

# Count the Cost // Luke 14:25-35

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Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0:00] Our reading this morning is from Luke chapter 14, which you'll find on page 1048 in the Bible's! And we're starting at verse 25. Luke 14 beginning at verse 25.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said, 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. 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? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? If he's not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap. It is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

Thanks, Katrina, for reading. Wow, these are hard words from Jesus, aren't they? I don't know what you felt as we were reading through them. These are some of the hardest words from Jesus in the Bible.

[2:07] Not hard because they're particularly difficult to understand. The meaning is pretty clear. But hard to hear. Hard to receive.

And hard to accept what they might mean for us in our lives. But just because they're hard doesn't mean that we get to skip over them. St. Silas here, it's our commitment to preach through, work through books of the Bible like the Gospel of Luke. Hearing what God has to say to us, even when it's challenging, even when it makes us feel a little bit uncomfortable. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his words.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we sung earlier, would you open the eyes of our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Help us to hear your word with willing hearts and minds.

And may your word not be snatched away from us, but take root deeply in us and bear fruit, producing in us a harvest of wholehearted devotion to the Lord Jesus.

For it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Well, if you're trying to persuade someone to buy something, there's a pretty obvious place to begin.

[3:33] What are they going to get? And in marketing, you often start with a wall covered in post-it notes. What's the problem you're trying to solve? What are people worried about? What are the pains in their lives?

What are they hoping to gain? And brand developers sometimes call these pains and gains. You work out what kind of matters to people and then you build your messaging around that.

Because if you're trying to persuade people to buy into something, you don't normally begin by telling them everything that's going to hurt. You don't lead with the small print.

You lead with the benefits. You tell people what they're going to get. And if you can get that message distilled down, boiled down to three or four words, all the better.

Just do it. Because you're worth it. Something simple and memorable, persuasive. But then you come to our passage in Luke chapter 14.

[4:35] Jesus is surrounded by a huge crowd in verse 25. People are following him. And if this were a marketing exercise, you'd think this would be the moment. This would be the moment, Jesus, to really sell it.

Tell them what they're going to gain. Tell them how great life is going to be. Get them signed up. I think sometimes we adopt a similar kind of strategy in our own evangelism.

Sometimes we're tempted to do something similar when telling others about our Christian faith.

Lead with the amazing things about what it means to be following Jesus.

Kind of leave the hard stuff until later once they've kind of bought in like that. But Jesus here does the exact opposite. He starts telling them what it's going to cost.

You want to follow me? Says Jesus. It's going to cost you your family. It may cost you your life. It will cost you everything you have.

[5:37] Now this feels like a kind of a bit of a bizarre strategy. Jesus isn't putting his best foot forwards here. But he's making absolutely sure that you know what you're getting yourself into.

That's important. Because Jesus isn't trying to sell Christianity to us. He's telling us the bare truth about what it means to follow him.

And the message that Jesus gives the crowd can be simpler. Count the cost. So you want to follow Jesus. Firstly, it will be costly.

Jesus is completely upfront about the cost of following him. Look at verse 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. Hate. That's such a strong word that we hardly ever use it. Hate your father and mother.

[6:46] Hate your family. And it's deliberately shocking language. Jesus, he isn't telling us to go out of our way to kind of despise our parents, despise our families, stop loving them like that.

The Bible elsewhere commands us to honor our father and mother. He's using deliberately provocative language here to make a point. You want to follow Jesus?

Well, your allegiance to Jesus must be so decisive that every other allegiance comes a distant second. Jesus doesn't simply want to be one important thing amongst many in your lives.

He wants to be first. So the goal here is not for people to go home from church and start despising your families.

That's not the goal. The goal isn't to hate your parents. But it may well be the consequence of following Jesus for some.

[7:50] And for some Christians, this isn't theoretical. And there are people indeed at St. Silas who know firsthand that choosing Jesus can cost you your relationship with your family.

For some, telling their family that they've become Christians means being disowned by their family. Losing contact in some cases.

For some, returning home to their homelands, to their family homes can even be so dangerous that it is prohibitive. So for some Christians, this is not theoretical.

So Jesus isn't telling you to go looking for conflict with your family. He's telling you that you have to be willing to lose even that relationship rather than lose him.

It doesn't always look that extreme. It can play out in all sorts of different ways. I think of my own mom. She came from a sort of nominally church-going family back in the day.

[8:56] Going to church on Sundays was simply what people did back then in middle-class Edinburgh where she grew up. But then she became a Christian as a teenager. And her mom in particular found that really hard.

My granny wasn't thrilled, for instance, when my mom decided to go away on mission trips with the UCCF around the country. And then she met my dad in the Christian Union University.

And initially my granny was actually quite pleased because dad was studying law. And my granny thought that he was going to become a lawyer. But then she discovered to her horror that he was planning to retrain for Christian ministry.

And a lawyer in her books would have made a far more respectable son-in-law. Well, that's exactly the kind of thing that Jesus is on about here.

There may be times when what Jesus calls you to do and what your family wants from you and expects from you simply don't line up.

[10:03] What might that look like for you? What might that look like in your own personal circumstances and situations? What might that look like?

Because I guess in Scotland today, people don't necessarily mind you being a Christian. Some people, of course, do. But most people, they don't mind if you're a Christian as long as you're not

too Christian.

So you go to church on a Sunday is fine. But you're giving how much of your salary? You're taking time off work to do what?

To go on a mission trip? You're thinking of going into Christian ministry instead of a career that your parents have sent so much time helping you invest in and helping you prepare for.

Can you just stop banging on about Jesus for a moment? You can be a Christian as long as you're not too Christian. You can be a Christian.

[11:08] Just don't let it get in the way of life. Don't get it let in the way of your progress. But Jesus doesn't offer that kind of Christianity.

He doesn't offer that version to us. And that doesn't mean that you deliberately go about trampling over your parents' wishes for you.

Sometimes honoring your father and mother will mean patience, taking time, explaining, listening, being gracious. Especially when they simply can't wrap their heads around what it is that you're doing and why you're doing it.

Of course it can work the other way around too. Perhaps you've got grown up children who have turned away from following Jesus at the moment. Your commitment to Jesus, your commitment to the church here, the way you use your time and money, can sometimes bring you into conflict with your children.

You don't stop loving them. You don't stop looking for ways to serve them. You certainly don't stop praying for them. But you cannot make their approval more important than Jesus' approval for you.

[12:21] Because ultimately if it comes down to a choice between Jesus or your children or Jesus or your parents, it has to be Jesus. Every time. Has to be Jesus.

Then Jesus goes even further. Verse 27. Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

I guess we've kind of domesticated that phrase, haven't we? It's kind of lost its impact and power. My micromanaging boss is just the cross I have to bear.

Or sitting through my in-law's Sunday dinner is just the cross I have to bear. But Jesus isn't talking about a kind of irritating minor inconvenience here.

As any first century person would have known, the cross was an instrument of death. And to carry your cross therefore was to say, I am willing to die rather than turn my back from following Jesus.

[13:25] Jesus is saying, I must come before even your own life. Now in the UK of course, it's unlikely to cost us our lives.

But just because our lives aren't at risk, following Jesus still will cost us. It will cost us our comfort at the very least. It may cost you your friendships, opportunities, your reputation.

Simply the ease of fitting in with your peer group, whatever that may be. Some places it may cost you your freedom. And for some Christians around the world, yes, it will cost them their lives.

Jesus doesn't put that in the small print. So imagine the marketing meeting. If Jesus were trying to sell this, I think this would be the point where the marketing team would be asking for a rethink.

Because come on, we've got a campaign to launch. Count the cost. It's a strong look. I'm not sure it's going to bring in the crowds. We've got the merch.

[14:36] Everyone loves a tote bag. We've got the merch. And then there's the main campaign.

Lose your family. Lose your friends. Lose your reputation. Anything else, Jesus? Yes. Yes, there's more. You may even lose your life.

Make sure you stick that on the poster. Right. I'm not sure this campaign is going to fly. Can we maybe make the messaging just a little bit more positive, please, Jesus?

But here's the thing. Jesus isn't trying to sell us something. Jesus isn't trying to sell us Christianity. He's telling us the way it is.

He's completely up front. He doesn't try to get you to sign up and then reveal the hidden terms later. That's not the way he goes about this. And if there's still any doubt about how comprehensive his claim is on us, then just look at verse 33.

[15:45] Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Oof. Everything you have.

Everything you have. Now, Jesus isn't saying that every Christian has to sell their homes and live in a commune, kind of go off grid, things like that. He's saying that nothing that we possess ultimately can be held back from him.

Everything you have is his in an ultimate sense. Your money, your home, your career, your relationships, your future, your identity, your ambitions, hopes, and dreams. All of it. All of it. Jesus must come before all of it. So at this point, you might reasonably be thinking, well, hang on. Why would anybody sign up to this? Jesus is saying, put me before your family. Put me before your own life. Put me before everything you own. Why on earth would I do that, Jesus? Because of who Jesus is and where he's leading us. [16:54] Remember the banquet earlier in the chapter. If you were here last week. A great banquet. People coming from every which direction. Taking their place at the table in the kingdom of God.

That's where Jesus is taking us. That's what he's inviting us into. Fullness of life with him. Life as it's meant to be. Life without pain, without suffering, without death. Life in his kingdom forever. Let's be absolutely clear about this. Jesus isn't saying that you earn your place at the banquet by what it costs you. Salvation is God's gift freely received through faith in Jesus. We don't earn it. We don't buy our way into God's kingdom. Jesus isn't telling us how to earn salvation. He's telling us what it means to follow him. He's the one who saves us. He's the one who's paid the ultimate price of his death on the cross. [17:59] He's the one who's paid the cost. So the cost of discipleship isn't the price of admission to God's kingdom. It's the consequence of belonging to its king.

And look where Jesus himself is going. He's on the road to Jerusalem. He's going to the cross. He's going to give up his life. But beyond the cross is resurrection and glory. So Jesus isn't calling us down a road that he's not willing to walk down himself. He's giving himself for us and enters glory. And he says, follow me. Follow me. So if you're here and you're not yet sure about Jesus, you may be kind of interested in sitting on the fence this past while. As David said earlier, we're starting Christianity Explored this week, this Wednesday.

It's a great chance, a brilliant chance to spend seven weeks thinking about who Jesus is, what Jesus claims are, who he is, what he says, what he offers. So if you're asking yourself, why would I follow someone when it sounds so costly? [19:11] Come and investigate Jesus for yourself. Take the time to do that. Because the question isn't whether following Jesus is costly.

The real question is whether Jesus is worth the cost. That's exactly why Jesus tells this crowd to do something important before they follow him. So secondly, you want to follow Jesus. Count the cost. Jesus gives a very simple picture in verse 28.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. When you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it. Because if you lay the foundation and aren't able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying, this person began to build and they weren't able to finish.

What a joke. We've got a rather spectacular example of what happens when you don't do that just along the other end of the M8 motorway. And at the top of Carlton Hill in Edinburgh stands the National Monument.

[20:24] The plan back in 1826 was gloriously ambitious. A replica of the Parthenon in Athens. No less befitting Edinburgh's status at that time in the Age of Enlightenment as the Athens of the North.

Just one slight problem. They didn't have enough money. They'd collected about a third of what they needed, decided to crack on anyway, and then the money ran out.

And there it stands today. A magnificent half-finished monument. Edinburgh's disgrace, as it became known. At one point, Glasgow cheekily offered to finish it, provided that they put the Glasgow coat of arms visibly on the front of it, which was very generous of Glasgow. Edinburgh declined. A folly in every sense. Well, don't start something you aren't prepared to finish. That's what Jesus is saying. It's the same point with the king going to war.

If you've only got 10,000 men, don't pick a fight, don't square up to somebody with 20,000 men. Unless you've got some kind of secret weapon up your sleeve. Otherwise, like the grand old Duke of York, who incidentally also had 10,000 men, you'll find yourself marching yourself up to the top of a hill and then looking for the off-ramp before you even get there.

[21:41] You count the cost before you start. And Jesus is saying, Do the same thing with following me. Think about what it means to be my disciple.

Think about the implications in your life. Think about what it will involve. Think through the scenarios. Think about who Jesus is.

Is Jesus worth it? Because it'd be rubbish to start following Jesus and only later discover, Oh, this is much harder than I'd expected.

And then quit. That would be rubbish. Perhaps you started following Jesus years ago. But perhaps nobody really properly explained what Jesus says here about the cost of following him.

Perhaps you were sold a kind of Christianity light. Come as you are. I'll carry on living exactly the way that you've been living. Just add a little bit of church on a Sunday, a little bit of Jesus, a little bit of devotion.

[22:49] You think, great. So you start following Jesus and then sooner or later you discover, Hang on. Hang on. Jesus has something to say about my family. He has something to say about my career, my sex life, what I do with my time.

This is way more demanding than I thought. Pretty sure I didn't sign up for this. I remember a guy I knew from Scripture Union Camp. He was there as a leader year after year, worshipping, talking about Jesus, leading like that every summer.

I remember him saying one summer, last time I saw him, that it had become too hard. He couldn't square what following Jesus meant for him with what it was costing him personally.

I think for him in the sphere of relationships. That's precisely the danger that Jesus is warning us of here. Don't start without knowing what you're getting yourself into.

So Jesus says here, I'm not interested in spin. I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I'm just going to be completely upfront about it so that you can make an informed decision.

[24:08] So if you're here and you're interested in the Christian faith, perhaps you're intrigued by Jesus, perhaps you're interested in his teaching, you know deep down in your heart that you're not actually yet following him wholeheartedly.

I hope that you are reassured by the way that Jesus is presenting himself here, like the opposite of a used car salesman.

He isn't filling your head with unrealistic promises. He's telling you the truth about what following Jesus means so that you can count the cost before you start.

And if you're here and you've been following Jesus for years, as most of us have been, don't assume that this passage is only for people who are thinking about becoming Christians.

Remember who it is that Jesus is speaking to.

This is a crowd traveling with him on the road to Jerusalem. So he's also warning those who've started on their journey with Jesus about the danger of not finishing.

[25:14] I think that's why he finishes with this strange picture about salt. Verse 34. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it become salty again?

So Jesus is warning about discipleship that doesn't last. I think salt here is basically a metaphor for the life of discipleship. You can be around Jesus, hear his teaching, be impressed by him, be enthusiastic, be part of the crowd, but for it all to kind of remain at surface level, skin deep sort of thing.

You can look like you're following Jesus without actually giving yourself to him down at the heart level. But being around Jesus isn't the same as truly following him.

And Jesus is saying, that's useless. It doesn't last. In the end, the person who turns away is not fit even for the manure pile.

So Jesus isn't looking for people who merely make a promising start. He calls us to follow him to the end, to keep following when the cost becomes real.

[26:28] And to notice then how Jesus ends. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. And if you've read through Luke's gospel, you might recognize that phrase, whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

Jesus says exactly the same thing at the end of the parable of the sower back in chapter 8. I think that's a very helpful connection because there too, Jesus describes people who start well but don't last.

There are some who initially look like they're doing quite well who receive the word with joy but when the testing comes, like the guy from the SU camp, it's too hard and they fall away.

Others hear the word but the worries, riches and pleasures of life choke it. They want Jesus but they also want these other things to a foot. In both camps, they start but they don't finish and Jesus doesn't want that to be you.

Jesus doesn't want that to be you. He doesn't want you to start following him and then 10, 20, 40 years down the line give up, turn away because you've never really counted the cost in the first place.

[27:45] So what does this mean for us? Well, if you're not yet following Jesus, don't drift into Christianity because you kind of like the atmosphere at church or because your friends are Christian or because your parents are Christian for any other reason for that matter without thinking it through for yourself.

Understand who and what you're saying yes to. And if you're already following Jesus, don't be surprised when the going gets hard.

Following Jesus is costly. It is costly. It's worth the cost but it's costly. And there will be things as you write through the Bible that you struggle with.

Things Jesus calls you to do perhaps that you'd rather not do. Things that Jesus calls you not to do that you'd rather keep going with.

Situations where for you personally following him means making a difficult and costly choice. perhaps even a radical choice that he's calling on you just now.

[29:03] I don't know what that is for you but when that happens you don't need to think I didn't sign up for this. Jesus told you and he told you from the outset Jesus isn't some dodgy salesman trying to get you to sign on the dotted line before you discover the small prince.

He tells you the truth from the beginning following him may cost you everything but he also tells you where he's taking you into newness of life with him.

He isn't hiding the cost and he isn't hiding the glory that lies beyond it. The British missionary and cricketer C.T. Stad put it like this if Jesus Christ be God and died for me then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

Notice where he starts not with what he has to give up but with Jesus and what Jesus has already done for us. C.T.

Stad had counted the cost and he had concluded that Jesus is worth it because all the pleasures and temptations that the world offers pale into comparison with knowing Christ not just in the life to come but now as we belong to him and walk with him.

[30:29] And so that's the question Jesus puts before us today is he worth it? Because when the cost becomes real you can say to yourself I knew this would cost me Jesus told me and he's still worth it.

Jesus just wanted to be totally honest with us to be totally and completely transparent about what this is going to involve. So count the cost and then keep following.

Listen again to what Jesus says if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother wife and children brothers and sisters you cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not carry your cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. And any of you who does not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple.

Let's just take a moment there and to reflect on what God has been saying to us. God not do!

Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus tells us the truth about what it means to follow him.

[32:16] We thank you that he doesn't hide the cost from us but speaks to us out of love and calls us to follow him into life with him.

Please, by your Holy Spirit, help us to take to heart these words of Jesus, these hard words. us.

And for those of us facing difficult and costly decisions on account of Jesus, give us courage to put Jesus first.

And for those exploring the Christian faith, would your Spirit help them to see who Jesus is and the love he's shown us in giving his life for us.

And Lord, if there's anyone here who's been around church for years but has never truly surrendered their lives to Jesus, would you open their eyes and see Jesus and all his worth, would you bring them to wholehearted faith in him.

Lord Jesus, we want to belong to you with all that we are and all that we have. So please, by your Holy Spirit, enable us to follow you faithfully, whatever the cost, and use our lives together as a church family to bring glory to your name for your worth amen.

[33:35] Amen.