

Main Idea: According to the Lord’s own words in Luke 14:25-35, making Christ the object of it all involves two activities: following and hating. Specifically, following Christ and hating family for Christ. There are three shocking realities to consider in Jesus’ message.

- I. Jesus gives us a **shocking announcement** (25-27).
  - A. If we don't hate, we're not His (26).
    1. The issue is loyalty.
    2. If Jesus Christ is not our number one priority, we're in trouble.
  - B. If we don't die, we're not a disciple (27).
    1. It involves a radical reorientation of our priorities.
    2. It involves a radical reorientation of our purpose.
- II. Jesus gives us a **shocking analogy** (28-35).
  - A. It's like building a tower (28-30).
    1. It's necessary to estimate the cost beforehand.
    2. It's a shame to start and not finish.
  - B. It's like going to war (31-33).
    1. The time to calculate is before you go.
    2. After you go, there's no turning back.
  - C. It's like salt (34-35).
    1. God despises diluted Christianity.
    2. God discredits diluted Christianity.
- III. Jesus gives us a **shocking application** (33, 35b).
  - A. We must count the cost before we follow Christ.
    1. I must be willing to forsake self.
    2. I must be willing to follow Christ.
  - B. We must count the cost every day.
    1. The issue is not—what did *they* do with Jesus?
    2. The issue is—what will *we* do with Him?

We’re worshipping our great God by looking at verbs this summer. Exciting, indeed! The New Testament is filled with important verbs that show us how to maximize our joy, by making *Christ the Object of It All*. He *is* the object of it all. But if we agree, it will show. How? The verbs tell us.

We open the door of our hearts to Him. That’s what we learned two weeks ago from Revelation 3. I stand at the door and knock, He says. If anyone *hears my voice and opens the door*, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Last time, we pondered Galatians 2:20 and the importance of finding our identity in Christ. *I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live. Christ lives in me. I live by faith in the Son of God.*

Today, Jesus Himself gives us two shocking verbs. *Follow*. And *hate*. Hence, the title of today’s message, “*Following Christ and Hating Family for Christ.*”

*Scripture Reading: Luke 14:25-35*

It’s a familiar story, but worth repeating. In April 1943 Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo, incarcerated, and interrogated. For the next two years he lived in a 6’ x 9’ prison cell. Eventually, he was taken to the Flossenbürg concentration camp where he was executed in April 1945.

In 1936, Bonhoeffer published *Nachfolge*. It would be later published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it he declares, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>2</sup>

In this classic Bonhoeffer warned about what he called *cheap grace*, which he described as, “Grace without price; grace without cost!” And then added, “The essence

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the message at WBC in 2000.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-cost-of-his-discipleship>

of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing.”

He also talked about *costly grace*, saying, “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.”

It seems we don't hear much about cost counting in the church these days. There's plenty of talk about what Jesus can do *for you*, and much of contemporary evangelism takes this approach.

Are you struggling with your family relationships, with stress on the job, with a low self-esteem, with financial strains? If so, come to Jesus. He will make life better *for you*.

It's amazing anyone would *not* want to come to Jesus with that kind of offer.

Please don't misconstrue what I am saying. Does Jesus offer us abundant life? Absolutely. Does following Christ produce positive benefits in our family relationships, and in our ability to respond to stress on the job, and in dealing with personal feelings of despair? Certainly.

But these are by-products. Is a person who comes to Christ merely to get the by-products truly a Christian? Jesus Himself faced this situation. Again and again, people came to Him for *deficient* reasons. Many people did. How did He respond to the multitudes of curious spectators? What kind of invitation did He give them? Simply put, He told them to *count the cost*.

But what does this mean? Counting the cost is what Peter Cameron Scott did. John Piper shares his story. Scott was born in Glasgow in 1867 and became founder of the Africa Inland Mission.<sup>3</sup> But following Jesus was no life of ease for Scott.

His first trip to Africa ended in a severe attack of malaria that sent him home. He resolved to return after he recuperated, which he did, and took his brother, John, with him. Sadly, John was struck down by fever, and all alone, Peter buried his brother and in his grief, recommitted himself to preach the gospel in Africa. Yet once again his health gave way and he had to return to England.

How could he ever overcome the desolation of those days? How could he ever find strength to go back to Africa after all these setbacks? Scott went to Westminster Abbey and found the tomb of the great pioneer missionary to Africa, David Livingstone. He entered quietly and knelt in front of it to pray to his God. He read these words on the tomb inscription:

*OTHER SHEEP I HAVE WHICH ARE NOT OF THIS FOLD; THEM ALSO I MUST BRING.*

He rose from his knees with a new hope. Scott did return to Africa. And the mission he founded is a vibrant, growing force for the gospel today in Africa. Peter Cameron Scott knew what it meant to count the cost.

Perhaps you're thinking, “Wow, amazing story. But Mr. Scott was an exception, wasn't he? We don't have to count the cost like he did, do we?”

Jesus Himself addresses this question in a message He preached to a crowd of people in Luke 14. What He told them was absolutely earth-shaking.

And please keep this in mind. In the message we're about to consider, Jesus was talking to *ordinary* people, just like us. Cost counting isn't a subject only for the spiritually elite. It's standard equipment for every follower of Christ.

If you are a Christian, this is for you. If you are contemplating becoming a Christian, this is for you. Jesus talked frankly about the cost of being His disciple. It wasn't in the fine print of the contract. He talked about it right up front, in plain and simple terms. There were no surprises.

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<sup>3</sup> see Piper, p. 200

I want to say this at the outset. I cannot imagine why anyone would *not* want to follow Jesus. There is a Savior who loved us so much that He died in our place so we can experience forgiveness and eternal life. He endured the punishment we deserve so we don't have to. What profit is there in gaining the whole world and losing your soul?

Again, I can't imagine why anyone wouldn't want to come to the Savior. But on the other hand, Jesus Himself makes it clear that no one should come to Him without first *counting the cost*, which involves following, hating, and making Him the object of it all.

Jesus gives us three shocking realities to consider in this message.

### I. Jesus gives us a shocking announcement (25-27).

Back in chapter one, we learn that Luke wrote this biography of Jesus for a person named Theophilus. To put that into perspective, Luke lived a generation *after* Jesus did, and was a co-worker with the apostle Paul. When he penned this gospel, the church was nearly three decades old, and it was thriving in its outreach in the Roman Empire. Many people were believing in Jesus, people who had never seen the Master. What was Jesus like? Luke interviewed living eyewitnesses and reported his findings in this gospel.

By the time we come to Luke 14, we find Jesus in the midst of his three year public ministry. His popularity is increasing. So is the hostility against Him by the religious leaders. The cross is getting closer.

One sabbath He was invited to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, and the account of what happened is given in the first twenty-four verses of chapter 14. We are interested in what happened *after* He left the house.

Verse 25 states, "Now great crowds accompanied him." I am intrigued by Jesus' response to crowds in Luke's gospel (see 8:4; 12:1; 18:36; 19:3, 7, 36). As Jesus left the Pharisee's house that day, a huge crowd followed Him. But He's not impressed. He knew that the majority of them were not interested in spiritual things. Some wanted another miracle, others a free lunch, and most hoped He would overthrow Rome.

Watch what Jesus did next. Verse 25 says, "And he turned and said to them." To that crowd, Jesus preached a sermon that deliberately thinned the ranks.<sup>4</sup>

Luke records a vital observation when he says (NIV), "Large crowds *were traveling* with Jesus." The implication is that this was not the first sermon they'd heard Him preach. They'd seen His works and heard His words. They'd been exposed. Now it's decision time. It's one thing to be fascinated with Jesus, it's another to *follow* Jesus.

Perhaps this is the case with you. You've been coming to this church for a while. You've been hearing the Word of God for six weeks, perhaps six months, or even six years. You kind of enjoy learning about Jesus. But you're facing a decision. Will you *follow Him*? It was to such people that Jesus made two radical announcements.

**A. If we don't hate, we're not His (26).** Yes, you heard the word correctly. *Hate*. Listen to Jesus in verse 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."

Stunning. Talk about strong language! If anyone comes to Me. Okay so far, but here's the qualification for coming to Jesus. "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."

Hate. Did Jesus say *hate*? Yes, He did. But isn't Jesus love? Yes. And didn't Jesus teach His disciples to love? Yes, He did. He later gave this familiar instruction to His disciples in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, 231

So, which is it? Hate or love? Is Jesus contradicting Himself? He never contradicts Himself. What He's doing is using a shocking word to make a vital point.

1. *The issue is loyalty.* To be a disciple of Jesus is to give ultimate allegiance to Jesus. We must be loyal to Him, above all else. He is the Master, and to be His disciple means that we seek to please Him above our families, and certainly above ourselves.

To hate, in this context, means to *love less*. In other words, the love a disciple has for Jesus must be so great that his love for family, by comparison, looks like hatred.

The issue, again, is loyalty. Jesus calls for absolute, supreme loyalty. Allow me to put it in the negative.

2. *If Jesus Christ is not our number one priority, we're in trouble.* Something is amiss, terribly out of line. Yet why is Jesus' language so severe? Why does He use such an offensive term like *hate*?

R. C. Sproul comments, "We must remember however that Jesus was an oriental teacher, and used figures of speech in order to communicate emphasis. On more than one occasion, he made use of hyperbole, that literary form that we identify as an intentional exaggeration in order to communicate a crucial point."<sup>5</sup>

And what's the crucial point in Luke 14? Jesus is sending a clear message to those who are coming to Him for the wrong reasons, to the uncommitted half-hearted.

When Jesus uttered these words, where was He going? It wasn't to a picnic. He was on His way to the *cross*. But many in the crowds that hung around Him thought He was on His way to an empire.<sup>6</sup> They were following Him for selfish reasons. They wanted to *use* Him, not give allegiance to Him.

That's why He spoke like this. He told would-be followers, "If you want to follow Me, you may come, but here's the first prerequisite. I must be number one in your life."

This is serious, isn't it? My friend, if you love your spouse more than Christ, you are not and cannot be a true disciple of His. If you put your children, or other family members, or even yourself before Christ, you cannot be His disciple. This is not my opinion. This is what *He* said.

Robert Stein puts it this way, "A person who commits himself or herself to Christ will develop a greater love for both neighbor and family, although at times loving and following Christ may be seen as renunciation, rejection, or hate if the family does not share the same commitment to Christ."<sup>7</sup>

Are you refusing to follow Christ because your spouse won't? Have you resisted God's command to be baptized because you want to keep a family member happy? Are you failing to live wholeheartedly for the Lord because you're waiting for your family to join you? Jesus' words are straightforward. If we don't hate, we're not His.

But that's not all, and in fact, it's just the beginning of Jesus' message. In verse 27 Jesus proceeds to make a second radical announcement.

**B. If we don't die, we're not a disciple (27).** Listen to Jesus in verse 27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." To be a disciple, we must bear our cross, Jesus says.

What does He mean? You may have heard devotional sermons spiritualize this passage to interpret the "cross" as everything from a cranky mother-in-law to a leaky roof to a 1957 Chevy.<sup>8</sup> "No, I don't like my job, but that's the 'cross' I must bear for Jesus!"

That's not what cross meant to Jesus' audience. When they heard the term 'cross', they didn't think of long term difficulties, or burdens, or even of Calvary, for Jesus had

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<sup>5</sup> Sproul, R. C. (1999). [\*A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke\*](#) (p. 295). Christian Focus Publications.

<sup>6</sup> Barclay, 196

<sup>7</sup> Stein, R. H. (1992). [\*Luke\*](#) (Vol. 24, p. 397). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, 201

not yet gone to His cross. What they thought of was *death*, death by execution, martyrdom.

In the first century, the cross was a cruel instrument of torture and death. The Romans used it to execute criminals. When Jesus said His followers must bear their cross, it was clear He was calling them to embrace death for Him. To be His disciple meant that they must make the ultimate sacrifice, die to themselves, and surrender to Him as Lord in every sense.

“I’ve died to myself. From now on I’m going to live for Jesus,” is the commitment we must make if we want to be His disciple.

You say, “This is radical stuff!” Indeed, it is. Being a disciple of Jesus involves a radical reorientation in two areas of our lives.

1. *It involves a radical reorientation of our priorities.* That's the issue in verse 26, our priorities. The day we became disciples of Christ was the day we gave our allegiance to Him. From that moment on, mom, dad, kids, and self must take a subordinant place in our priorities.

2. *It involves a radical reorientation of our purpose.* That's the issue in verse 27. A shift occurs when we become Jesus' disciple. Before becoming His disciple, when choosing a job, we select the one we want. After becoming a disciple, we choose the one He wants. Before becoming a disciple, we spend our money however we want. Afterwards, we seek to please Him with every penny. Before following Christ, we use our time as we see fit. But as His disciple, we invest our time for Him. When we become a disciple of Jesus, a radical reorientation of priority and purpose takes place.

Please listen carefully to the next sentence. I believe the Scriptures are clear that being a disciple of Jesus isn't some optional second phase of the Christian life. In other words, the Bible doesn't teach we can "get saved" (become a Christian) and view being a disciple as something we'll consider later.

Every true Christian *is* a disciple of Jesus. Jesus told us to go into the world and make disciples (Matt 28:18). In the book of Acts, the word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer*. A Christian is not a person who signs up for fire insurance from Jesus. A Christian is a disciple, a person who follows Jesus, whose life has been radically reoriented by the Lord Jesus.

Make it personal. Has your life changed since you “got saved”? I don't mean did you give up a few habits, for a person can do that for personal or family reasons. I mean, since you put your faith in Christ, do you now live with a new orientation, namely, to please Him above all?

When your family invites you to a picnic on a Sunday, and participation will necessitate missing church, do you ask the Lord what will please Him, or do you do what your family wants?

Once someone was talking to a great scholar about another person, and said, “So and so tells me that he was one of your students.” The teacher answered with a solemn tone, “He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.” As William Barclay surmises, “It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.”<sup>9</sup>

So Jesus begins with a shocking announcement in verses 25-27, and we must pay attention to it. But we mustn't stop there, because Jesus didn't.

## II. Jesus gives us a shocking analogy (28-35).

In it, Jesus uses three illustrations to help us grasp what it means to count the cost.

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<sup>9</sup> Barclay, p. 196.

**A. It's like building a tower (28-30).** Notice verses 28-30, “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? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

For a couple of summers while I was in seminary, I did house painting. One of the hardest parts of the job happened before I ever picked up a brush or ladder. I had to make an estimate. I had to decide before I did the job how much it would cost me to finish the project. Sometimes my projections were accurate, at other times off.

Jesus had a similar scenario in mind when He shared His first illustration, a situation involving a builder. We can make a couple of observations based on the illustration.

1. *It's necessary to estimate the cost beforehand.* Afterwards is too late! Jesus probably has in mind a vineyard tower, a tower which was used to keep watch for thieves in harvest time. No good businessman would start a project without first counting the cost ahead of time. Why not? The answer has to do with observation #2.

2. *It's a shame to start and not finish.* Shame is a big deal in the Middle Eastern culture, and Jesus knows it. What happens when a man starts a project, yet fails to finish it? In the case of the builder, Jesus says, “Everyone who sees it will ridicule him.”

This is what happens when a person says he wants to follow Christ, but does not first count the cost. There will be shame, for the person, but even worse, for the reputation of Christ.

Consider these words of application by John Stott, “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 warning 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.”<sup>10</sup>

Stott is right. It's the problem, again, of *cheap grace*. Friends, while salvation is free, it's not cheap. And so, says Jesus, we must count the cost. Counting the cost is like building a tower. Don't start something that you don't intend to finish.

This doesn't mean that salvation is earned, for it clearly is a gift from God. But to receive this gift, one must acknowledge that the Giver is now the most important person in one's life.

**B. It's like going to war (31-33).**<sup>11</sup> Here's how the LB puts it, "Or what king would ever dream of going to war without sitting down first with his counselors and discussing whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat the 20,000 men who are marching against him? If the decision is negative, then while the enemy troops are still far away, he will send a truce team to discuss terms of peace. So no one can become My disciple unless he first sits down and counts his blessings--and then renounces them all for Me!"

Again, the point Jesus is making is clear. He's not trying to trick us, but prepare us.

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<sup>10</sup> *Basic Christianity*, p. 108

<sup>11</sup> ESV “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? <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

1. *The time to calculate is before you go.* Eisenhower didn't wait to count his troops until they were confronting the enemy on the Normandy beaches, did he? The time for calculating is *before* the battle starts.

2. *After you go, there's no turning back.* Any king, general, or commander understands this reality. Once the battle begins, you don't stop until the objective is met.

So for the Christian. Jesus doesn't say to us, "Why don't you follow Me for a couple of months and see if you like it. If not, you can just go back to your old way of living, no questions asked."

This was *not* the invitation that Jesus extended to potential disciples, then, or now. Hear again His words in verse 33, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Two shocking illustrations. A builder who begins but doesn't finish a tower because he failed to plan? And a king who goes to battle without assessing whether he can win? Unthinkable.

And so is this. To say yes to Jesus without first thinking through the implications.

Leon Morris explains, "The two parables are similar but they make slightly different points. The builder of the tower is free to build or not as he chooses, but the king is being invaded (the other *comes against him*). He must do something. Cf. A. M. Hunter, 'In the first parable Jesus says, "Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow me." In the second he says, "Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to refuse my demands." ' Both ways of looking at it are important.'"<sup>12</sup>

Jesus then gives a third illustration about cost-counting.

**C. It's like salt (34-35).** "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? <sup>35</sup> 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."

There goes the Bible again, contradicting known science. So says the critic, because from a chemist's viewpoint, it is impossible for salt (sodium chloride) to lose its taste.

But again, this is not a contradiction. This was reality in first century Israel, and Jesus knows it. As Stein explains, "Most salt came from the Dead Sea and contained carnallite or gypsum. If carelessly processed, it would become insipid or poor tasting. Such salt was of little or no use; in fact, it was a distinct liability because it now had to be discarded."<sup>13</sup>

Leon Morris adds, "It was quite possible for the sodium chloride to be leached out of the impure salt in common use so that what was left lacked the taste of salt. It was literally useless. It could not fertilize the land or even decompose usefully on the manure heap."<sup>14</sup>

Yes, salt is good. Everyone in the first century knew that, for salt was used as a preservative, a flavoring, and also on the land to make things grow. But everyone also knew how useless the saltless salt was.

So what's Jesus' point? By using the salt analogy, He's showing us God's assessment of those who claim to follow Him but fail to count the cost.

1. *God despises diluted Christianity.* Unsalty salt is good for nothing. Sadly, this word-picture is an accurate depiction of a condition that exists around the world. There's true Christianity, with genuine followers of Christ. But right next to it, there's a watered-down, cultural Christianity, with those who claim Christ but don't follow Him.

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<sup>12</sup> Morris, L. (1988). [\*Luke: an introduction and commentary\*](#) (Vol. 3, p. 254). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>13</sup> Stein, R. H. (1992). [\*Luke\*](#) (Vol. 24, p. 398). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Morris, p. 237.

It's the "What's the least I can do and still make it to heaven?" version of Christianity. The "Don't ask me to be radically committed to Christ" version. The "I'll add Christ to my life, but I don't want to be fanatic about it or anything" version.

Wherever Christianity goes, cultural Christianity follows. Just give it a generation or two. We see it in the seven letters Jesus wrote in Revelation 2-3. We see it in the history of the church in Europe. We see it in our country.

And God is not pleased. God despises diluted Christianity. Furthermore...

2. *God discredits diluted Christianity.* Jesus words are blunt in verse 33, "Anyone who does not give up everything *cannot* be my disciple."

So, consider this question with me. Is it possible to receive Christ without intending to live for Him?

Think of the person who says, "I don't believe you *have* to go to Sunday School to go to heaven." My friend, you don't *have* to come to the mid-week Bible study and prayer service either. And you don't *have* to read your Bible every day. In fact, if you think your religious efforts contribute to your salvation, you don't understand grace.

But here's the question. Why would a person who professes to believe in Someone who gave His all for them, not *want* to take advantage of every opportunity possible to worship Him, to get to know Him better, to meet with His people and encourage them, and participate fully in the mission He has given to His people?

Brothers and sisters, the nature of true discipleship calls for a radical commitment to Jesus Christ. And to the true disciple, this is not seen as mere duty, but an incredible privilege. To borrow from the hymnwriter, Frances Havergal...

*I gave My life for thee,  
My precious blood I shed,  
That thou mightst ransomed be,  
And quickened from the dead;  
I gave, I gave My life for thee,  
What hast thou done for Me?  
I gave, I gave My life for thee,  
What hast thou done for Me?*

*My Father's house of light,  
My glory-circled throne  
I left for earthly night,  
For wanderings sad and lone;  
I left, I left it all for thee,  
Hast thou left aught for Me?  
I left, I left it all for thee,  
Hast thou left aught for Me?*

*I suffered much for thee,  
More than thy tongue can tell,  
Of bitterest agony,  
To rescue thee from hell;  
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,  
What hast thou borne for Me?  
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,  
What hast thou borne for Me?*

*And I have brought to thee,  
Down from My home above,  
Salvation full and free,  
My pardon and My love;  
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,  
What hast thou brought to Me?*

*I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,  
What hast thou brought to Me?*

This brings us to the punch line.

### III. Jesus gives us a shocking application (33, 35b).

Jesus is talking to us now, my friend. How do I know that? Listen to His concluding words, “He who has ears to ear, let him hear.” We have ears, and He calls us to hear. He lays before us two unmistakable responses.

**A. We must count the cost before we follow Christ.** You say, “I thought salvation was free.” It is. We are saved through Christ alone, not by our own merit (Eph 2:8-9). Salvation is the gift of God. All true.

But did you realize that God grants two gifts in conversion? He gives us repentance *and* faith. Repentance isn't something we do for God, but something God enables us to do (Acts 11:18). He enables us to count the cost, leave a life of living for self, believe in Christ and live for Christ. This too is God's gift.

But we can't take part of it, nor can we preach part of it. Here is what Paul said he preached as the gospel (Acts 20:21), “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

My friend, if you are pondering becoming a Christian, I am so glad. You'll never regret it. But you must count the cost. The cost is nothing compared to the eternal gain, but there is cost.

“What does it cost?” you ask. According to Jesus (verse 27, the cost is twofold.

1. *I must be willing to forsake self.* I must take up my cross and die to self. I must allow the Lord to produce a new orientation in the way I live.

Perhaps a specific example will help. Listen to the following: “Most men don't die of old age, they die of retirement. I read somewhere that half of the men retiring in the state of New York die within two years. Save your life and you'll lose it. Just like other drugs, other psychological addictions, retirement is a virulent disease, not a blessing.”

Those are the words of Ralph Winter, founder of the United States Center for World Mission. They were written a generation ago, but still true. It was his passion to remind young and old alike that the only way to find life is to give it away. He called retired Christians to quit throwing their lives away on the golf course when they could be giving themselves to the global cause of Christ. He called students to invest their lives in missions instead of hoarding their lives for self-centered pursuits.

To be a disciple I must be willing to forsake self. There's a second cost.

2. *I must be willing to follow Christ.* “Whoever does not bear his cross, and *come after Me* cannot be my disciple (27).” Are you following Christ? What does that mean?

I appreciate so much the message of the book *Desiring God* by John Piper. In one section, he explores the question as to why God prospers many saints, and offers this answer, “God does not prosper a man's business so he can move from a Ford to a Cadillac. God prospers a business so that thousands of unreached peoples can be reached with the gospel. He prospers a business so that twelve percent of the world's population can move a step back from the precipice of starvation.”<sup>15</sup>

Do those words unnerve you a little as they do me? You say, “Wait. God blesses us so we can enjoy it.” And that's true. He gives us all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). But it's not the whole story.

Listen again to Piper, “The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being

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<sup>15</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 169.

deceived into thinking a \$100,000 salary must be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. God has made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do."<sup>16</sup>

Jesus calls us to count the cost and forsake self *before* we follow Him. That's the first response. But there's a second.

**B. We must count the cost every day.** Jesus calls us to no less.

What price are we willing to pay to follow Jesus? Following Jesus requires the willingness to make personal sacrifices every day. Like Hudson Taylor did.

In the biography of Hudson Taylor, we learn how this missionary to China was willing to endure personal hardship in order to make time for daily Bible meditation. His own children made this observation in the biography:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayers and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A.M. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

Perhaps you're wondering how the crowd to which Jesus spoke these words responded. The fact is, we're not told. The silence is intentional for *we* are the answer.

1. *The issue is not—what did they do with Jesus?*

2. *The issue is—what will we do with Him?*

It's cost counting time. The truth is, we *will* make a decision today, every one of us. We will count the cost and then decide. Some will follow Jesus. Some will say the cost is too high. I encourage you to prayerfully consider the following questions.

Have you ever received God's gifts of repentance and faith, so that you turned from living for yourself in order to believe in and follow Jesus Christ? If not, will you right now count the cost and do so? You can become a disciple of Jesus this very moment!

For others, another question is in order. Have you been living like a disciple of Jesus? If we retraced the steps of your past seven days, would we find the Lord leading the way? Perhaps your life is like an unfinished tower, or a ruler who miscalculated the cost of the battle, or saltless salt. Will you count the cost today and say to the Lord, "I will forsake myself and follow You wherever You lead me."?

We've learned this morning about counting the cost. But remember, what God requires, God enables. If you are thinking, "I can't be a Christian, I don't have what it takes," realize this. The Lord will enable you if you come to Him on His terms. Will you choose today to follow Jesus?

**Next week:** "*Knowing Christ*" Philippians 3:7-11

**Closing Song:** #376 "*I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*" (all four verses)

**Closing charge:** Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

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<sup>16</sup> Piper, pp. 172-3.