

THE JESUS PEOPLE MET – LUKE 14:25-35 AN UNCOMPROMISING LORD.

Around 160 AD, Polycarp, ministered as the Bishop of the church in Smyrna, a city in Asia Minor (modern Izmir in Turkey) devoted to Roman worship.

Polycarp was an old man, at least 86 and probably the last surviving person to have known an apostle, having been a disciple of John. This was one reason he was greatly revered as a teacher and church leader.

In a round of persecution towards Christians Polycarp was arrested. It was recorded that "As he was being taken into the arena, a voice came to him from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp and play the man!" No one saw who had spoken, but our brothers who were there heard the voice. When the crowd heard that Polycarp had been captured, there was an uproar. The Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, "Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar.... "Swear," urged the Proconsul, "reproach Christ, and I will set you free." Polycarp replied "86 years I have served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

It's a rousing account of one man as he gives an account for his faith in Jesus Christ. He was clear eyed about the cost of being Jesus' disciple.

As someone who cut my teeth in the retail and service industry, I am always interested in the practice of costing things. I don't know what you feel, but I always like to know what the price is when I'm shopping. No price? No thanks?

And I always want to pay the least amount possible.

And it's not just purchasing things where cost is involved. Most decisions made in our lives cost us something.

Career, relationships, where we live, how we spend our time ...

Decisions have consequences that cost us something at some point.

And it's those intangible costs or consequences, that human beings are worst at calculating – everyone at some stage, or regularly, finds that they've made decisions/commitments that cost more than they expected.

Sometimes too much it seems. And our greatest difficulty in cost calculations is determining rightly what it will cost if we don't make a decision.

It's with that in mind, and here we are in church, that you'll not be surprised that I'm segueing to what does it cost to follow Jesus.

And that is a complex question in many ways. Because the cost of living with or without Jesus Christ is not a financial equation but one involving that most precious of things – our lives.

And Jesus puts this very question to people who are following him at the time he was on earth. Who do they think he is?

A Lord who asks for everything. AN UNCOMPROMISING LORD.

1. COUNT THE COST – WHAT WILL YOU GIVE UP TO FOLLOW CHRIST?

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.

This is one of those sayings of Jesus, that if he had had a communications team or media advisor, he would have been advised not to say it.

But Jesus is uncompromising in what he says here. So, what is he saying? Firstly, large crowds were following him, and he wanted them to be clear why they should follow him.

He wanted then, and he wants us today to know that the nature of following Jesus is that he will (and has already) given his life for us by paying the penalty before God of our rebellion, our evil, and our sin. And he will and has exchanged our punishment and death with peace and forgiveness and a fresh start and a living hope with eternal life at his coming again.

And Jesus says if you will follow me, commit to trusting in me alone for salvation, it will cost you everything too.

The word HATE sounds so awful, but it is actually used here as a term of comparison. I bought a new phone recently, which I haven't done for years. But when I did buy one, I put the phone in one hand and the money in the other, and I had to decide which I wanted more. Which was more valuable to me.

So, Jesus says loving Him is a choice of comparison. An act of commitment **to** him and not to the other, whatever that may be.

Of course we are to love our parents and honour them, of course we are to love our children and care for them. So too spouse, family and even ourselves we care for and honour in appropriate ways.

But Jesus is saying, if we follow Jesus hoping for a discount discipleship where we hold some part of our allegiance and commitment back we cannot be his disciple.

Putting it starkly he says – take up your cross and follow me ...
If anyone then had seen a person carrying a cross, they knew that person had a singular focus on life at that moment ...

Is Jesus asking too much? Some thought so at the time ... In John 6

⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

COUNT THE COST – WHAT WILL YOU GIVE UP TO FOLLOW CHRIST?

2. COUNT THE COST - IS FAILURE AN OPTION?

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.'

I wonder if Jesus as a builder, ever have a customer who ran out of money before the job was finished?

He certainly knew of occasions though judging by this example he gives. If you are a fan of Grand Designs or if you have built a house, you will be familiar with funds running low or even out before the building is finished.

The first outcome is ridicule – they didn't have what it takes to achieve their goal!

It's the same in the second example:

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.

The second outcome is far worse than ridicule – a failure to have what it takes to achieve your goal is disaster!

So, what is the point Jesus is making by these 2 examples?

³³ *In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

In 1956 Jim Elliott and 4 other men set out on a mission to make contact with a previously uncontacted tribe in central Ecuador, with the goal of telling them about Jesus.

After months of hard work in a well thought out plan to make contact with the tribal Indians, the 5 men stood on a river beach hopeful of some sort of communication with the men and women they met. They were dead within a couple of hours.

Subsequently years later the gospel did reach that tribe with great power. The sacrifice of Jim Elliot and his colleagues was not in vain.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Quoting 17th century English preacher Phillip Henry who had said, "He is no fool who parts with that which he cannot keep, when he is sure to be recompensed with that which he cannot lose."

Henry was paraphrasing Jesus: Mark 8 36-7 *For what shall it profit a person, if they shall gain the whole world, and lose their own soul? Or what shall a person give in exchange for their soul.*

If you are not sure if you have made a life changing to commitment to put your life in Jesus' hands – allow me to speak to you for a moment.

You may have questions – fair enough, I've been a Christian 70+ years and still have some.

You may have issues that you can't reconcile. Paradoxes that affront your intellectual self. You may be offended by the exclusive claims Jesus makes, and the exclusive demands he makes as well.

I've known friends who are the sort of people who want everything to be totally transparent and clear, and make total sense to them when it comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

I get that – truly. However, there are two 'however's' I have:

Every day in a hundred ways people live and breathe and have meaning in life without knowing the half of everything that goes on in their life. They and we all put our faith in people, things, ideas where we trust and have faith in other people, and rather than being anti rational, we make reasonable judgements.

And that leads me to the second however – every decision in life has consequences – and a reasonable person makes decisions based on weighing the consequences.

Objections to following Jesus are reasonable to a point, but will the alternative something be enough? Are we entrusting our life, eternally, to something that will run out at the grave?

Or worse, be a total disaster – in this life and the next?

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

COUNT THE COST – WHAT WILL YOU GIVE UP TO FOLLOW CHRIST?

COUNT THE COST - IS FAILURE AN OPTION?

3. LISTEN TO WHAT JESUS OFFERS – ACT NOW!

The title for this sermon is THE JESUS PEOPLE MET - AN UNCOMPROMISING LORD.

And I confess I hear a message that could be misunderstood in 2 ways. I'm not suggesting we should underthink following Jesus as if we are on a game show and we punch the buzzer before we think.

Jesus suggests a careful decision should be made – follow me.

Nor am I suggesting that to become a Christian – follow Jesus and die some horrible death somewhere as a martyr.

That would be catastrophizing the message Jesus proclaims to us.

In following Jesus, down through the ages, many Christians have indeed given up their lives for Jesus. And many will yet around the world. Many are harassed, imprisoned, oppressed, discriminated against, mocked and struggle every day because they love and serve Jesus Christ.

If that were to face you or I at some stage in our future, we can but ask God to give us strength by His Holy Spirit to withstand such hardship or struggle faithfully for Jesus. And we know he will hear that prayer.

But not all costs are borne in that harsh or deadly way. For Jesus is calling us all to be clear about what it means to follow Him. What it means to Trust in HIM.

He says that in following Jesus we must have a clear focus on what is of first importance in our lives.

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.

Salt that is not salt, is not salt! Salt that isn't salty is useless for the purpose that Salt exists – to preserve and add flavour.

Christian disciples of Jesus Christ who are not totally committed to Jesus Christ as their first and foremost love and allegiance, are disciples without any purpose or taste.

And it is possible that a man or woman has made a commitment to Jesus Christ in their life, but in their daily life, their decisions and values, reflect a self-following and self-value inconsistent with following Jesus.

His final words on the subject are, *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"* Which we might say is more like *"Hear what I'm saying —not what you want to hear!"*

I got new glasses a couple of weeks ago. I was told by the optometrist that my eyesight had changed in the past 15 months quite a bit. When I got the new glasses home, the distance vision was weird, and the reading vision had my laptop screen totally weird.

So, I went back a bit upset that the optometrist had got it wrong. After checking he explained that slowly my eyes had changed and my brain had compensated over the past year or more to a point.

Now the glasses were correcting my vision, and my brain needed adjusting to stop compensating and making allowances for poor vision.

That's what Jesus is saying about our lives. Hear clearly, see clearly, what is true about yourself, about your world and about me.

Our life and our decision about following Jesus – should be clear headed and clear sighted. What it will cost to follow vs not following Jesus.

And Jesus says "Will you follow me, put your life in my hands, or will you walk away?"

I put it to you all today that the only reasoned and rational response we could make is *"who else could we follow, and where else could we go, for you alone have the words of eternal life!"*