

# Counting the Cost

DISCIPLESHIP: PART 3 • LUKE 14:25-35

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Most of us here this morning probably love getting a bargain. We took the picture on the wall up here earlier this year at the Pike Place Market out in Seattle. Some of you have been there, and you know that there is some wheeling and dealing going on - fresh fish, and fruit, and vegetables, and all kinds of produce and crafts. It is a lively place, and it is lively for a reason. People apparently love the fresh food and the haggling. Locally, we also love getting a good deal. We have thrift stores, and UW SWAP, and Craigslist. I have bought and sold a number of items on Craigslist, and up to this point I have not yet been murdered, so that is awesome. We shop around, we keep an eye out for coupons; some of us appreciate the Bucky Book or the various discount cards sold by the kids here at church. Buy one, get one free; 20% off; we do the survey on our Culver's receipts and collect the Scoopie tokens. We do the Kwik Trip rewards card or the various fuel saver cards at area grocery stores. We compare prices. We shop around. I've been in the market for four new tires. We usually go to Weber up in Bristol, but I called around and actually found a better deal (which is rare) - buy three tires get the fourth one free at Farm & Fleet, and so we have an appointment set up for this coming Friday down in Verona. We want the most we can get for the least amount of money. And in secular matters, this is all good. The Bible teaches that we are to be good stewards of the resources God has allowed us to use.

However, we face a special danger when we turn to bargain hunting in spiritual matters. It is tempting to go looking for salvation, to go looking for the blessing of heaven, but to go into it looking for a bargain, looking for maximum return with minimum spiritual investment, with the least level of sacrifice as is humanly possible. This morning, we return to our series of lessons on discipleship with a lesson on COUNTING THE COST from Luke 14 (p. 1630). Certainly, all people are invited, ***"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest,"*** as Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, and yet there is a price to be paid. And we need to understand the sacrifice involved before we commit to making it.

Most of us know that even when we are careful with our money, sometimes we get more than we bargained for (and sometimes in a bad way). Sometimes we bite off more than we can chew. Sometimes we get in over our heads. And sometimes, what first appeared to be a good deal ends up costing much more than we originally understood. I think of owning a boat. I have never owned a boat, but I have heard stories, and apparently the old saying is that the best and happiest days a boat-owner's life are the day he buys the boat and the day he sells the boat. And most of us can probably understand that. It has been said that a boat is a hole in the water that you continually throw money into. I've never experienced that, but I think I can

understand. Sometimes, we make a purchase, and we regret it, because we realize that the cost of ownership is too high.

By now, hopefully you are in Luke 14, and even before we read the passage together, I want us to notice verse 25, because once again, we find that **“large crowds”** are following the Lord. And from a purely human point of view, we might think: That’s a good thing! If I’m preaching, I’m thinking that I’d rather have a crowd of 100 than a crowd of 50. I’d rather have a crowd of 1,000 than a crowd of 100. But Jesus, throughout his ministry, seems to be completely unimpressed with large crowds. In fact, he makes some of his most offensive and some of his most difficult statements when the crowds are the largest. It’s almost as if he is thinning the herd. And really, it reminds me of Gideon, as God had him reduce the number of soldiers from 32,000 soldiers, down to 10,000, and then to only 300. It’s not necessarily that God wants fewer instead of more, but he wants his followers to be fully committed. And that is what we are about to find here in Luke 14. He wants us to know that the true cost of discipleship is much more than it first appears. What seems to be a bargain, will actually cost much more than we might first assume. And as we are about to discover, Jesus wants the huge crowds to understand this. He wants them to know what they are getting into. If you will, please look with me at Luke 14:25-35,

***<sup>25</sup> Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “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. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup> Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. <sup>34</sup> “Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup> It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”***

Most of us in this room have ears, and so the Lord wants us to understand what he says here. This morning, we have a reminder for all of us who have already made the commitment to follow Jesus, and we also have a warning, a word of caution, for those here today who might be considering it. This message is for all of us. What do we need to know about the cost of living as disciples of Jesus Christ? I want us to notice the five pictures Jesus paints for us here.

- I. **And we start with the Lord’s comments in verse 26 - as he describes our FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, he explains that HE MUST ALWAYS COME FIRST.**

And again, this is addressed to the **“large crowds,”** and to these huge crowds, Jesus starts by saying, **“If anyone comes to me,”** in other words, Jesus is basically saying, “If anyone chooses to be my disciple, he must hate his own family” [paraphrased]. And to most of us, we think of what it means to hate somebody, and we think of the dictionary definition of hate as “feeling an intense or passionate dislike for someone,” the idea of “intense hostility or extreme animosity.” And if that’s what we’re thinking here, we have a problem, don’t we?

Because, in other passages, we know we are supposed to love our families! Husbands are to love their wives, and so on.

Well, we look into this a little deeper, and some of you might have a footnote by **“hate”** that says, “by comparison of his love for Me.” It seems, then, that Jesus is using a figure of speech, and it’s a figure of speech that’s used several times in the Bible. In Genesis 29:31, for example, the Bible tells us that Jacob **“hated”** his wife Leah, and yet it is obvious that he didn’t literally hate her; instead, he simply loved Rachel (his other wife) more than Leah. And even Jesus clarifies a bit in a similar passage (in Matthew 10:37), where he says, **“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”** Jesus, then, is not telling us to have “intense feelings of hostility” toward those in our own families, but he is saying that he must always come first. If there is ever a choice to be made, Jesus comes first.

Some of us know some people who have basically been disowned by their own families, just for obeying the gospel. I know a man from Iraq who formerly served in Saddam Hussein’s Revolutionary Guard. Over a period of many years, he learned more and more about the Bible and eventually obeyed the gospel. And when he did, he was basically disowned by his own family. They wanted him to chose between them and the Lord, and he chose the Lord. He’s now preaching in Michigan and reaching out to the Muslim population around Detroit. We had a situation right here many years ago when a young woman made the decision to become a disciple, and she also was basically disowned by her own family. They were very much against her obeying the gospel. And I remember as she came up out of the water downstairs, she was crying, and she called out the number of days until she turned 18. As I remember it, her parents were being extremely harsh with her concerning her decision to obey the gospel. They saw it as a rejection of the family religion. And it was. To them, it was personal. And that is what the Lord is warning us about here. Often, there is a high price to pay for becoming a disciple. We want them to follow the Lord with us, but if they refuse, we press forward, paying the price - more concerned about offending Jesus than offending those we love the most in this life. As I’ve summarized it on the wall up here, we are to love God above all others. When we are called to choose between following Jesus or following anybody else (including the members of our own families), Jesus must always come first.

**II. There is a second picture Jesus paints for us here is the picture of a CROSS, and the message is: The life of a disciple is a life of SELF-SACRIFICE, and there is no looking back.**

In verse 27, **“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”** Here in Madison in 2019, we are pretty well disconnected from what it originally meant to carry a cross. But to those who heard this for the first time, the cross was an absolutely horrific way to die, and to make it that much worse, the Romans would force each prisoner to carry his own cross from the trial to the place of execution. There was no real delay. The sentence was carried out almost immediately. And so if you saw somebody carrying a cross, it meant that the decision had been made and that that death would be coming fairly quickly. If you saw somebody carrying a cross, you knew it was a one-way journey. They wouldn’t be coming back from that. Carrying a cross was this person’s “goodbye” to the world. Today, our exposure to the cross comes in the form of a piece of jewelry or the engraving on the end of a pew. 2000 years ago, though, it was brutal and graphic. If you saw somebody carrying a cross, they were truly a dead man walking. They were as good as dead, and there was no way to avoid it.

What Jesus is saying here, then, is that when we choose to be disciples, we are choosing the cross. We are choosing to endure whatever shame or sacrifice comes our way. By taking up his cross, we are saying

“goodbye” to the world. We are associating ourselves with a condemned criminal. And as we are on our way to the cross, nothing else really matters in comparison. We think of Paul who wrote about being ***“crucified with Christ”*** (in Galatians 2:20). It’s no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us. We live for him from here on out.

- III. **The third mental image in this passage is the picture of a man who makes plans to build a TOWER (in verses 28-30), but in his planning, he fails to calculate whether he has enough to complete it, and he is forced to abandon the project before he completes it, and the message for us is: When you start, MAKE SURE YOU ARE READY TO STICK WITH IT TO THE END!**

We know that Jesus was a carpenter, so we can imagine that he is speaking from personal experience here. He knows how important it is to plan ahead and to make sure we have adequate resources before jumping into something. As with this whole paragraph, the emphasis is on counting the cost, looking ahead, anticipating future expenses, choosing wisely. How embarrassing to have a half-finished tower on your property! Of course, this passage is not really about building towers, is it? It’s about finishing well, planning ahead, sticking with it.

This past Wednesday, we talked briefly about Floyd, the 190-pound mastiff who got worn out on the trail and had to be brought back by a search and rescue crew out in Utah. It was a 4-hour mission, but it ended well. The story pointed out that Floyd’s owner might have taken a wrong turn here and there and that Floyd might have been somewhat injured. But some of us are a bit like Floyd, spiritually speaking! We start out, not realizing what it takes to finish, and then we get stuck halfway. That’s what Jesus is warning about here. He wants us to count the cost. He wants us to look ahead and to make sure we can finish before we head out in the first place. As these crowds have gathered, then, Jesus tries to get them to count the cost, to make the decision to stick with it to the end. There is a cost involved in being a disciple. Before jumping in, let’s make sure we are ready to go all the way. There is a value to finishing what we start, especially when it comes to being a disciple!

Those of you I’ve baptized over the past 10 years or so might remember that this is something I’ve tried to emphasize a bit more than I did earlier in my life. Whenever somebody says they are ready to obey the gospel, I almost always make sure we look at the “dog vomit” passage. In the last few verses of 2 Peter 2, he’s writing about those who turn back from the Christian faith, and he compares them to a dog returning to its own vomit or to a pig, after being washed, returning to roll around in its own filth. And then he says that those who turn back like that will be worse off at the end than if they had never obeyed the gospel in the first place. That’s a terrifying passage, but we need to think about it before we jump into being a disciple. We need to make sure we are determined to finish what we are about to begin. We need to make sure we finish well.

- IV. **The fourth picture in this passage involves a KING who is preparing to head out to battle, but he realizes that he is vastly outnumbered, so instead of fighting and losing, he asks for terms of peace and SURRENDERS.**

Some have suggested that this is just another way of retelling the tower story, but I think it’s a bit different, because of what Jesus goes on to say about this one in verse 33. Notice the application, ***“So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”*** The surrendering king story illustrates the fact that when we choose to become disciples, we are surrendering to a much more powerful king, and the application is: We surrender everything. In a sense, God is perhaps the more powerful king in this story, and a

true disciple surrenders completely and surrenders sooner, rather than later, when it is too late to surrender. But the price we pay, the exchange we make, is total surrender. Everything that is ours is now his. If he needs it, it's already his. And in exchange, we live.

If you are thinking about obeying the gospel, you need to know this. The people who were following Jesus here needed to know this. Too many thought they could follow, almost casually, but Jesus explains that there is a complete surrender involved. Count the cost!

**V. And finally, the last picture in this passage is the picture of SALT, and Jesus uses salt to explain the importance of CONTINUING WITHOUT COMPROMISE.**

We know that salt was incredibly important in ancient times. As we do today, they used it to preserve, to flavor, and to heal. And it was valuable. Today, when we talk about a "salary," that word (referring to salt) goes back to ancient times when Roman soldiers were paid in salt. Even today, we might hear somebody referred to as being "worth their weight in salt." Again, salt was valuable, but it lost its value if it ever became impure. And pure salt was rare. They didn't mine it (as we do today), but they usually got it from the Dead Sea. As the seawater evaporated, it left behind salt mixed with who knows what else. But the purer it was, the more valuable it became. But the impure salt would lose its flavor over time, as whatever it was mixed with decayed. As I understand it, pure salt never loses its flavor. They weren't dealing with pure salt, though. They were pretty much dealing with salt-flavored dirt. So, you might go to flavor your food, and this mixture had gone bad and had lost its flavor; or you would go to use this "**salt**" to preserve your meat, and the meat would decay; or you would try to use it to disinfect a wound, and the wound would get even worse. Just imagine if we got our salt by scraping it off the ground. Everybody understood this, and everybody knew what Jesus was talking about here, that if your salt ever becomes tasteless, there's really nothing you can do with it. It is worthless.

It seems, then, that the Lord is warning his disciples to be ready to continue without compromise. He's calling for purity. Don't allow yourselves to get mixed in with the world. Don't get diluted. Don't allow yourselves to get contaminated. Don't be like bad salt; but instead, be like the pure salt. Be like the salt that works. Be like the salt that is valuable. Stay pure. Be useful. But the point is: Know this going into it. Being disciples means that we act like disciples - in everything.

**Conclusion:**

This morning, as we come to the end, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

- Are we the kind of disciples who love God more than anything, even putting the Lord above those in our own families? That's what he's looking for, and if we cannot make that commitment, Jesus himself says that we are not worthy of being his disciples. By the way, thankfully, there are some situations where a person becomes a Christian, and UNITY is brought into the family (so there is a positive side of this). If somebody is holding out and then obeys the gospel, the family can then move forward together. We would love to see that happen today. But beyond the family matters...
- Are we taking up our cross on a daily basis? Have we made that commitment? Do we understand that we are crucified with Christ?
- Is he the Lord of our plans? Have we thought through what this really means? Unlike the guy building the tower, have we looked ahead a bit to really consider the cost of following him?

- Have we surrendered everything to him? Our lives? Our resources? Our talents? Our skills and abilities?
- And are we living in purity? Or have we allowed the world to mix in a bit with our Christian faith?

Yes, we need to consider all of this as we think about first obeying the gospel, but these are also decisions that are made on an ongoing basis.

And if you are thinking about obeying the gospel, we never want to pressure you or try to manipulate you in some way to make that decision. In a sense, I guess I'd rather try to talk you out of it. That seems to be what Jesus is doing here. We invite (as he did), but we also want to be up front about the cost going into it. He is looking for disciples. He's looking for 1.) the committed, 2.) the walking dead, 3.) the finishers, 4.) the surrendered, and 5.) the pure.

When it comes to being disciples, we are not looking for a bargain. We aren't looking for the very least we can do, but we are to be all in. We're not perfect, but we really do want to follow Jesus as best we can. Does he demand a guarantee that we will never turn away? No. Peter gave that guarantee, and even he couldn't live up to it. But the Lord is asking that we count the cost, that we try to anticipate these challenges, and that we stick to it, that we commit. And so, if we face a scenario where we need to forgive somebody, and if it's hard, we've already made the decision to do whatever needs to be done. Or if I give in to a new or even an old temptation, I've already decided that being a disciple means more than anything, so I confess, and pray, and make it right and move on. In every area of life, being a disciple of Christ shapes who we are, and what we do, and how we live.

If you are not yet a disciple, we would invite you to take that step, to obey the gospel, to make a commitment to turn away from sin, and then to call out to God for salvation in the act of baptism, a burial in water for the forgiveness of sins. There are no bargains; there are no discounts; there are no coupons. If you have any questions about becoming a disciple of Jesus, get in touch, but if you are ready to obey the gospel through repentance and baptism, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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