March 27/28, 2024

Count the Cost

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom

Luke 14:25-35

Pastor Bryan Clark

As you know, this is an election year, and there will be no shortage of politicians willing to say whatever is necessary in order to get votes. Many of them have no intention of keeping their promises. They're just trying to figure out how to get people to vote for them.

Contrast that with Jesus 2,000 years ago. There are large crowds following Him. And yet He says to them, "Hey, before you sign up, before you vote for Me, so to speak, you need to know there's a real cost to following Me." Jesus was so honest, so authentic, so real with people, it was like, "You'd better count the cost if you're going to be for Me."

So that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Luke Chapter 14. First a little bit about the context, where we are in the story of Jesus. So, Jesus has been up north in Galilee, which typically was the home base. He's making His way now to Jerusalem, and this is the last time He will make the trip from Galilee to Jerusalem. This time, when He gets to Jerusalem, He'll be arrested and crucified. So up north in Galilee, just below that is an area known as Perea. and then you get down into Judea. So this is referred to as His Perean ministry. It's in between Galilee and Judah, heading toward Jerusalem.

There are still quite a few people that are following Him. They're curious. They're curious about the miracles. They're curious about what He's saying, but they haven't necessarily committed to following Him. It's likely many in this crowd were what they would have called *pilgrims,* who are making their way to Jerusalem for Passover. And they're just following this crowd en route.

Right before the text that we're going to study this morning, Jesus told a parable about a man who was going to host a grand dinner. He invited the people you would imagine would get invited to a nice dinner. But they weren't interested. They were too busy; they had too many other things to do, and they weren't going to come. So, the host decides to invite the sinners and tax collectors, the outcast, the blind, the lame, the sinners and misfits and losers. They're all invited because they actually want to come. So that then is what sets up our conversation this morning. Verse 25 of chapter 14:

> **Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "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."** (*NASB, Luke 14:25-26)

This is the line that will be repeated several times in our text this morning…***then you cannot be My disciple.*** So, what does Jesus mean by this? When we read this language, it's kind of unsettling for us because we don't really talk this way. But you have to understand it wasn't so unusual in the

first century. It was a form of hyperbole. So for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “If you have a problem, pluck your eyes out. If you have a problem, cut your hands off.” He didn't actually mean to go out and do that. It was a rhetorical technique to just make a point. So in this case, it's called the comparative force, and it simply means that your commitment to Jesus, compared to all other commitments. has to be first. So we have to balance this with the fact that Jesus also said, “Love your parents; love your spouse; love your children; love your neighbor; love even your enemies.” So you have to put this statement in context.

What he is saying is that your commitment to Jesus must be above all other relationships. You have to understand that in a first century Jewish culture, the family structure was very tight and very important. And the father, as the patriarch, decided what the beliefs were for the family. That could even go down as far as the grandchildren. In the whole family structure, he decided, and everybody falls in line.

There is a growing hostility toward Jesus. There's more and more tension with the religious leaders. So, for someone to make a choice to follow Him, they would likely step out of a very rigid family structure that would have created all kinds of chaos. Think of it, for example, today, maybe in a Muslim country, with all the dynamics in those families. And if someone in the family makes a decision, “I think I'm going to follow Jesus,” it would have had the same kind of drama and dynamics. So that's what Jesus is talking about. A lot of people simply wouldn't have the courage to make that decision, because of all the dynamics of family.

So for us here, 2,000 years later, there's still some of that. Over the years, I've known a lot of people that, because of the denomination they grew up in, because of their own religion, because of the family dynamics, it's just too costly to make a change, and so they choose not to follow Jesus. But it isn't just family issues. It's any relationship that prevents you from making the decision to follow Jesus. It could be your peers; it could be your fellow students. It could be your work associates; it could be a family dynamic. It could be any relationship where it feels like, “If I'm going to make this commitment, it's going to be very costly.” Even simply just the relationships in the culture—to go contrary to the current of the culture—is going to cost me! And what Jesus is saying is, “Yes, it will. So count the cost.” The next one, verse 27:

“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Again, the repetition of this line, “Hey, before you jump on board—before you sign up, before you vote for me, so to speak—you better know, ‘This is what it's going to cost you!’” So what does this mean? Sometimes you hear people going through something, and they'll say something like, “Well, that's my cross to bear.” That has nothing to do with what Jesus is talking about.

Nobody in this crowd understood what was coming next. In the Roman culture, crucifixion was reserved for the worst of the worst. Everything about it was to promote shame and guilt. So if you were sentenced to be crucified, you were required to carry the crosspiece through the streets, in this case, of Jerusalem, so that everybody in the streets would see the shame and the guilt and the horror of this. It was a way of sending a message to everyone, “Don't mess with Rome. This is what happens when you color outside the lines.”

In the case of Jesus, soon enough He will arrive in Jerusalem. He will be tried; He will be sentenced, and He will be required to carry the crossbeam of His cross through the very narrow streets of Jerusalem to the point of crucifixion. Only this time, the streets are filled with hundreds of thousands of hostile people. This crowd would have been right on the edge of breaking out into a riotous mob. The scene must have been absolutely terrifying, as everything felt like it was right on the edge of being out of control. Jesus has already been flogged. They would have been screaming at Him; they would have been spitting on Him; they would have been throwing things at Him all the way through these narrow streets, up to the place of crucifixion.

The imagery that Jesus is using is: If you're going to follow Me, imagine a scene that feels that terrifying, and then to choose yourself to step out into the street, to carry your own crossbeam, and to go through the gauntlet of such hate and hostility in order to publicly identify yourself as a follower of Jesus. That's the imagery that Jesus is using. There will be no hiding in the shadows, no hiding around the corner, no looking on from a distance. If you're going to sign up, if you're going to be My disciple, if you're going to follow Me, then you will take up your crossbeam, step out into the street, and you take the hostility, and you will identify yourself as My follower. He says, "If you're not willing to do that, you can't really be My disciple." It's a very graphic imagery. Verse 28:

> **"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"** (Vs. 28-30)

So, Jesus tells this little parable. And what He's saying is, "Hey, before you sign up, before you follow Me, you need to understand this is going to be very costly." So He uses this parable about a man that builds a tower. That doesn't really make sense to us, but in that world, they build these small towers, and the tower would overlook a vineyard or overlook a property, sometimes even overlooking a city. This man decides to build a tower, but he doesn't really count the cost. It's easy to start. It's not so easy to finish. So he gets partway through building the tower and he runs out of money. So a half-built tower sits there, and everyone that comes by, looks at it, and it's a point of mockery. It's a point of shame. As a matter of fact, when the text says they ***ridicule,*** it's the Greek word that's translated *mockery*…like when the crowd mocked Jesus. It's very strong terminology. When it says, **'This man,'** it's a term of derision. It's "*this fool*," he started something, but what a loser! He can't even finish it!

A little over 20 years ago, Patty and I built a house, and I can tell you, it's very easy to start. That's not really the problem. But before you start, somebody needs to figure out what this is ultimately going to cost. And you need to be sure when the project is over, that you can pay the cost. So that's exactly what Jesus is saying. What sense would it make to step out into the street with your crossbeam, to endure the horrors of going through that gauntlet, only to later give it all up? Walk away? He's like, "Why would you start this if you aren't going to finish it? So before you sign up, before you decide to be a disciple, I'm just going to be honest with you, 'There's a cost. This is what it costs to follow Me, and you better settle that before you start the journey.'"

Then He tells a second seemingly similar story. Verse 31:

> **"Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace."** (Vs. 31-32)

This is a parable that's often misunderstood. If we just casually read through it, it seems like He's just using another little parable to make the same point. "Hey, before you go to battle, you better count the cost to see if you can win." And that may have been what is meant…if it wasn't for the way the parable ends. The conclusion that, "If this is a battle I can't win, I need to ***send a delegation and understand the terms for peace,"*** helps us understand this is a very different parable. This is about a King. And it's about a King that is coming back. He's a very powerful King, so you better count the cost for going to war against this King. And if your conclusion is you can't win this battle, then before He gets here, you'd better figure out what are the terms for peace?

What this second parable is communicating is, "Yes, there is a cost to following Jesus, but—just to be clear—there's also a cost to not following Jesus. It's not that there's a cost of following Jesus, and if you're not interested, well, you can just take a stroll through the woods. You don't get off like that if you go to war with this King, which is God; you cannot win this battle. You'd better count your troops. You have no chance! Therefore, before this King returns, you'd better figure out what the terms for peace are while you still have time. And the only option on the table is to be a disciple of Jesus. So yes, it's costly to follow Jesus…but it's even more costly to decide not to, because you are going to find yourself at war with God, and that's a war you cannot win. So the only option for peace is that God sent His Son to be your Savior.

It's very similar to Jesus' discussion about the two paths. He's like, "Hey, there's only two paths. There's a wide path, and most people are going to take that path. It probably looks easier. But at the end of the path, it's destruction. There's another path, and it's a narrow path. It looks harder, but at the end, it's the path to life." So what Jesus is saying is, "Yeah, you'd better count the cost, better count the cost of what it means to follow Jesus. But you also better count the cost of not following Jesus, because that's a war you can't win!" Which gets us then to "Why?" in verse 33, for it says **So then.** In other words, as a result of what we just talked about…

> **"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."**

What does that mean? It's a conclusion; it's a summary. *So then, if you're going to follow Jesus, Jesus has to be more important than everything.* More important than your relationships…more important than the hostility of the culture…more important than everything—my business, my money, my bank account, my stuff! "Seek first the kingdom of God." Again, you have to think this through from a perspective of an ancient culture. Those people that would choose to follow Jesus, they didn't have bank accounts. They didn't have retirement accounts. They didn't have a lot of material stuff. There was no way to lock up the houses. Jesus would literally call them to leave

their former lives behind. It would be a complete and radical change to be part of the team to change the world.

No surprises here! He's laying it out right up front. “If you're going to follow Me, if you’re going to be part of the team, if you're going to be a disciple, I've got to be more important than everything, and you have to be willing to set it all aside if you're serious about being my disciple!”

So I can imagine a question arising from someone saying, “I'm a little bit confused. Is it possible to still be a Christian and not be a disciple?” So, in other words what you're asking is, “Is it possible to get a ticket to heaven? I'm not really interested in the rest of the stuff. I really don't want to follow Him, and that sounds like it's too high a price to pay. But I’d still kind of like to have that ticket to heaven. Is that possible?”

So that's the question that a consumer would ask. “What's in it for me? Can I get my ticket? I’m not all that interested in the rest.” That's actually kind of a difficult question to answer because the New Testament knows nothing of a conversation like that. It has never been about getting a ticket to heaven. There is no conversation like that. It's always been about a relationship. It's always been about becoming a disciple, a follower of Jesus, a part of the team of Jesus to change the world. It's what it has always been.

It's a little bit like asking me the question, “Hey, I’m just wondering, is it possible, technically speaking, to get married even though I have no interest in ever getting to know or spending time with my spouse?” It's like, “I guess, technically, that is possible, but it kind of misses the whole point.” So, as a result of that, in verse 34, we get a

> **“Therefore**…*in light of all that I just said*…**salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”** (Vs 34-35)

So what does He mean by that? In the ancient Roman world, salt was actually a very valuable commodity. For example, we know that part of the salary for a Roman soldier was paid in salt, because salt had a lot of value. It was used as a preservative; it was used as a seasoning; it was used as fertilizer. But it was a very impure salt, nothing like what we think of today. As a result of that, it had a shelf life of somewhere in the neighborhood of 12 to 15 years, and then the salt was no longer salty. Once the salt was no longer salty, it had no value, and it was thrown out. What Jesus is saying is, “**Therefore**,” in light of what He has said, “What is the value of a disciple of Jesus if you're not interested in following Him?” What is the point of that? There is no point. That’s not what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

There's a whole multitude of people, and they're curious. They're trying to figure all this out, and they probably want to see a few more miracles. They're willing to listen to what He has to say, but Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem. He's going to be arrested; He's going to be tried; He’s going to be convicted; He’s going to be scourged, and when He walks that street, surrounded by a hostile crowd, to the point of His crucifixion, He will take that journey alone. There is not a single person in that crowd that will remain with Him. They will scatter.

But after the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus isn't done with these disciples. Failure is never final. God is always willing to forgive. And based on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, His disciples started to get it. And Jesus, once again, reminded them. “But you’ve got to count the cost. This will have to be more important than all your other relationships. This means you're going to have to take your cross and you're going to have to carry it through the most hostile streets imaginable. This means this has to be more important than anything else in your life.” And those brave, courageous men counted the cost and said, “Sign me up!”

It's a remarkable thing that the God of the universe would invite them to be part of something that would still matter 10,000 years from now, to literally be part of something that would change the world. They counted the cost. They said, “We're in,” and they changed the world!

So here we are 2,000 years later. It's not so different. Jesus is very honest, very authentic, and He's very upfront. “Hey, here's what I'm offering, but before you vote for Me, you need to understand that this is going to cost you. I expect to be number one—above all relationships, above all possessions, above all money, above all stuff, above all that—and, if necessary, you need to take up your cross and you need to walk through hostile streets, and identify yourself, ‘I'm following Jesus!’”

But we also need to understand that if you choose not to, there is also a cost. Because this King is coming back, and this King is coming back with a full army. You cannot fight God and win. And if that's true, you’d better quickly negotiate the terms of peace…because He's coming. And the only option on the table is through the Savior that died on the cross for your sins. The only option on the table is to say, “Yes, I'll follow Him. I want to be His disciple!”

It's a remarkable thing that the King of the universe has called us to be part of the team…to be a part of something that will still matter 10,000 years from now…to get up every morning and know “I've given my life to something that matters.” Every day is a day full of purpose, and He’s asking you, “Do you want to be part of the team to change the world?” Then I’d say, “Count the cost.” And I pray you will say, “Yes!”

> *Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You've invited us to be part of that which will matter forever. But this isn’t easy. Jesus was very honest. My prayer would be, that as your church, we would count the cost, and we would choose to be Your disciple, and that You would use us to change the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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SPRING 2024 // WEEK 4

Life Group Questions

Kingdom Stories: Living in the One True Kingdom // April 27-28, 2024

Count the Cost // Luke 14:25-35

Introduction

This week's sermon took us to several parables that emphasize the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. By using all-or-nothing examples, Jesus is challenging His followers—then and now—to choose between the kingdoms of this world or the Kingdom of Heaven and its One True King.

We invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Some people even use these questions to take notes during the sermon. The questions are meant to stir your thinking and prompt open discussion and we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) Have you ever spent money on something without worrying about the cost? (a special dinner out, a luxury spa treatment, an extravagant gift). What was that experience like for you?

2) Have you tried any of the Personal Spiritual Exercises this session? How did God use it in your life in a specific way? Or what have you heard God saying to you in your personal time in quietness, prayer and scripture reading?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

Read the full passage together with your group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) This passage is packed with potent parables. **Who is Jesus speaking to and what is the significance of the time and place in which these are given?**

2) Though Jesus' popularity was running high, He was about to teach that the cost of following Him was also very high. In verse 26, Jesus says that a person cannot be His disciple unless they "hate" their family and their own life. **How did Pastor Bryan explain this dramatic use of language by Jesus to this audience?**

What would be an example in your own life of following Jesus with that kind of commitment?

3) "Take up your cross" wasn't just a figure of speech in Jesus' world. **What real life images would the people hearing this example have in mind when Jesus said this?**

How should we relate such a strong image to our own lives these days?

What might Jesus be asking you to do or say in order to carry your cross for His sake this week?

4) Calculating the cost of building a tower and counting opposing troops in battle are two other examples of counting the cost. **How are they similar and how are they different ways to understand what it takes to be a committed disciple of Jesus?**

Why do you think Jesus introduced the idea of agreeing to peace in verse 32? What might that have to do with counting the cost of discipleship?

5) In the final parable, Jesus speaks of salt**. How was salt used in the ancient world?**

In what ways might salt have been an apt description for the life of a Christ-follower?

All of these parables taken together show the value system of a person who commits their life to follow King Jesus. **How would you describe that value system in your own words?**

Practically speaking, what is the cost for you to follow Jesus here and now?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: Counting the cost can look differently in each person, but God is the one who truly knows when we have surrendered our whole self to His leading. A meaningful prayer of surrender is given to us in *Psalm 139:23-24*; make this your prayer this week.

> *Search me, O God, and know my heart;*
> *test me and know my anxious thoughts.*
> *Point out anything in me that offends you,*
> *and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

Scripture Focus: There are various references to salt in scripture. Take a dive into the study of salt by looking up the verses below. Notice how these references relate to the parable about salt in this week's sermon and what it looks like to live as a faithful disciple of Jesus.

Leviticus 2:13 *2 Kings 2:20-22* *Psalm 107:34* *Matthew 5:13-16* *James 3:11*

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?