

Counting the Cost of Following Jesus

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[0 : 00] 14, Luke 14, verse 26, we read these words that may well have startled many, then and now. If anyone comes to me, says Jesus, 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.

Living in the kingdom of God is costly. Showing your love for God, showing your love for your neighbor, it's not without cost.

You're a Christian, it's not without cost. And you put yourself, as it were, at the back of the queue when you sacrifice self for the benefit of a neighbor for someone in need lying on life's roadside. That's costly. It's costly because you're seeking to imitate the Lord Jesus, our Savior, who showed his costly love in giving of himself in sacrifice for sinners.

That sacrifice that we'll be remembering, God willing, later this afternoon in our evening service. And if you're to imitate the Lord Jesus, if you're to give yourself for others, if you're to exercise that costly grace of sacrificial service, then you cannot but deny yourself in the work that God gives you to do in the kingdom and loving God and your neighbor as yourself.

[1 : 35] And here in this section that we read in Luke chapter 14, we've got this one emphasis anyway in the cost of following Jesus. And we might say it's maybe something we don't always think of.

We should. Jim in the children's address brought out the greatness of God, yes, even in relation to our family. We'll come back to that, of course, later when we look at Jesus' words.

But it's something that we do have to consider, how you love God, how you love your neighbor as yourself, if you would follow Jesus in denying yourself.

And when we have to look at how we are to live as believers, as Christians in this world, then, of course, as soon as we read these words that Jesus gave there in verse 26, automatically we might think, well, isn't this a contradiction?

I mean, after all, Jesus is telling us to hate those whom we love. What's Jesus saying here that actually, as we'll find, isn't a contradiction?

[2 : 47] What's Jesus saying, showing us how we're to live in the kingdom of God? How you, as a Christian, live putting God first in every area of your life?

Three things that we're going to focus on to help us to answer that question. We're going to look at what's central to your following Jesus. What's at the core of your discipleship?

And then, certainly, the two little parables that Jesus taught there from verse 28, looking at this whole focus of the cost of your discipleship. And then, these verses that Jesus speaks of in relation to salt, again, is part of Jesus' overall teaching in following him regarding commitment.

Commitment of discipleship. But let's look, first of all, at everything that concerns the centrality of our discipleship. What's at the core?

And look at verse 25 to 27, because we're told initially here that large crowds, lots and lots of people are following Jesus. They're following his every move.

[3 : 53] They're listening to his every word. They've never heard anything like this before. They're accompanying Jesus. And as they accompany Jesus, as you see there, Jesus turns to them.

And he challenges these very people. He's challenging their very walk with them. Why are they with them? Why are they accompanying him? Are they genuinely following Jesus as Lord?

Are they putting him first in their lives? What is most important to that crowd following Jesus? And of course, by implication, what's most important to you? You're following Jesus.

And as we said, he gives this challenge that would have been shocking to those who heard at the time, and maybe even to ourselves, 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.

Now, that will have stopped you in your tracks. Because you know that hate, as we generally think of hate anyway, is contrasted with love. I remember as a wee boy, a youngster, my mother always, always saying to me, I mustn't hate anybody.

[5 : 05] Don't use the word hate. She kept saying, don't hate anyone. Because as you know, hate has that intensity of emotion. It's that emotion that despises and devalues somebody.

And there's that extreme loathing that's contained in how we think and use the word hate. But Jesus here is speaking of hate.

And we've got to obviously explore why Jesus uses this particular expression. And again, you know, that's at the time, and maybe even now, something that shocks us.

And certainly when Jesus said, whoever doesn't bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Certainly at the time, that would have been utterly shocking, which we'll look at in a little while.

But, you know, Jesus is bringing out what's central, what's at the core, if you're following Jesus. Yes, they are, in one sense, shocking.

[6 : 05] But remember, when Jesus spoke in parables, so many of these parables were shocking. They were shocking. And certainly here, when we think of what Jesus is saying, then perhaps we wouldn't have expected Jesus to use the word hate, you know, in connection with somebody's relations.

After all, we know that God has a very high view of family. You see that throughout Scripture. You see the family unit that's honoured in Scripture.

In the creation itself. And we see the exaltation of marriage, man and woman together. We're told in Psalm 68 that God sets the solitary in families.

Family is God-ordained. Think of Jesus and his love of family. Jesus, age 12, in the temple, when he honoured his parents.

He did as his parents asked him to do. Conformity with the commandment. Honour your father and mother. Jesus rejoiced in the family unit. So what's Jesus saying here when he's using the word hate, when he's referring to parents and siblings and even our own life?

[7 : 22] Surely Jesus is using the expression that would have been certainly understood by some at the time, that Hebrew expression that means love less.

Love less. So when he's using this expression of hate, surely he's bringing out how all who follow him, you who follow him, you who are one of his disciples, you're to love them more than you love your father, your mother, your brothers, sisters, yes, even your children.

There's absolutely no contradiction of what Jesus is saying here. No contradiction of what Jesus says about loving our neighbour and loving less. Loving less our neighbour, our family.

There's no contradiction between that and loving God. It's part of the core of discipleship.

Because, yes, your love for the family, your love for your neighbour, is an expression of how you show your love for God. You're putting your family behind Jesus.

[8 : 34] Yes, you still love your family. Yes, you still love your siblings. But the kingdom of God is nearer and dearer, far nearer and dearer still.

And so, yes, Jesus is using this expression to shock us. And he's shaking us as he's shaking the people around him to see what absolutely is at the centre of following Jesus.

What it means to live in the kingdom of God. You see, living in the kingdom of God, being a disciple of Jesus, being a follower of Jesus, is that serious.

It's so important that even those whom you consider to be nearest and dearest in your love, they have to take second place. Because, Jesus has to be at the centre of your life.

And I know that that sounds so difficult to comprehend at times, and it sounds almost offensive.

Some people say, well, surely family comes first.

[9 : 34] Surely it's a dereliction of responsibility when you put your family behind your following the Lord Jesus. Remember, we're not saying that family doesn't matter.

Yes, of course you love your family. Of course you love those whom God has given you. But to live in the kingdom of God means that you worship God, the Lord, you serve him.

We certainly don't worship our families. I trust not. We love them. Yes, we don't worship them.

Jesus surely is the prime object of your soul's delight. And that's a challenge.

That's a challenge. But, something I think we can often miss when we see these words that Jesus gives here. Because Jesus surely is drawing attention to himself and who he is. Because if Jesus is speaking about loving life or family in relation to him, then surely Jesus is making a statement about his divinity. Surely Jesus here is telling us who he is. [10:36] He's got the Son. He's divine. He's to be loved more than any other because of who he is. Now, you see these words again in verse 26.

If they were said by anyone else, you would say that person has to be so deluded, so self-centered, have an ego of such staggering pride that, you know, you would say that that person is a delusion of himself.

The kind of attitude that you saw in the 20th century in dictators, whether it was Germany or Russia or Italy or Spain, you know, living in these fascist societies, these totalitarian societies, families were actually considered secondary to the loyalty that people gave to the leader.

But, you know, you don't even need to go back to the last century to see there's an application for ourselves here in what Jesus is saying. Who do you take your leading and guiding from? Who do you show your first love? Surely, it's to the Lord Jesus. You know, on another occasion, Jesus was asked, what's the greatest commandment? What was his reply? It was, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and your mind and with all your strength.

[12:01] And the second is this, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. Loving our Lord means that he comes first. He's your priority.

He's your life's priority. We live in a world that's so preoccupied by self. The principle of self-love, self just predominates.

But if you follow the Lord Jesus who gave himself for you, who died on the cross for you, remember, he showed and he gave the greatest love of all as we'll be thinking more of this evening.

And if that's the case, and it is the case, then your chief love is to the one who died for you. That love that has to take precedence over your family, even over your very self, that will test your faith, that will test your following Jesus.

And there are many, many ways that that happens in practice. Think of when somebody's converted. Jesus has to come first. And there may well be sacrifices, you know, in relation to your family.

[13:13] You as a converted person, you don't stop loving a parent who's not a believer or a husband or family who are not believers. But I have to say this, you love Jesus more.

Two years ago, a Muslim convert, some of you may have heard of him, Nabil Qureshi, he died aged 34. His funeral was in America. His friend and mentor, again, some of you know, Ravi Zacharias, spoke at his service how difficult it was for that young man to deal with his parents, his parents whom he loved, his Muslim parents.

And Ravi Zacharias said this at the funeral, he said of the converted Muslim, his biggest heartache was the pain the family was going to feel at his commitment to Christ.

His passion was tearing him apart over his love of his heavenly father and his commitment to his earthly father and mother and family. That young converted Muslim never denied and would not deny his saviour.

He wasn't going to let the love that he had for his parents stop him from following the Lord Jesus and putting Jesus first. Take a Jewish convert.

[14:30] Some of us here heard that a few months ago in Edinburgh, if you know that in Jewish society, family is so important, it's so strong in Jewish culture.

and to leave a family of your Jewish family, to leave that for faith in the Lord Jesus is really considered quite almost revolutionary.

But it's that Jewish convert whom we were hearing as he writes in his book, he says this, family is not ultimate. God alone is worthy of worship. Family must fall into place behind him.

That's the cost of true discipleship. And there will be many times in your life and in my life when the reality of that truth is seen and put into practice. And yes, it's tough, it's painful.

And yes, there are times when there really is heartache. Remember, Jesus comes first. In every decision you make, he comes first. In every path that you take in life, he comes first.

[15:40] And yes, even when there's conflict between family and Jesus, he comes first. He's to be followed first. Because if we don't put Jesus first, then we're idolizing our families, we're

worshipping our families.

It's not them whom we worship. It's our God, our Saviour, our Lord. But what else do we find here? Well, we look more at the cost, the cost of following Jesus.

Because Jesus is telling the crowds there in verse 27, he's telling them there is a cost, there's a burden, a burden, carrying your cross and following Jesus, counting the cost if you like.

And that's why Jesus gives these two short parables from verse 28 to 33. he precedes these parables notice with the words, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Now, at that time, 2000 years ago, that was utterly shocking. It still is, of course. Because, of course, at that time, the Romans carried out that most extreme form of execution.

[16:51] Maybe the people in that crowd, maybe I've seen somebody carrying their cross on the way to the place of execution and it was an utterly repulsive sight. But it was something that they would have seen and never forgotten.

This poor, condemned criminal carrying his cross to where he's going to be executed and Jesus is saying, you've got to be like that, otherwise you can't be a follower of Jesus.

Now, I think we have to explain this a little more because the cross, of course, was that thing in which a criminal was going to be put to death.

There was suffering even in the carrying of the cross and it was the cross that was carried alone.

No one else was carrying that cross for him and it was a reminder too of that person's death about to happen.

It was a one-way walk to his execution. There was going to be no return from the carrying of that cross. You see what Jesus is saying here, the person who follows Jesus, you as a believer, a Christian, a follower of our Saviour, surely you follow him, yes, in suffering.

[18:01] It's not an easy walk to be a Christian. Samuel Rutherford said, you know, you don't go to heaven in a feather bed. There is suffering in following Jesus. Jesus himself, of course, he carried his cross to Calvary but notice, as Jesus says, here, whoever doesn't bear his own cross, the cross that you are asked to bear.

You have a particular cross that no one else bears but you. The particular suffering that you will endure in carrying that cross will be yours, no one else's.

You have a particular cross to bear. Yes, it's costly but it's as God has given you. You know, elsewhere we read the running your race, the life of the Christian, that race, that service for the Lord.

Again, it's the race that you run in your life, the race that God's given you to endure and complete.

It's no one else's race. So the cross that you bear, yes, in your suffering for the saviour, it's the cross that God in his perfect wisdom has given to you to carry and to bear for his sake.

But it is a cross and it's part of following Jesus. It's that, we might say that one way walk from attachment to the world to that heading towards the glory of heaven.

[19:31] It's given to you in God's wisdom. We might even see that sharing in the death of self and that living for the Lord Jesus. We might see that daily struggle against sin.

But Jesus saying to the cross, don't underestimate what it means to follow me sincerely and fully and wholly. There is a cost and there's a burden. And that's why when we come to the parables, and these two parables focus on the cost of following Jesus.

Let's look at the two parables. briefly. The first one, the tower, even better to say the watch tower. This is an agricultural society of course that Jesus is living in.

Most of the people that were there around him would have worked in the land, and so they would be very familiar with these towers, these watch towers that were built in a farmer's land, a landowner's land, the tower to keep a watch over the fields.

So, you know, Jesus is saying, you know, this is such an important thing to build, it's going to cost a lot, it's going to cost all that's needed, money, material, people to work on the watch tower, and obviously the landowner's going to have to sit down and calculate how much the whole thing's going to cost, even before he builds it.

[20:53] Otherwise, it's just going to look ridiculous and a folly, just like the folly in Colton Hill in Edinburgh, I don't need to go into detail, but, you know, the cost wasn't counted for that, and it is now Edinburgh as well.

You can see, you know, there's a picture of not counting the cost, if you like, but bring this to the parable that Jesus is teaching us here about the person who doesn't count the cost in following Jesus.

He's like the farmer who didn't count the cost of building his watchtower. What's Jesus saying? He's saying, think the commitment that you give in following me.

You've got to be prepared to surrender everything in life in following me. Yes, even surrendering family and whatever else, even your very health, where you live, interest, everything, everything surrendered to Jesus.

Because, you see, if you don't count the cost in terms of your surrendering all to Jesus, just make look like fools. It's like the builder of the folly on the top of Colton Hill.

[22 : 06] It's like a half-complete Christian. In fact, well, no, there's a contradiction, a total contradiction. And, you know, ask yourself, have you counted the cost?

Are you prepared to give up everything, to surrender all in following Jesus? Or is there something that you're holding back with? Because, you see, when so many are confronted with the call to follow Jesus, then so many say the cost is just too great.

They realize, oh, I might lose my popularity, or I might lose respect even in my own family, and not really giving that full commitment to the Lord and Savior.

But the person who follows Jesus, the disciple, yes, he will count the cost, and he'll know that there is a cost to be paid, but he'll carry on, he'll persevere, because he knows that the cost is worth it.

Because he'll know that he's following, that she's following the one for whom it costs his very life in giving you that great salvation.

[23 : 24] And we have to say there's no cost, it's too great to give in serving, in giving your life to the Lord Jesus. If you think it's too much for you, well, you look to Jesus.

Jesus, yes, he surrendered all to the will of his Father. He gave up the glory of heaven. He gave his very life to give life to you, to me.

He knew what it was going to cost to give you that great salvation. The cost being his very life. But he continued in that road from, yes, from heaven to Bethlehem, from Bethlehem to Calvary, because of his great love for you again, that we'll explore more fully this evening.

And then, briefly, the second parable from verse 31 to 33, the parable of the king, the king who's planning to go to war against another king. And this king has got 10,000 men, he knows he's going to face an army of 20,000.

And he sits down and he asks, can I really afford to put 10,000 against this 20,000? And he realises he can't, he's going to seek peace terms. Yes, the greater king is going to impose harsh terms on this lesser king.

[24 : 45] He's going to make severe demands, but the price is going to be worth paying. Better to make peace with the stronger king, pay the cost, and risk losing your life, and the life of 10,000 of your men.

The foolishness of rushing into a war, which you know is going to not go well. What's the point of the second parable? Surely this, can you afford to refuse the demands of Jesus?

Do you afford to refuse his demands that he gives you in following him? What are his demands? Well, like the king with 10,000, the demand to surrender.

The king with 10,000 men had to surrender to the greater king. And if you're going to be a disciple of Jesus, you surrender to the greatest king of all. Again, this gym was saying to the children, the lord of lords, the king of kings, surrender all that you have that's dear to you in life.

Are you prepared? Are you prepared to do that? What did Jim Elliott say not long before he was massacred with the South American Indians? He who is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

[26 : 07] He knew, Jim Elliott knew there would be a cost. He paid that cost, yes, the ultimate cost if you like in human terms. Are you prepared to give what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose?

You gain salvation. You can't lose your salvation. And the words that Jesus says here in verse 33 really should speak to every one of us here.

If you don't renounce all that you have, Jesus says, you cannot be my discipleship. That disciple, that's the cost of discipleship. It's that living as if nothing is your own.

Living as one who's been given much and you give what God has given you, yes, even your very life and say to your Lord and Savior, Lord, use me.

Use all that I have. Use my very self in your service as I give my life to you. You see, if you can't give your life to Jesus, then you can't give him yourself, your full self.

[27 : 20] Because you see, there's a commitment, there's a commitment to following Jesus and that's what I think we see there in the last two verses of that chapter 34 and 35, the illustration of the salt that loses its saltiness.

first when you read this, it seems a wee bit out of place, but no, it is. I do think it's part, it's integral to what Jesus has been saying about the cost of following him.

Now, salt, salt generally doesn't lose its saltiness, but certainly the salt that was had around the Dead Sea area, that could be corrupted and contaminated, and corrupt and contaminated salt's no use, it's thrown away.

Lost its flavours, good for nothing except to be thrown out. Jesus saying surely in these last few verses, if you're not totally committed to him in service, if you can't stay the course in following Jesus, you're just as useless as the salt that loses its flavour.

Maybe even some who claim to be Christians, but really it's not giving that full, wholehearted service, and maybe not even through believer.

[28 : 39] You know, the language that Jesus uses here and at the end of this chapter, it is thrown away. This is the same, exactly the same expression that Jesus would use elsewhere when he spoke of those who were cast into hell.

and it's a solemn warning, it's a solemn, solemn calling, even in this service, even in preparation for our communion service this evening that we make our calling and election sure, and to examine ourselves, are we living as salt?

Are we giving that flavour of grace to those who are around us? Are we preserving the truth? The salt preserves food. Are we preserving the truth in our life, in our witness, in our testimony?

Are you doing that as a Christian? As we say, have you surrendered all to him? Are you, yes, walking in that path that he set for you? Are you bearing your cross?

Are you looking forward to that heavenly home? Will there be no more crosses to bear? Will there no longer be any cost to count? Instead, the eternal glory of heaven being with your Lord and Saviour forever, being in his very presence, being with him?

[29 : 59] So, is the cost? Following Jesus too much? Surely not. Absolutely not. But in life, yes, bear your cross and bear it well.

Give him that full surrender of everything in your life. Yes, renounce everything that even now is still hindering your full and wholesome walk with the Lord.

And yes, even rejoice in your suffering as you bear that cross, as you journey to your heavenly home. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, our God, you give us much to consider, much to apply in our lives, even to bearing our cross and surrendering all to you.

Oh, Lord, we pray that we truly will love you the more, that we truly will give you first place in our lives, that we truly will follow you with all that we are, heart, soul, strength, mind.

Lord, give us, we pray, that vision of yourself to see you as you are, to see you in all your glory, and to follow you with our hearts rejoicing in that following.

[31 : 18] Hear us, Lord, as we continue now in worship before you. Forgive, Lord, anything and all things that have been said amiss even this morning, and may you have the glory in all that we have done.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's close our service in Psalm 116.

Close our final singing in Psalm 116, page 154. We'll sing from the beginning down to verse 9. I love the Lord because He heard my voice.

He listened when I cried to Him for aid. I'll call on Him as long as I shall live because He turned to hear me when I prayed. 1 to 9, Psalm 116.