

The Cost of Following Jesus

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[0:00] Now, I wonder whether any of you have a Twitter account, and if you do, how many followers you have. Everyone knows what Twitter is, right?

I don't have to explain it, yes. It turns out that the person with the most followers in this world is a pop star by the name of Katy Perry.

There's a picture of her on the slide. She currently has nearly 107 million followers. Now, think about it. That's pretty mind-boggling, isn't it?

It's more than four times the population of Australia. So, whenever she tweets, maybe saying, tonight I will be eating gluten-free dumplings with sesame prawn toast, then within minutes, you know, technically, if everyone had their phones on, more than 100 million people in the world would know.

Now, it sounds rather impressive until you sort of think about it a bit more and you realize that actually it costs nothing to follow someone on Twitter. When a tweet comes true, whether it's made you happy or sad or indifferent, within a matter of seconds, you're over it.

[1:15] You've moved on. It really is a low-commitment endeavor. By contrast, we're going to see in tonight's passage that following Jesus is an entirely different proposition.

Following Jesus is a high-cost commitment that ends up demanding your entire life. Now, we're beginning actually at quite an interesting point in Luke, because up to now, what we've seen are great displays of Jesus' power.

He's the divine Son of God. He's been coming and in healing, casting out demons. When He commands the forces of nature, they've obeyed Him. And so, it's not hard in light of this to be attracted to all of this.

Power is seductive. And many who saw this would have wanted a piece of the action to follow such a king, maybe to get some benefit from it.

And I have to say that many people today, some people today, are drawn to Christianity for that very reason. And they think that they believe, if they believe, God will be able to do good things for them.

[2:29] But from this point on as well, in Luke, Jesus begins to spell out that following Him as king is not what they expect. Jesus as well has reached a decisive point in His life.

So, if you look at verse 51, we read that as a time approach for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. This is now the final leg of Jesus' journey.

And He's like a marathon runner entering the stadium. And He's able to see the finish line. And what He needs to do is run that final lap as He approaches that line.

Heaven is His finishing line. And He can see the time approaching for Him to be taken up to it. But the final lap for Jesus will take Him via Jerusalem, which is where the cross awaits Him.

His cross where He will die. But He's God's chosen Messiah. And so He sets His face resolutely towards it, because He's determined to fulfill God's plan, even as He knows that great suffering awaits.

[3 : 44] Now, the disciples are unaware of this. They probably have a much rosier picture of the journey ahead. After all, if we read the beginning of the chapter, they've just experienced success in ministry.

And then later in the same chapter, Peter, James, and John even had a chance to see the glory of Jesus up on the mountain in the Transfiguration. And so it was likely that they were being seduced by this power.

So much so that we read in verse 46, just before this, that they were fighting over who would be the greatest. And now in verse 52, when they meet opposition in the form of Samaritans in a village, they took offense at being snubbed.

And so we read in verse 54, that when the disciples, James and John, saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call far down from heaven to destroy them? But Jesus turned and rebuked them.

Then he and his disciples went to another village. They were very quick, weren't they, to judge the Samaritans, to treat them as the enemy. They were the good guys, and the Samaritans were the bad guys that God should be judging and destroying.

[5 : 03] And I have to say, if you look around the world today, it happens quite a bit. Just take a look at the polarization in the politics of the U.S. at the moment. Today, if you wear even the wrong cap, it can get you into serious trouble.

So this poor boy, for example, got beaten up for wearing this cap. I know it's Fox News, but I think it's right. He's got suspended as well. So the kids beat him up, and then the authorities suspended him.

Why? Just because he was wearing this cap, which, of course, identified him with Donald Trump. Now, it's not just the people who hate Trump, of course. Back in the 2016 election, it happened with supporters of Hillary Clinton as well.

If you didn't support her, then it didn't matter what she said. She was always wrong. Vice versa, if you supported her, it didn't matter what she said. She was always right. In people's minds, there were always the good guys and the bad guys.

Well, the problem with this kind of thinking is that Jesus doesn't take sides. In his eyes, there's no good guys or bad guys. Rather, we're all lost guys or lost people, fallen because of our sin.

[6 : 17] So yes, the Samaritans were wrong to reject Jesus, but so were the disciples because of their pride, because they were being seduced by this newfound power they had to do miracles.

They too were blinded by their own sin. And that's why Jesus had to return via the cross, because he had to be the savior, not just of the disciples, but also of the Samaritans.

He had come to rescue all rather than to destroy the lost. And so for him to authorize fire to come down from heaven would have been the exact opposite of what he was going to Jerusalem for.

It was inconsistent with his mission. And so Jesus turned and rebuked him. And then he goes to another village. Here, the disciples thought that following Jesus meant one conquest after another, that they, the good guys, would get rid of the bad guys.

But Jesus is beginning to show them that to be his follower required a very different path. For anyone who follows Jesus is following a servant king or savior king who has forgone all the trappings of power.

[7 : 31] Which is what we see in our next point on the outline, verse 57. As they, Jesus, and his disciples were walking down along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus replied, foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head. Here we have another gung-ho would-be disciple, rather like the twelve.

Like them, he too may have been attracted to Jesus' power. Now the thing is, unlike the disciples, Jesus doesn't rebuke him. He doesn't say, no, you can't follow me, you don't know what you're talking about.

He doesn't say, follow me, but you know you can't come where I'm going. No, Jesus actually thinks this man's commitment is the right one. That it is right to follow Jesus wherever he goes.

But what Jesus needed to do, though, is to set his thinking straight as to where this whatever or wherever is. Jesus needed him and all of us to realize that we are following a servant king, who not only didn't have the trappings of power, but he didn't even have the basic necessities in life.

[8 : 43] This was a king with no place to lay his head, much less a palace to indulge himself in. This is a king who came to serve rather than to be served, to sacrifice himself so that his people could be saved.

And although Jesus doesn't say explicitly, this is what his disciples, people who follow him, ought to expect as well. A willingness to endure hardship for the sake of him.

Following Jesus, as I said earlier, is a costly commitment and not an instant ticket to fame or glory. Now, for some of us, we may not be called necessarily to give up our basic necessities, but there will probably be other things that we hold dear, like friends or our privacy or our leisure or our goals, that will be asked to give up, perhaps, for Jesus.

And so the question is, are we willing to lose these to follow Jesus? And at first glance, it doesn't sound attractive, does it? And yet, I have to say, these are the only terms on which to follow Jesus.

But we do have an encouragement of assurance from Jesus. Not in this gospel, but back in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, he says, Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that is, follow him wherever he goes.

[10 : 16] And then he says, all these things, that is, all the things we need, clothing, food, and the like, all these things will be given to you as well.

And so we may think that, oh, we're going to lose all these necessities and things we need, but actually God knows our needs and he loves us and he will provide for us.

After all, he provided for Jesus, who, even though he didn't have a place to lay his head, we never read in the gospels at all that he was ever left without somewhere to sleep for the night. We never see him going around hungry or without clothes.

God is a generous God. But he asked us to put him first. Well, from the gung-ho disciple in verse 57, we turn now to the half-hearted disciples.

And perhaps, as you read the passage earlier, these are the ones that maybe you identify more with. Well, we meet the first one in verse 59, whom Jesus asked to follow him.

[11 : 18] Perhaps he may have just heard what Jesus had said, but he replies in verse 60, Lord, first let me go and bury my father.

But Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Now, if you think a bit more about this exchange, there's actually a few sort of peculiar things happening with it.

You may think, first of all, that given the first reading today, it seems odd that Jesus should be asking this man to disobey one of the Ten Commandments.

Why shouldn't this man honor his father by burying him? But we need to realize this, that actually, if this man is actually able to be by the roadside to meet Jesus, then his father actually hasn't just died.

You see, in Jewish practice, when someone has died, you spend the first seven days in intense mourning, where the family is expected to be at home or near the grave of the deceased.

[12:23] And then there's a further period of another month. But the mourning process doesn't just end there, because what happens is that after the first burial, the body of the deceased is left in the grave, perhaps a cave, and this is going to get a bit gross, but that's to allow the flesh to decompose.

Okay? And it sort of takes maybe 12, 11 to 12 months, but it is at the end of that process, where the flesh has been decayed and there's only bones left, that we then have the second burial.

And what happens is that they gather the bones, and they rebury them into a box, a bone box. And so the fact that this man was by the roadside most likely meant that he was referring to the second burial.

And in light of the fact that Jesus was about to send the 72 out to do ministry, it may be that he was trying to avoid going to the land of, up the north to Galilee.

Which means his reason for the delay wasn't due to his father. It wasn't actually genuine, but it was an excuse to avoid following Jesus. It probably also explains why Jesus' reply was quite curt.

[13:39] He says, Let the dead bury their own dead. And I think what's happened here is that Jesus is sarcastic, but he's saying, Let the ancestor in which your father is buried with, let them bury your father.

Let them sort out that decomposition process amongst themselves. But you come and follow me. At that time too, there was a belief that as the flesh is rotting, there was a sort of atoning or purifying effect on the soul as the body was decomposing.

And perhaps this man was believing that what he was doing was helping his father gain salvation through that process. If that was the case, then Jesus' response was also to correct that false belief.

Because he's saying that God's way of saving people isn't like that at all. That only Jesus' death could atone for your sins. So he wants this man to leave his father and come follow him and proclaim the kingdom of God because this is the only way where real souls can be saved.

Further, with Jesus' reply, we also see what it means specifically to follow Jesus. All of Jesus' followers have the task of proclaiming the kingdom.

[15:04] Or put another way, they are to preach the gospel. And so as a church, we may indeed do good works in the community like helping the poor, feeding the hungry.

Those are good things that we should not neglect doing them. But when we are asked to follow Jesus, that also means proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Because that's the only way that people can enter the kingdom.

That's why we've got the vision that we've got, which I've put up on the screen. And Andrew already talked about last week, but just to reinforce, I'm going to repeat again. It's to go, gather, and grow in Christ.

That's the call to follow Jesus. But how are we to do it? By prayerfully proclaiming, that's the word there, and promoting, that is helping the proclamation of, that's how you promote, God's word in love.

People enter the kingdom only as we proclaim the good news. So as we go about serving the Lord this year, let us remember that task that is important to proclaim the good news.

[16:07] Now as we look at the next person in verse 61, we get also a sense of urgency for Jesus. Because this man now says, let me go and say goodbye to the family, and then I'll come and follow you.

But Jesus replies in verse 62, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. And so we get the sense here that proclaiming the kingdom is God's urgent business, not to be delayed.

And we are to give ourselves wholeheartedly to it with total commitment. In other words, as I say in my outline, we are actually to be full-time, dedicated disciples of Jesus and not part-time.

Now this can be confronting for some. We may think, oh, we've actually got family to look after. We've got so many other responsibilities. I mean, does it mean we can't or mustn't do all these things?

Does it mean that we just drop everything and, you know, as people sometimes say, pastors like to tell their church to do, just do church work and nothing else? Well, the answer is no.

[17:10] But first let me say, notice who is the one who thinks he has to choose one over the other. If you look at the exchange in the dialogue, it's not Jesus, is it?

It's actually the disciple who thinks that he has to choose one over the other. Jesus actually doesn't make that distinction. But instead, I think he's saying if the disciple saw things in those terms, then Jesus puts it back to him in those exact terms, in his terms.

That yes, if you want to choose between looking after your family and following Jesus, then yes, following Jesus takes priority. Either the kingdom is your number one priority or else, Jesus is saying, don't waste your time.

There are only full-time committed disciples in God's kingdom, no part-time ones. But, you know, that should make sense to us, shouldn't it?

Because how can we call someone Lord in the first place and not treat him like the Lord? Number one priority. He's obviously got to be more important than anything else we've got, whether it's our family or studies or work, whatever it is that is stopping us from serving him.

[18:28] No, following Jesus means being a full-time disciple and being wholehearted in serving him. But it doesn't mean that we forsake our earthly duties either.

So how do we reconcile those two? Well, I think it's actually not that difficult. That is, once we've decided that yes, we will be full-time disciples of Jesus, that is the number one priority in our life, then God shows us how that works itself out in all the things that we do have to do, whether we're parents or we're children or we're students or we're workers.

We express our discipleship through these things. But as we go about doing these things, the question we then ask as a disciple is, how is the way I'm doing these things, how is what I'm doing, proclaiming and promoting God's kingdom?

But in all cases, the one thing that occupies us is to think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. So looking after our family, going to work in the world, doesn't need to be in conflict or in competition with serving the kingdom, provided what we do does not replace the priorities of the kingdom.

And so I think the challenge from our passage today is this, how are we going to be full-time disciples of Jesus? Now, it may be that some of you here today are not even sure you want to be disciples of Jesus in the first place.

[19:58] And given what I've just said, you may be even less sure. Well, I'm afraid I'm not going to sugarcoat it for you because that's what Jesus says. Jesus wants all of your life.

And to follow Jesus will be costly and sacrificial. Let me put it again. If you want to follow Jesus, it will be costly and sacrificial.

But at its heart, that is what faith is all about. It is about saying that the one who gave his life for you is worthy of your total trust, that you can totally depend on him and live in a way that serves him fully because what he offers you in return, the rewards of the kingdom, far exceeds anything else you want to be holding on in life.

When you give your life fully to him, Jesus says, you are in good hands because you are in the hands of the one who created you, who loves you and has actually given his life for you so that your sins may be washed away.

Now, for the rest of us, well, I think in our minds, we think, yes, we do want to be committed to Jesus, but sometimes we struggle to know how to put it all together. We feel like we've got so many bowls in the air that we don't know which ones that we need to keep up.

[21:21] Well, the beauty is that when we make being full-time disciples a priority, then that actually becomes the one coherent thing that ties our entire life together.

Everything we do and decide we want to do needs to be filtered through this criterion. Does it fit with being a disciple of Jesus? Is it consistent with serving him and his kingdom?

Now, don't get me wrong. It doesn't mean that then all we do is proclaim the kingdom. No, there's time for rest and leisure. There's time for having fun with family and friends.

God knows we need the rest. In fact, to observe the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments, isn't it? God knows that we need to be sustained in our work as a disciple.

So all these other things fit in with being a disciple of Jesus. But when all is said and done, brothers and sisters, following Jesus is a costly and sacrificial business.

[22:21] And if you've been thinking otherwise up to now, then I'm sorry, you've not been told the truth. We follow a servant king who sacrificed himself for us and he asks us for the same.

But he asks us to trust him as well, to provide, to give you the strength and the ability to do that, to serve him wholeheartedly. And at the end of the day, it will be totally worth it because our reward is none other than the unsurpassable kingdom of God itself.

To be ruled by the one who loves us, gave his life for us, who resolutely faced the cross even though it cost him dearly so that he can rescue us from destruction.

So let me give thanks to God for him right now and ask God to help us to live this life. Father, we thank you for your son Jesus who resolutely faced the cross in Jerusalem even though he knew of its great suffering.

Thank you that by this we are saved and have entry into the kingdom by faith in him. Help us to live for the kingdom sacrificially, wholeheartedly and joyfully knowing the peace and hope that is our reward in Christ Jesus.

[23:41] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.