

Counting the Cost

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[0 : 01] Luke chapter 14, beginning at verse 25. Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and 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 and 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 and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

[1 : 28] 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. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Heavenly Father, we praise you very much for Betty. Thank you that you have transformed her life.

Thank you for the power of your word to do so. And we pray now that as we look at these words of the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 14, please would you again be at work in power in our hearts and minds.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, the issue today is the cost of following Jesus. It's there in Luke 14, verse 28.

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost? It's there in verse 31. Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate?

[2 : 34] Now, no doubt many of us know exactly how much certain things cost. Perhaps you know how much a Spotify subscription costs each month. Perhaps you know how much your favorite posh coffee costs or the cost of that much-needed holiday that you're hoping to be able to go on in the summer.

Or perhaps the cost of a particular business deal that you're just in the middle of negotiating. But what about the cost of following Jesus? Now, I guess in a sense it can seem strange, can't it, even asking the question?

After all, we saw last week that Jesus issues the greatest invitation we could ever receive. The invitation to his heavenly banquet. An invitation that is entirely free.

And yet, ever since this section of Luke began in chapter 13, verse 22, that the backdrop has been the rejection of that invitation by the religious and political establishments.

It's why, in answer to that question in 13:23, Lord, will those who are saved be few? Jesus replies, strive to enter through the narrow door.

[3 : 46] For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. It's narrow, verse 25, because Jesus is the only way into God's kingdom and the door is not going to be open forever.

There will come a time when the door is closed. It's narrow, verse 28, because as well as being a heaven, there is also a hell. It's narrow, chapter 14, verse 11, because many won't humble themselves before Jesus.

It's narrow, verse 28, because as we saw last week in the parable of the great banquet, that for many people, other things are simply more important than Jesus' banquet.

Today, it's narrow because following Jesus is costly. Because remember that Jesus has been exposing what we might call the fake religion of the Pharisees, the establishment, their pride, their rejection of Jesus, their self-exaltation.

Jesus has been showing why they don't want him. Just as down the ages, and that includes in our day, so often the establishment don't want Jesus.

[5 : 06] The disdain of the media establishment, the denunciation by the educational establishment, the dismissiveness of our political establishment, as our nation drifts further and further away from the authentic Jesus.

While, of course, the religious establishment simply follows all the others, as it always does, because it wants to preserve its place at the establishment's table.

Now, that means, of course, that following Jesus is costly. So notice what's happened here in Luke chapter 14. We've moved from chapter 14, verse 1, the dinner party that we've been at over the last two weeks.

Now we're in 14:25, as Jesus addresses the crowds. He is speaking to us. If we're going to follow him, if we're going to do so in a society where the powerful, the opinion makers, the establishment rejects him, well, we need to sit down, which we are doing, all of us, apart from me.

We need to sit down and we need to do some careful thinking. And that is equally true whether we're looking in on the Christian faith or whether we are disciples of Jesus already.

[6 : 27] And you'll see on the outline there that Jesus is urging us both to count the cost of following him, but also to count the cost of not following him.

Let's look at each in turn. Firstly, we are to count the cost of following Jesus. And it's best summarized, I think, in the two headings I put there on the outline.

Jesus is saying we are to put him before other relationships, and then we're also to put him before our own ambitions. Firstly, Jesus before other relationships, verse 25.

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, Well, they're shocking words, aren't they?

They certainly make us sit up and pay attention. After all, marriage and family are God's good invention. And so Jesus cannot be telling us to reject that which God has made, nor indeed to reject the fifth commandment, which is all about honoring our parents.

[7 : 47] Rather, Jesus is using a turn of phrase. It's one we often see in the Bible. We see it in the Old Testament. He's using a turn of phrase which speaks of a priority relationship.

Jesus is saying that we should subordinate every other relationship we have, even those closest to us, even those dearest to us, to our relationship to him and our commitment to him.

In other words, this is not about despising parents and families. To follow Jesus is not joining a cult. Nor is it about fanaticism. Rather, it is simply wearing Jesus proudly.

It's living out the first commandment, to love God, to love Jesus, with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength. It's an issue of priority to me.

After all, if I put other people above Jesus, then I am making them into an idol. In other words, Jesus knows that the greatest hindrance to genuine, wholehearted discipleship are those who are closest to us.

[9 : 06] Let me say that again. The biggest hindrance to wholehearted discipleship comes from those who are closest to us.

Now, I wonder whether perhaps for some of us this is something of a new thought. So think for a moment of this crowd who are following Jesus in verse 25.

The Pharisees, those we've been looking at over the last couple of weeks, the religious establishment, they are very much their people. Their nephews, their uncles, their fathers, their brothers, their brothers-in-law, fathers-in-law.

Which means that when push comes to shove, they're going to have to make a choice about precisely where their loyalties and first commitment lies.

Now, I guess for us, it's most obvious if we're from a culture where there's a great emphasis on loyalty to the extended family. Or simply perhaps from any family which is close-knit from any culture.

[10 : 14] Or from a shame culture whereby following Jesus, you are rejecting your whole extended family as well, of course, as your religious heritage. And therefore, you're bringing shame on your whole extended family.

But whoever we are, if you care more for your family and friends and what they think of you, then you care for Jesus. Then Jesus is saying, either you won't begin to follow him in the first place because you'll regard the cost as too high, or you may begin to follow him, but eventually you'll find yourself taking sides against him.

Now, I think of men and women in the city at the Old Escape Talks where many of you know I'm involved, who have begun to follow Jesus. They've done so in the workplace, but of course then the crunch comes.

What's going to happen at home? Will they put Jesus first? For example, the pressure perhaps not to get stuck into a local church because that would disrupt precious family routines and other commitments like sport or whatever it is on a Sunday morning.

or perhaps they're fearful of what their husband or wife or close friends might think of them if they knew that they had put their trust in Jesus and begun to follow him.

[11 : 43] And I know for a considerable number of us, we have had to make exactly the same sort of decision as they have. And yet, who knows?

Who knows? Yes, it may be very painful, but those same family members or friends, they may come to thank us for it.

Just listen to one commentator on these verses. Thousands of Christians will bless God on the last day that they had relatives and friends who chose to displease them rather than Christ.

That very decision was the first thing that made them think seriously and led finally to the conversion of their souls. In fact, if you've never done so, of course Christmas is a great opportunity to do just this and to stand firm in front of family or friends over Christmas if we've never done so.

Perhaps making going to church part of our Christmas routine or perhaps reading a Bible passage to our children to explain to them the significance of Jesus or perhaps taking the opportunity or creating an opportunity to explain to a wider family or long-held friends that we are meeting with.

[13 : 10] what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus before other relationships. But not only that, Jesus before our own ambitions.

Verse 27. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Now here is a second dramatic and equally powerful picture of discipleship.

And we can see straight away it is one of self-denial. In the first century, condemned criminals were forced to carry the cross beam to the place of their execution.

At which point it would have been clear to everyone watching precisely where you were going. to far cry isn't it from the way which we so often talk about having a cross to bear by which of course we mean there's some minor inconvenience or ailments in my life.

discipleship means putting me and my ambitions to death. And this is the issue which is at the very heart of discipleship.

[14 : 24] It's about the entire direction and focus of our lives. Now, in a sense of course there's nothing wrong with being ambitious.

The question is where is my ambition directed at who or what am I ambitious for?

At my own kingdom? Being successful? Enjoying the fruits of success? Or our reputation at work? Or are we ambitious for Jesus' kingdom?

Seeing the gospel proclaimed? Seeing his kingdom advance? Ourselves are desiring to grow in godliness and Christlikeness at serving him where we can with the gifts that we have?

Longing for churches to be established and planted? Seeing others grow as Jesus' disciples? I guess most of us in this room are ambitious for something.

[15 : 26] The issue is what and who? the point is there's no place for half-hearted discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German pastor who was executed in Flossenburg concentration camp just days before the second world war finished wrote a well-known book The Cost of Discipleship.

In it he said when Christ calls a man or a woman he bids them die he bids them die to self-centeredness to personal ambition.

Hence the illustration in verses 28 to 30. 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's laid a foundation and is not able to finish all who see it begin to mock him saying this man began to build and was not able to finish.

Now I gather that the plans for Crossrail 2 for a second cross London railway line have just been abandoned by TFL. They have done exactly what the Lord Jesus here encourages people to do.

[16 : 49] They've sat down they've done their sums they've realised they haven't got the 40 billion pounds they need. They are not going to embark on the project. Unlike the builder in the middle of Dulwich village who started redeveloping the site of the old garage and has clearly belatedly done his sums and despite starting is unable to finish and the evidence is there and he's a complete laughing stock.

And yet of course sadly the Christian landscape is littered with builders debris and half finished buildings. Those who have claimed to follow Jesus and yet it hasn't been at the expense of their career or their promotion or their reputation or they perhaps be a leisure activity or a sport or it may be a particular relationship which has come before Jesus.

And I guess it's inevitable that in a room full of this number of people I guess it's inevitable that there are some of us here this morning who are in exactly that situation at the moment.

I think of someone who for a significant period of time seemed to be weighing up whether or not to follow Jesus that he was thoughtful engaged and yet clearly something holding him back something which he wouldn't give up.

I don't know what it was I don't know whether it was a relationship I don't know whether it was his reputation at work I don't know. And yet I also think of someone else who very recently told me that they had realized that they had been following Jesus if you like as saviour and yet not as Lord and they had come to realize what a complete nonsense that is and that actually they were going to start following him both as saviour but also as Lord as well.

[18 : 58] Count the cost count the cost of following Jesus it does involve painful choices regarding friendships reputation the way people think of us success at work perhaps sadly many don't choose wisely so ask yourself honestly is Jesus your Lord as well as your saviour count the cost of following Jesus but then secondly count the cost of not following Jesus have a look at verses 31 to 33 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 and asks for terms of peace so therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple now it may be the case that in these verses

Jesus is simply making the same point that he's made in verses 28 to 30 in other words just as you should make sure you can complete a tower before you build it so make sure you can win a war before you commit and send your troops into battle it may be that Jesus is simply making the same points and yet this second illustration it does feel a bit different doesn't it because notice the outcome in verse 32 is not that you commit your soldiers to send them into war and they win which would be the parallel with building a tower rather the outcome is you sue for peace now that feels very much like what we've seen throughout Luke's gospel Jesus Christ is God's king God's king come to earth he's the one who will rule forever who on the final day will bring in his heavenly kingdom on that day his kingdom will be seen in all its power and all its glory for what it is he comes now such that we might make peace with him he urges us we saw that back in Luke chapter 13 he urges us to settle up with God to settle things with

God before it's too late just as the king here in Jesus illustration needs to ask if he can afford not to make peace can you see what Jesus is saying do you really think you can take me on and win make peace with me while you can after all we saw back in 13 verse 35 Jesus speaks of hell as well as heaven sit down says Jesus and reckon whether you can afford not to be one of my disciples and a similar point is made in verses 34 and 35 salt is good but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored it's of no use either for the soil or for the manure heap it is thrown away he who has ears to hear let him hear why do you put salt on your chips because they taste good like that what do you do with salt that has lost its taste its flavor you throw it away it's good for nothing just as

Jesus is discarding the fit for nothing fake religion of the Pharisees indeed it's a warning to all of us about the danger of being a fake disciple in other words Jesus is warning us that the cost of not going through this narrow door is infinitely greater than the cost of going through it I hope we can see that I wonder if you've ever had the experience I guess we all have to some degree of turning an opportunity down which later on we came to regret perhaps it's a job that you didn't go for perhaps it's a relationship you didn't pursue or perhaps an interest or a hobby that you gave up and at the time you were so kind of focused on the sheer cost and the hassle of filling out the job application form whatever it was that you didn't do it but actually as time has gone by more and

more you focused on the cost of having not done if only if only
I'd applied for that job if only I'd pursued that hobby or interest more and the regret the if only is the thing that stayed with you I guess it shows that we don't always make rational decisions we like to think we are rational people but we don't always make rational decisions just as last week Jesus was explaining how people say no to him on the basis of the feeblest of excuses I got a field I bought some oxen I got a wife Jesus is warning us about the bitter regret if we don't factor in the cost of not following him I wonder if you can see what Jesus is doing here in Luke chapter 14 verses 25 to 35 I guess it's the equivalent isn't it of the pep talk before a big sporting event think of [25 : 03] Eddie Jones giving a pep talk to the England rugby team before a match before the training it's motivational it's realistic it's raising the bar it's laying everything straight on the line if you want to be part of the team if you want to play this is what is involved if you can't commit to that then you can leave now Jesus is saying count the cost of following him and count the cost of not following him well we say what are the implications well it may well be that you're not persuaded that Jesus is God come to earth in which case I think it's worth pondering this question would any merely human person make the kinds of demands that Jesus makes and if they would what kind of person would they be he claims supreme allegiance from us he demands that we love him above all else surely that either puts him on a level with the most insecure of insecure dictators or it's very simply the most obvious indication that he is indeed

God himself or if you're someone beginning to consider the cost of following Jesus well count the cost do count the cost of following him what will be the impact of putting him first at work with friends with family what direction might it take your life in the cost of going through that narrow door it could cost everything you have but count the cost as well of not following him because the cost of not following is even greater but what about the implications of those of us who are following Jesus well remember Luke is writing he's writing to give us certainty which means I take it that this should come first and foremost as an encouragement we feel that we very much the cost of being a Christian in a society where the establishments or perhaps family and friends or perhaps the colleagues we work closest with have little time for Jesus or those of us at school perhaps it's cost in terms of reputation or future prospects perhaps it's cost in terms of school friendships or friendship at the school gate perhaps it's cost in terms of invitations we haven't received to social events Jesus is saying that is normal and I take it that is wonderfully reassuring but for others I hope we can see how this is also a warning if when there's a choice we side with spouse over Jesus or if it comes to the crunch we put our extended family above Jesus or our close relationships above Jesus or when push comes to shove we put career or reputation above Jesus then we need to heed the warning and as well as heeding the warning to fix our eyes on Jesus because if we're claiming to be a disciple of his let's remember whose disciple we are not simply disciples of a program or a movement but of a person who at this point in Luke's gospel is resolutely on his way to Jerusalem where he will die if we keep our eyes on Jesus if we keep our eyes on his crucifixion on his death in our place for our sins then taking up our own cross will not seem nearly so costly at all indeed we will see what a very great and honorable privilege it is

Amy Carmichael was a missionary in India in the first half of the 20th century and she wrote this when I consider the cross of Christ how can anything I do be called sacrifice let's pray together let's pray whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple heavenly father we thank you very much for the Lord Jesus thank you that in his great love and concern for us he helps us to grasp both the cost of following and yet also the greater cost of not following each each of us in our own different situations please would you help us to take these words to heart and we ask it in

[31 : 00] Jesus name Amen