

## “How To Hate Your Parents”

*Say What? The Hard Saying of Jesus, Pt.6*

You hear a lot in Christian circles about “family values”. So I thought we would take a look this morning at what Jesus had to say about family – and he covers all the bases; parents, kids, siblings. Let me jump right into the text, because it’s one of those that is so self-explanatory it doesn’t really need a lot of set-up.

So, **Luke 14:25–27**, “*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*”

Well there you have it. Easy—peasey right? Well, of course not. You knew what was coming just from the nature of this series. We’re looking all Fall at the hard saying of Jesus. Things that appear on the surface to be absurd, odd or just down right offensive. But one of the things I love about Jesus is he would not let anyone put him in a box – and he still won’t. Oh, we all try, “Jesus is this.” “Jesus is that.”

But anyone who honestly reads the gospels will tell you that Jesus will not stay in anybody’s box. And he will call *all* of us to the carpet at one time or another.

So let’s dig into this crazy text this morning. Because it does take digging. Jesus doesn’t often leave meaning lying around on the surface – in fact, just a surface reading of Jesus will get you in all kinds of trouble. That’s how you wind up gouging out your eyes and cutting off your hands! You have to dig deep. You have to meditate and reflect and pray and think. So let’s do some of that here.

Because if you just look at this text on the surface: “You must hate your father and mother.” On the surface you might say either, “That’s absurd! How terrible!” or you might say, “It’s unnecessary. I *already* hate my father and mother.” If you do say that, that’s a problem. But there are a lot of people for whom that is exactly the case and it’s one of the great wounds in their life.

But if you dig deep enough, you will discover that Jesus actually has a solution for that. Jesus is saying, “If you hate your father and mother *your way*, the *only solution for that is to learn how to hate them *my way*.*” So there’s a lot in this.

Now, it's really about what? It's really not essentially about fathers and mothers even though that's the thing that jumps up at you. What this is really about is *discipleship*. It's about what it means to *follow* Jesus, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. That's really its subject, and we learn five things here. There are five things this text tells us about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Let's go.

The **first** thing we learn here – and we learn this from the context mainly – but **Jesus' discipleship is not optional**. Look, who does he say this to? It says, (v.25) "*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said...*" He turned to them from whom? He was with his twelve. He was with his insiders. He was with his followers who had signed up for full-time service.

But Jesus turns around and doesn't just speak to the 12 these words about discipleship and about the cross and all that. He says it to *everybody*. Now what does that mean? What he says, he says to everybody. What it means is Jesus has no double standards. Almost everybody thinks there are two levels of being a Christian.

There's the *regular* Christian level. There are regular Christians who they would believe - they don't get really excited about it - but they come to church, they

believe it, and they pray when there's trouble. Then there are the *devoted* types. There are the people who are kind of all-out. Jesus Freaks, you know? What is Jesus Christ saying when he turns to the crowds?

What he's saying is there are no two standards. There's only one standard. He says, "*Anyone* who wants to deal with me has to take up a cross. If you want to deal with me at all, you have to put me absolutely first, ahead of parents and family and career and everything else. I have to be number one. Full, complete, sacrificial discipleship is the *only* thing you can do in order to relate to me. There are no two standards. There are no three standards." You see? Full discipleship is an absolute requirement of everyone. It is not optional. To be a disciple is to be a Christian. You can't say, 'Well, I'm a Christian, but I'm not into all that.' There are no two standards."

Our daughter is going to be in Glasgow, Scotland all next semester as part of the requirements for her International Studies degree. And so we've been looking at dorms, when suddenly this week she got notice that the University has a housing shortage and they're only accepting students who can prove they already have a place to live. And so you have three weeks to find a place. Can you imagine?

So we've been scrambling. And when I say "we", I mean Deanna because she is the queen of finding great places to stay at good prices. We make a good vacation team, because she studies all the logistics, and I study all the history. But, one of that things that really chaps her is what they call "gotcha tourism". You see a hotel advertising \$89 hotel room and then when you actually go to book the room, it's like \$120 bucks. You say, "What's this?" Well, it's the fine print. When they quoted you \$89, they weren't talking about taxes, they weren't talking about service fees, they weren't talking about 2 percent for looking in the mirror twice, and on and on. They don't tell you about all that other stuff. They don't tell you the *real* cost. It's the fine print.

Jesus Christ does not turn to the crowd and say, "I will give you life and more abundantly," and then turn to his disciples and say, "But there'll be crosses once you've signed up. Oh, yeah, yeah. There's a big ol' cross." No, Jesus says, "There's one standard and one standard only. I'm up-front about it. I do not hide the cost. I do not hide the difficulties. I do not hide all the things that could happen being a Christian. To be a Christian *is* to be a disciple; to put me first; to kiss everything else goodbye. *Anyone* who wants to come to me *at all* has to be a disciple, full-throated, all-out." So, first of all, discipleship is not optional. That's a pretty scary thing. Ok, number one, number two...

The **second thing** we learn here is **discipleship is** not only not optional, but it's also **unpredictable**. Let's look at the range: father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters. What is all that? In a patriarchal, family-oriented society, that is basically the course of your life. Jesus is just laying out the way your life is supposed to go. Now, we have to be careful, because when you're in a secular Western, individualistic society, you misunderstand some of these statements.

Those of you who are from more traditional cultures, or whose parents are from more traditional cultures, you know how *vastly* more important the family was to everything that happened in your life. You never disgraced your family. You never moved away from your family. You never married somebody your family didn't want. Family was everything.

But here's what Jesus is saying. Jesus is looking at the normal agenda of a person's life. And what he is saying is, you have to be willing to kiss it all goodbye. He's saying, "Don't you dare come to me with *your* agenda for your life, with *your* outline of what you want your life to be and then try to fit me in. Don't come to me because you want to be a better husband or a better wife or to have a happy family. Don't even come to me because you just want a happier life or a more fulfilled life. I will not be used. You must come to me for *me*, myself. You have to be willing to kiss any of this stuff goodbye."

Now, that's kind of scary. But what better way could Jesus Christ have said than to say, "You must hate your father and mother, brother, sister, wife, child," what better way could he say, "Don't come to me because I'm relevant. Don't come to me because I'm exciting. Don't come to me because I'm fulfilling. Don't come to me because I will make you a better citizen. Don't go to Christianity in order to have a better society. Come to me for me, myself"?

Oh, he's saying, "I *will* be the most relevant thing. I *will* be the most thrilling thing. I *will* be the most fulfilling thing you ever could see, but not if you come to me as such. You have to come to me just for me. You have to come to me because I'm *true*...not because I'm relevant, even though I am relevant. You have to come to me because, quite simply, I am the way and the truth and the life. You must make me the lord of your whole life. Period."

I think we've made a mistake in painting Jesus as some tame thing. We talk about the imagery of Jesus as a lamb, but don't forget, he's also a lion. We forget that. And Jesus is saying, "I am not a tame lion." You know in the *Chronicles of Narnia* books - C.S. Lewis' fairy tales for children - there's this one place where the little girl, Susan, hears about Aslan the lion.

And she says, "Ooh, a lion. Is he safe?" And what's the answer? The Beaver says, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course, he's not safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Now, that's what Jesus is saying here is, "I am not safe, but I'm good."

He says, "You have your life outlined ahead of you. Don't shoehorn me into your life. Don't make *me* the means and *your life* the end. Your life is the means, and I am the end. When you come to me, you're not my disciple unless you come to me and say, 'I'm with you whatever.'" Okay? Before I go on to the third point, can I ask you a question?

Is your life kind of placid? Do you just pray sometimes, you go to church occasionally, and you believe, but you're basically pursuing your life and things are going pretty well and every so often you turn to God for spiritual strength? Is that your life? That's not the life Jesus envisions here. So the second thing we learn is discipleship is unpredictable.

**Now the third thing, discipleship is deeply emotional.** Let's take a look at this word "hate". Why would he choose this word hate? Most people look at this word, and you kind of know what he's getting at, right? First of all, I don't think anyone seriously believes Jesus Christ was saying here you should hate in the sense of being actively hostile to these people. After all, elsewhere Jesus says, "Love your enemies..." Jesus on the cross was saying, "Father, forgive them..." Jesus says you're not allowed to even hate the wicked.

So how in the world could he be talking this way about your family? No, he's not using the word hate in the normal sense, the common sense of being actively hostile. Here's the interesting thing. In Semitic usage, in the Bible, the word hate *can* mean hate actively, but it *also* can mean hate comparatively.

There's a great example of this in the Genesis 29 soap opera about a guy named Jacob and his two wives: Leah and Rachel. People try to say that the Bible is ok with polygamy, but I don't get that because every-time it's depicted it is an absolute disaster. The old KJV says, **Genesis 29:31**, "*And when the Lord saw that Leah was **hated**...*" Now your modern translations won't use the word – they clean it up to say "not loved" – but the Hebrew word is "hate". Jacob loved Rachel and hated Leah.

But does that mean he actively hated his wife? No, because in the verse right before it says, **(v.30)** "*[Jacob's] love for Rachel was **greater** than his love for Leah.*" It's comparative. His love for Rachel was so incredibly great that his treatment of Leah looked by comparison - even though it wasn't mean, he didn't curse her, he wasn't unkind to her, he was perfectly affectionate - but *compared* to Rachel, his attitude toward Leah was like hate.

So do you realize what Jesus' point is here? He's not saying, "I want you to hate your parents." What he is really saying is, "I want you to love me." What he's saying is, "Look at these kinds of loves." Father and mother, those are what the Greeks called *storge* love - familial love and affection. Then look at wife. That's *erotic* love. Then look at child. That's another kind of love.

You love your child in a different way than you love your parents. You love your child in a different way than you love your spouse. Then there are brothers and sisters. Those might not be siblings. Those might just be friends. But here's what Jesus is doing. He is taking every kind of love there is, every kind of human love - He's taking *sexual* love. He's taking *friendship* love. He's taking *family* love.

He's taking *all* these kinds of love - and he's saying, "I want and I offer a kind of love that will make all of those pale by comparison. I don't want sentiment. I don't want just an inspirational feeling at the end of the sermon. I want a love as real as your love for your wife or your husband, as real, as passionate, as interactive, as delightful, and then so much *more* that it makes every other kind of human love pale by comparison." He says, "I want to be the Rachel of your life...not the Phoebe." Sorry, wrong soap opera! "Not the Leah."

Now, this isn't to imply that there's no act of the will in discipleship. Of course there is duty and obligation and all the things that come with any discipline, even when you don't feel like it – *especially* when you don't feel like it. That's what makes it a discipline, of course. But that's not the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. He is actually saying, "You're not a disciple unless you're emotional about me. *So* emotional that it threatens to block out every other relationship."

You know, the stars are out all day. You just can't see them because the sun is so bright. And Jesus is saying, "I really want that kind of love, not to put out the other kinds, but I want to flood every other kind of love with the overwhelming sense of grace and love we can have with each other."

Let me read you some historical theology, because St. Augustine really got a hold of this. We talked about him last week. He shows that religious affections aren't just icing on the cake – Don't anybody sit here and say, "Well, now that's a rather lofty ideal, but I don't know that I'm that kind of person. I don't have that kind of temperament. My religion is a private thing, and I don't think I can ever get there." Don't think of this as a discipleship upgrade. This is at the very heart of it. Augustine gives us the essence of a "holy life". Look at this...

"Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally... but God is to be loved for His own sake." (*On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1, Ch.27)

Saint Augustine, says *the* key to transformed character, the key to a great life, the key to courage, the key to forgiveness, the key to peace, the key to the kind of great heart you want to have is ...What? He says it's not willpower. It's not working hard. Basically, he says it is correctly ordering our loves.

Think. We already laughed about hating father and mother in the beginning, but there are some of you who know you've disappointed your parents. It's like a cloud that follows you everywhere. You may not even admit it, but you just can't overcome the shame of it, the nagging ache of it and you can't get really free from that sense of failure. Or maybe it's somebody else. Maybe it's a spouse, or ex-spouse, or maybe someone you were in love with, or a dear friend, someone who rejected you, and you can't get rid of the sense of that failure.

Now, what does Saint Augustine say is the problem in every one of those cases? Why are you eaten up by that relationship? He says it's because something is too important to your heart. Your parents' opinion is too important to you. It has you by the throat. Your friend or the person who rejected you is too important. It has you by the throat.

Augustine asks, what are you going to do to get freedom? What are you going to do to get peace? There are only two things you can do. You can *actively* try to hate. You can say, "My parents were just such idiots," to get a little bit of freedom, or to say, "That person rejected me. What did they know? They were flawed people. They were trash themselves."

In other words, one of the ways you can get freedom and poise is to try to not love your parents so much, not love that person who rejected you so much, not be as passionate, kill that part of your heart, just harden your heart. That's one way to get freedom. But what a cost! Relational cost...emotional...mental...physical even.

He says the other way to get freedom...? He says the only way you're going to overcome the way your parents think of you, the only way you're going to overcome what other people think of you, the only way you're going to overcome even what your own heart and conscience think about you is you have to love God *more*.

He says *the* thing you need, to go from being a coward to being a courageous person...*the* thing you need to go from being bitter to being happy and peaceful and forgiving...*the* thing you need to go from being inferior to being confident - the love of Jesus Christ has to be so real to you that it *eclipses* these other things. Jesus is the sun to all those stars.

In other words, you don't really love anything *too much*. You love Jesus Christ *too little* in relationship to them. And therefore, the *essence* of a transformed character, the essence of what it means to grow into discipleship is to hate all these things comparatively. It's to let Jesus be the Rachel, let him be the fairest among ten thousand.

You really have to have that kind of love. You really have to receive that kind of love. That's the essence of what it means to be a disciple, deeply emotional. So we see what? Discipleship is...1.) non-optional, 2.) unpredictable, 3.) deeply emotional. A disciple is someone who's emotional about Jesus Christ, and you're not a disciple if you're not emotional about him. That's what he's saying. "I want you to just put me first. I want you to love me."

"Well," somebody says. "How in the world do you get *that*? Where does that come from? Good night! Do I just manipulate that up somehow? How do I do that? I don't know, the whole thing seems so abstract to me." Well, hold on, because that leads us to the **fourth thing, Jesus' discipleship is completely positional.**

Because we're told here you're supposed to "take up your cross." Jesus does not say, "Take up my *teachings* and follow me." He doesn't say, "Take up my *example* and follow me." He doesn't say, "Take up my *advice* and follow me." That would crush you. If you tried to pick up Jesus' teaching...Listen, just pick up the Sermon on the Mount and follow him. Go ahead. Get one step, and it'll crush you right through the floor. It says, "Don't envy anyone. Forgive everybody. Be completely poor in spirit." Just try it.

But no, what does he say? "Take up the cross." What does that mean? Well, a lot of people think, "Boy, that sounds pretty awful." In fact, one of the commentators says to take up the cross can only mean one thing. It must mean to put yourself in the place of a condemned criminal.

"Well," you say, "that sounds pretty negative." Not at all, because what condemned criminal are we talking about? What condemned criminal are you supposed to be putting yourself in the place of? What condemned criminal are you supposed to be identifying yourself with? This is what Jesus is saying. "The essence of discipleship is to realize that when I died, you died. Identify with me."

Paul puts it like this in **Colossians 3:1,3**, "...*set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God...For **you died**, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*" You died! The Bible says over and over again that when you become a Christian - the minute you believe in Jesus Christ - you died on the cross with him. The Bible says you were buried with him.



What does that mean? It means God looks at you right now as if you've paid all the penalty for every one of your sins. If you are a person who believes in Jesus and you start to beat yourself up because of your sin, because you feel so guilty...*don't*. Why? Because as far as God is concerned, you've already *been* beaten. You've *been* flogged. You've been crowned with thorns. You've been speared. You've been nailed. You've paid it all. Your life is hidden with God in Christ.

Now when God looks at you, He sees what Jesus has done. And therefore, to put yourself in the place of *this* condemned criminal means every day you get up, because in **Luke 9:23** Jesus says, "*Take up your cross daily.*" Every day you get up and you remind yourself of who you are...*in Christ*. That's what we're talking about.

You remind yourself that you have died. You remind yourself there's nothing to prove. You remind yourself that you're accepted. You remind yourself of what he did in order to get this done. Every day you take up the cross. What does that mean? You live in its shadow. You take up the cross. The sun is coming down. You're walking in the shadow of the cross all the time.

What it means is on the one hand, "I'm living a life of sacrificial service like Jesus," but it also means, "I'm doing it out of the fullness of knowing what he did for me there." Do you realize what that is? You can live with emotional wealth from knowing **your position in Jesus**, knowing your standing, knowing what you look like to the Lord.

In other words, discipleship is emotional because it's positional. You can live out of emotional wealth because of your position, your identification with Jesus Christ in his death. And that's what it means to take up your cross. It means to live a life like that.

In fact, I'll push you a little further. Do you see now when it says you have to hate even your own life? Of course, what does that mean? To hate your own life does not mean to be filled with self-loathing. No. To be filled with self-loathing – "I'm the worst" - is actually self-centered. You're very absorbed with yourself. There are two sides to the coin of pride – "I'm better than everybody else" and "I'm worse than everybody else." Both pride.

We are being called in this verse to an ego-crucifixion on the basis of Jesus' bodily-crucifixion. Ego-crucifixion looks like self-forgetfulness - not self-disdain, not self-loathing, not self-flagellation. You are being called to ego-crucifixion, but it's the kind of joyous thing that happens when you say, "I have nothing to prove. I know who I am in Christ. And therefore, I don't care if I'm snubbed. I don't care what they think of me. It's not the most important thing in the world. I'm living in the shadow of the cross." So discipleship is *not optional*, discipleship is *unpredictable*, discipleship is deeply *emotional* because discipleship is completely *positional* - it's living out of your position in Jesus.

**And then lastly we learn that discipleship is unconditional.** Now maybe that has been common sense. Maybe, in a sense, everything I've said all morning has been implying that, but I think we have to end this way. Take up your cross. That's unconditional. That's finality. There's no stronger way of putting it. Do you realize how weird this is to use this symbol of execution as the essential image of what it means to live a Christian life?

Imagine a candidate for office saying something like this? What if Governor Abbot's campaign slogan was, "Ditch those legs and roll with me to victory!" Oof! No one would do that. But Jesus Christ says, "Take up your cross and follow me." And here's what this means.

First, it's unconditional - no matter what. In the First Century, when you saw a man carrying a cross, one thing you knew was that was the last thing that person was ever going to do. You don't walk with a cross and say, "Eh, this isn't really working for me. I thought this was going to be kind of purifying, but it's not what I signed up for. Maybe I'll try the hot yoga class instead..."

Listen, a person carrying a cross is under arrest. Jesus Christ is saying you're under arrest. When you become a disciple, it means you're no longer your own. You're no longer an independent person - see this is what freaks us liberal Westerners out more than hating our families! You give up your rights. You're under arrest. See how this cuts both ways?

You see how in *one* single passage he subverts both traditional family culture *and* secular individualistic culture? Why? Because you not only have to hate your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your wife, and your child, but your *own life*. In Western society we say, "Nobody has the right to tell me what to do with my own life." Jesus says, "You're under arrest. You do not have the right to make up your own mind now. You follow me no matter what I say, no matter what I send your way."

Let me warn you. When almost anyone starts in discipleship, you really feel like, “Well, this means my life is going to go more smoothly. I’m giving myself to the Lord of the universe. Surely, He’s going to answer my prayers, start to bless me. Things are going to go a little bit better.”

When Jesus calls you to the cross, what he’s saying is, “I call you to a life of glory, a life of greatness, but I’m not guaranteeing you an easy life. I didn’t have an easy life.” When you saw Jesus Christ take up the cross in the Easter story, what did you know? You know he’s on his way to glory, on his way to greatness, but not on his way to a smooth and easy life.

Jesus says to his Father, “Not my will, but your will be done.” And Jesus says to us, “Obey me *unconditionally* no matter what comes.” In fact, if you don’t obey him unconditionally, you’re not obeying him at all. If you don’t serve him unconditionally, you’re not serving him at all. If you are saying, “I’ll stick with this Christianity as long as this happens and this happens. I’ll obey *if...*” We talked about this last week.

If there are any “ifs” in your service to him, you’re not serving him at all. When you say “I will *if...*”, “I will *but...*” you prove that *you’re* on the throne of your own life, that *you’re* the one calling the shots. You are the king. He is the servant. You are the one who’s deciding whether what he is doing is benefiting you, whether your service to him is profiting you or not. And that’s not service at all. That’s consumer review.

Don’t kid yourself. There’s an all-or-nothing-ness about this. You either say, “I will do everything you say. I will obey you no matter what you say. I will obey you no matter what you send my way,” or else you’re really not serving him a bit. Either you’ve taken up a cross or you haven’t. You’re either under arrest or you’re not. You’re either living in the light of what he has done, or you aren’t. There’s nothing in the middle. There are no two standards.

Now, I want to be brutally honest with you, but at the same time, I think everyone should do this. I believe being a disciple of Jesus is the best way for anybody to live. Let me just ask you this. Is there anybody here who says, “I could never do all that. I just couldn’t do it,” let me add one more point. It will only take 30 seconds. You can relax because...**Jesus’ discipleship is gradual.**

Do you know how I know that? It's tied to the means of death. Jesus doesn't say, "Sit in the electric chair and follow me. Face the firing squad and follow me." Because rifles and electrocution are instantaneous. You're dead. That's it. One minute you're alive; the next minute you're dead. No, Jesus says, "Take up your cross..."

Crucifixion is a slow death. It's a gradual death. What that means is get ready to be patient. It's gradual. Unless you hate your father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, even your own life, you cannot be his disciple. Unless you take up your cross and follow him, you cannot be his disciple. Are you there yet? Of course you're not. I know I'm not. It just means we have need of loving him more. It's not that he loves us any less as his imperfect disciples. No, no, God doesn't need to reorder *His* loves. But we do. Stare at the Son, stare at his cross, until all the stars of your life begin to fade by comparison.

Let's pray...