

Last week we said that one of the things that makes Jesus difficult is that He is going to go after our hearts. And the truth is when He does that, we're not going to like what we see. When you can compare your heart to the other people around you, you might pass with flying colors. When a holy God and completely other god lines up next to your heart and you see your heart for what it is, it's very difficult to see. It's ugly and it's dark. So in that moment, when Jesus goes after the heart, we kind of try to do an exchange program. So Jesus will go after a section of our heart and we'll go, "I don't want to talk about that, so let me tell You what I'll do. I'll memorize Scripture, I'll go through a Beth Moore Bible study, I will lead a home group, I will buy a Piper book, I will stop listening to secular music, I will not watch rated-R movies unless it's about Jesus..." and on and on and on we go, and we will religiously barter with the God of the universe if He'll leave our hearts alone. The good news is you're in the Bible Belt. There's a plethora of religious activities to try to numb yourself with. That's what makes it difficult. He's relentless after the heart. While most of us want to think that this is about some kind of external action, Jesus ruthlessly and violently always goes after the heart. It's what makes Him so very difficult. And so we've already read in Luke 14 how He just went after these men. I mean, this is a group of sadomasochists because apparently they never got up and left. They just kept on asking for more. So Jesus is "Heart... heart...heart..." and He ends it with the reality that most of us, when Jesus comes after our heart, will make excuses for why we don't deal with that. So He gets up from the dinner table, He walks outside and this massive crowd starts to follow Him. Here's just a really funny truth. Most of the Evangelical church today is very much concerned with church growth, "How do we grow our church?" Jesus is always concerned with how to wean it out a little bit. You'll see that what's about to happen here isn't what I call church growth strategy.

Let's look in Luke 14, starting in verse 25. "Now great crowds accompanied him,..." That's good, isn't it? You've got this massive crowd showing up. It's like a rock show of some kind. It's massive. "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters..." There's this same thing that goes on in the book of Matthew, but Matthew is not anywhere near as extensive as Luke. It's like the Holy Spirit here is just like "Who else? And your brother. Who else? And your cousin..." The list of hate is endless. Let's keep going, "...brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Now we've got to do something with this because Jesus teaches the opposite of this all over the place. Like earlier in Luke, He said that we have to love our neighbors like we love ourselves. But now we have to hate them. We have to love them with a kind of hate? Or is it hate them with a kind of love? This is confusing. And then later on, the Holy Spirit will tell the apostle Paul that a man has to love his wife like Christ loved the church. So how do you handle the command to love and to hate?

Let me tell you what's going on here. Jesus is going to go after the two great temptations. Let me get our heads where we need to be first, because when we think temptation, we shift to the negative. We think, "Temptation – lust, anger, greed..." But it's been my experience and I believe it's the teaching of the Scriptures that even more deadly than wicked things are good things that you have a tendency to make ultimate things. So Jesus is going to go after the two great temptations here, and He just went after the first one. Eleven years in, I'm still blown away that my wife said, "Yeah, I'll do the rest of my life with you." It still freaks me out. If I think about it, I'm like, "She knew me and she signed up. I mean, she said yes to that. It wasn't arranged. She said, 'Alright, let's go.'" I had heard people talk, just around churches, about how they really had to guard their hearts around their children, because they could see how their children could be an idolatrous relationship. And I just never grasped it until Audrey was born. And here's the crazy thing. It didn't even

take long. As soon as they put her in the little cart, I was like, "This is going to be a problem. This is going to be an issue for me." Here's what's happening here. We know that we're not being commanded by Christ to actually hate our family, but we are being commanded to be very careful that you don't take what is good and lovely and make it ultimate and therefore destroy it. So maybe the best way to do this would be to talk about what really is going between man and woman and children and the family unit. Maybe if we could see that, we could understand why this is such a necessity to grasp.

Go over to Ephesians 5. There are several chapters of Scripture that I have taken you to over and over and over again in my six years here. Ephesians 5 is one of those. Romans 1 and Romans 8 are others, as well as the book of Ecclesiastes. Now, Ephesians 5 is going to help us with understanding what the family is really all about. And then I'll show you what happens when you get outside of God's design and you make it ultimate and really the devastation that can follow there. So verse 22 is a wildly popular idea among our culture. Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Just a clarifying statement here. Husbands, if you have to get your wife to read this, you've already lost. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." If we had time to go back to Genesis 1 and 2, what I would show you is God creates the world and it is wild and untamed and rugged. And in the middle of it He creates Eden that is orderly, put together and well kept. He creates the man, blows life into him, sets him in there and says, "Make the rest of this world look like this. And so Adam begins to do that and doesn't do it long before God goes, "It's not good for this guy to be alone." So God sends the man to cultivate, to take what is untamed, after the fall to take what is broken, to push back the after affects of the fall, to be that cultivating agent and then He says, "I've designed it so that it's not good for this man to be alone." Then He has all creation come before Adam so that Adam can name them. And the Bible is clear that a suitable helper could not be found. So despite the fact that a dog is supposed to be your best friend, it's not and it's sad...even if you're single. Now, God pulls everything in front of him, a suitable helper for cultivating cannot be found, He knocks the man out, pulls the rib out and forms the woman, breathes life into her, Adam wakes up, sees her and sings. And man has his help-mate. So that God designed the woman to help the man as a cultivator in such a way that God is most glorified.

Let's move on to Ephesians 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way" as Christ gently, patiently, passionately, loving His bride, washing her in the water of the word, "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself." And we might be able to gather the implication that a man who hates his wife might just hate himself. "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." The man's job is not only to cultivate a broken, fallen world but now to cultivate, love, pour into his wife like Christ loved the church, in that He gave himself up for her. Which means the goal of the man is not to get all he can out of the woman but to pour into the woman all that he can. And in so doing, help-mate and man, as God as their ultimate, begin to cultivate in such a way that God is most glorified.

So how do children play into this? Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." So God puts Adam in the garden, says, "Push back what is dark, repair what is fallen, be the tool by which My Holy Spirit flows and moves and rescues. You're going to need a help-mate. Let Me give you the woman. There's a big

old world out there. You're going to need to be fruitful and multiply. You're going to have babies, and you are to impart to those babies, male and female, what their roles are in My plan to push back what is dark and reconcile to all things under Myself." That's the family unit.

Now watch what happens if you get away from this and you begin to worship family rather than worship God. If a husband is not finding fulfillment, life, joy and worship in his relationship with God, is not pursuing that as priority but rather expects his wife to be that for him, conflict is absolutely inescapable, because she does not possess the ability to be that for him. She can't do it. If a woman is looking to a man to, as Jerry McGuire says, "You complete me," you are going to destroy and suck the life out of every man you get around, because he was not designed to be that for you, God was. And so if you make your man ultimate, your wife ultimate then you are in the end taking something that is good and beautiful and elevating it to a place of worship, a place of ultimate, and you have created conflict, you have created the absolute impossibility of two becoming one in a very deep, spiritual way. Because the expectation of who they are and what they bring is off. Or if you gave up on your husband or wife a long time ago and you have taken that affection and the pursuit and you've lavished it upon your children, if you have made your children god, if you have elevated them to a place they don't belong, if you have forsaken the command of God on your life to raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and instead let their happiness be what dictates your family's existence, you're off the rails and things get goofy.

I did college ministry for ten years. Let me tell you a very, very consistent conversation. I would get a call from a churchman absolutely devastated that his 21 year old son wanted nothing to do with church and wanted nothing to do with God, despite the fact that he grew up in church. So I would just start to ask a few questions, and by the time I was finishing up college ministry, I could ask two questions and know what was going on. Nine times out of ten, God wasn't God. Soccer, baseball, football, volleyball that's what God was. And church was with other soccer players, etc. Basically what happened was, for fifteen years, a father taught his son, "That's secondary...that's secondary...your athletic gift is primary...it's ultimate..." And when the gift ran out as the competition got bigger, this kid had no background, no understanding, no passion, no zeal, no knowledge, no instruction, no discipline. And now daddy's panicking, despite the fact that for fifteen years he just trained him that he didn't need God. And if it's not that, it's school. I'm telling you, in the suburbs, raising kids is a competitive sport. If your kindergartener makes an 82, people freak out about that. If I made an 82 growing up, my parents took us to Red Lobster. What happens then, because you do not have God as ultimate, because He is not the pursuit, because you do not love your family less, which is what this word hate means, you live vicariously through your children, putting an unbelievable amount of pressure on them to perform so that you look good. And in the end, this is silliness upon silliness upon silliness. Now please listen to me. Sports are a really cool thing. I think they're a gift from the Lord. Sports are awesome. If your kid can kick the mess out of a ball, let him kick the ball. If he's got a fastball, let him throw it. If he can see a fastball and smack that thing, let him do it. But make sure that what you're creating is not an idol for them to worship. I've got a great friend who owns a baseball thing up in the Denton area. He says by far the most difficult part of his job is parents who will bring their six year olds to him and go, "He's in a slump. Can you help him? But tell me this isn't the air we breathe. Tell me there's not an unbelievable amount of pressure for your kids to be some of the smartest kids, some of the most athletically gifted kids. There's just an unbelievable amount of pressure on them, when what God has given you to do is to impart to your children the wonders of God. That's your job. And then I don't know how things changed or when it happened, but my parents said "no" a lot for my good, and I can't think of a time it made me happy. I can't think of a time as a kid where I went, "Thank you for not allowing me to play on Sundays. You're such good parents." No, I did that thing that we all did. I went to bed that night going, "I hate them. I'll never talk to them again." Then I woke up the next morning, "What's for breakfast?" I had already forgotten.

So great temptation number one: is your family your god? Temptation number two is worse. Let's go Luke 14. This is an interesting sentence because of where we are in history at this point where this is being spoken. "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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." This is easy for us, because we know that the cross has occurred. We see through the lenses of the crucified, resurrected Son of God, back to this statement. But when this statement's being made, they don't have that vision at all. In fact, despite that He blatantly told them multiple times the cross was coming, it was very much a surprise to these guys. So what's going on here? If you have any kind of church or biblical background, the easy translation is simple. There has to be a dying to self. If you want to follow Jesus Christ, there has to be a dying to self. I want to take it one step further and give you language that I think you might be able to understand. Let's go to Hebrews 12. I want to try to give you language that I think will help you understand a little better this "take up your cross every day." Let's start in verse 1. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." Now, are you familiar with the story of the cross? It's an unbelievably brutal 12-18 hours, an unbelievably brutal day. Where in the world is the joy in the cross? Because let me make this very clear. The Scriptures make it very clear that Jesus would rather not do it. He goes to the garden, the Bible tells us He collapses on the ground. He's sweating blood, He's pleading with God, "Take this cup from Me. Let's do this another way." Maybe we can say it this way. He's not happy about it. He's not going, "Tomorrow is the cross! Yeah! Woohooo!" That's not what's happening here. He doesn't have goosebumps. No, He's on the ground, He's in tears, He's sick, He says to His disciples, "I am overwhelmed to the point of death. Pray with me." Yet, "Not My will but Yours be done." Now let's go Hebrews 12 plus the garden. So Jesus is not happy about it, but He endured it with joy. So it seems that there is a blatant difference between and joy, that the two aren't synonymous.

Here's the thing about happiness, which is a good thing. Happiness is the pleasant emotions you when right circumstances (according to you) have aligned. So happiness is what we feel when we've got money and it's a perfect Autumn day and the windows are down and the car works and the radio is up and the wife is doing Ephesians 5, the husband is doing Ephesians 5, everything is lining up and you are happy. But here's the thing about happy. Happy seems to be quite fleeting, doesn't it? Has anyone had the day where there's a portion of the day that everything was right in the world and someone just walked up to you and with a sentence destroyed the universe? Like you just felt so great, everything was perfect and there was just this one small event that destroyed and stomped out every bit of happiness and actually took you to the other end of the scale. It happens all the time. Happiness is a fleeting emotion that will not sustain through difficult circumstance. The first thing to go with difficulty is happiness. If not, you're insane. You know that little thing that happens in Christian circles where some very difficult thing happens, like someone gets cancer, and they're just like, "Praise His name! Praise God!" No, it's one thing to worship through difficult circumstances, but that would be much more joy than happiness. So here's what He's saying here. Avoid temptation one, making your family god; avoid temptation two, the pursuit of happiness over the pursuit of joy. There is a belief within the mind of our culture that happiness is a God given right. That's a lie. God has not come to make you happy; He has come to fill you with joy, God exalting, worship creating, dark day sustaining joy. The Bible says that they dragged Stephen out of Jerusalem and began to pelt him with rocks. They're trying to kill him by pelting him with stones and he says, "Father, don't hold this against them." What is that? That's not happiness. Nobody's like, "Oh, this is a great way to die." No, it's, "Show them the same grace You've shown me." That's joy. The disciples are arrested, beaten and released, and they leave rejoicing. That's joy. Paul is headed to Jerusalem, the whole way there, everyone tells him, "You're going to be arrested...you're going to be arrested...you're going to be killed...you're going to be arrested." And he says, "I know, but I go." This is joy. It can't be taken, but happiness can. So here's what happens all the time. God will command and people will go, "I know that's what the Bible says, but I don't think I need to do that.. Because if I did that, I'd be miserable and God doesn't want me miserable. God would not want me unhappy. And so I'm going to do what makes me happy." Can

I point out one other thing about indulging the flesh in that way? Has anyone else had the experience where you did something where you thought it would make you happy? Like you're, "I don't care about right or wrong. I'm going to do this. I want to do this. This is going to make me happy." And what followed was an unbelievable amount of shame and guilt after the act was finished. So maybe God's on to something when He goes, "No, no no. Happiness is a good thing. It's a gift from Me, but let's chase joy. Let's violently and ruthlessly chase joy like it's gold." Beware of making your family god. Beware of the pursuit of happiness over the pursuit of joy.

Now back to Luke 14. Let's finish this up. Verse 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a 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.'" This is very simple. There are those of us who have said, "Yes, Lord," took two steps and went, "Never mind." And so we've become retarded in our faith. We have a faith that never grew into its fullness. We've taken four or five steps, we began to busy ourselves with religious activities but we don't want to engage the heart, and so there's no real growth, there's no rich transformation of the soul. There might be some kind of behavioral modification, but there isn't a transformation that creates any type of worship. This is what He's saying. You've got this, "Oh I'm following Christ" and you start building but it never gets finished and you just have this dilapidated tower that never got past the foundation.

Look at this next illustration. "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. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Can I give you an example of where I see something like that taking place? We were invited in through some government contacts and some other relationships we had to Darfur. We started praying about who would go, and several guys came forward. Michael Bleecker was one of them, whose wife was six months pregnant. Another was Jamie Hipp, whose wife was pregnant. I had all these guys coming into my office going, "God wants me to go to Darfur." And I'm going, "Your wife is pregnant. Does your wife know that you're in here talking with me right now?" Not only that, but there were several people even here very frustrated with us that we would let young men with pregnant wives and small children go to Darfur. What happened? These are men who considered the cost a long time ago. So when God came and said, "Let's go," circumstances weren't the issue. They had already decided a long time ago. They had already considered the cost a long time ago. "I am Yours. I lay my 'yes' down. You just need to ask." So God shows up, the Holy Spirit, "Let's go to Darfur." Their response is not, "Oh, not now. I have a two year old and one on the way." Their response is, "Yes, God loves my wife and children more than I ever will, and although this is not wise, this is obedient." And they got on the plane. "Consider the cost" He says.

Let's finish this up, because this last part is difficult. "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 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." That's a very difficult way to end this chapter. Because here's what He just said, "I have a plan for My glory and your joy. It's going to require Me coming after your heart. It's going to mean you making sure you haven't taken good things and made them ultimate. It's going to require you to follow Me, no matter where I lead." And salt is a good thing with a thousand uses, but if your answer is "no," or if your answer is "yes, but as long as it's convenient with my circumstances," or "yes, but as long as You do what I want in return," then He says, in regards to salt, you're worthless. Like your faith gets so retarded, your life lacks transformation at such a level that you're just a guy in a seat at church, you're just a woman who goes to church and attends Bible studies, you won't have a heart that loves God and worships God, you won't have a soul that pursues God as ultimate. So He goes, "What do I do? Go ahead, take your seat, open your Bible, but in the end...worthless."

I'm glad to get out of chapter 14, except that I know what's in chapter 15. Let's take just a minute here to take some inventory here, to let the Scriptures read us. The question is: Do you love everything less? Is your wife an idol to you? Is your husband an idol to you? Do you look to them for fulfillment? Have you made your children your god? Have you exalted them to a position of authority that is rightfully yours? Here's a great way to think about it on the kid front. Are you doing what God asked you to do? Are you imparting to them the things of God? Or have you bought into a very Americanized lie that that's the church's job? We're here to supplement, but the role is yours. Are you teaching your son, your daughter about Him, about grace, about His mercy? Does your appetite rule you? Do you really live by "I'm going to do what makes me happy. I don't care what the Scriptures say. I don't care?" Do you have areas of your life where you operate like that? Jesus is warning you that if this is how you operate, you cannot follow Him. Do you pursue happiness over joy? Because joy sometimes is long suffering to get to. Let's do inventory here. What's going on in us? What does the way we live reveal about what we really believe here?

Let's pray, "Father, thank You for our time. My prayer is that You would stir up our hearts toward You and that You would reveal to us where we have made good things ultimate things and by doing so created an offense. So I thank You personally for my beautiful daughter and my son and my wife. I thank You for smiles and laughter and all those things. I do love those things. I pray that You would guard my heart against them and that I would always see them as a result of You and not as something outside of You. I pray that they would create in me a deeper longing to know You and worship You and exalt You and love You and honor You. And I pray that my love would never terminate on them but would terminate on You because of Your grace and goodness in them. Help us. This is a difficult thing, and it's easy to get confused and it's easy to just to not think about where our love is terminating and what we've exalted. It's a confusing time to raise boys and girls in a culture that's driven by activity and sport and success as the world defines it. And it's really easy to get caught up in having great athletes who are great students who know nothing of what is eternal and what really matters. So help us. We need You. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."