

Count the Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-33 (NIV)

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' ³¹ "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Many are invited to the heavenly banquet feast in the kingdom of God. In fact, everyone is invited by God. Some, though, pile up excuses not to go to this feast, excuses such as "I just bought a field," "I just bought five yoke of oxen and I want to try them out," "I just got married." These people with their lame excuses will not get a taste of God's banquet in heaven. Jesus finished this lesson and moved on.

Apparently some of the people listening to Jesus got the message because large crowds were now traveling with him. They didn't want to be excluded from this feast. But maybe there were other reasons for following Jesus. Maybe some of them were traveling with him because they wanted to see one of these miracles that they had heard so much about. Maybe some of them were following Jesus because there were rumors floating around that if you follow Jesus, life will be easier. Maybe some of them were traveling with Jesus simply because that was what their friends were doing.

We don't know what was in the heart of these large crowds traveling with Jesus, but he did. He could read their hearts, which led him to say, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (verses 26-27) You want to make it to that banquet I invited you to, then realize that there is going to be a personal cost to you.

Cost? To a banquet I was invited to? No, Jesus didn't mean that there was an entrance fee, like some exclusive club. It's kind of like the cost associated with going to a wedding reception. The meal is paid for. You don't pay for the dresses, the flowers, the venue, the bulletins, or any of that. That's all covered. You are just invited. But to go to the wedding, you pay the gas to drive there. You pay for the appropriate attire that you're going to wear. You spent the money to get the happy couple a gift. And you spend your time going, getting ready, shopping, and then attending the wedding reception. Now, you don't usually think of these things as being a cost to go to a wedding reception because I assume you are just so happy for this couple and you want to share in their joy, see it in person without thinking of the cost to get there.

Similarly, there is a cost to following Jesus. It's not the cost of the banquet. There is no entrance fee that you have to pay. In other parts of the Bible, God tells us that he has even bought the special attire for us, a robe of righteousness bought with Christ's perfect life and innocent death. There's no cost to you for the invitation, but there is a cost in your life on earth in traveling to that banquet in the kingdom of God.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." (verse 26) Now when the people of Jesus' day heard the word "hate," they understood it differently than we do. Jesus is not telling us that we have to be mean and awful and cruel and despise our family in order to love him and follow him. No, this was a Hebrew way of saying, "If you give preferential treatment, if your parents, your spouse, your kids, you family, or even you yourself come first ahead of God, you cannot be my disciple." If your family gets in the way between you and God, God has to come first if you want to follow him. Following Jesus can cost you your family and even your sense of self.

God and your family are not mutually exclusive, though, as if your family will always be enemies to God that you have to fight against. For many people, this Christian life is lived with the whole family. The whole family can live with this priority that God comes first, even ahead of each other. But you and I know that not every family works that way. One spouse comes to church; the other does not. One spouse believes in Jesus as their Savior from sin; the other does not. Godly parents raise their children in the church, but when they are old enough to leave and be out on their own, their Christian life is left behind as well like a box of toys stored in

the attic. Parents brought you up in a different belief system, not a Christian one, and now you have broken away by becoming a Christian. Lines are drawn. They warn you. They threaten you. They express their disappointment in you. The family is divided. If you have family gatherings, they are never the same because you have chosen to follow Jesus. That's the cost he is talking about.

What do you think Terah, the father of Abram, said when Abram told him that the LORD spoke to him and that he was going to leave his homeland, leave his brothers and sisters, leave his father and mother, and go someplace that he didn't even know yet? Terah had already lost one of his three sons. Now another one will leave because he heard a voice, saw a vision? Even setting his father aside, what about Abram? Did he even want to leave his family? Did he want to stay and take care of his father and stay with his people in familiar surroundings? Regardless of what Abram wanted, he "hated" his own life. He gave preference to following God rather than pursuing what he wanted. This was the cost that Abram paid to follow the LORD. Can you pay the cost of family and self in order to follow Jesus?

"Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (verse 27) We hear this expression and we understand that this means suffering on account of following Jesus. We see the cross as the place where he sacrificed his life so that the wrath over our sins was now satisfied as God the Father punished the innocent Jesus, God the Son, with death. But we see this as we reflect on a historical event. These large crowds had not seen Jesus do this yet. What did they picture as they heard Jesus tell them to "carry their cross"?

The cross is an instrument of capital punishment, reserved for the worst offenders. Jesus was telling them to take up an instrument of death, that following him is ultimately a death march. You will suffer, you will sacrifice yourself, you will die to your self, your family, in order to follow him. That's the cost. Can you pay that cost of a life of suffering, of self-sacrifice, of eventual death for following Jesus?

There is only one way to answer "yes" to the question. It's not found in your abilities, in your resolve, in your resources, like the one building the tower or the king going to war. You can answer, "Yes," to paying the cost of being Jesus' disciple only when you focus on the one who paid the highest cost in order to give you the invitation to follow him, the invitation to the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God. This is what the Apostle Paul understood. He said, "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." (Philippians 3:8-9) Everything else in life is no comparison to being invited and attending Jesus' banquet in the kingdom of God. He paid the cost to get you there. He carried a cross for you. He put his devotion to God ahead of his family – his mother, father, brothers, sisters, and, yes, even his own life. He gave up everything so that we would have everything. He paid the ultimate cost.

When you see what Jesus has paid in order to invite you to the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God, you react the same way as a person who gets that invitation to the wedding reception of that couple that you love. You want to go. You make the time to go. You get ready. You buy the gift. You do these things and pay those costs not to earn the invitation or the right to go to the reception, but you pay those costs because you love this couple and want to celebrate with them. You pay the cost to make it there because it is such a joyous occasion.

The cost we pay in following Jesus and being his disciple is not the entry fee to his banquet in the kingdom of God; it's a labor of love, that I love God more than my family, more than myself. I love God more than I love my easy-going life, a life I think I can have without following God, without being his disciple. Although I cannot pay this cost on my own, knowing what Jesus had done for me, how he paid the cost of my sins, this makes me want to go and pay the cost of living as one of his disciples here on earth. Thank you, Lord, for paying the price for my invitation to your heavenly banquet. Now help me pay the cost of following you there, to live my life with you coming first above my family, my friends, and even myself. As I suffer and sacrifice in following you and being your disciple, remind me that you gave up everything so that I can enjoy that heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God with you. Amen.