

## A Word about the King

Luke 14.25–35

### Sermon

I distinctly remember 1st time I heard this psg explained in a way that left me angry. Summer of 94, student at Cornell, taking class on poli theory. Prof a highly respected historian, worked sequentially through poli theories beg w Soc/Plato & ending at Marx. This psg came up in his sec on Xian theories of poli, focusing on three peo (X, Paul, Aug). § What he said about this psg, v 26 in particular, was shocking: “J was a radical who opposes trad fam values.” As a good fund, I was incensed: how dare he speak like that? & yet over time I’ve come to realize that he prob understood this psg far better than I did. Granted, prof trying to be provocative/incite response. Then again so was J. But we Xians have been guilty of explaining away this very hard word (“doesn’t really mean hate”). Removed teeth of what truly is a shocking statement.

So we have to start here: what is J talking about? Whatever he means has to fit w entirety of his teachings: if we assume J was rational in the least, have to assume he’s not contradicting himself. Just a couple of chs ago we looked at story of GSam. What precipitated that parable was an expert in law who came to J & the two of them discussed the greatest comm §: *love G & love nabe* (10.27). Elsewhere J describes these as *two great comms* (Mt 22.37–40): loving G the 1st & great comm, i.e., highest priority, supreme obligation; 2nd is like it, love nabe as self. By saying love nabe is 2nd, telling us at least two things about love: admission that you can’t love everything equally, so there is a priority inherent in love (ergo *love G* before *love nabe*); affirmation that it is poss to fulfill your relat obligations when your loves are ordered rightly (ergo if you love G, you will love nabe, tho vice versa not true).

This concept of ordered & disordered loves given thorough treatment by 4th cent pastor-theologian Aug. Wrote a bk entitled *Confes* (really an

First NYC (4/9/17, Palm Sunday)

extended prayer), told story of his early life apart from X. Perh most famous line in *Conf* comes right at beg: § “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (1.1). Contemp philos/theol Jamey Smith notes **three claims** w/in this statement: design (here on purpose, teleological); what drives us to find that purpose is our heart (“fulcrum of your most fund longings,” “our loves orient us toward some ult end”); our heart will never be satisfied until oriented to our design (otherwise “we will exp a besetting anxiety & restlessness when we try to love substitutes”). § Here’s how Smith ill: our heart looking for purpose, meaning, end; a lifelong pursuit. § “To be human is to have a heart. You can’t not love. So the q isn’t *whether* you will love something as ult; the q is *what* you will love as ult” (pp. 8–10). & that’s what J is saying in Lk 10.27 §: you were made to love, you can’t love everything equally, so your loves have to be ordered rightly. Love G 1st & preeminently, then love nabe as yourself.

Which brings us back to § this hard statement in Lk 14. What does J mean when he says we are to *hate father*, etc.? He is provoking us to examine how our loves are ordered. Do we really love G w heart/soul/mind/strength? or is our primary commitment to the nabes in our home (*father*, etc.)? Might seem a bit abstract, so let me ill: consider a married couple, one a workaholic. Regularly work late, make appts for times they’ve already committed to spouse, forget about date nights they had scheduled, miss imp anniversaries. What is workaholic’s spouse going to say? (A lot!) But one thing they could say: “you love your job more than you love me.” Accusation that their loves are out of order. & that’s what J saying: if your love for G never causes a fam member to feel like they’re 2nd most imp pers in your life, § *you cannot be my disc*.

& that gets at what is perh most startling about this vs: not follower of G, but follower of me; not saying rightly ordered love is G 1st, then nabe, but me 1st, then nabe. J is not talking like a relig teacher or even a rabbi, but like a King. Why I chose this psg for Palm Sun. J claiming for

### First NYC (4/9/17, Palm Sunday)

himself very pos of G: “your love for me has to transcend your love for your fam.” More than that, bc J makes that statement (*cannot be my disc*) 3x, gives as it were 3 conds for being his follower. 1st: love me more than fam. § 2nd in next vs: *carry their cross*. Nutz: “When Rom soldiers had a man carrying a cross, he was carrying it to place of cruc. § The earthly affairs of the cross carrier were finished. He had no objs to accomplish. Attainments in this life became worthless. Family could not aid him. The condemned man understood his cross to be the instr of his death” (BV, April 1994, 30). J saying that to follow him is to die to your every other ambition, to subordinate every other desire to his will, truly for him to be L & M over your life. § 3rd cond in v 33: *give up everything*, all your poss. See, J saying like Aug after him that our loves can get out of order: poss for us to love fam 1st & relegate him to 2ndary status; poss for us love our own ambitions 1st & leave him on side; poss for us to love our poss 1st & give him little from excess. But J says, “No, I’m K & if you’re going to follow me, I must be 1st love.”

Now it’s about this pt in serm that you should be saying, “Who does he think he is?” CSL: insane, demon, Lord. That’s why we who are Xians need to give space for peo to grapple w that q. Rather than force peo into making a dec, inspire peo to think/assess/eval. Precisely what J does: sandwiched in bet three conds are two parables § & unlike many bels who want to see peo walk down an aisle to make a dec, J wants peo to *sit down* & think. 1st parable: story of a builder. Before he makes dec to build/plants shovel in ground, he counts cost. Two critical concerns: what’s project going to cost? do I have enough to pull it off? Assesses expenses & resources. If doesn’t *1st sit down* & make that assessment, his proj will fail § & he’ll incur *ridicule* of those who witness his incompet. 2nd parable: story of a king preparing for war. Just like builder, J says 1st thing he does is *sit down* & think. Same concerns: expenses & resources (what will it cost? do I have enough?). But this time, cost not money & reputation, but lives of his peo. What J saying: before you say you’re going to follow him, sit down & think.

### First NYC (4/9/17, Palm Sunday)

But more than that, bc J gives these parables in context of prob of disordered loves. Stories of builder & king not only telling us to count cost, making bigger pt than that. Warning us about where our disordered loves will leave us. If we live for our relats/desires/poss (those three conds), we're going to end up like the foolish builder. § We're trying to build our lives/create some meaning/find our id through our fam/ambitions/attainments, but we have no idea how big a proj that is nor how little our resources are to attain it. & in process whatever we center our lives on will be § crushed by weight we try to put on them. Your fam/job/poss can't be G for you. You'll crush them in process. Which brings up 2nd prob of disordered love: § when we pursue as ult what will be crushed by our expectations, we will be left dissatisfied. After expending so much effort to lay foundation, our inability to construct the tower of our own worth will leave us bitter & empty. You don't have the resources to build your own life. But a bigger prob yet awaits §: incur divine opp. In 2nd parable, J clearly wants us to see ourselves as king w lesser resources. § But who is 2nd king? Obvious, isn't it? He's the K who's been speaking this whole time, the M who has come to right every wrong, inc ones you & I have committed. Friends, we don't have the resources to stand against him.

So what do we do? Just what 1st king did §: *ask for terms of peace*. Openly acknowledge that he is real K & admit we've been rebels in his kingdom. Confess our disordered loves (love fam/desire/poss more than him). Ask him for terms of peace. & here's the wonder: the K has offered terms of peace. § Is 53.5. Cost: his self-sacrifice.

Ergo followers of this K sacrifice themselves.

My prof prob more right than he knew: J was a radical, never more so than in the claim to be G. But if you accept his claim, your heart will know rest.