

It seems we don't hear much about "cost counting" in the Church these days. Oh, there's plenty of talk about what Jesus can do *for you*, and much of contemporary evangelism takes this approach--"Are you struggling with your family relationships, with stress on the job, with a poor self-esteem, or with financial strains? If so, then come to Jesus. He will make things better *for you*."

It's amazing anyone would *not* want to "come to Jesus" with that kind of offer! Please don't misconstrue what I am saying. Does Jesus offer us abundant life? Absolutely. Does following Christ produce positive benefits in our family relationships, and in our ability to respond to stress on the job, and in dealing with personal feelings of despair? Certainly. But these are by-products. The question is this. Is a person truly a Christian who "comes to Christ" merely to get the by-products?

I find it interesting that the Bible reveals that in Jesus' day, there were people who came to Jesus for the *wrong* reasons. Many people did. He had crowds wherever He went. How did Jesus respond to the crowds of curious spectators? What kind of invitation did He give them? He told them to *count the cost*.

What does that mean? Counting the cost is what Peter Cameron Scott did. He was born in Glasgow in 1867 and became founder of the Africa Inland Mission (see Piper, 200). But following Jesus was no life of ease for Scott. His first trip to Africa ended in a severe attack of malaria that sent him home. He resolved to return after he recuperated, which he did, and took his brother, John, with him. Sadly, John was struck down by fever, and all alone, Peter buried his brother and in his grief, recommitted himself to preach the gospel in Africa. Yet once again his health gave way and he had to return to England.

How could he ever overcome the desolation of those days? How could he ever find strength to go back to Africa after all these setbacks? Scott went to Westminster Abbey and found the tomb of the great pioneer missionary to Africa, David Livingstone. He entered quietly and knelt in front of it to pray to his God. He read these words on the tomb inscription:

*OTHER SHEEP I HAVE WHICH ARE NOT OF THIS FOLD;
THEM ALSO I MUST BRING.*

He rose from his knees with a new hope. Scott did return to Africa. And the mission he founded is a vibrant, growing force for the gospel today in Africa. Peter Cameron Scott knew what it meant to count the cost.

Perhaps you're thinking, "That's a nice, motivational story, but Mr. Scott was an exception, wasn't he? We don't have to count the cost like that, do we? We aren't super-saints, so this cost counting doesn't apply to us, does it?" To answer that this morning, I'd like to take you to Jesus' words in Luke 14, as we continue in our series on "The Cost of Discipleship." In our four-week study, we are examining this topic from the perspective of selected texts from the gospel of Luke.

Proposition: We discover three shocking insights about counting the cost in Jesus' words in Luke 14:25-35.

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- I. Jesus gives us a shocking announcement (25-27).
 - A. If we don't hate, we're not His (26).
 - B. If we don't die, we're not a disciple (27).
 - 1. It involves a radical reorientation of our priorities.
 - 2. It involves a radical reorientation of our purpose.
- II. Jesus gives us a shocking analogy (28-35).
 - A. It's like building a tower (28-30).
 - 1. It's necessary to estimate the cost beforehand.
 - 2. It's a shame to start and not finish.
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 - 1. The time to calculate is before you go.
 - 2. After you go, there's no turning back.
 - C. It's like salt (34-35).
 - 1. God despises diluted Christianity.
 - 2. God discredits diluted Christianity.
- III. Jesus gives us a shocking application (33, 35b).
 - A. We must count the cost before we follow Christ.
 - 1. I must be willing to forsake self.
 - 2. I must be willing to follow Christ.
 - B. We must count the cost every day.

I. Jesus gives us a shocking announcement (25-27).

Back in chapter one, we learn that Luke wrote this biography of Jesus for a person named Theophilus. To put that into perspective, Luke lived a generation *after* Jesus did, and was a co-worker with the apostle Paul. When he penned this gospel, the Church was nearly three decades old, and it was thriving in its outreach in the Roman Empire. Many people were believing in Jesus, people who had never seen Jesus. What was Jesus like? Luke interviewed living eyewitnesses and reported his findings in this gospel.

By the time we come to Luke 14, we find Jesus in the midst of his three year public ministry. His popularity is increasing. So is the hostility against Him by the religious leaders. The cross is getting closer.

One sabbath He was invited to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, and the account of what happened is given in the first twenty-four verses of chapter 14. We are interested in what happened after He left the house.

Verse 25 states, "And there went great multitudes with Him." I am intrigued by Jesus' response to the crowds in Luke's gospel (see 8:4; 12:1; 18:36; 19:3, 7, 36; 23; 15, 48). As Jesus left the Pharisee's house that day, a huge crowd followed Him. But He was not impressed. He knew that the majority of them were not interested in spiritual things. Some wanted to see another miracle, others to get a free lunch, and a few hoped He would overthrow Rome.

Watch what Jesus did--verse 25, "And He turned, and said unto them." To that crowd, Jesus preached a sermon that deliberately thinned the ranks (Wiersbe, 231).

The NIV suggests an important observation when it says, "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus." The implication is that this was not the first sermon they'd heard Him preach. They'd seen His works and heard His words. They'd been exposed. Now it's decision time. It's one thing to be fascinated with Jesus, it's another to follow Jesus.

This is the case with some of you. You've been coming to this church for a while. You've been hearing the Word of God for six weeks, perhaps six months, or even six years. You kind of enjoy being associated with Jesus. But you're facing a decision--will you follow Him? It was to such people that Jesus made two shocking announcements.

A. If we don't hate, we're not His (26). Yes, you heard me correctly! Notice verse 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Wow! Those are strong words! "If any man come to Me"--okay so far, but there's a qualification for coming to Jesus. "AND hate not his father and mother..." Hold on! Did Jesus say *hate*? Yes. Didn't He teach His disciples to love? Yes (John 13:24). Isn't He contradicting Himself then? Absolutely not.

To hate, in this context, means to love less. The love a disciple has for Jesus must be so great that his love for family is hatred by comparison. The issue is loyalty. To be a disciple of Jesus, we must be unquestionably loyal to Him, even above our families, and especially above ourselves. If Jesus Christ is not our number one priority, then something's wrong.

Why is Jesus' language so severe? Why does He use such offensive terms? Because He wants to chase away those who are coming to Him for the wrong reasons, the uncommitted, the half-hearted. When Jesus said this, He was on His way to the cross, but the crowds with Him thought He was on His way to an empire (Barclay, 196). That's why He speaks like this.

Listen, if you love your spouse more than Christ, you are not a true disciple of Jesus. If you put your children, or your siblings, or even yourself before Christ, you cannot be Jesus' disciple. Are you refusing to follow Christ because your spouse won't? Have you refused to be baptized and live wholeheartedly for the Lord because you want to keep a family member happy? Jesus' words are sober. If we don't hate, we're not His.

B. If we don't die, we're not a disciple (27). What's that mean? Consider verse 27, "And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." To be a disciple, we must bear our cross, Jesus says. What is He saying? You may have heard devotional sermons spiritualize this passage to interpret the cross as everything from a cranky mother-in-law to a leaky roof to a 1957 Chevy (MacArthur, 201).

But that's not what it meant to Jesus' audience. They didn't think of long term difficulties, or burdens, or even of Calvary (for Jesus had not yet died!). What they thought of was death, specifically, death by execution. The cross was the cruel instrument of torture and death used by the Romans. When Jesus said they must bear their cross, it was clear He was calling them to die for Him. To be His follower meant that must make the ultimate sacrifice, and surrender to Him as Lord in every sense.

You say, "This is radical stuff!" It sure is. In fact, being a disciple of Jesus involves a radical reorientation of our lives in two areas.

1. *It involves a radical reorientation of our priorities.* That's the issue in verse 26--our priorities. The day we became disciples of Christ was the day we gave our allegiance to Him. Mom and Dad and kids and self take a different place in our priorities.

2. *It involves a radical reorientation of our purpose.* That's the issue in verse 27. A radical change occurs when we become Jesus' disciple. Before becoming His disciple, when choosing a job, we select the one we want; after becoming a disciple, we choose the one He wants. Before becoming a disciple, we spend our money however we want; afterwards, we seek to please Him. Before following Christ, we use our time as we see fit; but as His disciple, we invest our time for Him. A radical reorientation takes place when we become a disciple of Jesus.

Please listen carefully the next statement. I believe the Scriptures are clear that being a disciple of Jesus isn't some optional second phase of the Christian life. That is, the Bible doesn't teach we can "get saved" (become a Christian) and view being a disciple as something we'll consider later. Every true Christian *is* a disciple of Jesus. Jesus told us to go into the world and make disciples (Mt 28:18). In the book of Acts, the word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer*. A Christian is not a person who simply buys "fire insurance" by receiving Christ. A Christian is one who follows Christ, whose life has been radically reoriented by the Lord Jesus.

Would you ponder that truth? Has your life changed since you "got saved"? I don't mean did you give up a few habits, for a person can do that for mere personal or family reasons. Do you live with a new orientation now, that is, to please Christ? When your family invites you to a family-get-together on a Sunday which will necessitate missing church, do you ask the Lord what will please Him, or do you do what your family wants?

Once someone was talking to a great scholar about another person, and said, "So and so tells me that he was one of your students." The teacher answered with a solemn tone, "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." As William Barclay surmises (196), "It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples." Shocking insight #2...

II. Jesus gives us a shocking analogy (28-35).

In it, Jesus uses three illustrations to help us grasp what it means to count the cost.

A. It's like building a tower (28-30). (NIV) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"

For a couple of summers while I was in seminary, I did house painting. One of the hardest parts of painting happened before I ever picked up a brush or ladder. I had to make an estimate. I had to decide before I did the job how much it would cost me to finish the project. Jesus had a similar scenario in mind in this first illustration, from which we can make two observations.

1. *It's necessary to estimate the cost beforehand.* Afterwards is too late! Jesus probably has in mind a vineyard tower, a tower which was used to keep watch for thieves in harvest time. No good businessman would start a project without first counting the cost ahead of time. Why so? Observation #2...

2. *It's a shame to start and not finish.* As Jesus said, "Everyone who sees it will ridicule him." Certainly the name of Christ is ridiculed when we fail to count the cost.

Consider these words of application by John Stott (*Basic Christianity*, p. 108), "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers--the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so called 'nominal Christianity.' In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion." A second illustration.

B. It's like going to war (31-33). Here's how the LB puts it, "Or what king would ever dream of going to war without sitting down first with his counselors and discussing whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat the 20,000 men who are marching against him? If the decision is negative, then while the enemy troops are still far away, he will send a truce team to discuss terms of peace. So no one can become My disciple unless he first sits down and counts his blessings--and then renounces them all for Me!"

What's Jesus' point in telling this story? It's twofold.

1. *The time to calculate is before you go.* Eisenhower didn't wait to count his troops until they were confronting the enemy on the Normandy beaches, did he? The time for calculating is *before* the battle starts.

2. *After you go, there's no turning back.* So it is in the Christian life. Jesus doesn't say to us, "Why don't you follow Me for a couple of months and see if you like it. If not, you can resign and go back to your old way of living, no questions asked." Rather He says (33), "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

C. It's like salt (34-35). "Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its savor, with what shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill, but men cast it out. He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

Salt is good. Everyone in the first century knew that. Salt was used as a preservative, as a flavoring, and also on the land to make things grow.

From a chemist's viewpoint, it is impossible for salt (sodium chloride) to lose its taste, but the salt in use in first-century Israel was far from pure. As Leon Morris states (237), "It was quite possible for the sodium chloride to be leached out of the impure salt in common use so that what was left lacked the taste of salt. It was literally useless. It could not fertilize the land or even decompose usefully on the manure heap."

How is counting the cost in discipleship like salt? Jesus' analogy reveals two truths.

1. *God despises diluted Christianity.* Sadly, that's exactly what permeates the American Church--a watered-down, cultural Christianity that says, "What's the least I can do and still make it to heaven? Don't ask me to be radically committed to Christ. I'll add Christ to my life, but I don't want to be fanatic about it or anything." God despises that.

2. *God discredits diluted Christianity.* May I ask you a question? Is it possible to receive Christ without living for Him? Jesus said, "Anyone who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple (33)." Which brings us to a third shocking insight.

III. Jesus gives us a shocking application (33, 35b).

Jesus is talking to us, too, my friend, as His concluding words verify, "He who has ears to ear, let him hear." We are faced with two unmistakable implications.

A. We must count the cost before we follow Christ. You say, "I thought salvation was free." It is. We are saved through Christ alone, not by our own merit (Eph 2:8-9). Salvation is the gift of God. But did you realize that God grants two gifts in conversion? He gives us repentance *and* faith. Repentance isn't something we do for God, but something God enables us to do (Acts 11:18). He enables us to count the cost, leave a life of living for self, believe in Christ and live for Christ. That's God's gift.

But we can't take part of it, nor can we preach part of it. Here is what Paul said he preached as the gospel (Acts 20:21), "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

My friend, if you are pondering becoming a Christian, count the cost. The cost is nothing compared to the eternal gain, but there is cost. You ask, "What does it cost?" Jesus answered that question in verse 27. The cost is twofold.

1. *I must be willing to forsake self.* I must take up my cross and die to self. I must allow the Lord to produce a new orientation in the way I live.

Let me give you a specific example. Listen to the following: "Most men don't die of old age, they die of retirement. I read somewhere that half of the men retiring in the state of New York die within two years. Save your life and you'll lose it. Just like other drugs, other psychological addictions, retirement is a virulent disease, not a blessing."

These are the words of Ralph Winter, founder of the United States Center for World Mission. It is his passion to remind young and old alike that the only way to find life is to give it away. He calls retired Christians to quit throwing their lives away on the golf course when they could be giving themselves to the global cause of Christ. He calls students to invest their lives in missions instead of hoarding their lives for self-centered pursuits. To be a disciple I must be willing to forsake self. There's a second cost.

2. *I must be willing to follow Christ.* "Whoever does not bear his cross, and *come after Me* cannot be my disciple (27)." Are you following Christ? What does that mean?

I have been deeply challenged in the past two weeks in reading the book *Desiring God* by John Piper. In one section, he explores the question as to why God prospers many saints, and responds (169), "God does not prosper a man's business so he can move from a Ford to a Cadillac. God prospers a business so that thousands of unreached peoples can be reached with the gospel. He prospers a business so that twelve percent of the world's population can move a step back from the precipice of starvation."

Do those words unnerve us a little? You say, "Well, God has blessed us so we might as well enjoy it." Piper continues (172-3), "The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking a \$100,000 salary must be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. God has made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do."

What price are you willing to pay to follow Jesus? Following Jesus requires the willingness to make personal sacrifices every day. Like Hudson Taylor did.

In the biography of Hudson Taylor, we learn how this missionary to China was willing to endure personal hardship in order to make time for daily Bible meditation. His own children made this observation in the biography:

"It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayers and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A.M. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God."

Here's the second unmistakable implication of Jesus' words. Not only must we count the cost before we follow Christ, but...

B. We must count the cost every day. Jesus calls us to no less.

Response: Perhaps you're wondering how the crowd to which Jesus spoke these words responded. The fact is, we're not told. The silence is intentional for *we* are the answer. The issue is not what did *they* do with Jesus, but what will *we* do with Him. Will you count the cost today and choose to follow Jesus, no strings attached?

How do we make that decision. The following song will help guide us.

Hymn of Response: #369 "O Jesus, I Have Promised"

Let's bow our heads to reflect on Jesus' words. My friend, have you been trying to live a diluted brand of Christianity? Are you like an unfinished tower, a ruler who miscalculated the cost of the battle, a saltless Christian? The truth is there is no thing as a saltless Christian. It's an anomaly, a contradiction in terms, like hot snow and dry water.

Have you ever received God's gifts of repentance and faith, so that you turned from living for yourself in order to believe in and follow Jesus Christ? If not, will you right now count the cost and do so? You can become a disciple of Jesus this very moment!

For others, another question. Have you been living like a disciple of Jesus? If we retraced the steps of your past seven days, would we find the Lord leading the way? Will you count the cost today, and tell the Lord, "I will forsake myself and follow You wherever You lead me. Wherever."?

Time for Response in Prayer

Wendy comes now to sing a song which will help us as we continue to count the cost.

Ministry in Music: Wendy Pearson

We've learned this morning about counting the cost. But remember, what God requires, God enables. If you are thinking, "I can't be a Christian, I don't have what it takes," realize this. The Lord will enable you if you come to Him on His terms. Will you decide today to follow Jesus or to recommit yourself to following Him? If so, sing the following.

Song of Commitment: #376 "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"