

The Cost of Discipleship

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Location: St George's Battery Point

Series: Stories along the Way (Parables in Luke)

Texts: Luke 14:25-35; Philippians 3:4b-14

Years ago, I remember having a conversation with a friend. He was agonising over whether he should ask his girlfriend to marry him. He asked me, “How do you know?” I said, “You don’t. You just have to choose.” “But how do I make that choice?” I didn’t really have an answer for him. On reflection I realised that at least part of the question was what does the choice involve. My generation and younger like to keep our options open. But we can’t come at the most important things in life like that. To choose this, means to say no to that. But when you make that commitment, lots of other possibilities open up that you would never have seen if you hadn’t made the choice. Choosing to marry Claire meant that I shut down all sorts of possibilities, not least the possibility of all other romantic options. And yet it opened up a whole new set of possibilities that weren’t there before - a depth of intimacy and love, children, a new extended family, and so on.

Over the past couple of months we’ve been listening to Jesus’ parables in Luke’s Gospel. Walking with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem as he teaches his disciples and us what it looks like to follow him as the King of God’s kingdom. I hope, if you’re a Christian this has helped deepen your faith and obedience. If you’re exploring faith with us, I hope you’ve seen a little more of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him and that you will find life in his name. I don’t know whether you’ve noticed, but many of Jesus’ parables call for a decision. And that’s where we are today. If you like we’ve been with the large crowds traveling with Jesus in verse 25. And now he turns, looks us in the eye, and says: “unless you give up everything you cannot be my disciple.” That is incredibly confronting, whoever you are - exploring faith or mature Christian.

This morning we’re going to explore this **challenge** from Jesus. We’ll then look at the 3 parables Jesus tells to help us see **why** his challenge is good, and then we’ll finish with **how** we can step up to Jesus’ challenge.

1. The Challenge

26-27 “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. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

What is Jesus’ talking about here? Is he anti family? Anti life? I don’t think so. But he does want us to consider the cost of following him. For those who heard him on that day, carrying your cross was not a metaphor. Those who carried a cross were as

good as dead. They were one their way to be executed. This was what Jesus himself would do shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that German pastor executed for his participation in a plot to kill Hitler, he put it like this:

When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.

Of course the great paradox of the Christian life is that you give up your life in order to save it. The only path to the resurrection is the cross. It's possible to gain the whole world and forfeit your soul. Jesus says that if you try to save your life you will lose it, but if you give up your life for his sake you'll save it. The cost is worth it. In Matthew's gospel Jesus says,

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Jesus and his kingdom are worth it. But it may cost you everything.

I find it very interesting the two things that Jesus says you may have to give up to be his disciple.

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.

Your family and even your own life. Of course our family is very important to us. But if you come from a non Western culture, family is often more than important. It's paramount. The honour and reputation of the family is everything. What you want takes a back seat to what your parents want. The cultural narrative is that the collective is more important than the individual.

In Western culture we value the individual over the collective. We love our families of course. But more important than that is being who you want to be, being free to follow your own desires. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are after all our inalienable rights, at least according to the US declaration of independence.

Yet these good gifts of family and your own life can become for us idols - false gods we worship and serve instead of the true and living God. And when we treat them like that they fail and we fall. The tighter we try to hold onto them and control them, the more they slip through our fingers. Think about the father who so dotes on his son he doesn't discipline him and instead indulges his bad behaviour. The little emperor despises his father for his weakness, and the father loses the son he was trying to hold onto.

On the other hand in the West we're always in danger of breaking the command to honour our father and mother. The pursuit of pleasure becomes addiction. Personal freedom becomes more important than protecting the vulnerable or caring for the needy.

What about in the specific situation where Jesus makes this point - that if we don't hate our family even our own life we cannot be his disciple? If we flip his words to the positive. How might we love Jesus more than our family, or put him before our family? William Cripps was a Sunday school teacher at St George's in the early 1900s. I wonder if he had Jesus' words in mind when he left his estate to the church in his will, much to his family's dismay. On a subtle level it might be saying no to the family birthday party on Sunday morning, because you are going to church. For some people choosing to follow Christ might mean facing rejection by your family. Whatever the case, following Christ will change how you relate to your family and how they relate to you.

What about loving Jesus more than your life? For some sisters and brothers, like the 21 Egyptians who were beheaded by ISIS for their Christian faith, it may mean literally losing your life. But most of us will not face such an ordeal. Rather it is in the mundane. It will mean using your freedom to serve him and your neighbour. Submitting your desires to his will. Offering him your body as a living sacrifice. Stepping down off the throne of your life and letting Jesus be your king.

Jesus' point is that he doesn't want followers with divided loyalties. We cannot take a consumer approach to Jesus, where we take the bits of his teaching we like, the bits of Christian community that suit us, and leave the things we don't. He does not want to sit in a corner of our house like a little Buddha. He wants the whole of us. And so as he invites us to follow him, he also calls us to count the cost. And he tells us three parables to help us do that.

i. Building a tower (28-30)

“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? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’”

I have to say I come to this parable with some trepidation. I'm sure Anne and Arthur and those on the restoration committee don't really want to tell what it's like trying to estimate the cost for restoring a tower! Although Jesus is definitely realistic:- costings are always only an estimate, not an exact figure! But Jesus' point is clear. Before you embark on the project, work out how much it will cost and if you can see it through to the end. Don't start if you're not prepared to follow through. If you're going to follow Jesus, you need to know he wants all of you. There's no part of your life that he will not touch. You can't keep something back from him in a dark corner of the house. You can't do the church thing on Sunday and then live for yourself Monday to Saturday. It's all in.

ii. Going to war (31-33)

In case we didn't get the point Jesus' tells us a second story.

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? 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. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

In the first parable the action Jesus urged as to *estimate* the cost. Here he asks us to sit down and *consider*. I like this because it says that it's ok to take your time working out this whole Christianity thing, whether or not it's true and whether or not you want in.

But the parable also says you can't put off making a decision forever. Did you notice in the story that the king is going to war because another king is coming against him. He doesn't have a choice about the conflict. The choice is whether he can win on the battlefield or whether he has to sue for peace. King Jesus is coming. The question you need to consider is whether you want to meet him as the coming Judge or as the Prince of Peace.

iii. Salt (34-35)

Jesus' third story has, if you like, a different flavour.

"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 pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Is this parable really about counting the cost of following Jesus? I think it is looking at the question from a different angle. Salt is used to both preserve meat and give flavour. If it fails at both of those things it's useless. Here then Jesus says it is only as we give up everything and follow him that we will remain salty. That is, as we give ourselves fully to Jesus, we will bless those around us. Where there is darkness, we can bring light. Where there is death we can bring life. Where there are wounds we can bring healing. Where there is despair we can bring hope. I remember talking to a Tasmanian politician who is not a Christian. I asked her, "What would you like to see from the church?" She said to me, "Society is tearing apart. I would love the church to be the glue that holds us together." It's only as we're salty, wholly committed to Jesus, living the life he calls us to, that we can be that glue. That's the promise of the cost.

How?

Jesus' challenge is to give up everything - to hate our family, even our own life - and follow him. It seems impossible. How can we do it? And if we do, will it be worth it? Won't we miss out? Jesus says that his kingdom is the pearl of great price, but how

do we know? Why should we trust him? It seems like a leap in the dark? The answer is that Jesus has already done it for us. He went into the darkness for us. He considered you and me worth giving up everything for. He gave up the place at his Father's side, even his very life to bring us home and make you God's daughter, God's son. He paid the cost of his own blood that we might meet him in peace as our king. Because he has borne the cost, all you need to do is trust him and receive. And if God has graciously given us his own Son, Paul writes, how will he not give us all things?¹

What is it that Jesus calls you to give up today so that you can follow him? Will you do that today? Will you take his hand and let him hold you and guide you? Will you let go of control, of your family of your life and give them to him? Will you step down off the throne, let him in, and receive the life, the forgiveness, the hope and joy he offers? Will you give up everything and follow Jesus? He's worth it and he won't let you down.



¹ Romans 8:31-32