

Counting the Cost

Introduction

The Text

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

³⁴ “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ 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.” (Luke 14:25–35)

My Apologies

- A. I should apologize in advance: My goal with this sermon is to make us a bit uncomfortable this morning. Let me be a bit clearer here: I am sorry for not being sorry that my goal with this sermon is to make us a bit uncomfortable this morning. Are you with me?
- B. I’m not sorry because I believe that Jesus’ goal in the text we just read is to do just this. Great crowds are gathering about Him, and He turns to them and says: “Hate your closest of kin, take up your cross, renounce all that you have . . . if you want to run with Me.”
 - 1. Now let me ask you: How do you think that made the crowds feel? How do you think that message went over? Do you think He lost a few fans? Do you think He got a few more of those angry faces on His Facebook feed? Do you think there may have been some people in the audience a bit uncomfortable with the sermon?
 - a. Surely there were. But you see, Jesus is not interested in pandering to us. His aim is to save us—from the wrath of God, certainly—but also from ourselves. And I want the same for us as well.
- C. Listen to me: Just this last week, right here in our city, there was an event headlined by a number of prominent prosperity gospel preachers—a conference held for all who like a good tickling of the ear. And the people came out in droves.
 - 1. “Tell me that Jesus died to make me healthy and wealthy here and now. That’s my kind of gospel! God put His Son on the cross so He could put dollar bills in my hand. Preach it pastor!”

- D. Three out of four of the largest megachurches in America preach this kind of nonsense. Do you want the masses to follow you? The strategy is remarkably simple: Tell them what they want to hear.
1. But there's only one problem with this: What we want to hear and what we so desperately need to hear are often two different things—not to mention the fact that what these people are telling folks runs precisely counter to what Jesus Himself has so clearly said.
- E. Interestingly, an article recently ran in the Financial Times and, in it, the US national editor for the publication is trying to make sense of this so-called prosperity gospel. In the article, he quotes one of these prominent prosperity preachers, Paula White, as saying: *“Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is Satan.”* Couldn't be God saying that!
1. Al Mohler, the President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote in response: *“Someone needs to tell Paula that Jesus actually said that we should deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him. If you get Jesus confused with Satan, you have made an eternally fatal error.”*
- F. Well, brothers and sisters, one of the places in Scripture where Jesus actually says this is the text we have before us this morning.
1. I am aware that these words come at us harshly. But I am also aware that, if we would stick with Jesus here, and hear Him out, we will find life hidden in these verses.
 - a. Jesus' end goal isn't to leave us uncomfortable. He doesn't stir up controversy for controversy's sake. He has your salvation, your life, your joy in view!
- G. Do I have your attention yet? I hope I do. So let's dive in! I'll organize my thoughts for this morning under three headings: (1) The Cost; (2) The Calculation; and (3) The Commission.

(1) The Cost

You Cannot Be My Disciple

- A. There can be no doubt that Jesus is first in our text this morning concerned to make plain what is required of us if we are, indeed, truly desiring to be one of His disciples. It is this matter of discipleship that is clearly accented in His discussion here.
- B. The idea shows up three times in particular, and always with a more a negative bent. He is describing things that if we are not willing to do we shall find we are not able to be His disciples.
1. If you won't do this, you *“cannot be my disciple”* (v. 26).
 2. If you won't do that, you *“cannot be my disciple”* (v. 27).
 3. If you won't do the other, you *“cannot be my disciple”* (v. 33).

- a. He wants to make sure that it is crystal clear to us what it means to be His disciple, and, even more, what it will, in fact, cost us if we should endeavor to be so.
- C. The context at this point, though I've already alluded briefly to it, is illuminating. We must not miss that little detail that Luke notes for us there at the beginning: "Now great crowds accompanied him . . ." (v. 25a). It is to these great crowds that Jesus addresses these hard words about the cost of discipleship.
 - 1. Jesus is well aware that there is quite a big difference between merely accompanying Him and truly following Him, between being one of His fans, and being one of His disciples.
 - a. He is well aware that people can come after Him for any number of reasons: Some may be looking for a little entertainment, others may want a sickness healed and they'll be on their way, still others may want some guidance for their relationships or investments or whatever. But only a few will truly be interested in being one of His disciples—in deep, intimate, surrendered relationship with Him.
- D. The question we must pose here at the beginning then is precisely this:
 - 1. Are you merely accompanying Jesus, are you with Him in this loose sense, along for the ride with the crowd?
 - 2. Or are you wanting to be a disciple, are you ready to hear what it means to truly come after Him, to truly be among the number of His people?
 - a. This is the issue Jesus is forcing on the great crowd in our text, and He is forcing it on us here in this room this morning as well.

Three Restatements

- A. He forces the issue on us by restating the matter, as I've said, three times—in three distinct, memorable, and even troubling ways. Let us consider them one by one now for a brief moment.
- (1) Hate Your Own _____
- A. The first we see there in v. 26: "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."
 - 1. Now, we looked at this a little last week, but let's consider it briefly once more. He's using strong, even scandalous language, to make a critical point.
 - B. Among the Jews, this language of hating something can be a way of saying that a person loves something else more.
 - 1. That's why back in Gen 29, in v. 30 we are told that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah", but then in v. 31 we read: "the Lord saw that Leah was hated." To hate one thing is to love another thing more. Something else has first place in your heart.

- a. I think this is why when Matthew renders Jesus' words this way: *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt 10:37).
- C. So, again, the question is: Does Jesus have first place in your heart? Are you willing to let all else go to follow after Him?
- D. The irony in all of this, then, is that, when Jesus is calling us to hate father, mother, wife, children, and so forth—though it looks as if He is contradicting the second greatest commandment—that we would love our neighbor as ourselves—truly, He is helping us fulfill it.
 - 1. Jesus knows that the only way to fulfill the second great commandment is to call us towards the first and greatest commandment: Namely that we would love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (cf. [Mark 12:30](#))—that we would have an undivided, all-consuming love for God above all else, that He would have first place in our hearts.
 - a. Ironically, counterintuitively, the only way to truly love you is to, at the same time, "hate" you in preference for Christ alone. Or to put it, perhaps more palatably: I cannot truly love you if I do not love Jesus first. That's the point of [v. 26](#)!
- E. I do not have time to give many detailed illustrations on this point. But I will at least say this: I do think this is one of the great problems in the church of our day. If we can be faulted for anything it might be that we love men and women too much, you might say. We know that hard words about hell or wrath or sin or sexuality and so forth do not at first feel loving to people, so we squish the truth and massage it a bit until it does.
 - 1. Because we love our brothers and sisters more than God we end up forfeiting love for both. Do you see that?! But if we hold in love for God and His word above all else, however other people may feel about it, in the end we shall find that we have loved them well.
- F. This why Jesus says: "Until you settle this matter in your heart, you cannot be My disciple." You've got to get the first commandment right.

(2) Bear Your Own Cross

- A. The second statement comes at us immediately following in [v. 27](#): *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."*
- B. Here now we come to face the idea of bearing one's own cross. The image is, perhaps, so commonplace to us today that we miss the shocking nature of it at the time.
 - 1. As one commentator puts it: *"The disciples had probably seen a man take up his cross, and they knew what it meant. When a man from one of their villages took up a cross and went off with a little band of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He would not be back. Taking up the cross meant the utmost in self-denial"* (TNTC).
 - a. Jesus is saying: "Is your earthly life worth more to you than me? If it is, you cannot truly follow after Me."

- i. After all, we must not forget where Jesus is headed even while all of these crowds are trying to tag along with Him—to Jerusalem, to Calvary, to suffer shame, rejection, and death by way of the cross. And He is saying: “Do you really want to follow Me there? Do you really want to be My disciple if that is what is involved?”

- C. We again are prone to think of Jesus as harsh here. But really what He is after is our life, our salvation, our sanctification, our fruit-bearing, and our joy!
 - 1. I wonder if you realize, and I will put this as boldly as I can, that every sin you ever commit is a lapse at this particular point—a shrugging off of the cross you are called to bear with and for Jesus in that moment:
 - a. When you click on that link to go lust after that girl, it’s a shrugging off of the cross in that moment. “I don’t want to wait and get this pleasure in the right way, within the boundaries of a covenantal commitment to one woman for life. No, that sounds too hard. I want what I want and I want it now.”
 - b. When you speak to your spouse with that razor blade tongue, it’s a shrugging off of the cross in that moment. “I had a bad day. I don’t want to be patient with you. I want you to feel some of my pain.”

- D. Do you see it? Taking up your cross and dying for Jesus is not some distant, secondary thing that a few unfortunate martyrs may have to experience at the end of their lives. It is demanded of every disciple at the very beginning.
 - 1. Your Christian life can’t even get off the ground if you refuse to pick up your cross. You can’t even begin to overcome sin or bear fruit for God if you don’t start here. That’s the call. Come and die . . . that you might truly live!

- E. I love that verse I often cite from Paul in [Gal 2:20](#) where he writes: “[I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.](#)”
 - 1. Notice: It is not death that gets the last word with Paul, but life! But we cannot circumvent the cross to get it. The only way to share in the resurrection life of Christ is to pass through with Him in His crucifixion death.

- F. I thought of the Puritan, Samuel Rutherford, at this point. He was imprisoned for his faith and wrote many letters from jail. And in one of these letters he writes this: “[O how sweet are the sufferings of Christ for Christ! God forgive them that raise an ill report upon the sweet cross of Christ. It is but our weak and dim eyes, and our looking only to the black side, that makes us mistake. Those who can take that crabbed tree handsomely upon their back, and fasten it on cannily, shall find it such a burden as wings unto a bird or sails to a ship](#)” (Letters, p. 43).
 - 1. We think that taking up our cross will ultimately crush and kill us but Rutherford is saying that when we fasten that cross firmly upon our back truly we shall find we have given ourselves wings. To lose your life for Christ’s sake is to find it!

G. If you'll humor me and allow for one more illustration on this. The New Testament speaks of the Christian being transformed. In the Greek it's the word metamorphoo (cf. [Rom 12:2](#); [2 Cor 3:18](#)). It's obviously, where we get our English word metamorphosis, which makes us immediately think of butterflies does it not?

1. Listen, I've got butterflies emerging from chrysalis' in my house right now. It's one of the perks of homeschooling. The kids are studying lifecycles. So we got these gross little worm things. And slowly they grow and you can tell they're caterpillars. Then they form their little graves it would seem, right? Everything seems dead as they hang there for days. And then just yesterday they start ripping through their burial garments and they come out with wings, they come out a superior creature, beautiful, they can fly.

a. And it's a picture again of what Jesus does for us. He takes the sin, the guilt, the shame, and He brings out something beautiful in its place. If we'll die with Him He brings us out from the grave a new creation by His grace. Again, what we thought would be a crushing burden turns out to give us wings!

(3) Renounce All That You Have

A. Jesus comes at this same idea one last time as a sort of summary statement down in [v. 33](#) just to kind of clear things up once and for all: ["So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."](#)

1. This word translated ["renounce"](#) here brings out this idea of ["saying farewell."](#) It is the word used in the book of Acts when Paul is setting sail from various cities and saying goodbye to the saints there.

B. So the picture being painted here is you and I gathering together all that we have—our loved ones, our possessions, our achievements, our plans, our hopes, our dreams, our desires—and then we line it all up on the shore. We look at it, we count it, we consider it, we weigh it, then we give our hugs, perhaps . . . and we get in the boat with Jesus and say: ["Farewell!"](#)

(2) The Calculation

Of Towers and Battles

A. Now, the picture we've just painted really sets us up for this second heading that I've termed: The Calculation. Jesus speaks to the crowd about the high cost of discipleship because He wants them to come in with full knowledge. He wants them to count the cost. He is not after quick decisions. He wants a person to really think it through.

B. This really is the meaning of those two parables He tells in [vv. 28-32](#): [" ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten](#)

thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

1. You see it, don't you? The first image is of a tower you start to build but can't finish. The second image is of a war you enter into but can't win. The point in both is essentially the same: Think it through before you start, weigh the matter, count the cost, look honestly at the project, make sure you are ready to go the distance, to finish the job.
- C. To be clear: The call here is not to procrastinate or put off making a decision to follow Christ. Jesus is not implying that discipleship to Him is of small importance and can be decided upon at some later point. Far from it. The warring king's army is pressing in on your boundaries. It is most certainly an urgent matter.
1. He is saying, rather, that discipleship to Him is of such importance—of such weighty, comprehensive, life-altering importance—that you better slow down and think deeply about it before you just impulsively and superficially dive in.

Costly Grace

- A. He wants us to stop and think about the cost involved in receiving His grace. Perhaps this has been troubling some of us up to this point. “I thought we are saved freely by grace. What's all this talk about cost and calculation? I can't earn or purchase my salvation!”
1. Well, brothers and sisters, we might put it like this: The grace of Christ is most certainly free, but it is not cheap. You cannot earn it. But you must let all else in your life go if you are to truly lay your hands on it.
- B. It's this distinction that Dietrich Bonhoeffer brings out wonderfully in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He writes this: “Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. . . . Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. . . . Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son: ‘ye were bought at a price,’ and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us” (pp. 43-45).
- C. Ours is a day, brothers and sisters, of cheap grace. You can lay hold of it without letting go of anything. You can get forgiveness without transformation.
1. But the gospel, when the Spirit of Christ really comes into a person, it will change you from the inside out. Grace doesn't just cover sin, it kills it! You will die with Him and rise in Him

anew. Jesus will not be your errand boy, your homeboy, your cleanup crew, He will be your Lord and your Treasure . . . or He is not yet truly your Savior.

(3) The Commission

Tasteless or Salty?

- A. Now, Jesus is taking pains here to make sure that you and I are the real thing—that we don't just jump in all excited and then bail when it gets hard, when we realize what it actually means to follow Him. Why? What's His concern in all of this.
1. Well, certainly He is concerned for us—that we come to know Him and His love and transforming power. But there is more. And we begin to see this as we move to the last part of our text and the last heading for this morning: The Commission.
- B. Jesus comes out of this discussion about authentic discipleship and starts to talk about salt: “³⁴ Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ 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” (vv. 34-35).
1. The image of salt is often utilized to speak of the Christian's influence in the world.
- C. This salt that loses its flavor is like the half-hearted disciple. The one who starts building the tower and then bails halfway through. Instead of influencing for good and attracting people to Jesus, this half-hearted discipleship often brings reproach on Him.
1. John Stott writes eloquently of this in his little book *Basic Christianity*: “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 warnings 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. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.
The message of Jesus was very different. He never lowered his standards are modified his conditions to make his call more readily acceptable. He asked his first disciples, and he has asked every disciple since, to give him their thoughtful and total commitment. Nothing less than this will do” (pp. 136-137).
 - a. Think of the damage that has been done to the cause of Christ in the world because of “nominal Christianity”—by people who take on His name but have nothing of His heart! That's why Jesus is so jealous to make sure His disciples are the real thing!
- D. But, remember now, the opposite is also true, and it is exciting to consider. Where half-blooded disciples lose their saltiness and turn people off to Christ, full-blooded disciples have a certain flavor

to their lives and people are drawn to Christ because of it. You can tell that they love you, that they'd give their life for you. They don't just talk about the cross, they live it.

1. I think of what Hudson Taylor once said regarding his missionary efforts in China: "China is not to be won for Christ by quiet, ease-loving men and women . . . The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put Jesus, China, [and] souls first and foremost in everything and at every time—even life itself must be secondary."
 2. I think what Charles Spurgeon once said regarding his ministry efforts there in England: "Give me twelve men—importunate men, lovers of souls, who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God—and I will shake London from end to end."
 3. And, finally, I think once more about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Certainly, his writings are good enough to stand on their own merit, but one has to wonder if the reason they have had such influence through the years is due to the fact that his life validated and vividly illustrated what He wrote of.
 - a. You see, he didn't just write about the cost of discipleship, he paid the cost. As a German Christian during the second world war, he decided Jesus would have him stand against his own nation for the cause of love and justice. And on April 9, 1945, at the young age of 39, he was executed by the Nazis for his efforts.
- E. Do you want to influence this city for Jesus? It starts with this: counting the cost, taking up your cross, and following Him. You do that, and you will be the salt of the earth.