

Count the Cost

Luke 14:25-35

There's some debate today about the terms "Christian" and "disciple." Some people claim you can be a Christian without being a disciple. They believe (and teach) that you can be saved by believing that Jesus died for your sins and then you can walk away - for all practical purposes - and not follow Him. Never grow, never serve Him, never do anything or produce any fruit at all; and your salvation remains intact. But is that Scriptural? Is that what Jesus taught?

The Gospels record for us the life and ministry of Jesus while He was here on earth. When Jesus began His ministry did He seek converts or disciples? We know He chose twelve men to **follow** Him, to live their lives with Him, to learn to see the world through His eyes, to live life as He lived it. From the beginning of His ministry they were called disciples. Jesus never used the term Christian; that came later at Antioch, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. There's some indication it was given to the followers of Jesus as a derogatory term.

Now there's nothing wrong with the term, Christian, especially as we understand its original meaning: Christ-follower. But, through the centuries, the term has gathered negative connotations because some used the name for personal or political benefit rather than for the cause of Christ. So when I teach from the Scriptures on our international radio broadcasts I talk about being a Christ-follower and I avoid the word, Christian.

So then, if disciple is the more Scriptural term for followers of Jesus, what exactly does it mean to be a disciple? That's the question we want to answer as we continue our study in the Gospel of Luke. By God's grace and the aid of the Holy Spirit we'll answer this question by examining the words of Jesus in **Luke 14:25 to 35**. Listen carefully to these solemn words.

*In this text Jesus counsels His hearers to "Count the Cost" by assessing several **AREAS** of life relative to being His follower.*

Three times in this text Jesus makes the negative statement "...cannot be my disciple." The repetition reinforces the weight of His words! I believe the key verse in this section is verse 33, where Jesus says "*So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*" But let's look at the individual areas of assessment that Jesus demands.

The First AREA of Assessment is

Your Relationships

Notice the setting for this teaching; there were great multitudes following Jesus. It's likely these were pilgrims headed to Jerusalem for Passover; the direction Jesus was headed. So picture this: Jesus is walking and the crowd is following. All of a sudden, Jesus stops dead-in-His-tracks and turns completely around to face the multitude. That's the word-picture we get from the text. Whoa! That surely got the attention of the crowd. Imagine the crowd jostling each other as those farther back bumped into those who'd stopped so suddenly in front of them.

Why did Jesus do that? He needed to check the wild and unthinking enthusiasm of the crowds who followed just to be following. It seems there was a kind of "herd mentality" here. Jesus understood the need to separate the hangers-on, the curiosity seekers, and the loaves and fish crowd, from the true disciples. What He was about to share with them was a sobering reality-check.

Jesus outlined 2 areas of assessment with regard to relationships. The first one was; a willingness to surrender all family relationships in allegiance to Christ; and even one's physical life. The second one was related; public identification with Jesus in cross-bearing. Let's take time to look at these more carefully.

Jesus said *"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."*

Let's not stumble over the word "hate" that Jesus used; but let's not minimize it either. It is a strong word. Jesus cannot possibly be commanding us to hate father or mother in the sense that we bear malice and ill-will toward them. That would run contrary to Matthew 15:4 where Jesus reminded His hearers of God's command to honor father and mother. And Jesus Himself said that He fulfilled ALL the Law.

This same word appears in Romans 9:13 where we read *"...Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."* Did God hate Esau in the sense of bearing malice and ill-will toward him? No, that would fly in the face of God's love for all people. It is only in the realm of preference or choice that this distinction is made. God's heart yearned for Esau as a person and as a people. If you don't believe that read Jeremiah chapter 49. But in His sovereign will He chose Jacob and his descendants to be the people called by His (God's) name.

In Deuteronomy 7:7 God makes it clear that He did not choose Jacob and his descendants because they were so numerous or, I might add, so special. After all, Jacob was a conniving, thieving, con man! Yet God chose to break him and use him because of His covenant with Abraham. And God doesn't need to explain to us why He made that choice. One writer says Jesus is using "the hyperbole of antithesis." That is, our love for Christ should dwarf our love for family to such a degree that it will seem like hate. I think that expresses the thought well.

Some of you listening may have had a lot of affirmation when you made the decision to become a follower of Jesus. Your family and friends rejoiced in your decision. Others may have faced opposition and rejection. You were ridiculed and harassed. If that's your experience you have a better sense of what Jesus is teaching here. In Matthew chapter 10 Jesus told us that the Gospel would divide families.

And, I wonder...did Jesus specifically mention a wife because of the man who used his recent marriage as an excuse to avoid coming to the great banquet Jesus spoke about? The people who refused to come to the banquet were engaged in legitimate activities. The problem was they gave their activities priority over Jesus' invitation to be a part of His kingdom, His family.

One of the blessings of being a follower of Jesus is the realization that He does not ask us to do anything He's not willing to do! In Mark chapter 3 Jesus was teaching the crowds and His mother and brothers showed up. Evidently, because of the crowd they couldn't get close to Him. The crowd told Jesus "your mother and brothers are here." What did Jesus say? *"Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."* Was Jesus giving His family the cold shoulder? Not really, but He was showing that relationships formed through Him are stronger than blood lines.

As you and I assess the area of relationships we often find it difficult to give Jesus priority over family. For many of us, our families are precious; they are an integral part of our lives. I've been blessed and gratified to see many godly parents encourage their children to follow Jesus even though it meant moving to another community, or even another country. And by God's grace my wife and I have encouraged our children to follow Jesus wherever He leads.

Do these parents miss the regular interaction with their children and grandchildren? Of course! Do they have concerns about their physical safety? Some do; but they're committed to putting Jesus first in their lives and the lives of their children! They understand that relationships formed through the blood of Jesus are eternal; while biological relationships, as we experience

them now, last only for our lifetime.

Do your choices prove that you love Jesus more than your family? Are you willing to release them to Him for His service even if it costs them their lives?

And then Jesus brings us to the toughest assessment; a willingness to love Him more than our own lives. Every one of us has an elemental instinct of self-preservation; but Jesus says unless we're willing to yield that to Him, we can't be His disciple. Do I love Jesus more than my own life? Do you? This is a tough question for me to ask myself. It's a tough question for me to ask you. But we can't avoid it.

It's one thing to say "I love Jesus more than myself, even more than my own life." But what does that really look like in our daily choices? That leads us to Jesus' statement in verse 27. *"Whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."*

Have you ever heard anyone talk about a grouchy neighbor, or an ungrateful spouse, or a co-worker that=s a real pain, and then say, AI guess that=s just my cross to bear?@ Or maybe it=s illness or a physical limitation that=s referred to as a cross. Is that what Jesus is talking about?

No; and unfortunately, we have, in many ways trivialized the Cross; we've removed its rough edges. Modern day Christianity and the world have generally turned the cross into a nice piece of harmless jewelry, all shiny and pretty.

Jesus and His disciples lived under the Roman occupation of Israel. Their primary form of capital punishment was crucifixion. The people of Jesus= day had seen crosses by the hundreds and even thousands. And they hated the Romans for it.

The condemned were flogged almost to the point of death and then compelled to carry the crossbeam of their cross to the place of execution. That crossbeam could weigh anywhere between 75 to 125 pounds. Once at the crucifixion site, they were stripped completely naked and either tied by cords or nailed to the crossbeam. Artists have tried to protect our sensibilities and lessen the humiliation of the victim by adding clothing to their paintings.

Then the crossbeam was hoisted into place in a notch on the upright and secured. The victim=s feet could then be nailed, one on either side of the upright. The crosses held the victim=s feet just a few inches off the ground, not high in the air like we often see in pictures. This left him exposed to humiliation by those who passed by; to their mocking, their taunts, their spitting.

Death was slow, but usually came within 36 hours. The pain of infected wounds, the weight of the body compressing the lungs and dehydration all added to the torment. Often the bodies were left to decay and be devoured by scavengers. When Jesus mentioned the cross, **this is what the people saw in their minds. It was an instrument of the cruelest form of death. They knew that those who “bore” the cross never returned.** Jesus carried the cross for us.

As you assess the relationship between yourself and Jesus, are you truly one of His followers? Have you truly died to yourself? Do your choices primarily benefit you or others? Have you given Jesus the freedom by His Spirit to live His life through you? Do you realize that the path of suffering is what Jesus often uses to assess our level of discipleship?

One man who realized this was Adoniram Judson, pioneer missionary to Burma. Adoniram endured untold hardships trying to reach the lost for Christ. For 7 heartbreaking years he suffered hunger and privation. During this time he was thrown into Ava Prison, and for 17 months was subjected to incredible mistreatment. For the rest of his life he carried the ugly marks made by the chains and iron shackles which had cruelly bound him.

But he was a man who had embraced the cross of Christ and was willing to carry it. Upon his release he asked for permission to enter another province where he might resume preaching the Gospel. When the godless ruler heard his request he indignantly denied it, saying, “My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might SAY; but I fear they might be impressed by your SCARS and turn to your [God]!”

These are sobering, difficult questions for me to ask myself as I assess my relationships with respect to discipleship. I can too glibly say “sure, I’m a follower of Jesus.” But that’s from my perspective. What would others say? And most importantly, what would Jesus say if someone asked Him whether or not I’m one of His followers? What I say and what He knows may be two different things!

But as God’s Spirit searches my heart and knows my motives I believe He will find it’s my desire to be one of His followers whatever the cost. I hope that’s your desire too.

The Second AREA of Assessment is

Your Resources

One of the beauties of Jesus’ teaching is its simplicity. He used common illustrations His hearers could easily understand. He imbued the common events of life with spiritual meaning. A

tower was something the people were familiar with. They built them in vineyards, on city walls, for a place of refuge, or an ornamental part of a more elaborate building. So they could readily identify with the scenario Jesus proposed.

I've seen, and maybe you have too, a building that's been started and partially built; but years later it's still in that unfinished state. It becomes a monument to someone's lack of preparation. In our culture the person may be mocked or ridiculed for their failure, but eventually people forget about it and move on.

However, the culture of Jesus' day was based on the competing ideas of honor and shame. So this unfinished building would be a continual reminder of the shame of failing to plan wisely. And that shame was not just personal, but affected the entire group, family, or village. Jesus used this example to show the crowd it was very important that they assess their resources and count the cost before deciding to follow Him.

In the current practice of Christianity there is too little emphasis on this subject of counting the cost. People are told "just come to Jesus as you are and He will save you. Your sins will be forgiven and you will escape eternal punishment." That's certainly true, but it's not the whole truth. Salvation is given to us as a free gift when we acknowledge that the blood of Jesus is the only thing that can restore us to righteousness in the sight of God. When we acknowledge that reality and accept God's forgiveness we become one of His followers; a disciple.

But many converts, when they begin reading the Scripture and see what's required of disciples, say "nobody told me following Jesus was going to be this costly. I don't want to do this. I just wanted to escape Hell; I didn't want to give control of my life to someone else." Jesus was warning those in the crowds following Him to take time to think through the implications of being one of His disciples.

When Jesus gave His final instructions to the disciples He didn't tell them to make converts. He commanded them to make disciples. Part of the process of discipleship was baptism and the teaching of the all things Jesus commanded. This process of discipleship is the imperative of the Great Commission.

In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said "*Truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" To be converted means to change direction, to adopt another course of action. It's not accepting Jesus as Savior and going on your own merry way through life. Salvation is surrender! Becoming like little children speaks of trust

and imitation; children are imitators, followers; so are disciples.

Once again, the idea of a person accepting Jesus as Savior yet not being a disciple is an idea for which I find no basis in Scripture! Jesus said that one *“who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is not well-suited for the kingdom of heaven.”* My friend, an unfinished life is a much more tragic spectacle than a cement foundation without a building.

So then, whose resources are being assessed in this area of counting the cost? Being a disciple can only be accomplished with God’s resources. But you and I must be committed to appropriating and using those resources.

You see the plans for the Church that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit worked out in the eternal counsels of Heaven are much like the plans for a tower. They calculated the full cost of what it would take to build a structure that the gates of Hell could not destroy. Jesus knew full well what the cost of birthing the Church would be; it would cost Him everything. Not only would He need to stoop down and bear the image of the created, He would die a death reserved for the lowest criminals.

So He voluntarily waived His divine rights and became obedient even to the point of death...on a Roman cross. It was at that point of death that He cried out to His Father... *“IT IS FINISHED.”* The tower was complete; the resources were sufficient. And He calls you and me to understand and embrace the same way. There is no cheap or easy path to discipleship!

My friend, are you trying to be a follower of Jesus on your own resources? That will never work. You’ll get discouraged and give up. The language of discipleship Jesus uses throughout the Gospels reminds us the path is rugged even with all Heaven’s resources at our disposal. The only way you’re going to make it is to tap into those resources and commit yourself to finishing the course. Without that, Jesus said, you cannot be my disciple. It’s time to count the cost by assessing the resources you have in Christ and using them to the fullest.

The Final AREA of Assessment is

Your Strength

This section seems to be almost a separate parable but it is closely linked to the previous one. Here the story involves a king going to war against an aggressor. He takes counsel with himself and his advisors to see if the task is possible with the strength of his forces. A famous military strategist once said *“First weigh, then venture.”*

Look at the odds – 2 to 1. This isn't an easy decision to make. One must have a good grasp of the strength and mettle of his men to determine the outcome with this disadvantage. Otherwise, he will quickly send his ambassador to begin negotiations for peace.

As I think about this my mind goes back to the War of Independence in the United States. Great Britain was a world power whose armies and navy had been victorious in many parts of the world. Yet with all their might they could not crush the flickering flame of freedom that burned in the hearts of a ragtag band of militiamen. In fact, that ragtag bunch of farmers, woodsmen, lawyers, teachers, and others eventually sent the British packing.

How did they do it? They counted the cost! They had a cause that was, in their minds at least, worth dying for. It was that cause that gave them strength against overwhelming odds. They were willing to sacrifice their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to establish a land where freedom could flourish. And many of them suffered great personal, family, and financial loss because they were committed to the ideal of freedom.

And then consider the Twelve; the most unlikely group of men who, in the words of their enemies, “turned the world upside down.” Few of them would've been voted “most likely to succeed” by their classmates. Yet when they were filled with the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, they pressed forward against seemingly impossible odds.

Think of Peter, the denier of his Lord. When he embraced God's strength, through the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on his own strength, he became a powerful spokesman for God. His epistles reflect his view of suffering and his encouragement for Christ-followers to embrace the cross and the crown.

All of the apostles were insulted by the enemies of their Master. Tradition tells us Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia. Mark expired at Alexandria, after being cruelly dragged through the streets of that city. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in the classic land of Greece.

John was put in a cauldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner. He was afterward banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome upside down. James, the Greater, was beheaded at Jerusalem. James, the Less was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller's club.

Bartholomew was skinned alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, preaching to his persecutors until he died. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned and then beheaded.

Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica. Paul, after various tortures and persecutions, was finally beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero. All of them had counted the cost of discipleship and obtained a victor's crown!

Can you picture Jesus looking across the multitudes in our text and wondering how many of these would actually count the cost and go "all in" for Him? Would they join His army, consistently outnumbered by enemy forces, and fight to the finish? How many would quickly answer the call to discipleship without adequate reflection on the tremendous cost involved? How many would stand firm as the casualties mounted all around them? How many would stare death in the face and not blink in faithfulness to their commander?

Can you envision Jesus looking down the corridors of time and seeing your face in the crowd? Can you remember the moment you surrendered your life to Him; spirit, soul, and body? When you said "I'm yours Lord; use me as you will." Are you battered and perhaps bloodied from the battle; but still faithful, still moving forward, still storming the gates of Hell for your Commander-in-Chief?

My friend, Jesus is assembling an army. No, it's not an army like those of this world. Remember, He told Pilate "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.*" Jesus is building a heavenly kingdom, the Church of Jesus Christ; and the powers of Hell will not be able to overcome it!

You see, the source of our strength is not within us; it is in Christ. On our own we are no match for our enemies; the powers of the world, the powers of our flesh, and the powers of the devil. If we make the tragic mistake of attempting to be a disciple on our own strength it can only end in defeat, disillusionment, and death. Only as we realize our strength lies solely in His limitless resources will we be able to be victorious!

Jesus closes this text with these words; "*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.*"

At first glance, these words may seem disconnected from the words Jesus had just

spoken. But the context helps us understand them. I believe these words reinforce the concept of counting the cost of being a genuine disciple of Jesus.

As I said earlier, Jesus used examples the people easily understood. Evidently, the salt they were accustomed to using was not as pure as we have today. It could actually lose its effectiveness. When it did it was thrown out. In Matthew Jesus says it is “*trampled under the foot of men.*” Here, He says “*...it is not beneficial for the land or the manure pile, but men cast it out.*” It still looked like salt, but it had lost its inner characteristics that made it beneficial. Those who claim to be followers of Christ, but rely on their relationships, their resources, and their strength will ultimately be revealed as pretenders. They will not be willing to make the sacrifices Jesus demands of disciples.

Remember, large crowds were accompanying Jesus. They appeared to be following Him. But this whole text is Jesus’ warning to the crowd about the cost of becoming a genuine follower. So again He gives the warning of the ridicule, the destruction, and the rejection that awaits those who fail to properly count the cost.

My friend, what about you? As you assess the relationship between yourself and Jesus, are you truly one of His followers? Have you truly died to yourself? Do your choices primarily benefit you or others? Have you given Jesus the freedom by His Spirit to live His life through you? Are you allowing other relationships to keep you from full surrender to Jesus?

Are you trying to be a follower of Jesus on your own resources? That will never work. You’ll get discouraged and give up. The language of discipleship Jesus uses throughout the Gospels reminds us the path is rugged even with all Heaven’s resources at our disposal. The only way you’re going to make it is to tap into those resources and commit yourself to finishing the course. Without that, Jesus said, you cannot be my disciple. It’s time to count the cost by assessing the resources you have in Christ and using them to the fullest.

And finally, You and I must realize the source of our strength is not within us; it is in Christ. On our own we are no match for our enemies; the powers of the world, the powers of our flesh, and the powers of the devil. If we make the tragic mistake of attempting to be a disciple on our own strength it can only end in defeat, disillusionment, and death. Only as we realize our strength lies solely in His limitless resources will we be able to be victorious!

My friend, with Jesus, I urge you to count the cost. Jesus clearly stated the cost is great. But the promised rewards are even greater! Will you truly follow Him today and every day?

