

# 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 8, 2013

## LOYAL TO WHOM?

Pastor Jim Dunn

(One quote and some inspiration for this sermon come from Francis Rossow's comments on this text in his book *Gospel Handles*, pp.225-228)

### Luke 14:25-35

#### The Cost of Discipleship

**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.

**28** For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** 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. **33** So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

#### Salt Without Taste Is Worthless

**34** "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? **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."

Cecelia Cichan is not afraid of flying. That's pretty amazing, because she was in a traumatic plane crash when she was four years old. In 1987, a flight from Detroit to Phoenix crashed shortly after takeoff. That crash took the lives of all 157 passengers on board, except for one. Cecelia was pulled from the burning plane by firefighter John Thiede, who not long ago walked Cecelia down the aisle on her wedding day. She lost both of her parents and her 6-year-old brother in that plane crash. Although she was fortunate to be alive, she suffered a fractured skull, broken collarbone, broken leg, and multiple third-degree burns. Rescuers believe Cecelia survived the plane crash at all because her mother, Paula, shielded the child with her own body as the plane went down. Picture in your mind that little girl being shielded by her mother's body. Paula attempted to protect her daughter from the impact of the crash. She was loyal to her daughter to her dying breath. She risked her own safety to get as close to Cecelia as she could in order to save her daughter's life.

Could you do that? Could you risk your safety, to remain loyal to someone, to stay close to that person, in order to save his or her life?

You can think of someone, maybe a few someone's you would do that for. Now in your mind, seat them all around you on a plane. If, like Cecelia's mother, you could shield only one, who would you choose, who would you stay closest to, who would receive your closest loyalty?

It's hard to choose, isn't it? That's the tricky thing about loyalties. They have a way of conflicting with one another.

Jesus wanted to make that point clear to the crowd that was following Him closely. He had just told them the parable of the wedding banquet, which is about inviting people to follow Jesus. After this He would tell the parables of the lost, which are about proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet followed Jesus. So, He wasn't trying to discourage the crowd from following Him closely. But once they had heard the Gospel and accepted the invitation, they needed to know they would face some tough choices.

---

Loyalties have a way of conflicting with one another. "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Jesus wasn't saying we should hate our family members or our friends or our pets or ourselves. He's not saying we should be disloyal to our loved ones. He's saying that when the time comes that you have to choose, like Paula Cichan had to choose as the plane was going down, between this person or this person or Jesus, you must choose Jesus as your closest loyalty. Being a Christian, a member of the church, is not simply a matter of joining an organization, attending worship services, learning what's in the catechism. Being a Christian means Jesus is your closest loyalty. You choose Him over everyone else, over everything else, every time.

*And that will bring consequences* that we may not enjoy. There may be times when we have to make difficult decisions or say difficult things for which we may be seen as disloyal by people we love. That's the point Jesus makes when He talks about building a tower and leading an army to war. Either one will have consequences. So, the builder should consider the consequences of building before the date of the groundbreaking even gets close. And the king should consider the consequences of engaging the enemy in battle, and if necessary should sue for peace before the enemy gets close, "while the other is yet a great way off." And we should consider the consequences of following Jesus as our closest loyalty.

Yet, it's been hard for us, even impossible for us to ever imagine that we could be at odds with a loved one over matters of faith or morality. I was practically an adult before I met a person who didn't believe in God. We just didn't expect that just because we love Jesus, people we care about might see us as unloving or disloyal. We just didn't expect that we would ever have to worry about being seen as disloyal. We didn't expect that being a Christian would ever be that hard. We didn't admit that there would be consequences for following Jesus that we would not enjoy. In our shock, then, do we do what is necessary to appear to be loving and loyal to others? I mean, do we let Jesus and God's Word take a back seat without realizing it? Just for the sake of not appearing unloving or disloyal to our loved ones?

---

For Jesus, even the back seat is too far away. When we are torn about who receives our closest loyalty, we put a little distance between Jesus and ourselves.

But He closes that distance between us. In this mini-parable of the king who sues for peace while the other king is yet a great way off, we hear familiar words. “But while the Prodigal was yet a great way off, his father ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20) “So it is with Jesus and us. He saw this problem a long time ago of our conflicting loyalties, and He had compassion on us. Jesus came running to us. The One who has the right to demand our closest loyalty humbled Himself, embraced us from a cross, and planted on us the kiss that breathes into us the breath of life. He closed the distance.” (Rossow) He got as close to us as He could. He risked His own safety. He remained loyal to us. He shielded us with His very body. And He has saved us.

After Paula saved her daughter Cecelia in her last dying act, the question was who would now take care of this little girl who was attracting so much media attention? She was in a Detroit area hospital. She and her family had been living in Tempe, Arizona. But she had an aunt and uncle far away in Birmingham, Alabama, and they closed the distance between them. The aunt and uncle came to Detroit, and now they shielded Cecelia from having to live her life in front of the media. They raised her away from the cameras, in Birmingham, Alabama.

Jesus closed the distance between Himself and us and still does. He still shields us from the eternal consequences of our sins. And He raises us. More and more He raises us up to the closest loyalty to Him. Through daily confession and forgiveness, He raises us up to a greater honesty with ourselves about what that closest loyalty to Him will cost us. He helps us admit we can't build that tower alone or fight that enemy alone. The costs, the consequences are too great. He raises us up to a greater reliance on His Word and forgiveness and presence. He raises us up to a greater trust in Him, that He is helping us know what to say and when to say it.

He is the Host who invites our loved ones to the wedding banquet. He is the One who came to seek and to save the lost. He wants the tower built. He wants the battle fought. He wants us and our loved ones to accept the cost of following Him. And He will give all that is needed for us to do that.

Amen