



Luke 14:25-35

This is a difficult time in the history of our country and our world. We have changed from being a country and a world where we have been accustomed to plenty, to having to start to think carefully on how we spend our money. There's a programme on TV called Super-Scrimpers which gives people hints on how to spend less money. It may be changing shopping habits, or turning the heating down or knowing how to get the best price. It's all about counting the cost.

Actually all our actions have a cost associated with them. Whether it's what we wear, what we eat, where we live, how we get around. There is a cost associated. And from time to time, we review how we use what we have for our benefit – we count the cost.

We have come around the Lord's table this evening. We are here to remember how God counted the cost once. We remember what He has done for us as demonstrated by His broken body and shed blood. The cost of our salvation was Jesus' blood and Jesus' sufferings. As it says in 1 Peter 1: *18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* God paid a massive price for us, it was His choice because He loved us. He thought we were worth it.

As I've already said, all our actions have consequences. As we affirm Jesus this evening, we recall again that we once accepted Him as Saviour and as Lord. We became His disciples. There was a time when we counted the cost and followed Him.

But there come times, when we need to consider our discipleship and count the cost again, so we don't short-change Jesus in our worship, in our prayer lives, in our service, in our witness, in our walk with Him. Following Jesus isn't a one-off decision, but a continuous decision because life is a journey. We follow Him day by day. So the challenge of this passage is also a day to day one.

And then we come to Luke 14 and we are reminded of the massive challenge Jesus lays down to all those who would follow Him. As I read this tonight I find this challenges afresh as I compare my cost to God's cost. So what challenges does Jesus give us about being His disciples now? I would suggest four things.

Discipleship changes our priorities

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

People find this a little bizarre. Surely if Jesus is about love, why say we should hate? What's that about? It's a little of what we would call hyperbole. It's using an exaggeration to make a point. Consider these phrases.

*"You wait until I get my hands on him."
"If he misbehaves again, I'll kill him!"
"I'm so hungry, I could murder an Indian."*

If we took them seriously we would be in big trouble. But we all know what they mean. They are hyperbole. Exaggeration to make a point which is what this statement is about. Jesus requires devoted disciples; people who love Him and put Him first over everything. He's the key to life, death and eternity. Our love for our families must seem like hatred compared to our love for Jesus. How important is Jesus to us – now?

Sometimes, for people following Jesus means that their family will reject them, even try to kill them. It's not like that here in Britain, but following Jesus means that we can lose friends and sour family relationships. The more likely problems in our families and friendship groups is having to make decisions between our faith and the behaviour of our families and friends. Do we make a stand? Or do we just go with the flow? That's a hard one to answer. All we can do is seek the One whom we have decided to follow – without turning back. What does He want us to do? What would Jesus do?

Discipleship changes our direction

27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Being a Christian is less fashionable now than it ever was. It wasn't fashionable in Jesus' day. The cross was the Roman symbol of execution: a mark of shame – particularly for Jews because if someone was hung on a tree, they were cursed. And of course it was why it was the Roman execution of preference in Judea! Today, we use the cross as a positive Christian symbol – it's seen as a good thing. Jesus wants to identify with the cross by taking ours up - he says daily in Luke 9. So what does taking up the cross actually mean?

Firstly, it is a symbol of God's love in action for the human race and therefore it is a symbol of our love in action as we join Him in that mission of love. As we take up the cross of Jesus, we as disciples show we are following Him in His mission of rescuing the world – even if that results in our shame, our suffering and our death. As we've found in past sermons, we may not be called on to literally die – but we are called to lose our lives for the sake of Jesus.

Secondly, the cross is also a symbol of obedience to the Father. Jesus died in obedience to His Father, so therefore as we are called to carry our cross, it is a symbol of obedience. Jesus says "follow me;" where He goes, I go. Whatever He asks, I'll do.

Thirdly, the cross is also acceptance of God's power, not mine. Jesus did His earthly work in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we take up the cross we recognise that we can't do any of this without the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus never asks us to do things that are impossible. What He asks is possible - but never in our power: only in the power of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to have the same vision of our lives He does, and see what He can do in His power.

Discipleship is costly

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war

against another king. Will he not 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.

Discipleship is costly. Its something we should have thought about when we first believed. But this still applies to us. We are faced with change throughout our lifetimes. The call to serve goes on until we die. And that call changes at different times of our lives and that brings new challenges. That being the case, have we counted the cost? I've come across so many situations where people have started something with the best of intentions, but it isn't long before they are struggling. Why? Because they never counted the cost before they started.

As you can see from the passage, not counting the cost can lead to a bad end. First of all we can end up a laughing stock – people will not take us seriously. Or we will end up surrendering with the disgrace that brings.

The command of Jesus is that if we follow Him, we must count the cost. Not just at the start of our believing, but throughout our Christian lives as we are faced with changing situations and fresh challenges.

Discipleship should not be neglected

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Of course, the remedy for many Christians is that they are not even prepared to count the cost. They are challenged to follow Jesus but see it as too costly, or don't think about it too hard.

This little verse comes at the end of this passage and is put there for a reason. It comes three times in the gospels, each in a different context, although the meaning is the same. The implication in terms of discipleship here is that disciples are the salt which is the same as in Matthew and Mark's gospel. It's here for more than the sake of putting it somewhere. It comes at the end of this section on what it means to be a disciple and as we have seen as disciples we are called to be different, not in what we do but in who we are. And if we follow Him as we are supposed to - in the power of His Spirit - we will be people who are world changers (or at least Felixstowe-changers). So what's this about?

Jesus is probably referring to rock salt. It's not the refined salt we have which is pure Sodium Chloride, but contains other stuff too which is tasteless. If neglect our rock salt and leave it lying around in the damp, the sodium chloride will dissolve and lose it's saltiness. If we decide not to count the cost the result is neglect and our witness becomes ineffective because we aren't doing what Jesus wants us to do, we don't show our passion for Him. Counting the cost is not just about deciding to follow and obey, but the cost that there is of deciding not to follow as we should.

The bottom line is that when we came to Christ, we entered into a relationship with our Father, with His Son and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It was and still should be a life-changing experience for us and the people we touch. Our passion for Jesus eclipses our pattern for other relationships and things. Because our passion for Him is so great, we

have a passion for what He does: His work of redemption. Most of all we are people who must understand that we have a God who is a finisher and who has the resources to finish what He has started. Are we going to let Him finish?

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