uses a second illustration about a battle. He says, "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? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace." He says consider the conflict. Count the cost, but then consider the conflict that's going to be out there. Consider what's going to rage in your heart -when you face this world- of following me so that you don't exit early. And Jesus, speaking to the crowd is also speaking to us today. He says, "I want you to know that being my disciple- here's what it looks like: I'm headed to a cross." Count the cost so you won't stop short, and consider the conflict so you won't exit early.

There's something that happens in this. Don't miss this! There's something that happens in that time of counting the cost and considering the conflict that cements our feet in to following Jesus, so that when we get out there and the costs are high and the conflict is hard, we say, "I've set my face toward this. I will keep following. I will press on." Here's where the real battle hits. We say, "Pastor, is it safe? I don't

know if it's safe. What will happen to my income? What will happen to my family? What will happen to my life? What will happen here? I don't know if it's safe!"

Well, I can just clear that up. It is not safe. It is not safe. Following Jesus is not safe in the way that Americans define "safe." It's not safe to follow Jesus, but it's sure. It's sure. Simon Peter wrestled with this, and he was with Jesus face-to-face. In Luke 18, right under these verses about the rich ruler, Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." We have left our homes and followed you, Jesus. Verse 29: "And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.'"

Count the cost. Consider the conflict. Don't you for a second stop remembering the rewards. It's not safe, but it's sure. I don't know if it's Southern, American, or worldwide, but we have this mantra sometimes we throw around that we live by: "Better safe than sorry." Jesus did not teach that. What Jesus taught was this: "Better sure than safe." It's better to be sure than to be safe. I think reality is if we're sure instead of being safe, we won't be sorry.