

The Cost to Discipleship (Luke 14:25-35)



Jesus was now away from the Pharisees, and big crowds were gathering around Him again. This took place most likely around *Perea*, which was in Herod's jurisdiction. Jesus was getting closer and closer to Jerusalem, the place of His suffering and crucifixion. Can you imagine what might have been going through Jesus' mind?

A. Questions to Consider

1. *Why were large crowds following Jesus on His way to Jerusalem?* No doubt some needed healing, and some enjoyed the food Jesus multiplied. Some were excited by Jesus' ministry of miracles and profound teaching, and some must have been drawn to Jesus' clear and powerful stand amid corrupt religious leaders. And almost all Jews believed their Messiah would come to liberate them from the harsh Roman occupation and establish a mighty political empire and 'make Israel great again'. Everyone wanted a piece of this success. They all had an agenda which they hoped Jesus would soon fulfil for them.
2. *What was on the forefront of Jesus' mind looking at the crowd as He moved closer to Jerusalem to be crucified?* We need to notice that whenever Jesus was with a large crowd, He would say something very challenging and send many of them packing and heading back home. (c.f. 11:29; 12:1, 54) Jesus entertained no illusion about large numbers and He didn't care about retaining the crowd. On the other hand, He was very concerned about the crowd enthusiasm based on their faulty assumption about the Messiah.

Time and time again Jesus clearly laid down up front the costly terms of being His disciple in the strongest words. Jesus told every follower of His to sit down and carefully count the cost of following Him before they proceed any further. Jesus did not make room for anyone to follow Him out of faulty assumption, only to fall away later disappointed and disillusioned. He would much rather have one serious disciple who has carefully counted the cost and go all the way with Him, than to entertain a large crowd and have them follow Him out of superficial and selfish motives.

Do you remember the rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus? Did Jesus say, 'Welcome! Please, sign here and attend my regular service, and put some money in the offering basket now that you are a member?' No. Jesus told him to give away all his money which he trusted in, and then he could follow Jesus. The rich young man went away sad. Jesus didn't win him over by sweetening the deal.

3. *Why are you a Christian?* Did somebody promise you that if you follow Jesus you will be happier, richer, successful, and fulfilled? What if it costs something? Would you still be a Christian? What if you get persecuted, lose your job, or lose everything? Will you still follow Jesus? Have you ever counted the cost of truly following the Lord Jesus Christ?

If we never sit down to count the cost of following Jesus, and if we are not prepared to pay the price, then at some point in life when the quality of true disciple's heart is required of us, we will stop and not be able to move forward with the Lord. Jesus said insistently seven times in the gospels, '*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*' (14:35 c.f. 8:8) This is one of those occasions.

B. The Cost of Discipleship

Jesus spells out two major costs every disciple must seriously consider before committing to follow Him:

1. Earlier Jesus said, '*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*' (Matt 10:37) Here Jesus says, '*Whoever comes after Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters...cannot be My disciple.*' (v26)

Putting it in the negative form of 'hate' makes it a lot more emphatic.

- a. 'Hate' is not primarily an emotional word for malice or desire to hurt someone, but of making a definite choice. God said, '*Jacob I have loved, and Esau I have hated.*' (Mal 1:2-3) God chose Jacob for good but turned away from Esau. David said, '*Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? ... I hate them with perfect hatred.*' (Ps. 139:21-22) David meant, 'I will turn away from sinful association; I choose to totally disassociate from such people.' Rachel was 'loved' but Leah was 'hated'. (C.f. Gen 29:31,33; Deut 21:15) So 'hatred' is not absolute emotional word for harm, but a comparative word in terms of loyalty.

- b. If the claims of our nearest and dearest comes into a direct conflict with the claims of Jesus, then our attitude toward that claim must be 'I hate it.' We cannot let anything, or anyone come between the Lord and us. There can be no divided loyalty, no competition, no rival for the Lord. And often those nearest to us are the greatest foe to our walk with the Lord. When Peter assumed to help Jesus by getting between Jesus and the Father's will, Jesus turned around with a strong rebuke for Peter, *'Get thee behind Me Satan.'*
 - c. Jesus already said, when the kingdom of God comes it will divide the family along the line of their primary loyalty and affection. (Luke 12:49-53) The true disciple of Christ must be prepared to stand firm in such times of conflict. The Lord demands the first place in our affection, loyalty, and priorities. Our God is a jealous Lover! If Jesus is not the Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.
2. The next level of cost for a disciple of Jesus is to *'hate his own life (ΨΥΧΗ΄) also...or he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.'* (v26-27) Jesus already said to His disciples before starting the journey toward Jerusalem, *'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'* (Luke 9:23)
 - a. Jesus' teaching goes right against the spirit of our age which is all about 'pleasing myself.' I must choose for myself, give to myself, indulge myself, preserve myself, take the best possible deal for myself, etc. But there is nothing self-serving in following Jesus. Christ's disciples must deny this life driven by 'self-centredness' and follow Him on His way to the cross. Jesus is saying, 'I take up My cross, and you take up yours also and follow Me.'
 - b. Sometimes we think our 'cross' is an 'ingrown toenail' or our 'husbands and wives'. The cross doesn't give us inconveniences. It crucifies us dead. In Jesus' days, when a man took up a cross and went off with Roman soldiers, everyone knew he was on a one-way journey, and he wasn't coming back. Taking up my cross and following Jesus means self-denial where my ambitions, my job, my desires and aspirations become secondary to Christ's claim on my life, and Christ and His will and desires become my only priority, and He becomes my supreme delight, vision and ambition.
 - c. There are three different words for life in Greek, (1) Bios, the physical life; (2) ΨΥΧΗ΄ Psyche, the soulish life; (3) Zoe, God's divine life. It is the soulish self-life we must learn to hate, the 'self-centred', 'self-pleasing', and 'self-preserving' ego.
 3. These are the terms and conditions Jesus laid down if you and I want to become His disciples and follow Him all the way. We must clearly sort out our loyalties with our nearest and dearest; and then we must sort out our priorities in regard to our self-life and ego. Jesus said, *'unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.'* (Jn 12:25)

C. Counting the Cost

'For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it.' (v28) Jesus is saying, 'I want you to first sit down and count the cost before you commit yourself to Me.' Jesus tells us the cost involved *before* we make a decision to follow Him. It is like entering into a marriage commitment, 'for richer or poorer in sickness and in health...' We must not rush into marriage or get pushed into it. So, each Christian also ought to sit down and ask what it means to commit themselves to Jesus.

What will it cost you? Your cost will be different to mine, but it will cost us everything in the end.

1. Jesus gave two vivid examples, which were twin parables to drive the same point home.
 - I. *'Starting a Costly Building Project'* – Imagine you just bought a piece of land and you want to build once-in-a-lifetime dream house for your family. Who would start such a project without carefully working out how much it will cost them in total? It would be extremely irresponsible to start such project without counting the total cost from start to finish. And the higher we want to build, the deeper our foundation must be, and greater will be the cost!

Once Ps Paul saw a half-finished building in Thailand with no roof and rust eating away the exposed steel. He found out the owner didn't have enough money to finish the building, but when and if he gets more money, he will continue. Paul's reaction was, 'how irresponsible!'

Jesus warned, if we start building without the costings done, then we will run out of money and won't be able to finish the building and enjoy it. And it will bring us bitter disappointment and embarrassment.

- II. *'Entering into a Battle'* - Nobody starts a battle against their enemy without first carefully weighing up their military capabilities. It would be a disaster for us to engage in an all-out war with much more powerful enemy without first thoroughly analysing all our resources. It is the same with Christ's disciple. A disciple's life involves an all-out spiritual conflict with the enemy. The day we committed to Christ, we made an awful lot of enemies. Satan is not happy about our decision to follow Jesus. The Almighty God is on our side, but it doesn't mean we will skip and smile all the way to the gates of heaven.
2. Deciding to follow Christ is like undertaking the most serious building project of our lifetime, which will last into eternity. And it is like entering into the raging war of this age, that will mark us and make us for eternity. So, we better carefully count the cost. Am I prepared to start building the house and see it to completion? Am I ready to join the war and see it to the glorious end?
 - a) Salvation is free, but it is not cheap. It costs you nothing to begin the Christian life, but it will cost you everything to finish your race. So, Jesus warns each individual follower, *'So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciples.'* (v33) He repeats *'...he cannot be my disciple'* three times. (v26-27, 33) Each person who means to follow Jesus, must be prepared to bid farewell to all he knows and all he has on his journey of following Christ.
 - b) Much disappointment and disillusionment in the Christian life arise out of false expectation, especially those who enter fulltime ministry. It is disturbing that very few sits down to count the cost before they begin and prepare themselves to pay the price no matter what. Too many expect to have a fulfilling ministry career and easier life, and therefore cannot endure because they are spiritually and mentally unprepared. Unrealistic expectations always result in disillusionment and hurt. Only when we have counted the cost and have a clear picture of a true follower of Christ, we can be successful as His disciples to the end.

D. Why Count the Cost?

1. Why does Jesus want His disciples to count the cost upfront? Because He wants disciples of quality, not just quantity. Jesus only wants 'salty disciples.' The greater the *cost* of your discipleship, the greater the *quality* of your discipleship. If following Christ has cost us nothing, then quality of our discipleship is likely to be poor. But if following Christ cost us something – in our relationships, time, money, and priorities, etc - then it will produce 'quality disciples' in us.
2. Salt in those days was an impure mixture of sand and salt, most likely scraped up from the Dead Sea. They were not the pure grade *'Sodium Chloride'* like our table salt. So, if the salt mixture were left exposed and unprotected from the outside moisture or rain, the salt content would slowly leach out, leaving behind only the white sand. So also, we can lose the potency of Christ's life within us if we do not give adequate protection and nurture to our spiritual life. The gradual influence of this world or the sudden storms of life can leach out the life of God from us and wash away our 'saltiness'.
3. Jesus said salt is good. What qualities of salt was Jesus referring to? (a) 'Seasoning' – it brings out flavour in food; (b) 'Fertiliser' - Salt mixture in those days enriched the soil for fruit trees; (c) 'Disinfectant' - it was sprinkled over hands and over waste material to cleanse. Just one true disciple actively following the Lord would function as salt in this world than a whole lot who have no 'salt' content in them. 'Sandy Christians' will be of no use and so be discarded, just as people threw away the salt which was no longer salty.
4. When is a Christian in mortal danger? Not when he is going through a difficult time, but when he discards his cross along the way as an unnecessary chore, and when he counts his cross as his enemy. Such a Christian will fall away from Christ for any reason and for any difficulty in life.

Wiersbe sees the twin parables of Jesus in the passage this way: the builder and the king is Jesus. Jesus is building His church and He needs to have the material He can count on. Jesus is fighting His battle and must have the soldiers He can count on. Are we the kind of trustworthy disciples with whom He can build His church and fight His battle?