

Followers of Jesus 'count the cost' and are 'lost and found'

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[0 : 00] I have found my lost coin in the same way I tell you that is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Amen. So, we're back on the road with Jesus.

We're following his journey to Jerusalem. And as we begin, I wonder if you can identify with this kind of experience. Perhaps maybe you had it on your holidays. You're visiting somewhere unfamiliar. You're on the phone getting directions, and you suffer either bad reception, or there's a lot of background noise in the vehicle you're traveling in, and you miss some key information. Or maybe you discover that Google Maps has stopped functioning, and you find yourself completely lost and bewildered. If we miss vital parts of our directions, we know what happens, don't we? We find ourselves frustrated, more often than not heading the wrong way, finding ourselves getting lost. Something similar can happen when we think about following Jesus. So, we're rejoining Jesus, and He's on the road to the cross, and we hear twice that there are large crowds around Him. Some of them have misunderstandings and are confused. And so, He says to them, and He would say to us, listen up, listen up. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. And what this section does for us is it gives us two dead ends to avoid, two ditches that we need to be careful not to fall into. The first is the dead end of thinking that Christianity is all about comfort. You know, if I follow Jesus, I'll have health and wealth and everything will be wonderful. And so, Jesus wants to say very clearly, following Him involves counting the cost. He's on His way to suffer and die. But the other dead end that

He would want us to avoid is that of cold, legalistic versions of Christianity that have no grace. And so, we're introduced to Jesus who celebrates with joy when lost people are found, who loves to show the grace of God, who invites us to come to Him for grace. So, because it's Jesus that we're invited to follow, and because Jesus is on the road to the cross, that's why His followers have to do both those things. We have to both be ready to count the cost, and we have to receive His grace to be lost and found. It's a really good place for us to begin the year, on the road from Jesus, learning from Him.

[3 : 17] So, let's get into our text. Followers of Jesus count the cost. That's there at the end of chapter 14 from verse 25 onwards. We get our bearings in verse 25 when we're told, large crowds were traveling with Jesus. So, He's on His journey to Jerusalem, and so are the crowds.

Passover festival is coming, the great religious festival of the year for the Jewish people. So, the roads are packed, and expectation is high. Maybe this is the year God will deliver and rescue us from our enemies. And in all this enthusiasm, Jesus surprises us, perhaps. We see very clearly, Jesus isn't interested in playing the numbers game. He's not looking to just gather a crowd, and He's not going to soft sell what it looks like to follow Him, to appeal to the masses. Instead, what do we have? We have a whole section where He spells out the cost, the demand of following Him. He will speak really clearly about cross-carrying, giving up everything, or being ready to die to be His follower. Because Jesus knows where His journey is going to end in Jerusalem.

He is the King, yes, but He is the King who will bear a cross. The crown He will wear is a crown of thorns. And He needs His followers to understand that we are called to walk that same path of dying to self, of a life of sacrifice. Two ways that we can think together about counting the cost from Jesus' words. First, about priority. As we hear Jesus' words in verse 25 to 27, at very least, I imagine they sound shocking to us. They sound extremely demanding to us. If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple. Clearly, if this was anything other, anyone other than the Son of God speaking these words, we would say, here is a person to avoid. This is someone

looking to control.

You should run. So, it's really important that we take care to understand who Jesus is, and to take care to hear what Jesus is saying and what He is not saying. Okay, because Jesus was speaking to first century Jews. So, when Jesus says, speaks about love and hate, He's not saying to us, you must literally hate your family. He's not saying to be a Christian means we abandon our family, we ignore those that we love the most. How do we know this? Because Jesus would never ask us to disobey one of God's commands. Fifth command is really clear, honor your father and your mother. But He's using love and hate as the language of our great preference. He is saying, and it's still shocking, and it's still highly demanding, we must love Jesus more than. We must love Jesus more than our family. We must love Jesus more than life itself. That's still highly demanding. The first priority of our heart must be Jesus, if we are to be His disciple. As Matthew records it from Jesus, he says, if you do not love me more than your family, you are not worthy of me. Only because Jesus is God can He claim this priority on our hearts.

[7 : 24] But think about the challenge just for a moment. Lots of ways that this challenges us, I think. One way that we will maybe experience, maybe we often experience, is when claims collide.

For some of you, you're the only Christian in your family. So, suppose your family asks you to give up your faith, opposes your faith. Or a family member or a friend invites you to do something or to go somewhere that now you're a Christian you know to be wrong. At that moment and in those moments, we have choices to make choices to make, don't we? We have a choice to make as to whose claim am I going to listen to? Who am I going to follow? Who am I going to offend? And Jesus says, to be my follower is to say, Jesus is my Lord, to be ready to offend even our own family rather than to offend Jesus.

Not calling us to be offensive to our family. But when claims collide, we're called to choose the way of Jesus. It's a challenge when we think about the way of the cross. He is clearly saying to us, there is no room for a Christianity that simply suits our convenience. This isn't casual following.

Christianity isn't that hobby you pick up when the weather is fine and you feel like it. It's an all or nothing. It's a way of life. It's demanding self-giving, dying to self for Jesus in light of His self-giving for you. I read this week the story of a lady called Ji-ho in North Korea. For over 20 years, the hardest place to be a Christian in the world has been North Korea. 50,000 to 70,000 Christians are in labor camps, prison camps today for their faith. Well, she remembers as a child her dad being taken away by the police. They found that he had buried a Bible wrapped in plastic in his garden to try and keep it secret. But he was discovered and taken away. And Ji-ho, when she was an adult, got a radio set. And one day, as she was trying to find a station, she heard messages, Christian messages coming through the radio. And she remembered those stories that my dad told me.

These are the stories in the Bible, and they're about Jesus. And she became a Christian. And she speaks of counting the cost every day in the context of North Korea, starvation, the danger of discovery. And we might think, why would she pay such a high cost? Here's what she said.

[10 : 21] Jesus wanted to be my Savior, and I want to follow Him, like my Father did. She understood the cost that Jesus paid, and she is ready to pay it. Counting the cost also involves perseverance, perseverance, as we see there in verses 28 to 35. He invites this mixed crowd to carefully consider the cost of following Him. He says very clearly, you need to take this seriously. Don't take it lightly. He knows His destination is the cross, and He knows from experience the reality that many people would perform a U-turn. Following Him gladly until things got difficult, until His teaching didn't match up to expectations. And so, He invites us to very carefully consider the cost of following and persevering. He gives us three pictures. In verse 28 to 30, it's the picture of a tower builder. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it. If you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, you're going to be the subject of ridicule. I was a student in Glasgow in the late 90s, early 2000s, and if you were around the city center of Glasgow in that era, up until 2013, you'd be familiar with what became known as bridges to nowhere. So, when they put the M8 right through the city center, they had these wonderful plans to build pedestrian walkways over passes, but they lay unfinished. So, you would go up the steps, and you would walk the path, and all of a sudden, you'd be met with a fence. You'd see the destination, but there's this great gap. They ran out of resources. They ran out of willpower. Who knows?

But it became a standing joke in the city, these bridges to nowhere. Jesus says, before you start a project, of course, what do you do? You sit down. Do I have the resources to meet the cost?

For those of us who are involved in the refurb of this church, we had lots of meetings. Do we have the money to meet these costs? Because if you start something, you don't finish. Jesus says, you become a laughingstock. Following Jesus is to be the great master project for all of life.

And so, He asks us to sit down and to ask ourselves, am I ready to see this through? Am I ready to carry a cross? Am I ready to bear the costs? He gives us another story of a king going to war.

Suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000?

This isn't empty philosophy. There's a time for action that the enemy is coming, and he's got more numbers than you. So, the king has two choices, isn't he? He can fight, and if he doesn't think he can win, he needs to urgently sue for peace.

[13:39] And after telling the story, Jesus says, in the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. There's this great call to follow and to count the cost and to commit to the end. But there's a third story. Maybe you wonder how it fits with those first two.

Well, in this final picture, it's about salt. It's a negative example story, representing the life of someone who didn't count the cost, who didn't persevere, in which case, becoming like worthless salt. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty?

Again, it's fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap it's thrown out. No good for food, no good for the soil, not even good for manure. Something has changed in the salt, and now it's good for nothing. Salt must keep its essential properties to have any value. What is Jesus saying to those who would be his followers? What's the essential property he's just been talking about? We must come and keep on coming. We must count the cost and keep on counting the cost. We must follow and keep on following Jesus our Lord, coming to him to worship him, coming for forgiveness, coming to find grace, coming to be guided. We read Paul's testimony in the book of Philippians. Paul liked to use athletic or Olympic language to speak of the Christian life. Perhaps we can think of a marathon. Some of us have run marathons. Some of us have not, will not. We'd hate the thought. But at least we know this.

We know that there are never medals handed out on the starting line. Paul encourages us. Jesus encourages us. Run the race of faith with endurance.

Persevere to the goal, the prize who is Christ and being with Christ. Followers of Jesus count the cost. First Sunday of the year. This time of year is always a good time to reflect, isn't it? By way of application, let me give three and suggest that at least one of these might be helpful for you. First of all, think about the idea of evaluation. Think about taking some time to ask, how am I doing in counting the cost in following Jesus? Am I living under his lordship?

[16:46] Am I revealing more of his character? Think about that in terms of perhaps your relationships. First and foremost, your relationship with God. Your relationship with the other people in your life.

Am I counting the cost to follow Jesus in my responsibilities? In the workplace? In our families? Are we looking to represent Jesus, come what may, in those contexts?

For some of us, evaluation will be helpful. There's also the idea of imitation. Maybe especially for those who are younger, for those who are young in faith, this idea of following probably makes sense.

We follow lots of people. We follow sports teams. We follow musicians. We have those that we follow on social media accounts. Well, let me encourage you to think about this year following, looking for a godly, older follower of Jesus. To look to learn from them. That might be one of your parents, or a grandparent. It may be a member of this church, or the church you belong to. It may be even someone that you have read of in a biography. Look to learn from those who have walked the way of Jesus before us.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. We have the privilege in our church of people from lots of different generations. We have lots of wise, godly, mature followers of Jesus that us younger folks can learn from.

[18:21] I get to class myself as younger, just for a moment. But do make the most of that privilege. For some of us, imitation will be a helpful way to think about this. What's it look like to count the cost to follow Jesus today? Perhaps the application is to hear the invitation of Jesus.

This is Jesus. This is your creator. This is your king. This is the one who would be your savior. He's saying, consider the cost, but come to me. Follow me, because I am your God and your savior.

Think about his wonderful life. Think about his sacrificial death. Think of all that he would give to you, that you would come to him and follow him. So, followers of Jesus count the cost. And very briefly, we're going to think about the truth that followers of Jesus are those who are lost and found by grace. Because we're going to think next week about the parable of what's known as the parable of the prodigal son next week. But just to kind of flag that up, we're going to think about lost and found just for a few minutes. And in God's providence, we had a wonderful lost and found story in our house this week. Back in the year, I think, we think, 2019, we had like a kid's GoPro camera that went missing. Lost without a trace. We searched high and low. It was the cause of much frustration, mostly for us as parents. Well, it was discovered on Thursday, four years later. Joy and jubilee in the house. We love lost and found stories. They make the news quite regularly. Not that one. That's not that spectacular. But we have two of Jesus' trio of these famous and well-loved lost and found stories. But we just need to understand that he's speaking about far more than hooray for a lost camera or a lost sheep or a lost coy. We're discovering something that's unique to the Christian faith. We're discovering something unique about our Savior and the nature of salvation. Because Jesus is revealing the truth that our God is a seeking God. Religion without grace says, here are the steps that you must take to try and find God. The gospel, the good news of the Bible says, this is what God has done to find you by His grace. This is what John Newton discovered. So, he could sing, and we can sing, and we can sing of being spiritual wretches, being lost and being blind and being dead. But we can be saved by amazing grace. Because it's not about our efforts, not about our ability to seek and find after God. It's about God seeking and finding us. It also reveals to us the heart of Jesus as we see the joy of the searcher. So, Jesus wants to reveal the grace of God to us. But you might be thinking, how do these two sections connect? I wonder if you notice the point of connection between verse 35 and chapter 15, verse 1. Let me read the end of chapter 14.

Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. Now, the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to what? To hear Jesus. So, you get this wonderful truth that the lowest of the low, the worst of the worst, the sinners, they're hearing this urgent call to come, this high demand of following, and they're counting the cost, and they're gladly gathering around Jesus. Because Jesus offers grace and not judgment. Again, at the start of chapter 15, Luke wants to draw attention to the fact there is this crowd around Jesus. But this time, the attention is drawn to the fact that there are these two responses going on. Those who are typically rejected in society, rejected by religious society, they're gathering and they're listening. While they're religious in society, they're standing to one side and they're grumbling. Hear their words. Verse 2, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Now, the wonderful thing is that though they speak these words with disgust, these words are wonderfully true.

Jesus will wear friend of sinners as a badge of honor. And this reality and these words are words that will delight our hearts as they delighted the hearts of the sinners in Jesus' day, as we recognize what it tells us about Jesus and about our salvation. There's another point of connection. It's not emphasized here, but just to remind ourselves before we get into chapter 15, that it's God's grace that saves sinners, but it's also God's grace, His love and power that enables people like us to count the cost and to persevere, just so we don't think we're left to do it in our own strength.

[23 : 47] Chapter 15, verses 1 to 10, two brief lessons about salvation. First, let's think about the who of salvation. Verse 4, suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave in 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? Now, theoretically, Jesus could have chosen any main character and any item that was lost and found. A man had many boats and he lost one and then he found it again. But notice, Jesus' choice, shepherd, sheep. This is not accidental.

Again, for these first century listeners who are used to hearing the Old Testament, this for them is a lightbulb moment. This is an ha moment. Because in the Old Testament, who is the shepherd? It's God. Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. Ezekiel 34, we hear words of judgment on the bad religious leaders of Israel by God, and then God says, I myself will be the shepherd of my people. And then he promises to send his king, we know he's Jesus, to be the shepherd of his people. Or Isaiah 40, verse 11, here's what the sovereign Lord says about himself. The sovereign Lord tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers his lambs in his arms.

As we listen to the Bible, as we listen to this story, we're invited to remember God is the shepherd. And Jesus, he calls himself the good shepherd. He's come to call, to seek, and to save, to lay down

his life for the sheep. So, it's Jesus who does the seeking, the finding, and the rejoicing. Now, we need to think about the why of salvation. The why of salvation. And it's that idea of lost and found. We have the lost sheep, and we have the lost coin. And that's saying to us as people that we are all lost as a result of our sin. That by nature, we are in a state of rebellion towards our God. That we choose to dishonor and rob God of glory. That we break his laws. That we choose to make other things more important, first priority, rather than our God. And in these two simple stories, we're being reminded that actually being lost is misery. Think about that lost sheep for a moment. [26 : 43] He's gone astray. He's lost all security. The loss of a certain supply of food. There is the threat of danger around every mountain pass. And this lostness is something that by ourselves as people, we cannot fix. Perhaps that's the lesson of the lost coin. What can a coin do to be found? Precisely nothing.

By ourselves, we are hopeless and helpless. But this isn't just a story about lost things. It's a story about lost things that are found. And it's about the God who has joy in finding the lost. Whenever we're reading one of the stories of Jesus and we come to a surprising bit that sticks out as being out of the ordinary, we know that Jesus is wanting to emphasize something. So, listen again to that first parable. So, he's found, we get to the point where he's found his lost sheep. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Of course, you would expect joy from an owner. He's found a sheep.

But here's where it gets surprising, I think. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep. Can we imagine inviting a whole community over and throwing a great feast because a sheep was found? This is the surprising element that's inviting us to see the heart of God, the overflowing joy of the searcher. And the point is made twice so that we don't miss it. Perhaps we think it's too good to be true. I tell you that in the same way, there'll be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent. Or at the end of the lost coin, in the same way I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Heaven, the place where God is, filled with joy when the lost are found. There's joy for the angels. There's joy for the saints who are worshipping around the throne, and there's joy for God himself as his work of salvation continues.

Jesus is revealing to us the love of God, the grace of God, and the joy of God in this story and in his life. Jesus is the active seeker. He left the glory of heaven to become one of us, to live that life of perfect obedience. He doesn't just risk danger to find the lost. He actually dies on the cross so that lost sinners might be found and brought home. Jesus comes and suffers and dies so we can be welcomed, so that heaven might rejoice, that we can be welcomed home by God.

[30 : 11] No wonder the sinners gathered round and were so glad to hear this message. No wonder Jesus is known as the friend of sinners.

To be found is to hear, is to repent and believe. The sinners of Jesus' day knew it. They were being told all the time, you failed. You're a terrible sinner. You've broken God's commands. But then Jesus came with a startling message of good news. Yes, by yourself, you are lost and you are in danger and you are helpless. But I have come to seek, to find, and to show grace and to joyfully restore.

Jesus here is mapping out the way of the Christian life. It is to come to Jesus for grace, to be found by him and saved by him, and then with the grace and help that he provides, to then live for him. Counting the cost, persevering in our faith, making him our great priority and our great love. Is this the road that we're going to walk this year? Well, we hear these words of verse 2 as wonderful words to delight our hearts also. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. May it be that as we consider the love of Jesus for us, his undying love and loyalty for us, may that fuel our own love and loyalty for him. Let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you for the honesty of Jesus, that he wanted us to know that following him involves sacrifice, demands that we acknowledge him as king, acknowledge him as king, calls us to a life of absolute commitment and perseverance. But Lord, we thank you too that he showed such grace and love and kindness in his life and in his death. And even now, as he sits on the throne of heaven, still sending us his word, still sending us the spirit, still sending us his presence. Lord, as we see your love for us in Jesus, may we respond to your grace and may we live counting the cost, knowing the cost that Jesus paid for our salvation.

[33 : 02] Amen.