

2022.07.24 - Parables Of Jesus - Counting The Cost

So What? Counting the cost of following Jesus leads to an awakening of purpose.

Feel What? Challenged.

Now What? In what ways do I need to count (or recount) the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, everyone. Today, we're continuing our summer message series through the parables of Jesus. These are the stories he told to describe what the values of the kingdom of God are and how they often collided with the natural and worldly expectations his listeners held.

In order to grasp the meaning of the Scripture, what I sometimes find interesting is looking at the earliest followers of Jesus closest to the time of his ministry to see how they responded to his teaching. One community of faithful believers that I think is particularly fascinating is the desert mothers and fathers of the Fourth Century. During this time, the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, so it went from a heavily persecuted faith to a near state-sponsored one. Christians went from being killed for their faith to emerge from their hiddenness to a point where it was culturally advantageous to say that one was a Christian for political, economic, and societal gain.

Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*: “Once the persecutions had ceased, it was no longer possible to witness for Christ by following him as a blood witness. Yet the end of the persecutions did not mean that the world had accepted the ideals of Christ and altered its ways; the world continued to prefer the darkness to the light (John 3:19). But if the world was no longer the enemy of the Christian, then the Christian had to become the enemy of the dark world. The flight to the desert was the way to escape a tempting conformity to the world.”

These weren't necessarily the most holy or special or called people who fled into the wilderness. Some were leaving behind a wayward life of crime and misconduct. Some were running from what they felt was the Roman government overreaching into their

private affairs. But there were some who did feel it was exactly what Jesus was inviting them to do to embrace a lifestyle of silence and solitude.

Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*: “Born around 251, Anthony was the son of Egyptian peasants. When he was about eighteen years old he heard in church the Gospel words, ‘Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor . . . then come and follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). Anthony realized that these words were meant for him personally. After a period of living as a poor laborer at the edge of his village, he withdrew into the desert, where for twenty years he lived in complete solitude. During these years Anthony experienced a terrible trial. The shell of his superficial securities was cracked and the abyss of iniquity was opened to him. But he came out of this trial victoriously—not because of his own willpower or ascetic exploits, but because of his unconditional surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When he emerged from his solitude, people recognized in him the qualities of an authentic ‘healthy’ man, whole in body, mind, and soul. They flocked to him for healing, comfort, and direction.”

Now, this seems extreme, does it not? Leaving all you’ve known behind—all your familiar surroundings, your home, perhaps some of your family and friends—all that you hold dear so that you can draw near to God seems a bit far fetched, right? Where would someone get this idea?

Transition: And, is this even expected for us, and what would that even look like today?

SOLUTION

Luke 14:25-36, NIV: Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “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. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ 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? 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, those of

you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. 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. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Bold words from Jesus. Let it not be said that these parables are simple children's stories.

So, what does he mean when he says we must “hate father and mother, wife and children,” and so on? Are we to angrily toss aside every meaningful relationship so we can follow Jesus? If you're on Twitter, you would be tempted to say, “Yes.”

But if we look deeper, we understand Jesus is being purposefully inflammatory to probe the deeper feelings of his listeners and activate a response. Remember, in the First Century Jewish culture, honoring one's family was of utmost importance. This wasn't just a cultural demand, but a religious one as well. God had written in the Ten Commandments to honor your father and mother, and rebellions against that was punishable under the Old Testament Law by death.

The contrast between love and hate here is better explained through a loyalty framework. In other words, Jesus is probing their loyalty and saying that if someone shows more loyalty to their father, mother, wife, and children—and if their prefer following themselves above all—then that person is unable to be a disciple. They can't follow Jesus because they won't follow Jesus. Especially when decisions become difficult. If your husband demands action that you know to be sinful against God and you're more loyal to her, then you'll choose sin. If your best friend gets into another jam and demands you empty your bank account to bail him out and you miss your mortgage payment, that's what you'll do.

Our love for God must supersede all other loves. When we love God first and most, then that overflow will allow us to love all others well. And when we do so, we must be ready for the difficult repercussions of putting God first in our lives.

Jesus then tells two stories to demonstrate this important principle: You must take into account what it costs to be a disciple of Jesus. First, he asks his listeners who among them would begin a building project, such as a tower, without taking into account of the full cost. Then, he tells them about a scenario where one king is about to go to war who realizes he doesn't have a sizable enough army to win the battle and must avert disaster. All to drive home the point that they must be ready to take into account what it means to follow him with honesty and sobriety.

Jesus finishes his teaching with one last illustration about salt losing its flavor and being discarded because it has lost its usefulness—a really offensive thing to say if you’re trying to build a movement, wouldn’t you say? Why would Jesus challenge these people in such a way that might cause them to rethink their commitment to him?

Story about Shackleton’s ad: Ernest Shackleton had a dream to lead an expedition to explore the Antarctic. They would travel from South America, explore the South Pole, and finish below New Zealand. In 1913, he told a reporter, “The unknown fields in the world which are still unconquered are narrowing down, but there still remains this great work.” In order to make this dangerous trek, he needed to find not just qualified people, but the best. So he put out this ad in the London Times: ***MEN WANTED for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success.*** And, wouldn’t you know, thousands of people responded to this ad. And from them, he chose 27 to accompany him upon his 350-ton ship, the *Endurance*.

I think Shackleton knew something that Jesus is touching on in his parable: Few things which are easy turn out to be rewarding and there’s something in us that desires to rise to the challenge of making a difference. When we count the cost of difficulty, there also quickens within us the possibility of reward.

Today, many things in our life have been created to give us luxury and easy. The American dream beckons us to believe that we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, where happiness is defined as comfort, ease, disposable time and income to indulge in all our pleasures.

I have three robots servants constantly listening for my queue. They turn lights on and off, tell me the weather and news, kick on Fortnite, and make my other robot servant vacuum my floor. But the more of this stuff promises to make my life better, the less effort I spend on things and, interestingly, the less fulfilled I become.

The Way of Jesus cuts against this by demanding that we give up our rights to embrace our responsibility as apprentices to Jesus. None of these things are wrong or evil. They’re just impotent in the face of the call of the kingdom of God. Culture calls you to comfort. The kingdom calls you to its cause of redemption. Perhaps if you’re struggling with boredom in your faith it’s due to having one hand gripping your call and another grasping for comfort. And Jesus is inviting you to choose whom you will serve.

No doubt, it is becoming more difficult to call yourself a Christian and live a life of ease. We’re insulated from this a bit in the Midwest, but throughout the world, and even in

different parts of our country, the cultural acceptance of Christianity is dwindling. To be an apprentice of Jesus increasingly means that we have to make difficult decisions, say hard to hear things, and behave in a way that will cast us as outsiders. And we do this, not for attention, not for posturing, not for self-promotion, but for love. Because we follow the rejected Messiah who came to reconcile the world back to himself, but was deeply misunderstood.

Transition: Now, just a few additional thoughts today of how we can apply this to our lives.

APPLICATION

The first question we must ask from these stories is, What is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?

As we've previously taught, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be a learning or, perhaps better stated, an apprentice to him. We want to be with him, be like him, and do what he does. Basically, to be a disciple is, in the words of Dallas Willard, "Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you."

And the cost of this is nothing less than total surrender of our lives to him. Our call is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. To be an apprentice to Jesus means to live in a way where these are being continually aligned as a tuning fork bring the pitch of a piano to its proper place.

Much of discipleship requires unlearning and relearning—which is sometimes confused with deconstruction. Along the road of following Jesus, we are asked difficult questions to dig into our core values and trust structures. You might ask yourself:

- How do I respond when threatened with loss?
- What do I fear most?
- What am I clinging to more than Jesus? (Our family? Our money and possessions? Our job? Our race or ethnicity? Our sexuality? Our party affiliation?)
- Where am I place my greatest hope?

The cost of discipleship primarily means that I'm no longer in control and that I've given leadership of my life to Jesus. And I've committed myself to be a part of his church through participation and presence.

But let's not miss this question: What is the benefit of being a disciple of Jesus?

There is the low-hanging fruit answer, of course, which is redemption: Jesus has saved my soul and I get to spend eternity with him. But, when I think about answering this in terms of a flourishing life, I come to a three-part answer:

Truth.

As the Apostles Creed says, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit...” I believe to my core that none of us are happy little accidents, but that we’ve been created by a Creator for his purpose and for his pleasure. I believe the great pursuit of life is getting into the mind of our Creator God to know him and to know what we are to do because those things are real and they are true.

Goodness.

There is something about a genuine, unguarded relationship or a good deed done in earnest that warms and cheers us. St. Thomas Aquinas defined love as willing the good of another and to sacrifice self for others is a picture of supreme good that has been woven into our world.

Yes, there is profound brokenness in our world. But we’ve been invited into its restoration, first for ourselves and then to others, so that, to borrow from Tolkien, everything sad will soon come untrue, and the goodness God intended will fully be renewed.

I’m reminded of the famous saying by Mother Teresa of Calcutta: **“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”**

Beauty.

From the microscopic dividing and multiplying of cells in a developing baby to the majestic color scapes of the Grand Canyon to the awe-inspiring smattering of galaxies captured by the Webb Space Telescope, there is profound beauty in our universe. We have been placed carefully in this wonderful storyline of cosmic redemption that will have us asking for plots and details to be retold by the Master himself for billions of eons to come.

OBJECTIONS

Now, I know that some may say that they’ve only experienced the opposite of truth, goodness, and beauty from those who say they follow Jesus, and I understand that. I’ve been on both ends of that, as victim and as perpetrator. But what you need to know is

that God never gives a pass to the wayward behavior of his followers. Just let the words of Jesus echo in your heart, both as a warning and as comfort that there is accountability: Let not the salt lose its flavor lest it be discarded. Bold and sobering for all of us.

Transition: What I want to leave you with is a simple story that I've told before about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

INSPIRATION

What's interesting about Bonhoeffer is that he wrote an entire book called *The Cost of Discipleship* to push back against the cheap grace that he saw prevailing in the Western church. He had spent time among the Black Church in America and was convicted by their deep affection for Jesus and their identification with his suffering. This was in contrast to the easy believism that he saw running rampant. He was a promising academic who was encouraged to pursue his career in America and avoid the ramping up to World War 2. But he became increasingly alarmed at the rise of Hitler and the capitulation of the German church. Bonhoeffer returned to Germany and started an isolated community called *Finkenwalde* intent on training the next generation of pastors.

One day, a friend visited him at the camp to convince him to take the easier road and return to academic prestige. So he and his friend board a boat and row to the far side of the lake. On the other side they see thousands of teens and children training in a Hitler Youth Camp. He turns to his friend and says, "That [Finkenwalde] must be stronger than this [Hitler's brainwashing]."

The Way of Jesus is more true, good, and beautiful than anything else this world has to offer. The only question is whether we have counted the cost and are willing to pay that price.

Transition: In response, I want to invite us to take this next step this week.

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- In what ways do I need to count (or recount) the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?

Prayer

Invitation