

Luke 14:25-35 "A Costly Kingdom"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2018

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We come this morning in our study of Luke's gospel to a really hard passage. It's not hard because it's complicated to understand.

In fact, it's remarkably simple to track with. It's hard to live out. It's one of those that although many of us in here profess to be followers of Christ, and most of us understand what this passage means, I don't know if any of us truly, consistently live by its standards.

It's Luke 14, at verse 25. Jesus is in the midst of teaching about his kingdom while he journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross. This is God's holy word.

And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, 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.

[1 : 4 2] 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.

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.

Let's pray as we look at God's word together. Father, we need your help. I'm afraid we understand already some of what your word calls us to.

But it is hard for our hearts. Holy Spirit, would you come and would you challenge us?

[2 : 5 1] Would you show us what we need to see in your word? And would you show us Jesus? We might love him, that we might know more what it looks like to follow him.

We ask in his name. Amen. Sir John Franklin was a British explorer who in 1845 departed with about 130 men on what would be his final expedition.

Author Annie Dillard describes their plans this way. They embarked from England to find the Northwest Passage across the high Canadian Arctic to the Pacific Ocean.

They sailed in two, three-masted barks. Each sailing vessel carried an auxiliary steam engine and a 12-day supply of coal for the entire projected two or three years voyage.

Instead of additional coal, each ship made room for a 1,200-volume library, a hand organ playing 50 tunes, China place settings, cut glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware.

[4 : 0 4] Two months after departure, a British whaling captain met the two barks in Lancaster Sound. He reported back to England on the high spirits of officers and men. He was the last European to see any of them alive.

They died of disease, starvation, of cold in the Arctic. Or you could say, they died of underestimating the cost.

The cost of their commitment to explore. They packed for a pleasure cruise, as it were, and walked into a much more serious and difficult situation.

They thought they could continue their comfortable officer club lifestyle they'd been enjoying in England on board this expedition around the world. But the truth was, everything about that needed to change.

And that's a big part of Jesus' point here, when he tells the stories of counting the cost before heading into a battle, before building a tower.

[5 : 12] He's saying, just as in those situations, when you determine to follow me, to be a part of my kingdom, you should consider what is required.

What you're really committing to. See, many of us think we can continue our comfortable lifestyles, and just kind of tack Jesus on the side, as a nice addition to what we already do.

It'll be a master suite on the back, you know, nothing else will change. It'll work nicely. I thought about it in terms of my phone. Most of you have a phone.

I try really hard not to have mine with me when I'm up here. But there's a significant difference that Jesus is asking us to consider in following him.

It's like the difference between adding an app on your phone and changing operating systems. See, like you, I can just add a free app on my phone anytime, right?

[6 : 09] Just click, and it's there. And I can use that app, and it doesn't affect any of the rest of the phone. I can open up that Jesus app and use it, and the emails work just the same, and the text messages are the same, and the calendar is just the same.

Nothing else changes. But Jesus is suggesting that following him involves changing operating systems.

Now, that's something entirely different, isn't it? How many of you, like me, avoid updating your operating system as long as possible at all costs?

I know some of you do this. Why do we do that? You're pointing at each other. This is terrible. That's so mean. Why do we delay so long updating our operating system? Because it changes everything else, doesn't it?

Nothing else works the same. It doesn't work right. I changed mine finally over a year ago. I still can't add a new event to my calendar. I have not figured it out yet in the new system.

[7 : 14] They mess with you. Why would you want that to change, right? My email doesn't load the same. Texts don't look the same. All the other apps function differently. And Jesus says, that's what it means to follow me.

To have that center operating system of your life changed so that everything else has to adapt in light of that priority. He's not just one thing on a list of many.

He must be the first priority, the greatest value that everything else revolves around. That's what it means to follow him, to be a part of his kingdom.

And he challenges us, doesn't he, on that very issue in some specific areas that are not easy for us to hear. But we need to hear them and to trust that he knows what's best for us.

Three times in this passage, he says, as you're counting the cost, realize that unless, fill in the blank, you cannot be my disciple.

[8 : 19] Unless this changes, you cannot be my disciple. What things does he say have to change? First one, verse 26, 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.

We must value Jesus more than any other person. Now listen, kids, you especially listen, okay?

This does not mean that it is okay to treat your brothers and sisters meanly, unkindly. It does not mean that it is okay to be disrespectful to your parents, to hate them.

It does not mean it's okay to be harsh with your children, parents. Those are not okay. It's not what Jesus is saying. Jesus says in many places we are to honor our parents, to love our spouses, to care tenderly for our children, and even we're to love our enemies.

So we know that he's not saying those other things are okay. What he is saying in this passage is that we are to love him above all others.

[9 : 40] He gets first place. Everyone else gets second place. This idea in the Hebrew culture when we talk about hate in this passage is one of your greatest priority.

What will your heart be given to? To hate in this sense is a disavowal of primary allegiance. It's a change in who is most important.

I think of it in terms of what I would say to a couple in premarital counseling. I will often remind that couple that leaving and cleaving means something very important.

It means once we get married there must be no confusion about who my primary commitment is to. It's to my new wife or my new husband. Now I'm still to honor my father and mother.

That relationship remains important. We should care about it. But we must make sure that our spouse understands he or she is my first priority in my family. Right? You may have said you cannot be married to me unless you value me more than your mother.

[10 : 50] Jesus says you cannot be my disciple unless you value me more than any other person. For many of my friends in India that has meant losing relationship with family who have disowned them because they embrace Jesus.

Some of you know that experience. You've dealt with some of that pain in your close relationships. Mocking from friends. Rejection from family.

But for many of us it looks a little bit different from that. It's that we have such high family values that we subtly begin to value our family more than we value Jesus.

And it's not that these people we value are bad people they're just bad gods. Last week in the passage we were looking at it was three good things used as excuses to keep people from rejoicing in the king's banquet wasn't it?

A wife some oxen a new field good things that kept people from God eternally. Watch out.

[12 : 07] They're not sinful things. We recognize those more quickly. These are not sinful things keeping us from God but when we try to put these good things in God's place they ultimately can't bear that weight.

Isn't that true in your marriage? I've watched myself more than I care to remember forgetting God's delight in me and trying to fulfill myself through Christi to think that she's the one who's got the pressure on her to make me okay to have her approval and her affection make me feel secure and significant and accepted and when that happens I become this needy demanding person.

it's exhausting it can be even crushing to a spouse right? Many of us do the same to our kids centering our lives around them so that our priority of worshiping God accidentally becomes secondary and our kids can wilt under the pressure right?

You've seen it happen. They're not bad people to love they're just bad gods I found this to be one of many very very hard aspects of parenting how do you make it so your children feel deeply unconditionally loved without them also feeling the world revolves around them?

Isn't that hard? How do you communicate to them and demonstrate to them how loved they are without making them think it's all about them? It's one of those hard questions that's very difficult in many situations it's one of the reasons I'm so thankful Derek's going to answer it for us in about 30 seconds Tuesday night so you'll want to be there for that thank you Derek but what I see in my own parenting and in our church culture is a tendency to love our children so much that we obscure the person we actually want them to love most God sometimes unwittingly we communicate to our children their athletic performance their academic success their having fun in the worship service or Sunday school or youth group is what really matters we need to make sure that you like it that you're happy there and that it's more important than the worship of

[14 : 48] God himself than living in community together than learning about God together just want you to like it now those things don't have to be competing priorities but sometimes we treat them that way pastor Kent Hughes says we often love our kids in a way that shows we hate God in the language of this passage we get it backwards thinking what are even our highest priorities for our kids he writes we fall short when we spend more time in the car in one day shuttling them to games and lessons than we do in a month in prayer for their souls ouch what kind of pastors say things like that it's convicting isn't it what do we most long for for them what are our hearts for our kids we love them but do we love them as God has called us to

Jesus says put me first value me prioritize me and those second things will flourish your love for your family will deepen and be enriched when it's in its proper place it can't handle first place that's not what they were created for I am I'm the one you must trust then Jesus continues in a similar vein with some other specific things he says we must value him more than our own comfort or reputation look at verse 27 whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple now this certainly could involve dying for the cause of Christ after all Jesus has made it very clear he's headed where he's headed to Jerusalem to a cross to lay down his life and so if you're considering following him you ought to count that cost he's saying to those walking along the road with him carefully count the cost of following

Jesus but even more particularly this second statement is talking about how we live Jesus elsewhere calls us to take up our crosses not once when we die but daily right as we live that's the picture taking up your cross the part of that journey where the condemned criminal would actually put the cross on his back and have to walk through the streets of town up the hill in deep physical agony carrying this heavy weight with friends and neighbors gathered around mocking shouting at them ridiculing them so the emotional agony the shame that is experienced in taking up one's cross well before the actual death that's what Jesus is describing he's saying that truly following him will not be comfortable will not be socially advantageous it's a lot less like a pleasure cruise and a lot more like a death march that's why

I bristle when someone says to me and it happens quite regularly well I I just know God wants me to be happy so he does you know that I know he wants you to be completely satisfied in him that's that's one thing but the bible seems to say that reality might involve quite a bit of painful suffering difficult obedience when it doesn't feel like it humiliating repentance when we fail things that you may well not mean in your definition of happy that you're suggesting to me right now God wants you may not use those words you wouldn't think of saying that perhaps but where are you believing that lie about happiness in your life if we're not walking into uncomfortable places and painful situations taking up our cross we're not following

Jesus and cannot be his disciple finally after reminding us to count the cost of following him telling those parables Jesus makes a third statement in some ways it's a summary statement verse 33 so therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple we must value Jesus more than any other possession yes that could mean very broadly anyone or anything you can't follow Jesus and hang on to a pet sin you can't follow Jesus and hang on to old priorities and habits that's losing your saltiness losing the unique flavor and impact of the kingdom becoming eternally useless Jesus says but especially here this last statement in terms of money and possessions they certainly have value to us don't they they must not be more valuable than Jesus we must not use our things to build our status rather than build his kingdom we must not pursue financial gain at the expense of kingdom gain rather

[20 : 38] Jesus is saying everything we have is valuable in relation to furthering his kingdom what matters most one of the things I always say in the welcome to Southwood class is that there are no membership dues here at Southwood there's no fee to be a member of the church and that's true perhaps I should also say but you need to know that following Jesus with us here will cost you everything we want to be shaped by God's word right which says here if I'm to be his disciple everything I have is at his disposal I must not cling more tightly to anything than I do to Jesus so here's what I've been wrestling with lately what God has been showing me in my own life is that if that's to be true it must actually begin with me treasuring valuing

Jesus himself for who he is for how wonderful and glorious he is that God himself would be the greatest prize the only one I truly can't live without the one worth more who's more fulfilling than everything I own or could own I love the way Paul says this after he reviews all his assets his possessions his spiritual resume boosters he looks at all of them and he says whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for his sake I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord have you experienced that have you have you felt that reality that surpassing worth

Paul says even suffering can help him know Jesus better as he learns how Jesus suffered and what could be better than knowing Jesus he's all glorious he's perfectly good he's endlessly faithful he's so worthy of our worship right kids all of you who are here have people who've brought you here today who could be during this couple of hours doing something else to make some money whether it's the work they usually do or something else and you need to know that a big part of the reason that they're here and not off doing that is they believe Jesus is worth it Jesus is more valuable than money we have to believe that to be here together but sometimes that reality is hard to remember at other times and on other days isn't it am I truly delighted in him do I really treasure

Jesus because I've had to wrestle with that because if I don't treasure him for just who he is in himself he's going to ask me to do really hard things and to leave behind other things that I really love and so there's no way I'm going to do that unless Jesus is worth it to me that's what I've been wrestling with that's what Jesus is calling us to consider this morning so often I don't trust him value him follow him if you're really up for a gut check if you really want to consider Jesus' challenge in this passage here's a question that gets at the same issue a different way I've been wrestling with and dodging this for a few weeks now so you can dodge it too or wrestle with it along with me what would change in your life if Jesus left if your relationship with God ceased if it was no longer a priority what would change would it just free up two hours on

Sunday and say roughly 10% of your income just a little blip on the radar screen but everything else basically the same would you treat your spouse any differently if Jesus didn't matter would you live in a different neighborhood attend different schools spend time in different relationships in other words if the operating system of your heart changed today it wasn't Jesus anymore would the money app function any differently from what it does today the parenting app work different or just the same how about the free time app the workplace app would it affect any of those if the honest answer is no then something's wrong

[25 : 57] I know I'm meddling but Jesus started it he did it first and he's doing it to me first this is where he calls us to consider the cost of following him and to ask how much do I truly value him or do I just say I do what would it cost us to be in relationship with Jesus to be part of his kingdom he tells us we should expect it to cost us everything we have Walter Gowans was one of three friends who in 1893 followed the call of Jesus to go from Canada to Sudan with the good news of Jesus like many other missionaries of the time they sold many of their possessions and they packed what little they kept into a coffin and bought a one way ticket across the Atlantic to Africa not expecting to come back counting the cost prepared to give everything the efforts of

Walter and his two friends were the beginnings of a long-standing mission agency called Sudan Interior Mission but Walter never saw that himself one year after leaving Canada he was dying of malaria and he wrote this final journal entry to his mother back home August 9 1894 written in view of my approaching end which has often lately seemed so near but just now seems so imminent and I want to write while I have the power to do it well glory to God he has enabled me to make a hard fight for the Sudan and although it may seem like a total failure and defeat it is not we shall have the victory and that right speedily I have no regret for undertaking this venture and in this manner my life has not been thrown away my only regrets are for my poor dear mother for her sake I would have chosen to live mother dear and what a mother you have been it seems

I appreciate you now more than ever I did oh how often I have thought while lying here of your love and how I have longed to see you again in the flesh don't mourn for me darling dearest mother if the suffering was great remember it is all over now and think of the glory I am enjoying and rejoice that your boy was permitted to have a hand in the redemption of the Sudan oh how I did wish to live for your sake goodbye dearest till we meet at Jesus feet Walter you may or may not have to leave those you love pack all your possessions in a coffin for following Jesus to cost you everything but he does ask for everything and knowing him is worth it isn't it after all no matter what it costs us to be in that relationship to be a part of his kingdom being in this relationship with us cost him more didn't it he gave up heaven he bought the one way ticket as it were to earth and with passionate resolution headed to the cross for you and for me what a great savior to trust and to follow let's pray

Jesus we need your help to know what this call means in our lives we need your help to be willing to embrace that to be willing to give up things that we love so Holy Spirit would you make Jesus glorious beautiful and valuable in our eyes this morning that we might follow him no matter the cost we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org