

The Terrible Tragedy of a Nominal Christian

Luke 14:34-35

September 19, 2021

Go ahead and open your Bibles to Luke chapter 14, just two verses for today. At the end of Luke 14, verses 34 and 35, two verses, but a lot to learn. As we come to the close of this great chapter, Jesus issues a warning. And the warning is for nominal disciples. That is to say, these are disciples in name only, but not in heart, not in conduct.

They're disciples in name only. They are following after Jesus, like the crowd that he's speaking to, that he's confronting. They're following after him, but they don't really know him, they don't really get what his life and ministry is about. So Jesus stops them in their tracks, he calls for some serious self reflection, some sober minded, self examination, so that he might call some true disciples and see them emerge from this crowd of fickle minded followers.

Let's return to verse 25, what we covered last week, and just remind ourselves of the context of what is going on. "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned in 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, 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. 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 was not able to finish.'"

"Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." That outlines pretty clearly in very stark terms, what true discipleship requires, it's straight from the words of Jesus himself.

Fundamentally, discipleship means a radical change of mind, you have to see that there, a radical change of mind. It's something that works from the inside and comes out to the outside. It's a way of thinking that results in a way of living, in a way of walking, change results in a radical realignment of loyalty. That's what verse 26 says. No longer are family relationships paramount, but now the relationship that matters most is that with God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The change results in a radical resetting of priority, verse 27. The priority is on cross bearing, in being obedient to Christ commands which brings the rejection of the world. And so thus the cross, the cross that is the symbol of rejection of the world, ultimate rejection in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And then finally, that change results in a radical redefinition of prosperity, which is clarified in the story of the king facing a death threat. Grave, grave challenge of another king coming into his land with an army, clarifies all that really matters. He starts to clarify prosperity as life itself and life itself, really, that comes from God, so thinks about whether he can win that

battle or whether he needs to sue for peace. Either way, he is clarifying what prosperity is. And Jesus says, so renounce everything else, renounce everything and clarify what prosperity is, it's knowing God, it's knowing Christ.

Without those radical changes on the inside, a radical change in the heart, the mind, the thinking and that is, by the way, predicated on a change of nature, that can only happen by the Spirit. That's called regeneration. That's called being born again. Without that radical internal change of nature. Not only will there be no external changes, there will be no reality of discipleship at all. No radical change, no true discipleship. If your life looks just religious, you really have to question, "Do I know Jesus Christ is Lord? Do I know God? Am I reconciled to him? Have I been born again?"

Because all these people were religious. He's calling them to something else. All of them sacrificed, all of them went to the temple, all of them went to synagogue every single week. Just like we go to church every single week. Jesus isn't speaking to the irreligious. He's not speaking to the pagan world here, he's speaking to what looks like

on the outside faithful Jews, look like everybody else. It's why he comes to the end here, with a challenge, two verses Luke 14:34 and 35. And he says this, "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."

And then this, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This is how Jesus concludes his confrontation to those thousands who've been following along behind him, this is the situation of many in the crowds of thousands, following after him, and I gotta tell you, it is the same situation that many are in today. So many who are professing to be Christians, but we know that there is no real internal change because we don't see any evidence in their life. Some people you don't know them well enough. All you can see on the surface is they attended to church, a profession of faith, they listen to Christian radio stations, it's all you can see.

But what's passed for Christianity in our land for the last number of decades on a popular level, really has everyone passing through a very, very wide gate, and

walking undisturbed along a very broad road, taking the easiest way. They've fooled themselves into thinking that it's Christianity that they've embraced, but it's really the way that leads to destruction. And Jesus said that, "There are many who go in by that gate," and walk along that road. One day, Jesus is gonna hear the protest coming from those many, who think they've embraced Christianity, as they say to him, "Lord, Lord," but he will turn away from them. He'll declare to them, "I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Those many are nominal believers. They are believers in name only. Many who followed Jesus were nominal believers, they would have called themselves disciples, but they did not know him. They didn't have this radical understanding of discipleship, and they didn't count the cost. Think about it, deliberate and say "Yes, that's what I want above all else, I'm willing to sacrifice everything else to get it." Today, they're called nominal Christians. They have a superficial version of the gospel, a rudimentary understanding of some facts, because they've grown up in this land, they've been attending churches, but

in reality, they are ignorants.

Some of them pretenders, hypocrites, some of them self deceived, but they live always in doubt, fearful of going deeper to think deeper, because they don't really know what they're gonna find when they think more deeply. They live in double mindedness. They're always unstable, always vacillating between two or three or 10 opinions. Never sure, never firm and steadfast, never confident or assured. In fact, at the end of the day, when you find them picking an option, oftentimes, it's far afield from what the Scripture teaches.

So Jesus calls out once again, here clarifying the radical demands of discipleship and here at the end, providing one more warning to this crowd in the form of another parable. And those with the ears to hear, they will hear, those with the ears to hear, they will come, they will embrace this radical demand of discipleship. Because God has given them ears to hear. My hope for you today, the many of you are not nominal Christians, but actually the real deal, truly in the faith. You know the Lord, you love the Lord, you have confronted these radical demands, and

maybe it's cost you, it's cost you relationships, it's cost you jobs, it's cost you money, it's cost you all kinds of things.

And you look at this, and you say, "That's what I want, more than anything." When you heard last week's sermon, you said, "Amen, yes and amen. And I will follow Christ." But I realize that in a group of this size or really a group of any size, I realize that there are those who are nominal, there are those who are going through the motions, there are those who have yet to really reckon with these demands. And so for the true Christians among us, I hope that this steels your resolve, what we hear today. Some hard words from Christ, and I hope it steels your resolve. I hope it causes you to double down on your commitment because God has truly made you new, and you return and revisit these demands from Christ and you long to follow him, no matter what it costs you.

But for those who do not yet know or understand, those who have yet to reckon with these demands. I hope that what Jesus says here troubles you. If it doesn't trouble you and it glances off of your head and darts into another

direction because your head is hard, and your spine is stiff, and you have no ears to hear, that would be a judgment. And I pray that that is not you. I hope instead that your heart is soft, and that these words will penetrate and trouble you, trouble you to the point of salvation, that you go through the difficult work of repentance, that the spirit would cause you to be born again and you would embrace Jesus Christ, and know his true salvation.

Because listen, this life is so short, we're going to be gone, like a vapor coming off a, steam off a cup of coffee, like a flower the field that passes away this winter, eternity well, it's eternal, it's forever. And I want you to know him forever. That parable features the nature of salt, just one little salt grain, tiny little mineral with great, great influence. Just a few grains sprinkled on your food and you can tell, it's barely visible to the eye, but there's enough there to enhance the flavor of your food and increase the pleasure of eating. Small little grains of salt, but great, great influence because of the nature of salt. Take away the saltiness of salt and it's useless. Same thing with discipleship. Same

thing is true of true Christianity.

Not many true disciples in the world at any given time, but just a few sprinkled throughout society and culture and they are enough to have profound influence. The only caveat is that they must be true disciples. They must be true Christians, after the manner that Jesus has described following the pattern he's laid out for us. That's why there's a lot of question when we see our country going the direction it's going. How many true ones are out there?

A lot of false ones though. And like salt losing saltiness, if that were possible, they too would be worthless, terribly misleading. You think you're picking up salt, looks like salt, but there's nothing there. You think you're dealing with a true Christian, a true disciple, when you get into the midst of his life and his thinking, nothing there. It's misleading.

So if salt is to be effective, it must be salty. If Christians are to have any effect, they must be

Christianly, real Christians. So three points for this morning. Very simple, the metaphor, the meaning and the message. The metaphor of salt, the meaning of this metaphor, and then the message, that is, what are the implications of this? What are we to take away from it? So first point, the metaphor. The parable assumes a general knowledge about the properties of salt. That I think Jesus is safe to assume that his audience and our audience today, we understand the properties of salt.

It's a common mineral compound used every day, in every culture, in every place of the world. And throughout human history. Usefulness of salt is universally acknowledged, universally appreciated, universally used. So common table salt, it's a mineral compound, sodium chloride, there's about 40% sodium, 60% chloride, and salt comes from mineral deposits that we can either mine out of the earth or draw from salt saturated water, like seawater. So we evaporate the water and then harvest the crystallized salt that lays on the ground afterwards.

Jesus says, it's just almost a truism to say this "Salt is good." The word good is *kalos*. It could be morally

good or ethically good, but he's not talking about that with salt. He's using the word good in the sense of useful, beneficial, it's helpful to have salt, how so? Well, just outlining a few things that seem to hold true over time, several ways. First, salt is good for seasoning food, it enhances the flavors of our foods. What would potato chips be without salt? I mean, low sodium potato chips or no sodium potato chips. What is the point? Right? Gotta have the salt.

In small concentrations as my wife likes to remind me, in small concentrations, salt enhances sweetness and mitigates the bitterness of foods. So those properties of enhancing sweetness and lessening bitterness in food allows our taste receptors in our mouths to detect other more subtle flavors that are already in the food. So because of how salt interacts with the water that's in the food, which has a diluting effect on food flavor. Salt helps to concentrate and then strengthen the less dominant flavors and draw them out, allow our tongues to detect them.

Salts also makes meat juicier, which is why brining meat is such a helpful process, take your meat, dunk it in

salt water for 24 hours and let her rip. One source told me why that's so. He said, "When you soak meat in brine, the salt water flows in, and the salt goes to work on the protein cells, altering them by loosening and unwinding the strands of protein, allowing them to sop up the brine."

Savvy chefs add other flavorings to their brine like sugar, herbs and spices and the meat will drink in those flavors too. Every good cook knows this, understands this, practices this and even for those of us who do not really understand how salt works the way it does, why or how this happens. We know the simple truth that salt just makes food taste better.

There's a biological benefit of salt as well. Turns out that this salt compound, sodium chloride in moderate amounts is good for our health. Sodium and chloride are electrolytes, along with some other minerals as well, but they're electrically charged minerals that are essential for proper nerve function and muscle contraction, we need that. That's why when someone, an athlete is completely wiped out, you give him a bottle of Gatorade or he's really bad you give him Pedialyte or plug it into his veins in a IV or something like that. But sodium helps maintain the

body's water and electrolyte balance.

The body also uses chloride, the chloride side of that equation to produce hydrochloric acid, which is stomach acid. It's used to kill germs that piggyback on our food coming down our gullet, and also helps to break down proteins and make them useful for our body. So sodium chloride very helpful, very useful salt is useful.

In the same ways we can say that salt is useful for the human body, go back to an agricultural time predominantly in the first century. It's also useful for animal bodies, livestock to raise healthy cows and sheep and goats. So dairy farmers, ranchers supplement their animals fodder with salt. In fact, they'll often put out large blocks of salt in the field for their herds, it's good for their bodies.

Salt was also essential, especially in the ancient world. And you got to think about this before refrigeration. Refrigeration is a miracle the modern age, we're so grateful that we're not having to salt all of our

meat, but we can put it in a freezer. But it's essential back in the ancient world for preserving meat, so add salt to meat, the salt will absorb the moisture that's in the meat which creates a drier environment, where it's harder for bacteria to grow. Slowed bacteria growing, it slows the decay of the meat which means the meat will keep longer, that was massively important for those who traveled in the ancient world and had to carry meat with them. Think about soldiers going out on a long campaigns. They needed meat.

They needed protein to strengthen their bodies to get ready to engage on the battlefield. So, essential to have salt. So when Jesus says, "Salt is good." It's an understated way of saying salt is really essential for life. Everyone understood its value. Pliny the Elder, he had served as a Roman military commander in the first century before giving his life to study, in the writing of his famous encyclopedia *Natural Histories* and as a military man, he understood the value of salt very well. He writes in *Natural Histories*, quote, "In innumerable seasonings, it is the taste of salt that predominates, and it is looked for when we eat garum." Have you ever heard of garum? I

hadn't either.

But garum was more popular than cheeseburgers in the ancient world. In especially the Roman world. Garum was an ancient sauce. It was used as a condiment for dipping breads, as a seasoning, used in many, many recipes. It was made though from fermented fish that was highly salted. Sounds terrible to us, doesn't it today? But Worcestershire sauce, that is basically the same thing. It's made of fermented anchovies, and salt. We, we use the same stuff today. So Romans love this stuff called garum. Pliny said, "Scarcely any other liquid except perfume, has begun to be more highly valued."

So the Romans added garum to all their recipes and in its essence, garum was salt. Pliny goes on to write about salt in *Natural History*, as he says, "Moreover, sheep, cattle and draft animals are encouraged to pasture in particular by salt, the supply of milk is much more copious, there's even a far more pleasing quality in the cheese." Therefore, he says, "Heaven knows a civilized life is impossible without salt." We might say, "Civilized lives impossible without refrigeration and running toilets." Same

kind of thing. Pliny went on to describe, "Salt as so valuable that salaries of political officers and military service and all that were paid in salt."

In fact, the Latin word for salt, *salis* is embedded in the word salary. The word *salarium* refers to the yearly revenue from the sale of salt. And so *salarium* meant allowance or stipend or pension and literally it meant salt money. So it was the soldier's payment that enabled him to purchase salt. The phrase "He's worth his salt." Comes from this same idea. Pliny says, salt, *salis* in Latin, he says quote, "It's applied metaphorically, even to intense mental pleasures." We call them *salas*, referring to all the humor of life. It's supreme joyousness, relaxation after toil are all expressed by this word *salis* more than any other. Which is why Jesus uses this metaphor, understood fully in the ancient world. He uses this metaphor for believers, Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth."

So with that little brief review in mind, think about the richness of Palestine, in particular the land of Israel, the promised land in particular because of salt. What natural resource did the land of Palestine have? Where

did first century Jews find an endless supply of salt? In the Dead Sea, you've ever been to Israel, and I've never been there, but I'm told by those who've been there, they can actually try to go and float in the Dead Sea. And they float and bob like a cork. They can't get down low because there's so much salt, it pulls them up, in so much salt in the water. Salt concentration, the Dead Sea is above 30%, which is incredibly high.

And so since the Dead Sea sits at 1,400 feet below sea level, since it's surrounded by an arid desert with pretty high temperatures, the water evaporates more quickly around there, leaving salt deposits everywhere. And that's where the Jews harvested their salt. Gathering what was left over after evaporation that left behind this mineral mixture crystallize there on the ground with a high concentration of salt. So continuing Jesus' metaphor, "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."

It's actually impossible for salt to lose its taste. James Edwards points this out, he says "Salt is a very stable compound that does not degrade naturally. Nor does it lose its physical properties including flavor, apart from a chemical reaction." So how do we understand Jesus' point here about salt losing its taste? One way to interpret this is to understand that Jesus here is speaking hypothetically, like "If salt could lose its taste, it would be worthless, utterly useless." That is the simplest option, simplest options is often the best. But I think since Jesus elaborates here, when he says "It is of no use either for the soil over the manure pile." He seems to be describing the experience that his audience would be able to imagine, an experience that maybe some of them have had before.

Since salt had such a wide range of uses in a rural setting, an agricultural setting we can think about salt from the Dead Sea purchased by a farmer in the area in bulk, keep the price down so it's not highly refined. Salt bought in bulk would not come in its purest form. It had other minerals around the Dead Sea that other minerals mixed in like magnesium, calcium, sulfur, bromide, iodine,

potassium, that's just to name a few of the 21 different minerals that can be found in dead sea salt. So it's not completely pure as it comes from the market. Bulk salts would need to be purchased maybe at a lower price because it avoids the refinement.

But then purified back at the farm, so the farmer stored his bulk supply of unrefined salt, he drew out only what he needed, when he needed it, put the impure salt through the distillation process there on his farm as the need arose. He used the purest salt for his family, less pure, maybe for his animals, less pure evens further still to cure fish or meat or cure hides. In the event though, that his bulk storage developed a water leak say, the water would leach the salt from the bulk supply, would run out with the water, leaving behind a very low concentration of salt on a far higher concentration of all those other minerals. To the naked eye. It all looked the same.

It all looked in the supply container, like salt, but the quality had changed dramatically, radically, something was different. The net effect would be that the whole supply left in that container was essentially worthless.

Salt's gone couldn't be restored. There's no use in trying to distill any salt from the container because there wasn't enough of it left in its mineral form. So the remaining minerals on their own without any salt would have made great additives for the soil mixed with manure, they'd make a rich fertilizer. But there was a, still enough salt left behind in this bulk supply to ruin the usefulness of those minerals as well. Couldn't risk spreading it across a field. Salt ruined a field. In fact, after a battle, sometimes the fields were salted so that it was ruined for any future crops.

Any farmer who put that on his crop would destroy any future crops. So, too little sodium chloride left in that book supply to provide salt for the family, animals or cure meat, too much sodium chloride left in it to risk mixing it with dirt or manure, fertilizer, so disappointing. So costly, it looked very much the same, but in substance, in reality, it was actually radically different. The only thing to do is to throw away the entire lot, cut your losses, and learn your lesson.

Go fix your containers, go fix the leaky roof or whatever it is, and then start over. So all that to say uh, ruined bulk supply of salt would be totally worthless to the farmer, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, expanding this a little bit, he said "It's no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

So you would take whatever's left over after the ruination. And you would just use it for ground covering for a footpath and everybody would walk on it. That's it's only use. So that is the metaphor. Unpack briefly, but it's enough to help us who live in an age of refrigeration to understand the metaphor. Makes sense to us now. Okay, so as we turn to point two, we're asking the question, what does it mean? What does this metaphor mean? What is Jesus driving at?

So number two, the meaning in the original text, verse 34, that verse starts with the word, "Therefore," it's not translated doesn't carry over into the ESV translation. But Jesus literally says here, "Therefore, salt is good. But if salt is lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" So what we need to do is to remember that verses

34, and 35, are a logical conclusion to verses 25 to 33.

So that means the connection to Jesus teaching on discipleship helps to determine the meaning of the parable that he uses here at the end. So if salt is the metaphor, what is it stands for? Looking back at what Jesus just taught, what does salt symbolizes? Very simply put, the salt stands for the true disciple. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt." You're the salt. You're the salt of the earth. And by the way, here we read, "Salt is good." So salt is good, the true disciple is good. Why is that? Salt stands for the true disciple, the one who has his loyalties properly aligned, the one who lives by a single minded priority of cross bearing, coming after Jesus.

This is the one who's calculated the cost, the one who's discerned the true meaning of prosperity, the only prosperity that matters for him is eternal life from God. And so he readily, eagerly renounces all that he has selling all to buy that one pearl, the pearl of great price. Why is that so good? Because he gets, what life is all about. He understands meaning, he understands purpose, he understands significance. And he's there as a testimony

to the entire world to check their decay, to preserve the world from decay. That is a good thing.

He's there, his life stands as a protest to all that they count as valuable. He's also by his influence and testimony able to win some, so he's good. He's pulling people back from the brink of destruction. Being a true disciple is good for the world. It's good for our community. It's good for Greeley. So if salt stands for the true disciple. What is the quality of saltiness stand for? Saltiness simply put is, that which makes a true disciple, true.

It's what makes him the real deal, the genuine article. Saltiness is that which can be tasted, by the way, you might say, tested by other people. There's a certain flavor, certain taste, there's a sense that others get, it's unmistakable. Whenever they're in the accompany of a true disciple. They can see evidence that this person holds a singular allegiance. He's loyal to the death, even if it costs him family relationships. He's loyal to the death to God and God alone.

People can see that in his presence. They can see the evidence this person lives for one priority, in one priority alone, and that is to bear his cross. He's living to endure the weight of suffering for the sake of the son of man. He's living to follow Jesus Christ forever into eternity itself. There's a certain taste, a flavor, a sense that other people get in the company of a true disciple that this person is unshackled. Any earthbound definition of health, wealth and prosperity. He doesn't care about wealth. He doesn't care about rich salaries. He doesn't care about big influence, fame, fortune. His eyes are fixed on things that are above.

He sees unseen realities. He pursues invisible glories all reserved in heaven for him. He does not count his best life as now, but then. He understands suffering is for now, difficulty is for now, he'll endure whatever suffering comes during this life because he's believed the tender assurances of his beloved savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true shepherd who says, "Fear not little flock, it's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Therefore, let your hand be loose about everything else, give it all away."

The metaphor here is negatively oriented. It's oriented that way in order to deliver a warning from the Lord. Therefore "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."

So the meaning of what Jesus says is this, if someone professes to be a true disciple, if someone claims to follow Jesus in discipleship, whatever it is that maybe at one time distinguished him as a disciple, if that is leached away, if that fades over time, if what was once maybe apparent, now is dulled and subdued and no longer really apparent at all. Such a person is in a most desperate condition. One in which restoration really seems impossible.

The almost certain expectation about such a person is that that person will be cast away forever lost in eternal judgment. This is the warning Jesus gives to nominal Christians: Beware, wake up, whether they're settled in

their complacency of being lukewarm, or whether they are falling among backsliders and drifting, or whether they've hit the bottom and they're now apostates.

If you are a Christian in name only, beware. Just to illustrate this, if you turn over to Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 4, because this is the same warning that we hear from the writer to the Hebrews, and no doubt he's taken his cues from the Lord in delivering this warning. In Hebrews 6:4, look what it says there, warning to the drifting, to the falling away, the backsliding those who are staying out, away from the fellowship, those whose saltiness is being leached away by the pressure of the culture around them.

The writer of the Hebrews says this Hebrews 6:4, "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, "Who's that? Those who have sat in synagogue, maybe sat underneath Jesus teaching, or maybe some of the apostles, maybe those who have separated from the synagogue, and come to hear the apostles teach in the Jerusalem church? Who are they today, those who sit in churches, who hear truth proclaimed every single week, who come to understand that truth, and maybe even ascent to its

truthfulness. They stopped short of true faith because they don't have an affection for it. They don't set their wills toward it. They don't walk after it. They don't obey it, but they do understand it. And they do assent to its truthfulness.

They've been enlightened. It's impossible in their case, and in the case of those who have tasted the heavenly gifts shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. Who are those? Again, back in the first century, we're talking about people who have seen Jesus ministry in John 6 those who ate of the miraculous supply of bread and fish, but many of them by the end of the chapter, turned away and walked with him no more. Oh, they tasted the power of the Holy Spirit, didn't they? The powers of the age to come, the power of the Word of God? How does that transfer to us today, who are not seeing those same miracles of the apostolic age and that transitional time in the book of Acts?

What about for us? Man, anybody who sits in our midst and sees a true Christian, being sanctified, that is super

natural. If you take a snapshot of my life, before I was a Christian, and look at my life now, you think you're looking at two entirely different people. An' you know what? You are. Today, you look at someone who has changed by the power of God, whose been regenerated to a new life. I'm a new creature in Christ. The old is passed away, it's dead. It's been crucified with Christ on the cross. Behold the new has come, all things have been made new and I continue to change and grow. That is done by the power of God by the power of the Spirit.

It's what is true of all of you, for an unbeliever to sit in our midst, and to see all of that and to say, "Yeah, I mean I've seen the same thing in AA. Probably midlife crisis, you know, people go through troubling times, maturity can explain all that. I mean, I had a rebellious kid when he was young, and he got older, he got a job, family, wife, I mean he's totally sorted out now, same thing. There's nothing special here." What is going on here week after week, month after month, year after year? It's nothing short of supernatural. It's exactly what is described here. This is the heavenly gift of salvation.

This is the Holy Spirit working in and among us, causing fruit to be growing in our lives, starts on the inside comes to the outside. Around here, we taste in so many different formats in so many different venues, we taste the goodness of the word of God, we experience the powers the age to come. So for those who have experienced all that, and then verse 6, have fallen away. What is that referring to? The salt, losing its saltiness.

To restore them again to repentance, to restore them again, since they're crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding them up to contempt, impossible. Then this beautiful imagery, this metaphor of the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. The hope that comes in that text for those who are in this condition is the word near to being cursed. I always like

to tell people while there's breath, there's hope. Jesus is saying the same thing in this metaphor about the salt losing saltiness, he's given the same warning.

You can go back to Luke 14. J.C. Ryle says what Jesus teaches here, he calls it a very painful but necessary truth. And then he goes on to say this, "Nobody, it must be remembered, is in so dangerous a state as someone who has once known the truth and professed to love it, and is later fallen away from that profession and gone back to the world."

And I just want to add as a little parenthesis there (Gone back to the world in their hearts.) They may sit in churches week after week, they may not be running after the bars and all the stuff that pagans do, may not be bowing down to idols. They could be sitting in evangelical churches every single week. And their hearts are clinging to the world. They haven't followed the admonition of John in 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, it's not from the Father, but from the world. The world is passing

away an all of its lust, but the one who does the will of God will abide forever."

Their heart is attached to the world, it clings to the world, no matter if they sit in our midst, or they sit somewhere else. Continuing with Ryle, he says, "Such a person has not sinned in ignorance like many have, but has gone away from Christ with open eyes. He has sinned against unknown and not an unknown god." End quote.

In other words, such a one has sinned against the light, and he will be judged according to the love of the light he's received. It's one thing to be a nominal Christian in a squish church that panders after the world. That chases all the worldly fads and loves big rock bands and all that stuff and all the lights and smoke and mirrors and all that stuff to draw people in. For someone who's a nominal Christian, in that setting to go to stand before the judgment is much less severe then from someone coming from this congregation, or any other faithful congregation that serious minded about the truth.

They'll be judged according to the light that's come out of this pulpit. And this is why you who are true disciples, you who are real Christians, listen, whenever you see someone who seems to be falling away, who seems to be living on the fringe, man don't hesitate. You run, you reach out, you grab that man, grab that woman, you hold on to him, you hold on to her. You warn that person because their soul is in grave, grave danger.

People in this condition, it's so tragic too, I think you know what I'm talking about because you can almost see the lostness in their eyes, that they know that they're stuck, that they're enslaved. That they're under the burden of guilt and condemnation heading for judgment. They seem to want to want the repentance of your offering and speaking of, they just can't do it.

The world has too much of a hold on their hearts. So off they go. Like the ox to the slaughter biding their time until judgment. It's tragic isn't it? But still, we try don't we? We try. It's what James appeals for in James 5:19-20 last words in this mighty little epistle, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and

someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering, will save his soul from death will cover a multitude of sins." Don't you want to be involved in that work, rescue the perishing right? Care for the dying, for all who come to him in humble repentance, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save, while there's breath, there's hope.

So we're going after that wandering disciple, that person hanging out on the fringes in our church, we don't want him or her to apostatize, be lost forever. In the meantime, there are fruitless, idle, unproductive people who are attending our churches, they may talk a good talk, they may have learned the lingo over the years, but they're nothing but nominal Christians. And so they're just faking it, they're hoping no one notices. So that's what we turn to now. What are the implications of all this? We talked about the metaphor, talked about the meaning. Let's talking about the message, Jesus ends with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So there's more to hear, there's more to contemplate, more to think about, a message for those with ears to hear.

So third point, the message. The direct application of Jesus words, was to a fickle minded crowd of followers thousand, who are caught up in the hype, they'd a triumphant mentality about following Jesus that needed to be corrected, they needed to be disabused of this false notion that following Jesus is going to lead to immediate earthly glory.

Following Jesus means suffering with him. Following Jesus means the way of the cross. Man, don't we need that same message today? This is really part and parcel of what we're doing at this conference this next week, is to call to all of evangelicalism and say, listen, we're really concerned that evangelicalism and who knows what that word means anymore, but it's just all over the place.

All different doctrines, all different interests, all different representatives, all different voices. It's been taken over by nominal people, nominal evangelicals, they're not true evangelicals. They need to be reminded, they need to be warned, they need to be pulled back from the brink. Faithful Christians need to be called out of that. They might listen to the truth, a true followers of Jesus today,

we need these reminders, don't we? I mean, we need the encouragement, any blowback that comes to us from following Jesus Christ. Listen, that is normal. When we're ostracized, when we're marginalized, when we're set aside, when we're mocked, when we're excluded. Listen, that is exactly the way the Christian life is supposed to be.

But a little salt on your food, people like it, you give them more salt to put it on their food. They spit it out, don't they? Peter says 1 Peter 4:12 "Beloved, don't be surprised that the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." I love the way he speaks to us. Don't be surprised I, don't think this is strange, it's not strange. He says instead, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." When you're persecuted, laugh. When you're persecuted and shunned and excluded and mocked and scorned and ridiculed, rejoice.

There are a host of people in our churches today, though, who don't expect trials at all, let alone fiery trials. They embrace a Christianity without a cross. A

Christ without any authority to command their conscience, a life of health, wealth and prosperity, they didn't sign up for suffering. It's not the gospel they embraced. They like good news, gospel of ease and comfort and pleasure. So they never counted the cost. They never deliberated on the radical nature of discipleship. They never deliberated and thought deeply about what Christ is really saying here. They were bored in church.

When that message was being preached, they thought about other things, thought about what's for dinner, thought about the next weeks to do list. They never thought about it. And many times they were never asked to think about it. That's why rather than push back against family demands they cave every time. They can't say no. We understand sometimes when a wife married to an unbelieving husband has a difficult time because she's under his authority and how to work that out. But when a husband can't stand up to a wife who's drifting into bad doctrine, or is bitter in her tongue, or gossipy and he can't correct that and confront it and shepherd his wife to righteousness.

What's going on there? Why can't a husband do that? It could be because his loyalties are not rightly aligned. Rather than discipline, control to self, they give in all the time. Nothing radical, nothing fundamental has changed in them at all. Rather than resetting the priority of their life, they keep living according to worldly priorities. They're like hamsters on a spinning wheel, in a terrarium, cage. They work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, play on Saturday, church on Sunday more play on Sunday. And then they work, eat, sleep, work, eat sleep, they just do that *ad infinitum ad nauseam*, interrupt the cycle every now and again for a vacation.

Some photos for the photo album, but regularly reading the Bible to see what their Lord wants him to do, no. Bearing the cross that results from radical obedience to the commands that they find in Scripture. That's not happening either. There's no real love for God. There's no real devotion to Christ, no fruit of the Spirit growing in their life. They are the nominal Christians. They are the Christians in name only, they look good on the outside, they may look like salt on the outside. They never took time to count the cost, they never resolved to renounce

all, take up a cross and follow him. May have attended church all their lives, gave money, sang in the choir, chased toddlers around the nursery, taught Sunday school.

I'm afraid some of these nominal people have preached messages in pulpits. That's why this is a confrontation for me too, that they will spend eternity with the apostates, pagans and the irreligious because it didn't count the cost. Let's make sure none of us here miss the message. My concern is the same of that writer to the Hebrews, Hebrews 3:12, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." So to that end, I'd like to close the sermon here. Not now, but in a little bit, close with a list of tragedies really that befall those who are nominal Christians. Those who are living according to a false form of Christianity, a list of tragedies that they face in the end.

As they come to the end of their life and as the stark reality of divine judgment hits them, as they pass through the veil, and now they stand before the throne and they're rejected. The realization of certain tragedies are going to

hit their mind with unrelenting force. So we'll just walk back through the text starting verse 25. I'll name a tragedy, elaborate a bit and keep moving. Number one, which is verse 26. The tragedy of a misplaced loyalty. Number one, the tragedy of misplaced loyalty. Think about coming before the judgment seat and you preferred your family or preferred your wife or preferred parents or whatever demands your grown kids are making on you, that you conform to their way of thinking, conform to their lifestyle.

And now you're standing before the judgment seat and you realize, what folly. You prefer family relationships over relationships that pertain to the kingdom, nominal Christian prioritizes loyalty to a temporary fleshly bond, allegiance to flesh and blood, that's soon gonna end. Ignorant sentimentality may contribute to this misplaced loyalty but, to continue in it, especially hearing this from Christ is to ignore what Jesus clearly says here.

Those who prefer a spouse to God obeying a wife or a parent, catering to a child, young or old. Only Christ has the right to command a conscience. Only the Christ has the right to determine your behavior, how you live, your

lifestyle, the way you prioritize your day, your week and months, your years. Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born in the spirit of spirit."

That's why John 3:3, "You must be born again." 1 Corinthians 15:50 "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. All flesh is like grass its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. This is the word of the good news that was preached to you."

Prefer the word over family relationships. When this life is over, your blood relations will not be there at the judgment seat to plead their blood for your justification. Only the blood of Christ matters, which means only the word of Christ in his command matters. Don't suffer the tragedy of a misplaced loyalty.

Number two, the tragedy of what I call usurped ownership, the tragedy of usurped ownership. Again the true disciple verse 26, he comes to Jesus hating not just his

family that is deprioritizing his family in comparison to Christ, but hating his own life as well. The word here is actually *psyche*, his soul, he entrusts his soul, he relinquishes it himself, of being the owner and the captain of his soul, and he entrust it to the care of the savior. He realized that everything he has, including a soul is what comes from God. It's not his anyway, it's only on loan from God. Nominal Christian though has usurped the ownership of his own soul.

He holds on to what he cherishes most, whether it's his personal autonomy or his comfort or his ease, or his opinions or his judgments or his pride of thinking, pride of place, he thinks his soul is his own and he can hold on to it forever. Remember the wealthy fool, Luke chapter 12? Remember what he said? "I'll say to my soul," I love how he speaks to a soul. "Soul, you have ample goods later for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry. God said to him, 'Fool, this night, your soul is required from you.'" Don't be like the rich fool. Don't suffer the tragedy of usurping God's ownership over your soul. Your soul is God's to command, not yours to coddle.

Tragedy of misplaced loyalty, usurped ownership resulting in, thirdly, number three, the tragedy of forfeited glory, the tragedy of forfeited glory. This is, looking at verse 27. Nominal Christian claims to follow the way of the cross, but at some point in time, perhaps unnoticed by others around him, but he quietly set down his cross and he's tried to blend into the crowd. Nominal Christian doesn't want to bear the weight any longer.

So he gives in to cowardice. He doesn't like to offend people, doesn't like to hurt feelings, rejects the shame of being associated with Jesus Christ. Because Christ is offensive. Absolutely tragic, he is making a foolish trade here. He is preferring the temporary earth bound approval of human beings. Or more often, he simply wants to avoid the disapproval of his fellow man and just coast through life.

But in this trade, he's forfeiting the approval of God. And therefore the glory of God. In John 12:42, we read about the tragedy of those who refuse to bear their own cross, many of the Jewish authorities, even on the Jewish Sanhedrin, they actually believed in Jesus, but it says,

"For fear of the Pharisees, they didn't confess it, so that they wouldn't be put out of the synagogue. They love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." Listen, those who eschew that nominal form of Christianity, those who reject that, who take up their own cross, follow Jesus Christ to death. They realize the way of the cross is glory through suffering. It's not the avoidance of suffering, its glory through suffering. "For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us in eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison, as we look to the things not that are seen, but the things that are unseen."

The things that are seen are transient, they're passing, they're going away, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Jesus calls true disciples to share in his suffering in verse 27, to share in the shame of burying our crosses along with him to share in his rejection, and it could potentially lead to quite literally our own death.

Why does he call us to that? Because he wants us to suffer like he did? No, there is no suffering like he did. Only he bore that suffering, it's unique, one of a kind,

only he could bear it. Is it because he's sadistic, and loves to put us through torture? Does he want to make us earn our stripes to get to heaven? That is not it at all. He wants us to understand the grace of God that ministers to those who are suffering. He wants us to understand what it is to identify with him through it all.

That to go through the battle together, to go through the difficulty together, that forges such a unique bond of relationship. And he showed us that the suffering is a prelude to glory. Hebrews 12:2 "Look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." That is, to make light of that shame. "And he's seated now at the right hand of the throne of God," glory.

Don't try to find your best life now. Don't experience the tragedy of forfeited glory. So the tragedies of misplaced loyalty you served ownership, forfeited glory, all those things come an burst into the mind at that moment of the judgment seat, standing before God and being turned away by Christ.

Fourthly, at that moment, you're going to realize the tragedy of a wasted life. Number four, the tragedy of a wasted life, you had an entire life, to give to the glory of God, to live out as the stewardship and you wasted it. The nominal disciple, nominal Christians portrayed as a foolish builder, in verses 28-30. He dives into the project with haste. It's the person with a rocky soiled heart, Luke 8:13, "He hears the word receives with joy falls away under testing." No thought, no reflection, no counting the cost, nothing but ignorant zeal, foolish action, running into the fray without any idea what he's doing at all. May throw himself into building with great enthusiasm, but he only gets as far as the foundation before he has to abandon the entire project all together.

He's wasteful. He's lost his original investment. He loses future income, he loses his reputation, his honor. He's known in the community as an idiot. In other words, wasted life. He's blown his one chance of stewardship, to render a good account to the God who gave him everything, and nothing but eternal scorn remains. Listen, don't be a foolish builder.

As Mark preached the other week from Matthew 7, don't build your house on the sand, only to face the tragedy of realizing you've wasted your life. Number five, the tragedy of eternal regret, eternal regret. No true king facing the reality of being attacked by a superior force, that's verses 31-32 is either going to rush off half cocked, in the battle on a suicide mission, kill himself and all of his men.

Neither would a true king, lock himself in his palace, procrastinate, drink wine, do nothing, like Belshazzar. He's gonna deliberate, a true king is gonna deliberate and then he's going to act appropriately. Listen, the nominal Christian is completely unlike this king. He lives his life in a foolish unthinking manner, by not deliberating about his life, by not reflecting on what really matters, he is one day going to face a superior force of judgment, and it's going to expose his thoughtlessness.

It's going to reveal his lack of planning, his lack of forethought, his lack of deliberation, it's gonna overcome him completely and destroy him utterly. Added to the experience of loss and suffering is going to be the tragedy

of eternal regret.

"I should have thought more about this, about what really matters." Don't let that be you. Do not live a thoughtless non reflective life. Don't, you'll regret it. Tragedies of misplaced loyalty, usurped ownership, forfeited glory, wasted life, and the regret of knowing it forever. Number six, tragedy of ultimate loss, this is verse 33. The tragedy of ultimate loss, for all those who resist Jesus call in verse 33.

To renounce all that we have cut the heartstrings that keep us attached to the things of the world, they will forfeit all in the end, they'll experience ultimate loss. Mark 8:36-37. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul? What can a man give in return for his soul?" A loss of the soul means ultimate loss, existential loss, forfeiture of self, everything, self loved and held on to all gone. Everything the self lived for, gone, obliterated, do not let that be you.

And finally, seventh, the tragedy of really utter uselessness, utter uselessness. Because the nominal Christian comes to realize he's like the useless salt that Jesus is described here. When the salt was leached out from the bulk supply, all that was left is look like substance, it's good for nothing at all. Couldn't use it for the table at home, couldn't use it for animal feed, couldn't use it even to enrich the soil. You couldn't even use it to mix with manure.

Life of the nominal Christian is like that, it's good for nothing, not even good for the manure pile. Since he was a Christian in name only, he lacks the substance of what it means to be a Christian. He's been faking it. He's been taking on identity that's not really his. So he's no good to the church. And he's no good to the world either. He's useless in both realms, because he's living on the fence. That's utter uselessness.

And to realize this at the end of your life is a terrible tragedy. But it is one that is avoidable through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He's been sitting in the pew, he's been in close proximity to the truth. The

message of salvation is very near to him. He continues on as he is as a nominal Christian, he's going to be judged against all that truth, against all that light that went through his ears. Without the ears to hear the truth did him no good.

All it did was accrue to his judgment and his just condemnation, such a person cast away, remanded to eternal judgment. He's forgotten forever in the dustbin of history. May the Lord deliver us from such an outcome, Amen? May he deliver all nominal Christians that are in the hearing of these words to true salvation, to radical discipleship to what is true joy, even joy through suffering.

I'm really happy to say that for most of you, I believe in the words of the writer to the Hebrews. I believe this of you "Beloved, were convinced of better things concerning you. Things that accompany salvation, though we're speaking this way." But isn't it useful to speak in this way to hear Jesus say these things? Because man, it reminds us how great our salvation is. We could have been lost in the same way and reminds us to get back on track with radical commitments. Amen.