

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

◆ Intro: I ran across some ads reportedly from the 1930's. One was a cigarette ad that read "Blow smoke in her face and she'll follow you anywhere." Really? Another showed a happy little family at the beach and claimed they were happy because they ate lard. But the one that made me shudder the most was the one advertising tape worms under the promise that you could eat all you want and never get fat, and that they were easy to swallow! **[show picts]** Now I don't know for certain if these are actual relics from the past, but one thing is certain: we have much different views today of such things and we would think anyone buying these lines of reasoning to be downright moronic. Interestingly, that's a term Jesus uses in our text (v34). After describing a builder who only builds half a tower due to the lack of planning, and a king who goes to war without calculating his military strength –Jesus says "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness..." The verb there is literally, "μωραίνω"; becomes useless, or "moronic" or nothing, a foolish contradiction. Salt that is not salt is just crazy! Here's my point: just as we'd say you're a fool for thinking cigarette smoke is a turn-on, or isn't going to cost you, or that you're a fool for going to war without enough weapons, or thinking it isn't going to cost you, or that you're a fool to use salt that isn't salty, Jesus is warning us that you're a fool if you think it's not going to cost you to join up with God.

◆ So there is a cost, a high cost, to Christian discipleship. How high? Jesus uses poetic exaggeration to make the point: you gotta "hate" your father, mother, brothers, sisters to follow him (v26) We know of course that this is not literal because everywhere else Jesus teaches us to love our

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

families, in fact even our enemies! So don't go telling yourself you're being a good Christian because you don't like your mom. The next verse tells us we have to "take up our cross" which doesn't seem so bad since most of the crosses we have and carry are made of gold or silver and hang around our necks. But to "take up your cross" was to be willing to die for the cause. It's a bit like saying "buy a noose and stitch your own name on it, and keep it with you." Or, "Put on a black decapitation hood". Or "Let the media get a shot of you hand cuffs for the front page." You are on your way to give it all, even die. That's what it means to side with Jesus.

◆ In my own Bible-reading time one day this week I read the story of Stephen being stoned for being a Christian. He was one of the very first to die for Jesus' name. I thought to myself, "Would I be that bold? To let a crowd throw bricks and boulders at me until I'm dead for the sake of being known as a follower of Christ? We might be inclined to *claim* such a faith. We'd like to be noble. What if I toned it down just a bit. Would I... go to jail for Jesus? How about a little less severe. Would I... befriend a troubled inmate already in jail for Jesus? Would I... take a hungry person to restaurant and buy her a meal for Jesus? That's gotta be a whole lot easier than *dying* for Jesus. Would I even stop and talk to someone sitting alone on a park bench for Jesus? Even less costly, would I... lose money, or just lose business for the sake of Jesus and his ways? Would I... limit what I watch for Jesus? Now the thing is, I might find myself quicker to say I'd die for Jesus,

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

than to actually deny myself a movie for his sake. But doesn't that sound just a little... moronic?

◆ The fact is, that if you really want to sign up with Jesus and his Church, it's *not* on a par with, say, joining a quilting class, or buying season tickets to the Colts. Jesus is calling each of us to take a serious look down the road because this is no easy street. It's a matter of life and death.

◆ **1. If I'm serious about following God, I can expect opposition, so I'll need to learn how to face it.** On the other hand, if I find following God relatively easy, it's a good possibility I haven't really been following him all that closely in the first place. Fact is, the life Jesus commands is not easy.

◆ *"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.' Jesus replied, 'No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'"* Luke 9:57-62, NIV.

◆ A. The commonly held drawbacks of being Christian aren't even close to what they really are. Many non-believers, and even some baby believers are seriously misled about what the cost of being Christian is. Some think it means...

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

- ◆ I have to feel guilty and bad about myself a lot. or...
- ◆ I can't have any fun any more, especially at church, or...
- ◆ To really be an orthodox believer I have to be serious, dour, and noticeably lacking in happy emotions. Or...
- ◆ To be holy means staying away from everyone who doesn't agree with exactly what you think theologically, politically. (Now none of this is true of real Christianity, but you'd be surprised at how many times in my life growing up as a PK I've heard people voice such idiotic assumptions.)
- ◆ Now to be sure, earlier in this same chapter of Luke's gospel we read about the Great Banquet and a God who desires to party and celebrate and bless human beings. And we sing songs like "Come Jesus as You Are", but while Jesus openly invites us to his salvation just as you are, he has no intention of leaving you just as you are! He is like a generous man who says, "Yes come and live with me at my house. I welcome you. I will provide for you." But because he is forgiving and generous and even just plain interested in you doesn't mean he will let you deal crack from his garage, or come in every night drunk. Jesus is not cool with us being casual christians. Rather, he is intent on bringing us to complete conversion. This is what turns out to be costly.
- ◆ Think about his illustrations. First of all (v28) you don't build part of a tower. You might build part of a shed, or part of garage until you have enough to finish. There's no urgency there. But a "fortified tower" the usual meaning of the term, is for protection and security. You don't build one half way. And further, you don't go halfway to war. Seriously, it's an

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

all or nothing affair requiring careful preplanning and calculation. You can't "tap out" in a war like you do at a wrestling match, can you? I think Jesus is giving the large crowds (v25 mob attraction, hoping to get in on the goods) a heads-up. Being a disciple is not like being a groupie of Hollywood star.

◆B. So what is this great cost of taking sides with God? The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way.

◆88 Q. What is involved

in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. Two things:

the dying-away of the old self,
and the coming-to-life of the new.

89 Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin,
to hate it more and more,
and to run away from it.

90 Q. What is the coming-to-life of the new self?

A. It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ
and a delight to do every kind of good
as God wants us to.

◆1) Dying and rising is no afternoon check list! For one, following God is at odds with the natural bent of everything else in the world of men and women. We all want to do what makes us feel good for the moment. We don't want someone else, or a God, telling us not to. We will chose for ourselves, thank you very much. But following

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

Christ means following him into death. Are you willing to die? Many are not. And there are many levels of dying involved as we shall see.

◆2) Following the true God is at odds with all other religions as well.

In Sudan whole Christian villages have been shot, mutilated and even crucified. One Egyptian newspaper wrote, "You Christian swine have cursed God almighty, claiming God has a son. You have slandered against God...your punishment is severe... By your actions you have condemned yourselves to death and loss of your possessions. Your blood is permissible to shed..." Pakistan has a federal law requiring the death penalty for converting from Islam. Already in 1992 Saudi Arabia said that converting to Christianity was legal ground for beheading. So following Jesus can quite literally get you killed on our planet. I read of a Christian in India who went to talk a man every day. The Indian spit on this Christian every time he came. Eventually he converted to Christ. When asked how long he spit on the Christian who came to share with him, he said, "Everyday, for Thirteen years." But there are other ways of dying too.

◆3) Dying to self to be Christ's disciple often means having less and

feeling more. Many Christians forgo a cruise they could otherwise afford so as to follow the biblical command to tithe on their income.

Many Christians choose to work less than they could, and make less than they might so that they can be involved in PTA or serve on a board in town, or volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and the like. It costs to give someone a good book, or CD. It costs to invite someone to a seminar or conference. It costs to share. It costs to

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

serve on a ministry team; you might have to lose time. You might have the hassle of making scheduling changes.

◆ Lets say the church decides to take a bus to a baseball game or something (like we will be doing this Fall). Lets say that someone from church signs up to go and you and that person clash? Going anyway may be a small death to self that following Jesus involves. Pagans are free to avoid all the people they don't like. Christians are not. We are charged to take on other people's sufferings with them, and even to love our enemies. Paul writes...

◆ "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" 2 Corinthians 11:28, 29, NIV

◆ He's saying he takes on the pains of people around him. He is not content merely to see what's on channel 13 tonight. Caring takes time. Caring takes money. It might take political action. Writing the mayor. Sponsoring a child. All of it is cost. This is following Jesus into death.

◆ 4) Being Jesus' disciple requires the hardship of a well-formed faith. Listen folks, it will not do to believe what you believe merely because that is what you were always taught. *Anybody* from *any* religion can say the same. And religions are mutually exclusive. You need to develop your faith. You need to find the answers to questions. You need to be able to tell someone else what it means to follow Jesus and why you do it (We call that evangelism.). You need to read your own Bible and see what God says about things. Why aren't you a Muslim, or a Jehovah's Witness? If all you can say is you weren't taught that way, you have not become

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

Jesus' disciple yet. Faith requires learning and understanding. That's why we hold classes on basic Christian practices, or discovering your giftedness, or missions, or a host of other things.

◆ Following Jesus is a whole life thing. Now thankfully Jesus does not expect us to become fully devoted followers all overnight. But we may be sure it is his ultimate plan for us.

◆ *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Romans 8:29, NIV.*

◆ This process is by no means simple. GK Chesterton once said, “Christianity as not been tried and found wanting. It's been found difficult, and so not tried.” One final thought before we finish, a word of encouragement.

◆ **2. Following Christ may not be easy, but it is certainly good.** Jesus is constantly telling his followers to look further down the road. Look beyond today. Look all the way to the next life. Gain a larger perspective from which to walk these infinitesimal footprints here on earth. Live beyond the moment. Think beyond what feels good right now. Don't play around at sex and drink and fame or reputation when there are such larger things like love and family, and meaning, and calling. So let's read one.

◆ *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness,

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

Matthew 5:11-13, NIV.

◆ Here in Matthew's account we find Jesus talking about the same kind of things as our text in Luke: the cost of being salt of the earth. Yet along with the cost of being salt of the Earth, is a promise of reward in heaven. If you are a disciple of Christ you are a prophet in your time. And every Jew knew that prophets would be rewarded in heaven. Are there rewards here in this life? Certainly, although you and I get a say in how life plays out and we often say the wrong sort of thing. For example, if we follow Jesus' commands we can have very good marriages. But then even Christ-followers sometimes choose not to do marriage Jesus' way. (We might not allot the time to listen to each other's hearts without giving advice. It's hard work. It costs effort. We might dominate each other either physically or verbally. We might not choose God's sexual limitations. All of this means that in some ways, sometimes realized and sometimes unrealized, we will not experience the rewards we could have. All of which is to say deciding to follow Jesus through life does not mean an automatic basket of blessings. Are blessings available? Absolutely, but on earth we get to be part of the equation!

◆ B. Thankfully God aims to take us all the way to perfection. And what remains incomplete here will be completed in heaven. And this is our reassurance as we take up our crosses and head toward death. Because of his great sacrifice, like him, our death will turn into life. Our sufferings

COUNTING COST, LUKE 14:25-35

Parables #6

will turn into reward freely given and unmerited. This is the call of faith; to believe this promise even when it doesn't feel like it.

◆ **Conclusion:** Remember Christian, God's Word is constantly reminding us of his coming rewards. These are not pay. We do not earn anything in heaven. But just as our salvation, and everlasting life with God are gifts through faith in Jesus' blood shed for us, so the rewards he is preparing are gifts of grace. Every opposition we face, every death we enter, every hard choice you make is putting real treasure in heaven for your future.

Scripture puts it...

◆ *we will rule angels*

◆ *we will reign with Christ*

◆ *we will reap a harvest*

◆ *we will be like him and seem him face to face*

◆ *we will enter his joy*

◆ *tears and pain will be gone*

◆ *sin will be history!*

◆ *blind eyes will focus without correction*

◆ *bad backs and sciatic nerves will give way to doing the high jump*

◆ *kids will play with lions*

◆ *deserts will blossom with flowers and trees*

◆ Sure beats cigarette smoke or tape worms, don't you think?

◆ "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory

COUNTING COST, LUKE14:25-35

Parables #6

is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” Philippians 3:17-4:1, NAS95.