

Counting the Cost

Luke 14:25-35

You can't Priceline discipleship: Hotels.com® and Captain Obvious; Trivago®, or Priceline.com®; We like to get a good deal, don't we? We like to cut costs and save a buck. That's okay because that's how companies do business. Jesus talked about something like this in Luke 14:25-35 except He was not talking about saving money but counting the cost not cutting costs.

In this text, Jesus called those who want to follow Him to count the cost but He did not cut the cost of being His disciple He raised it. He wants us to understand that, while salvation is a free gift that Jesus paid in full it will still cost you everything to be His disciple.

Jesus words in this passage are not hard to understand, they are just hard to swallow. Have you ever eaten a piece of hard candy?¹ You don't just pop it in your mouth and begin eating it like it is a Reece's Peanut Butter Cup®. If you do that you will break a tooth. As a matter of fact, one time when I was younger I broke a tooth. The next week I was in the dentist's office getting a cap put on one of my molars.

When you eat hard candy, you have to put it in your mouth and you suck on it. You enjoy the flavor and eventually it gets smaller and smaller and as it does you are able to eat it. Jesus' hard sayings are kind of like eating a piece of hard candy. You have to read the text, think on it, mull it over, ponder it, and as you do you are able to digest it and apply it because you understand it.²

Let's make sure we don't chip a tooth on the hard sayings of Jesus this morning. Let's think about them, savor them, enjoy them, digest them, and let them nourish our hearts.

In Luke 14:25-35, Jesus basically makes application to the first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before Me* and the Great Commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength*.

Jesus knew He was talking to a crowd that loved their families, loved their own lives, and loved their money and possessions more than Him. When He had called people to follow Him they would say: *I need to go home and bury my parents, I have just gotten married and can't, and in Luke 18 we will hear how the rich young ruler let his money and possessions keep him from following Jesus*. Jesus knew the hearts of the people in the crowd that followed Him. They wanted to Priceline® discipleship but He was not going to allow that.

Notice how our text begins in v. 25, *"Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them" hate your family or you cannot be my disciple, prepare to be executed or you cannot be my disciple, renounce everything you own or you cannot be my disciple and be worth your salt as my disciple*.

They had to feel like they were biting on a hard piece of candy and breaking a tooth. So . . . before we get a mental cavity thinking about this text, let's work begin to understand what it means to count the cost of discipleship. Jesus said four things:

I. Jesus' disciples must hate their families in order to follow Him (v. 26)

The first thing I want you to see is that Jesus extends the call to *anyone*. He said, *If anyone comes to me*. This is a John 3:16 kind of statement, *"For God so loved the world that whoever believes."* The question is who is invited to follow Jesus? Answer: *Anyone! Whoever!* However, if you are going to come, you must count the cost of the free gift of salvation.

What Jesus says next is a *piece of hard teaching* that requires us to mull it over: *"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."*

This was Jesus strategy for making disciples. Have you ever thought about this being your disciple-making strategy? The Great Commission calls us to go and make disciples but do we ever say anything to anyone like this to anyone who wants to follow Jesus? Usually, we are nice and subtle and gentle but at some point, the hard teachings of Jesus must be addressed.

Let's savor Jesus' words. Jesus was not calling for unqualified hatred of our family members or our own lives. We need to put our text in context because the Scriptures are filled with passages that call us to love our families, our enemies, and our own lives.

- Jesus would not call us to break the fifth command to *honor our fathers and mothers (Exodus 20:12)* and then call us to hate them.
- He would not command *husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* in Ephesians 5:25 and then advise them to hate their spouses.

¹ I got the idea of this illustration from a sermon by Tim Keller; [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013) Logos.

² For Parents with small children: Parents the teaching this morning is very provocative. If you have children in this service, you will need to work with them to help them understand this passage. A helpful book is *A Family Worship Guide to Luke* by Geoff Gleason.

- Jesus loved little children and called them to come to Him and He blessed them and so He would not call parents to *hate* their kids.
- He would not call us to love our enemies and then *hate them*. After all, Jesus called us to *love our neighbors as we loved ourselves*. The fact is we cannot love others too much.

What did Jesus mean? Well . . . again, let's put the text in context. In Matthew 10:37, Jesus, Himself, qualifies what Jesus meant by the word "*hate*" when He said, "*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*" Jesus was not demanding unqualified *hatred* of family. He was calling us to think and realize that we must love Him more than we love our own families and even our own lives in order to be His disciple. There will be no other gods before Jesus. You must love Jesus with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jesus must be our ultimate loyalty. Our love for Christ is to be our dearest affection in the whole world. He must mean more to us than any relationship in the whole world--even family.

We live in a society that says *family first* but the Scriptures teach us that *family is second*. If we are not careful, we can make our family members an idol and therefore break the first commandment. If we are not careful, family worship becomes worship of the family.

Here is where life gets tricky as a disciple. Many people begin their Christian lives when they are single. Jesus is their ultimate loyalty. They are sold out and then they get married and have children. All of the sudden there are these new relationships that will compete for Jesus' affections. Marriage is good. Children are a blessing. However, if we make our spouses, our children, or even our parents the ultimate in our lives we are worshipping at the altar of family. If we will love Jesus more than we love our spouses, children, and parents, we will be the best husbands, wives, sons, daughters, and parents.

There will be times when the love of our families competes with our love for Jesus. It does it when we let our parents discourage us from making a more complete commitment to Christ. It does it when God calls us to move to where God wants us to go for the sake of the gospel and our families object. It does it when a marriage turns inward to serve self-interests instead of outward to serve others for the sake of the gospel. There is nothing more destructive in our lives than when our love for family members, mothers, fathers, children, and even ourselves turn inward. You cannot be Jesus' disciple if you love your family or yourself more than you love Him.

II. Jesus' disciples must prepare to be executed in order to follow Him (v. 27)

This is the second negative statement Jesus has made about being His disciple. If the first one did not get the crowds attention, then surely the second "*cannot*" did the job. Jesus said, "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*"

Think about being in the crowd when Jesus made this statement. They knew what it meant to *carry your cross*. They understood crucifixion. They knew it meant the death penalty. They knew it was shame and humiliation of the highest order. They knew it meant being flogged with a cat o' nine tails, carrying the rough, wooden, cross beam up the road in front of hundreds of people spitting on you, screaming at you and going all the way to Golgotha. They knew it meant enduring the most excruciating pain by being nailed to that wooden beam. They knew that the cross and crucifixion was reserved for traitors, criminals, and slaves. They knew when they saw a man carrying his cross that he was about to experience the worst of all possible deaths. They knew what it meant to carrying your cross meant but they did not understand that Jesus was going to die this kind of death although He had told them many times that this was the kind of death He would die. They did not know He was dying as their substitute, in their place on the cross in order to pay for their sins against God.

Here we learn Jesus' second disciple-making strategy: bear your own cross. But what does it mean for a disciple to carry his cross? Theologian and pastor, David Gooding said, "*A man carrying his own cross along the street of some ancient city was normally a condemned criminal or a defeated rebel sentenced to death, deprived of all rights and possessions, and on his way to execution. Everyone who claims forgiveness in Christ because Christ died as his substitute, thereby confesses himself as a sinner who has forfeited all his rights and everything except what the grace of Christ gives him.*"³

Dr. Norval Geldenhuys, in his commentary on Luke's Gospel, sheds some more light on what it means for a disciple to bear his own cross when he says, "*The general idea that these words of Jesus about 'bearing the cross' refer to passive submission to all kinds of afflictions, like disappointments, pain, sickness, and grief that come upon man in this life, is totally wrong. The people to*

³ Gooding is quoted from Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Reformed Expository Commentary, Volume 2: Chapters 13-24*, 92.

whom Jesus spoke those words fully realized that He meant . . . that whoever desires to follow Him must be willing to hate his own life and even to be crucified by the Roman authorities for the sake of [following Jesus].”⁴

You have probably heard someone say about some struggle or sacrifice or pain they are going through and they say, “Well . . . that’s just my cross to bear.” I am sure they are well meaning in saying this but this is not what *cross bearing* means. Dr. Geldenhuys helps us here again when he says that bearing our cross “means the acceptance of all sacrifice, suffering, persecution experience in the whole-hearted following of Jesus, and not just ordinary suffering.”⁵

Bearing your own cross means death to your old way of life. It means you must carry your cross every step of the way every day of your life until Jesus calls you home. It means you must step out of the crowd to follow Jesus and go where ever He leads you the entirety of your life. It means enduring any kind of persecution for the sake of Christ. It means you have given up rights to your own life just as Jesus did. It might mean you being disrespected at school or university. It means you might be disrespected or ostracized at work. It means you might be disowned by your immediate and extended family because you love Jesus and talk about Jesus. It means your pace is set, your goal is Heaven, your road is narrow, the way is rough, your companions may be few, your mission is clear but your Guide is reliable.⁶ It means we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ when we bear our own cross.⁷

There is one more thing we must consider as we think about bearing our own cross. We must consider the way Jesus carried His cross. Let me ask you a question, do you complain or gripe or have a pity party when you bear your own cross. Often, we complain or belly ached or have a pity party when we are bearing our cross. I am not saying we do not need counseling or encouragement when we bear our own crosses. However, instead of focusing on the pain and suffering we need to be meditating on the person and work of Christ who bore His cross by fighting sin every day in order to live a holy life for the glory of God and to earn our righteousness. He was despised, rejected, and considered crazy. He was poor, wretched, falsely accused, and falsely condemned. He was beaten, spit upon, and stripped naked. He dragged His cross to the place of execution. He was nailed to the cross and hung between two criminals. He hung there for six hours and was mocked, and stabbed and never once did He complain, gripe, or have a pity party. Instead He trusted in God and for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross scorning its shame. We should bear our crosses as Jesus bore His cross—with joy.

Have you ever had to bear your cross only to bear it by complaining, griping, and having a pity party? Not only have I done that but I have been called out by brothers who love me and my wife for doing that. Discipleship is costly BUT that does not give us freedom to complain about bearing our cross.

Elizabeth Freeman was a missionary to the Muslims in the nineteenth century. In her last letter home to her sister she wrote, “Should I be called to lay down my life, do not grieve, dear sister, that I came here, for most joyful will I die for him who laid down His for me.” Elizabeth Freeman was martyred by Muslims in 1857.⁸ May this be the way we carry our crosses.

III. Jesus’ disciples must count the cost of following Him (vv. 28-33)

In vv. 28-33, Jesus uses one more “cannot.” It is as if He scans the crowd and thinks, “Enough is enough. These people do not understand what it means for follow Me. They want to hold on to the world and Me too.” So, He says, “You cannot follow me unless you renounce all that you have.”

To explain what He meant, He told them two parables. The first one was a construction parable of a man who wanted to build a tower (vv. 28-30):

“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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

When we went to India last month, we went to the Taj Mahal. If you have ever seen pictures of the Taj Mahal you know it is solid white marble. It is an amazing building. What most people do not know is across the Yamuna River the king wanted to build a Black Taj Mahal for his own tomb. The problem was that he did not count the cost of building one more mausoleum. Before King Jahan could build the Black Taj Mahal, he was deposed by his son. The King had ruined the country financially in order to build the Taj Mahal and was going to build another one for himself but his son did not allow it. King Jahan did not count the cost of time and money.

⁴ Ibid, 93.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Adapted from the poem in Steven Lawson’s book *The Cost: What It Takes to Follow Jesus*, 126.

⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Reformed Expository Commentary, Volume 2: Chapters 13-24*, 92

⁸ Elizabeth Freeman, quoted in *The Voice of the Martyrs*, Sept. 2007, 11.

Jesus does not want us to make the same mistake. We must count the cost of following Him. Salvation is a free gift of God, but it is a gift that will cost us everything. It may cost family, friends, and even our own lives.

In the second parable Jesus calls us to not only count the cost of discipleship but to also count the cost of *non-discipleship* (vv. 31-32):

“Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

Verse 31 calls us to see things from the perspective of the weaker king who was about to be invaded. The weaker king was about to be crushed by the stronger king and he knew it so he must consider the cost of indecision. Indecision leads to certain death.

When we consider this parable, we need to see ourselves as the *weaker king* and Jesus as the *Superior King* who will crush us in the end if we do not follow Him. In Luke 20:18, Jesus said, *“Everyone who falls on that stone [meaning Himself] will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”* Jesus means that we must be broken over our own sin and seek peace with Him before the final judgment. If we do not seek peace before then, the full wrath of God is on us. *So, not only must we consider the cost of discipleship we must also consider the cost of non-discipleship.*

Jesus concluded His call to count the cost in v. 33, *“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”* Jesus calls for nothing less than total surrender of all that we are and all that we have. If we cannot do this then there is some other god before Jesus.

Jesus’ call for unqualified allegiance to Him does not mean you go and sell everything and live as a monk in the mountains. He was not saying it was wrong to have money and possessions. You need a job, you need to make money, you need clothes, a house, perhaps a car and other things. *He is not saying having these things are bad but He is saying when these things have you it is bad.*

Jesus is constantly prying our hearts away from the love of money and possessions. God has given us a means of grace to help us regularly pry our hearts away from dependence on and love of money—it is called tithing. Regular giving says to God all that I have is Yours. The part represents the whole. Giving a generous portion to the church is not so that your staff can get wealthy or we can build bigger buildings. It is so that kingdom work can be done. It is so missionaries can be sent locally and overseas. It is so churches can be planted and so we can help the poor. Regular giving is a means of grace whereby God regularly pries our hearts away from the love and dependence on money.

Here is the tricky thing about the love of money and possessions and renouncing all you have so that money and possessions is not your god. You don’t just do this once. When I began following Jesus I was broke. I was a poor college student with no money and then I began to make money. Then I learned the more I made the more I needed to tithe. It seemed the more I made the more God needed to pry my heart away from my love and dependence on money. Regular giving is a small means of taking up your cross daily.

Let me ask you, what are you clutching to that is keeping you from renouncing it all to follow Jesus? Perhaps it is a profession of faith in Jesus where you turn from your sins and trust Christ as your Lord and Savior. You know if you do this it might cost you family or friends. Yet, you must count the cost of following Jesus and also count the cost of not following Christ. It will be costly to not follow Christ.

Perhaps you are a Christian and Jesus is calling you to share your faith in Jesus with someone else and you believe you might be rejected or ostracized. You see the risk and you know it *might* be costly at work or in your neighborhood or your family. Remember it will be costly to not share your faith as well. There will be those who will not hear the gospel and that is costly.

Perhaps Jesus is calling you to follow Him by moving to a new place and begin a new gospel work and you are counting the cost. You realize it means leaving the ones you know and love. It means leaving the safety of friends and family to go to a new town or a new state or a new country. What will you have to renounce in order to follow Jesus? And . . . the cost of not going is that there will be people who will not hear the gospel because you didn’t go.

When we are counting the cost of following Jesus we need to remember that the Savior who call us to follow Him is the Savior who counted the cost of His own obedience to God. Jesus knew that obeying God meant that He would be born of a virgin and live a fully human life in the weakness of human flesh. He knew He would be rejected by His own. He knew He would suffer and die a God-forsaken death on the cross.

Long before Jesus ever went to the cross Jesus counted the cost and determined He would pay for our sins and purchase our righteousness. Jesus knew the cost was worth it and so He set His face toward Jerusalem and finished the work He came to do. Jesus rightly calls us to take up our cross and follow in the path that He has blazed. He calls us to follow Him.⁹

IV. Jesus' disciple must never quit because it is worth it (vv. 34-35)

Jesus concludes His call to count the cost of discipleship with the parable of the salt that loses its flavor. This parable does not mean you lose your salvation and then it can be regained. As Charles Spurgeon says, *"That doctrine of re-re-re-regeneration is one that have never found in the Word of God."*¹⁰

So, if you cannot lose your salvation and then regain it over and over, the question is what did Jesus mean by this parable? We need a little background to understand this parable.

In that time in that part of the world there was real salt, sodium chloride, and there was fake salt. The fake salt was a salty mineral mixed with gypsum. Sometimes it was an impure crystal derived from sea water. This fake salt looked like the real thing but when you tasted it you could tell it was not. It started out salty but over time it would lose its saltiness.¹¹

Brothers and sisters be genuine salt. Be worth your salt. Never stop following Jesus. Never stop loving Jesus more than you love anything or anyone. Never stop dying to yourself daily, taking up your cross, and following Christ. He is worth it and it is worth it.

We cannot Priceline® discipleship. There is no *"I'm looking for a sweet deal on discipleship"* online. True discipleship costs you everything. A true disciple who is committed to Jesus in regard to his or her family, cross-bearing, money, and possessions is a powerful weapon in the hands of King Jesus. A true disciple's life is salty in a bland world. A true disciple's salty life helps others taste and see that the Lord is good. But remember, being salty can be costly and if you are not salty you cannot be Jesus' disciple.

The Apostle Peter wrote to a suffering church whose saltiness was costly. He wrote to encourage and exhort them as they paid the cost of discipleship:

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:6-10)

⁹ I am grateful to Dr. Philip Graham Ryken for his gospel-centered application of this text.

¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/spe/luke-14.html>.

¹¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Reformed Expository Commentary, Volume 2: Chapters 13-24*, 92; also see Steven J. Lawson, *The Cost: What it Takes to Follow Jesus*, 104-105.