

Count the Cost

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] The kids are going to go out to Kids Church now, and the rest of us are going to pick up Bibles. If you haven't got your Bibles open, grab a Bible, turn to Luke 14, and I'm going to pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for the privilege of joining together as your people. Lord, as we look at your Word now, I pray that we might have ears to hear. We pray also for our young people departing from us now to their program.

Lord, I pray for them too that you might pour your Spirit out amongst them and upon their hearts and their minds so that they might have ears to hear and willing hearts to obey.

I pray that for ourselves too, Lord, and we ask for your sake. Amen. The radio station Today FM used to have what was called the annual celebrity party. I don't know if they still do. I haven't listened to Today FM for a while, but it was an annual celebrity party.

It was a little misleading though because although there was a couple of famous people, you know, 15-minute fame kind of people there, the bulk of the party goers were average Joe blows like me.

[1 : 12] Not the rich, not the famous. Those who never really get a chance to mix it with a high life of the famous people. Apparently it was a great party, an enormous party, a lot of people there, heaps of drink and fun and food and average people like me were there.

It was advertised as the party to beat all parties, the party that everyone wanted to be at. And one year in their promotion for this celebrity party, they had a guy ring up pretending to be Kerry Packer to the radio station wanting to buy tickets for this party.

He was promptly told that no amount of money could buy him a ticket to the party. It was invitation only and he wasn't invited. Luke 14, Jesus tells the story of the greatest party of all times.

It's a party that we've been all invited to, a party that we have to RSVP for. It's also a party that no amount of money can purchase a ticket for. This party is invitation only.

I think it's a surprise to most people to discover that Jesus liked to party as much as anyone else.

He often saw Jesus attending weddings and dinner parties. But what is really surprising is that he actually describes heaven as a party, as a great banquet, which is a little bit different from the popular notion of hymns and harps and halos.

[2 : 37] It is a big banquet. And so Jesus is at this dinner party. He's at a dinner party with some of his disciples and he leans across to the host of the party and tells him who he should invite to his parties.

It's there in verse 12. So have a look at Luke 14, verse 12. When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives or your rich neighbours. If you do, they may invite you back and so you'll be repaid.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. It's an amazing thing. He leans across to the host of the party and says, don't invite people to your party who you want to be there.

Invite everyone else. Don't invite your friends, your neighbours, your rich. In other words, what he's saying is, I want you to live a life. Remember Jesus talking about discipleship here. I want you to live a life where you do things and don't expect to be repaid for it.

But he's so different than us, isn't it? I mean, isn't it good to be able to do things and get some sort of recognition for it? It's so much easier to pick up your cross and follow Jesus when there's a crowd clapping, acknowledging you picking up your cross.

[3 : 58] It's so much easier being humble when you can tell people that you've been humble so they can pat you on the back for being humble. And Jesus says, don't invite the people who are going to pay you back.

Invite, in fact, he says, the poor, the sick, the crippled, the outcast, the people who were the outcast in first century Palestine. Invite those people, the ones who can't pay you back. Why does he tell us to do that?

Well, that's how God treats us. It's how God treats us. This is God's attitude. The invitation that God gives us to have a relationship with him and to spend eternity at his banquet table in heaven is to everyone who doesn't deserve it, everyone who can't pay him back.

God invites the sinful people of this world. He invites those who live life as if he doesn't exist, those who go about their daily routine of life and give no acknowledgement to God whatsoever.

Don't give him a second thought. Reality is what he's saying is that everyone who dines for eternity at God's table in heaven will not deserve to be there.

[5 : 11] There won't be a single person there who will deserve it, who would have earned it, who would have bought their way there simply just because they're there, because they have accepted the invitation to join with God for eternity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Well, that must have been a party clangor. But Jesus didn't stop there. He reclined back in his chair, started to tell a story about a particular party.

It went something like this. There was a rich man who organised a party and he invited heaps of people. And then when it came time for the party, he sent his servant out to get them to come on in. What we've got to realise, this is a party in first century Palestine. Parties took a lot longer to organise back in those days. Nowadays, quick text message, and you've got, you know, put on food, and you've got a bunch of teenagers home in no time at all.

But it was different back in those days. Significantly different. Kid comes home, wants to have a party. You know, yes, certainly, the food's out there in the paddock.

[6 : 21] You've got to go and chase it down and kill it and slaughter it and do all that sort of stuff. It takes a while. So what they used to do was they put out the first invitation first. So out you go, invitation to everyone.

We're going to have this great party, a big banquet. This is not necessarily just two hours' worth of, you know, dinner time. This could go on for days and weeks. Out goes the first invitation.

People go, yeah, I'll be there. Sounds like a great idea. Then the servant gets and does all the preparation. He slaughters the cows, picks the carrots, barbecues the meat, puts the drinks with the sterly straws in them, all set aside.

Desserts are cooling in the fridge. It's ready to go. Goes around, brings in the party goers, and what he discovers is those who said yes to start with are now saying no.

And what he gets faced with is a bunch of excuses. Verse 18, I have just bought a field and I must go and see it. What an idiot.

[7 : 21] He's just bought a field and now he must go and see it. He's just bought himself a farm, right? He's just bought himself a business, hasn't looked over the books, hasn't seen whether or not the paddock actually exists or not, but I've got to go and see it now.

I can't come to your party. I can't wait, you know, a couple of days or anything. I've got to go and see it now because I might not be there in the morning. Verse 19, I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out.

This guy has just bought a secondhand tractor, hasn't even seen it, doesn't even know if it's got all of its wheels attached to it, whether there's a motor there, a transmitter, got no idea whatsoever.

He's bought it and he's got to go and try them out now when the party's on.

He can't wait a couple of days because they might get lonely tonight. Number three, verse 20, I've just got married so I can't come. Well, that's pretty self-explanatory.

You know, you get married, you don't go to parties anymore, you know, got other things on your mind, don't go and worry about that. You see, what it's saying here is all these people who were initially invited have changed their mind.

[8 : 29] They signed up to it, they thought it was a good idea and then when push comes to shove, don't want to be part of the banquet. And what Jesus is faced with here, what he says is, is that they are just excuses.

And in actual fact, Jesus is saying these excuses are both laughable and pathetic. They are laughable and pathetic, even good things like buying a field and buying a bunch of cows and getting married, even good things.

When it comes up against the greatest thing of all, they can be but distractions from the greatest and the best thing, an invitation to party with God for eternity.

So he wants to make it clear that every excuse that we make to put off an invitation of a relationship with the God of this universe is pathetic, it's laughable.

There is nothing more important for yesterday, today and always than to know the one who gives us life, who has control of eternity in the palm of his hand. Anything that puts that relationship to one side and makes it less important, the number one priority is a pathetic excuse.

[9 : 47] And I think we've been challenged about this as we've journeyed with Jesus to Jerusalem, haven't we, over the last few weeks? When Jesus describes about what it means to be his disciple, what does it mean to walk with Jesus along this road to Jerusalem, into Jerusalem, to pick up our cross, to walk outside of Jerusalem, to die with Jesus out there on the place of the skull?

And how often do we make excuses? What this passage is saying and the next one, this whole collective passage is saying here, which is the whole point of this travel narrative, do we actually trust Jesus with our life?

Do we really trust Jesus with our life? Jesus is not asking us here, do we go to church, we part of a Bible study group, do I arrange the flowers at church, do I, he's asking, do I actually trust him with my life?

Or am I still making excuses? I've come up with all sorts of excuses over the years, so I've been faced with all sorts of excuses, I've made excuses myself. One of the classic ones is I'm too smart to be a Christian.

A Christian is just made up for dumb people who need some form of crutch, but I'm too smart. I've heard that one, I've heard it, the most clearest excuse in that regard that I heard came from a 16 year old and it was in the middle of a scripture class, this kid said to me, the Bible's full of mistakes and Christianity's all flawed.

[11 : 24] And, you know, very authoritatively said that and I said, so tell me where? He goes, well, you haven't got a Bible. Unfortunately, I had my big Bible bashing Bible at the time and I threw my Bible, which just landed perfectly on his desk and slid into his lap and it was just, you know, just a great effect.

And I said, so show us where the, you know, show us where the mistakes all are. And he goes, well, I don't know exactly where they are, I've just heard it's full of mistakes. Well, who told you? Well, I don't know where I heard it from.

I've heard it from someone. I said, is the person reliable? I don't know, I don't know who it was. And I said, so in other words, you don't really know, do you? And he goes, no, you're right, I don't really know.

Or the other one I've heard is, I'm too good looking and too cool to be Christian. Like being a Christian is going to spoil my image because clearly Christians are the people who tuck their ciglet inside their undies and we're the guys who wear the sandals on outside of our socks and dagginess has nothing to do with Christianity.

It's in your jeans, not in the type you wear but in your mum and dad so blame them for that. Or I'm too involved, I'm too involved in the opposite sex or with family or friends, you know, what would those people think?

[12 : 45] I'm too involved with all these other relationships to actually give great consideration to the best relationship at all, a relationship with a guy in this universe or I'm just too busy.

I'm too busy with my work, I'm too busy with my hobbies, I'm too busy with my clubs, I'm too busy with my study, I'm just too busy with life itself to give a thought for the one who gives me life itself. How do your excuses stack up? In Jesus' story, and this is, you've got to read this one here, not one of those who are invited to the banquet got a taste of the banquet. Verse 24, I tell you, not one of those men who are invited will get a taste of my banquet.

Not one. What Jesus is saying is if we continue to reject the invitation of our relationship with him, if we continue to make our excuses, if we continue not to trust in Jesus, then he will end up treating us for eternity the way that we have treated him in the short span of our lifetime.

Away from me, I never knew you. Away from me. What Jesus wants to make very clear for us here is that it is the most important decision.

[13 : 57] It's what we do with Jesus. It's the most important decision in our life and that is why Jesus wants us to be so, so clear about what we are doing. So clear about what we are doing when we sign on to follow Jesus.

I want to say that as well by way of encouragement, I have been amazed recently, the last two weeks have been the most difficult ministry years of my, ministry weeks of my life and yet in amongst that difficulty I have been rejoicing consistently of those who have been coming to Christ in our midst.

God has been good. God has been good. The evil one would want to distract us from the main game and Jesus keeps encouraging us with those who have come to Christ.

Praise God. God has been good. But he wants to make us very, very clear what we are signing on for here as his people. Jesus says if you want to follow him it's going to be tough.

It's going to be tough because you die to yourself and you rise to me. It's going to be tough because you take up your cross and you follow me. It's going to be tough following me on this road to Jerusalem and outside of Jerusalem to the place of the skull so you better get ready for it.

[15:09] You better get ready for it. He says you've got to realise that you are sheep amongst ravenous wolves. You've got to be ready for it because I'm getting you to carry your cross as well as much as I'm carrying mine and you need to count the cost.

It's no good RSVPing for heaven signing up for a gentle Jesus meek and mild and then realising that Jesus is more than meek and mild.

Jesus is a king who demands my allegiance and then realising you've signed up and you've made a mistake. And so Jesus uses two illustrations to make the point. He says you don't go building a building if you haven't got the money to finish the job.

You look like an idiot. You don't just get the foundations and you go okay well where's the rest of it going to come from now? And he says you don't go picking a fight with a guy who's bigger than you if you're going to lose.

You know I don't go walking around picking fights with you know two foot tall sorry two meter tall two foot tall guys I'll pick fights with those guys two you know two meter tall bodybuilders you don't pick fights with those guys.

[16:18] In other words he says think about what you're committing to and this is a significant warning for us I've said this before from the pulpit that it's easier for us to be part of the Anglican Church of Australia than it is to be part of the kingdom of God.

That what Jesus demands in terms of discipleship is not what is demanded in terms of the Anglican Church of Australia. It is much harder to be part of the kingdom of God than it is to be part of Sir Paul's Chatswood.

And let's be frank about this even the rich young ruler would be welcomed amongst us. He would be included given a position of leadership and frankly right now the Sydney Diocese could do with his money.

And he even came running up to Jesus with the all-important question what must I do to inherit eternal life? If he came up to me and said that it would be vastly different than what happened when he said it to Jesus.

He walked away sad because he wasn't prepared to trust Jesus. He wasn't prepared for Jesus to be number one he trusted his money more. If he ran up to me I would have had him praying the sinner's prayer before he caught his breath and I would have had him baptised before he filled out a follow-up card.

[17:36] Jesus was a magnet to people like him people who want Jesus for all that they could get out of him but not prepared to give Jesus everything. Verse 25 tells us that there are a great number of people who were travelling along the road with Jesus but he was never fooled by the crowds.

Jesus always made a distinction between the crowds and his disciples. He was never fooled by the crowds. Just because they were there he didn't think for a moment that they were his true disciples and so he told them what it meant to be his disciple.

And so here's the question for you. Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus? Do you want to be a true disciple of Jesus? Do you want to be at his banquet table whatever that is for all eternity in heaven? Do you want to be there in the end? Jesus? Well then you need to do this. You need to put your hands up like this. Both of your hands.

Come on. I'm not going to be the only idiot here. Everyone's got to do this. And you need to get behind your ears and you need to do this. Because Jesus says this in verse 35 he who has ears to hear let him hear.

[18 : 51] You want to be my disciple? Listen up. Okay? You don't need to keep doing that. Listen up. Jesus says three things in this passage. What it means to be his true disciple.

Jesus said first of all you cannot be my disciple if you love other people more than you love Jesus. Have a look at verse 26. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Now if you had an argument as a family on the way here today you'd think these are great words but that's not quite what Jesus is saying. The point is that the relationship that Jesus calls us to is an exclusive relationship.

Jesus says the first thing that has to happen if you're going to be his disciple there is no more important relationship than your relationship with Jesus and as C.S.

Lewis says when you put the first things first everything else doesn't become second it actually becomes first. when God is first you will love your wife, your husband, your children, your friends, your neighbour like you will not love them now.

[20 : 06] What Jesus is saying is that there is no competitors for this relationship. He says it won't be our parents, it won't be our wives, our husbands, our brothers, our sister, our children, our boyfriend, our girlfriend, our best friend, our work colleagues, it won't even be ourselves.

He says there, I won't even love myself. I won't live for my security, for my ease, for my comfort, my pleasure. Nobody will be competing with Jesus for our love, our affection, our allegiance.

Jesus will be the one who sets the agenda for my life. He'll be the one who I love, who I will serve like no other. We will do what Jesus wants us to do before what our friends want us to do, even before what my boss wants me to do.

It means when Jesus speaks to us through his word, as our dearly loved friend, as our king, we will listen and we will obey.

We will listen and we will obey. Do you trust Jesus enough to do that? Do you trust him enough to do that?

[21 : 17] Jesus also said that you cannot be his disciples. Number two, if we are people who love safety more than we love Jesus. Verse 27, anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Amazing verse. Jesus calls us into a relationship that is actually worth dying for. He calls us into a relationship that is actually worth dying for and that means it's everything to live for.

When something is worth dying for, it is everything to live for. You see, the decision is now, tomorrow, the day after, the next day, take up my cross and follow Christ.

Even if it costs me my friends, it costs me money, people think I'm an idiot, even if it costs me my life, no matter what, I'm going to follow Jesus.

Do you trust Jesus enough to do that? Third thing, Jesus also said that you cannot be my disciple if you're a person who loves things more than you love Jesus.

[22 : 37] Have a look, verse 33, in the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. And I've spoken on this one a number of times lately, and I'm going to consistently do it, because the world in which we live wants us to love things.

You turn on the TV and every ad is telling you that your life is meaningless unless you buy this, fill in the blank, whatever the product is. You know, a bowling ball, a backing clinic can lift a bowling ball, I mean, that's the meaning of life.

You know, everything. And what Jesus is saying here is that he is the one who determines our future, our goals, our plans, our security, and even our spending.

Do you trust Jesus enough to do that? do you love Jesus more than anything or anyone else? I'm not asking you are you a member of the Anglican Church?

I'm not asking you whether you go to Bible study. I'm not asking you whether or not you arrange the flowers at church. I'm asking you, do you trust Jesus more than anything?

[23 : 49] Maybe you know the Christian message well. You pray regularly, you can memorize important Bible verses and it hasn't changed your priorities. It has an impact on the way you treat people, even the way that you treat God.

Or even the way that you day by day go about your business and even plan your life. How many of us here prayerfully considered our last purchase?

Okay, that might be a bit harsh. How many of us here prayerfully considered our last holiday? How many prayerfully considered a career change?

Because all of those decisions, I significantly consider and take into consideration the thoughts of and the words and wisdom of my lovely, dearest wife, Natalie, but if I considered Jesus to be the most important, wouldn't I be prayerfully considering those decisions with him as well? Wouldn't he have something to say about my spending, my leisure, my time? how many people have got an ache in their gut right now?

[25 : 19] When you realise what Jesus is calling us to as we walk along that road of discipleship to Jerusalem with him. Jesus wasn't fooled by the crowd who followed him around, who only followed him because of what they could get out of him.

He wasn't fooled then and he certainly isn't fooled now. What I'm calling us to do here is the very thing that Jesus called his disciples to do 2,000 years ago in clearing up their misconceptions of what it meant to be his disciple.

He called them to a life of radical discipleship. Actually, let me retract that. No, he didn't. He called them to a life of following him, the radical king.

That's the key. The key is not our life, but the king who we follow, the radical king. And what the radical king offers us, what the radical king offers us is an eternal banquet with him, the greatest thing you could ever possibly have or imagine, and he says, follow me.

Follow me all the way there, me the radical king. And when you stuff it up, as you will, keep looking to me, the radical substitute king who sacrificed in your behalf because you failed to follow me, the pace setter.

[26 : 49] So let us be a people who in the power and the comfort of the gospel, in the power of the indwelling spirit, with the great king Jesus before us, decide today, tomorrow, the next day, 10 years time, 30 years time, to get on that road, to stay on that road to Jerusalem, to get to Jerusalem, to pick up our cross, and to walk with him to the place of the skull, and there with him die to the old life, and with him rise to a new life.

Amen.