

Luke 14/25-35: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

What enjoyments/achievements in life have a cost attached to them?

Do not most things that are really worth anything have a price attached – a grade, a qualification, a job, a successful career, the acquisition of wealth, a stable family, lasting friendships, a great holiday, etc?

What/where has been your greatest achievement/influence – and was there a price to pay for that?

What happens in life to those not prepared to pay a price – or who kick out halfway because it costs too much?

Conversely, we can think of people who've really succeeded in something – by paying a huge price to get there.

Introduction

Yet 'in this age of easy living', people want a religion without cost, one that will not require any (or too much) sacrifice or change from them. Comfort, convenience, pampering, indulgence, anything goes, easy come easy go, are all values and pursuits of our age; sacrifice, service and self-denial have fallen on hard times.

Sadly, the church in many places has followed the trend, preaching and living a gospel without cost. Sometimes it has been unconsciously influenced by the spirit of the age; sometimes it has deliberately diluted the Christian message and life to be more attractive and less offensive to people in and outside the church.

The biblical witness is different. If even in life things of value have a cost, how much more things of eternity? Obviously we are not talking about a cost in attaining salvation but in living out our salvation (life and service).

1. One fact: There is a cost to following Jesus (v25)

Luke has noted the crowds following first John and then Jesus from the beginning of his Gospel. Neither of them were ever fooled/seduced by mere numbers of followers, however, or ever shied away from challenging the crowd in order to maintain numbers. They knew ten true followers were worth infinitely more than a hundred or even a thousand 'groupies'. It is not that they wanted to stop people following them, but they wanted to discourage seeming v actual followership; they wanted to prevent people from presuming and assuming they were disciples when actually they were not; they wanted to discourage people from having a superficial view of followership, one in which there was no cost involved or no change of heart and life required. John had done this in 3/7-9, Jesus in 8/4-8. Here Jesus again makes it clear to the crowd of would-be followers that there is a cost involved if they want to (truly) follow him. The fact that he seldom addressed the crowd (even when they were present he often addressed his disciples) makes these words even more remarkable

2. Two analogies: Count the cost before you commit (v28-32)

Jesus gives two analogies – a man building a tower, a king going to war – each designed to demonstrate that in spiritual life, as in daily affairs, we should deliberately and carefully 'count' (calculate and weigh-up) the cost of something to see if we are able and willing to meet it before we commit to it. If we don't, at the very least, we expose ourselves to ridicule (v29); at worst, we may suffer severe loss (v32).

"In the same way" (v33a), just like this man and this king, "any of you who" want to be my disciple need to count the cost of following me before you commit, to see if you are able and willing to meet it.

P.S. A warning if we don't (v34-35) [The man unable to complete his tower, and the king who engages in a battle he cannot win, parallel salt losing its saltiness, so you could deal with v34-35 here, rather than at the end.]

The sober warning of the final two verses underline the importance of first counting the cost. "Salt is good": this recalls Matthew 5/13, where Jesus calls his disciples "the salt of the earth". (The rest of Mw 5/13 is almost a repeat of these verses.) It is good to be a disciple, to be salt. But if salt loses its saltiness (this suggests a disciple who falls away or, at the very least, who turns back from counting the cost: cf. 9/62), it cannot (so the text infers) be made salty again. Fit neither for the soil nor even the manure heap, it can only be thrown out. (Mw: "It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.") Jesus does not want people to become disciples superficially, without realizing there is a cost involved and first weighing-up whether they are willing and able to pay it. This will mean almost inevitably their falling away or shrinking back when the cost becomes apparent and the time comes to pay the price. Then, having lost their saltiness, it will be almost impossible to make them salty again – they will be 'useless' to ("not fit for service in") the kingdom. Hence his impassioned address to the crowds (then and now) about first counting the cost of discipleship before becoming disciples – and his closing (as he often did when communicating something of special urgency) with the plea, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (cf. 8/8).

3. Three requirements: The cost of true discipleship (v26-27,33)

(i) *We must love Jesus more than anyone else (including our families) and even more than our own life (v26)*
Luke states this in the form of a hyperbole (over-statement/exaggeration). Like all figures of speech, this is a figurative not literal use of language, designed to heighten impact and meaning: compared to our love for him, our love for others (even our 'nearest and dearest') is to look like 'hate'. Matthew gives the more literal rendering of what Jesus means: "Anyone who loves his father or mother *more than* me is not worthy of me." (Mw 10/37). Similarly, we are to 'hate' our own life, i.e. love Jesus more than we love our own life. This requirement suggests the probability that we will sometimes have to lay down some aspect of our life as we follow Jesus (e.g. our comfort and ease, our reputation, our priorities and plans) –and possibly even our life itself (Re 12/11).

(ii) *We must carry our cross and follow him (v27)*

Jesus carried a cross. So to follow him, i.e. to imitate him and to go where he has gone, will require us to carry a cross too. But not Jesus' cross, or just 'a' (any) cross, but *our* cross ("anyone who does not carry *his* cross"). Jesus does not say we might have a cross; he assumes we will (cf. Jn 15/18-20, 2 Ti 3/12). Again, this could be figurative: we must walk the road that sometimes will involve self-denial and opposition – possibly disgrace (He 6/6) and shame (He 12/2). But it might be literal: we must be prepared to suffer and die (albeit not – as it was for the first generations of Christians – by crucifixion).

(iii) *We must give up everything we have (v33)*

Most obviously, this refers to material possessions (Jesus later applied this requirement in this literal way to the rich ruler: 18/22). But 'everything' means everything, so it also encompasses all non-material things like our relationships (family, friends, etc), education, careers, leisure, dreams, desires, plans, priorities, affections, loyalties, reputation and comfort.

We must give up (renounce) everything we have – not be willing to give it up but actually give it up. Even though many of us have found that Jesus allows us to keep some (or even most) of what we give him – for our sustenance, blessing and to sow into the kingdom – nevertheless we have given it to him, it now belongs to him, and he can call on any or all of it anytime he chooses.

Summary(i+ii+iii) Jesus wants to be the first in our hearts (by far), he wants us to be willing to endure hardship and suffering for him and with him, and he wants us to give up every rival claimant to our lives.

N.B. Jesus concludes all three requirements with "anyone who does not...cannot be my disciple"

Jesus is quite clear and uncompromising about this. If we do not meet these requirements, we "cannot" be his disciple. He doesn't say 'might not be', or 'may not be able to be', or 'will find it difficult to be'. It's black and white: we either are willing or we are not; we either do or we don't; we either can be or cannot be a disciple

Conclusion

Consider the enormous price some have paid for money/power/fame or their ideology/religion. How can we be content to pay anything less – when our God and his salvation are true, righteous, eternal and glorious!

Men are looking for something they can give their lives to, something worth paying a price for – something worth living for and worth dying for. Jesus is all of that!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*: "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross."

For the believer: let us recognize and embrace the cost of following Jesus – and so follow him in a new way.

Not just count the cost but *rejoice* in the cost: "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." (Ac 5/41)

For the unbeliever: as you come to Jesus, recognize and count the cost to following him, and then commit.

He's worth it! And the reward – in this life and the next – far outweighs the cost (Lk 18/28-29).

Some additional thoughts from The Bible Speaks Today commentary (The Message of Luke, Michael Wilcock, p147f)

Jesus was 'calling not for spectators but for recruits'. When he called men to follow him, he meant them not to tag along behind him out of curiosity, but to throw in their lot with him in commitment.

'To love this and to hate that' is a typical biblical way to express preference: 'to love this rather than that' [e.g. Jacob /Esau]. Love for parents is to be so far surpassed by love for him that it will seem in comparison like hatred.

Total commitment means that there is no space to squeeze through "the narrow door" into the kingdom if we are cluttered with reservations and provisos, with ifs and buts [with all manner of possessions and priorities].

It is no use hoping for another chance, or for a less uncomfortable stripping, or for a less total yielding. You can only be a disciple if you discard all sloth, all pretensions, all reservations. That is what it means to be a disciple. That is the distinctive saltiness of the salt, the thing that makes it what it is, the discipleship which characterizes the disciples of Jesus. The time is *now*; the person is *you*; the demand is *everything*.

Jesus speaks about the cost of discipleship 3 times in Luke: to his disciples (9/23-27), seekers (9/57-62) and the crowd (14/25-35). I include sketch notes on all 3 passages below for those who want to touch on the other 2. See also: 12/8-9, 12/51-53, 17/33; and the reaction to 'the cost' of the rich ruler (18/22) vs Zacchaeus (19/8).

9/23-27 (disciples)

- v23 **If anyone would come after me...follow me** – look where I'm going: "suffer...rejected...killed"! (v22)
he must deny himself – what I want/think; self-denial, the exact opposite of this age's doctrine
and take up his cross – hardship, humiliation, death; die to himself ("When Jesus calls a man..." Bonh);
- v24 **save his life** – for himself, from cost/denial/sacrifice/suffering/discomfort/inconvenience/loss
will lose it – even in this life plans can come to nought, and in next judgement (what good is it...: v25)
loses his life – gives/sacrifices – surrenders lordship/ownership/mastery of – whole life and possessions
for me – Jesus, not for any other god/cause (however sincere or sentimental), or because of stupidity
will save it – salvation + rewards
- v25 **gain the whole world** – wealth, power, fame, pleasure, etc
lose or forfeit his very self – loss of true personality in this life, loss of personhood in next
- v26 don't be ashamed of Jesus (his person/claims) *or* his words (his teachings/truths)
cf. Lk 12/8f: acknowledges v disowns; Ro 1/16: I am not ashamed of the gospel
cost not just personal but public: have to nail our colours to the mast, no matter what the consequences
- v27 reference to consummation of K (v26) stirs mention of inauguration (v27): i.e. critical separation point
not so far away; indeed, foreshadowed just 8 days later in transfiguration! (v28-36)
Jesus telling them that his future (v22, because he is the Christ:20) will be theirs too: first lesson in discipleship
Cost is personal (give up everything to God) and public (lived before men)
Cost is radical/total, repeated (v24: **daily**), little and large, permanent (by definition)
Beware Christ/Christianity/commitment without cost (Bonhoeffer); part of gospel and gospel communication
My story: school, career/wealth, university/security, denomination/family, military/reputation, SA/Ldn
v army
Sundar Singh's story

9/57-62 (seekers)

- v57 Jesus corrects (as we should) superficial would-be followership and wrong expectations (supe/sent/self)
- v58 Not literally true: no settled (owned, secure) home on this earth; earthly lot 'worse' than animals.
v Comfort & Convenience
- v59 This time (cf. v57) Jesus calls – and a typically 'reasonable' excuse
- v60 Again, not literal: let earthly people be busy with earthly things but kingdom people with kingdom thing
v Customs & Culture
- v61 Another 'reasonable' request; again(always) something to be done **first** – can't follow Jesus till he's first
- v62 If he's not 1st, there will always be other things we want to do 1st (not only at the beg)(cf. Mk1/17-20, 2/14
v Family & Friends)
- Fit for service in the kingdom of God? Count cost, pay price, then **resolutely set out** (v51) without looking back

14/25-35 (crowd)

- v25 Again, Jesus doesn't play to the crowd; if anything, he tries to discourage (sober) them
- v26 Not lit, but fig (hyperbole): loves them more than me (cf. Mw 10/37; Lk 12/51ff: division not peace)
We are to hate (love Jesus more than even) our own lives (cf. 9/24[lose v save]; 17/33[keep], Re 12/11b)
- v27 cf. 9/23: what's stated positively there (if anyone would...he must), here stated negatively (anyone who does not...cannot be)
- v28-32 Two parables teaching need to count cost before decide (presume) to follow Jesus
That's why counting the cost should form part of our gospel presentation
Failure to count cost results in apostasy/ridicule (from men/demons) and defeat/destruction (in life/judge)
- v33 What is that cost? To love Jesus more than even our nearest & dearest and our own lives (v26), to carry our cross (v27), and to give up everything we have (v33; cf. 18/11 [RYR: Sell everything you have]).
- v34 Those who turn back are like salt that loses its saltiness, fit only to be thrown out!
The importance of recognizing & embracing the cost of discipleship: **He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**

