Stories that Change the World
"On Discipleship" Text: Luke 14:25-33
~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on July 16, 2017 by Pastor Kevin Thiessen

TITLE SLIDE Last week Pastor Steve walked us through the parable in Matthew 22:1-14 – that compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast for a king's son. Steve unpacked for us the invitation that the King sends out and the way it may be rejected or accepted. We looked at what's required to attend the feast, and then we considered the feast itself. An invitation has been made to all of us, but we need to respond – to trust and obey – to enjoy the fellowship with the King and the feast that he offers.

We may want to conclude the matter there – offer salvation in Jesus – the free gift of God's grace.

But Jesus continues his teaching, and today we will consider the cost of following Jesus.

My basic thesis is that to truly follow Jesus Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else. Know that my choice to preach on this passage was due to my desire to understand it better because I found it to be a troubling passage. As I share with you what I have learned, I hope that collectively we will taught by the Holy Spirit – and that having fully considered the cost – we can respond with our whole being – all in for Jesus.

To do this, we are going to make sure we get the context for Jesus's address … then we're going to review the conditions for following Jesus … and finally we're going to count the cost and I hope be compelled to put what we learn into action.

1. CONTEXT:

[25]Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, [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.

Verse 25 is crucial for interpreting what follows. "Great crowds accompanied Him." How many pastors would love to have this kind of following? Most of us are encouraged when large numbers turn out, and are discouraged when numbers are low. It's common for pastors with large congregations to get their books published and to be invited to speak all over the world because they are "successful." So often we measure success by numbers.

But Jesus was different. Large crowds did not fool Him. He knew that many were following Him for selfish or superficial reasons. It was the exciting thing to do. Would someone get healed? Would he make wine from water again? What sensation could we see today? But Jesus knew the hearts of the crowd, and after giving an invitation to the great feast – he now weeds out those who are following Him for superficial reasons. Why would he do this? Because he knows that when life gets uncomfortable - when the crowd is no longer interested – when the battle heats up - the uncommitted will fall away and cause damage for His cause. So He turns to the crowd and lays out the cost of discipleship – the cost of following the Jesus way.

At the outset I need to point out that there are many in evangelical circles who draw a sharp distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is presented as God's free gift, but discipleship is presented as the costly long-term outcome. It is suggested in some circles that some are "saved" even though they never commit themselves to being disciples. In these circles it would be said that it is possible to receive Jesus as Savior, but not to follow Him as Lord.

SLIDE #2 (handout) I cannot find any basis for such teaching in the New Testament, and there are many Scriptures to refute such teaching. To believe in Jesus Christ as Savior it is necessary to follow Him as Lord.

Salvation is not just a decision that a man makes, but it is the mighty power of God in raising a dead soul to eternal life. Philippians 1:6 says that God, who began that good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus. If a person claims to be a follower of Jesus – but is not seeking to grow in obedience to him, he is fooling himself. As we will see in a short while – Jesus has some sobering words of warning to false followers. In Paul's words these types of people, "…profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16).

All this being said – it is possible to follow Christ *superficially* and it is to such followers that Jesus lays out the cost of discipleship. He knows that his way is narrow, that few will enter, that it will be intense and He doesn't want to anyone to trust him with their lives under false pretenses.

PROBLEM: We are creatures who love many things – and many of them more than Christ.

[27]Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

This problem is exasperated because too many of us are unwilling to bear our own cross. We want others to do the work for us. We're happy to receive a Savior who's done everything for us … but we're unwilling to put in any work ourselves.

SLIDES #3-5 *A. W. Tozer, in* Man: The Dwelling Place of God*, made these radical statements:*
In a very real sense no man can teach another; he can only aid him to teach himself. ... What the learner contributes to the learning process is fully as important as anything contributed by the teacher. If nothing is contributed by the learner the results are useless; at best there will be but the artificial creation of another teacher who can repeat the dreary work on someone else, ad infi nitum. ... Perception of ideas rather than the storing of them should be the aim of education. The mind should be an eye to see with rather than a bin to store facts in.

Here's my concern … little life change can happen through lecture-style teaching *alone*. On its own, we all become far too comfortable – consuming knowledge but not putting it into action. Many people are more comfortable being told what to think about Scripture than being empowered to think about it for themselves. Some fear looking ignorant if they try to speak up when an "expert" is present. Or to come at it from a different angle, I am often approached by people looking to join a Bible study (not necessarily a CG … but a focused study on its own), and my underlying concerns behind the question is two fold: first, that they may feel inadequate to engage and study the Bible on their own and second, that they aren't wanting to be a part of a CG because it calls them to activate what they're learning and to get 'on mission' for Christ.

This is by no means meant to throw out preaching ministry … but I want to be crystal clear that preaching alone will not ignite life transformation. We not only need to know the truth – we need to live it out! As we seek to live it out – as Christians we know this is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit given to us and working in us. (See insert) Paul Washer explains this work in this way, "Every work God begins, he completes. Salvation is more about a declaration of God's power in the universe. You be assured that if God saves a person he has changed the person in the very core of their being and he will continue working about sanctification (making us holy) and conformity to Christ."

This doesn't mean that after being saved by Jesus our life will look like a constant upward arrow on a graph. Life is filled with growth and struggle – failure and success – refinement and improvement. It's a journey, a process, an act of following that involves our submission to His Lordship and our willingness to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus. (handout)

I hope that our preaching ministry offers new insights and greater context and understanding … but I also hope that we are all regularly initiating and maximizing our friendships and community groups to dig deeper, to grow together and to move together to humbling ourselves before Jesus – and then individually and collectively living

out what we learn in everyday life. This involves personal examination – testing our faith – seeking God in prayer, reading His Word and inviting him to expose those areas within our life that need to be confronted and refined.

So with the context for why Jesus is saying these things in perspective, let's now consider the conditions that he lays our for following His way.

2. CONDITIONS:

These conditions of discipleship need to be interpreted in light of Jesus preceding prediction of his own suffering and death. It cost Jesus everything to follow the will of His Father – and in turn it is going to cost those who follow him. Jesus' teaching on discipleship took place well into His ministry and addressed the kind of commitment He desired of His followers. By giving these conditions in light of his own commitment – he is being crystal clear what is required for those who desire to follow God's will.

SLIDE #6 John Stott: "Thus, in order to follow Christ, we have to deny ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to lose ourselves. The full inexorable demand of Jesus Christ is now laid bare. He does not call us to a sloppy half-heartedness, but to a vigorous, absolute commitment. He invites us to make Him our Lord." (John Stott, Basic Christianity, 114)

1. "Hate your loved ones." (v. 26) Matthew's records this same account in Matthew 10:37. In Matthew's account, Jesus says the one who "loves" family more than Him is "not worthy" of Him. In Luke, Jesus says no one can be His disciple who does not "hate" his family and his own life. This condition is upsetting for many whether it speaks of salvation or of a deeper commitment.

As Francis Wright Beare asserts, Jesus was probably using a Semitic figure of speech:

This is the more Semitic manner of speaking – Luke's words are the literal translation of an Aramaic original; but the verb "hate" does not carry its full sense. It means no more than "love less", and Matthew has turned this into the positive – not that they must love the immediate family less than Jesus, but <u>they must love Him more</u>. *Loyalty to the Master must override even the closest family ties.* (Francis Wright Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew, 257)

In Matthew, Jesus is giving a warning about family members who will be divided over Christ (10:34-35). In such a situation, a person who is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah will have his ongoing loyalty tested by those in the family who disagree. This would present a great temptation to choose family ties and harmony over one's identity with Christ. Sometimes a tug of war develops, where a family member puts pressure on us to back off from or even abandon our love for Christ. In those difficult situations, we do not love either Christ or the family member if we give in to the pressure. We do not love the family member, because if we bow to the pressure, we are saying that Christ is not worthy of being followed above all others, and we keep the family member from seriously considering the claims of Christ. We do not love Christ because we have put a sinful human being, who did not give theirselves for our sins, in a higher place than the spotless Jesus Christ who freely offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

Both Matthew and Luke are putting forth that Jesus deserves first place – our supreme love – more than any other. Remember our series on idolatry? Warning: Family can easily be our idol. We can try to justify it (to glorify Him) – but Jesus wants/gets 1st place. In Romans 5:8, Paul tells us that Christ died for us while we were still sinners and 1 John 4:10 tells us that God loved us before we loved him – seen primarily in the sending of His Son to ransom us. God making the first move is critical – as this demand to love Him over our blood relations would be an extraordinary and incomprehensible demand for any who have had no experience of Jesus's redeeming love. (handout)

When Jesus says that we must hate even our own lives, again He means in comparison with our love for Him. Normally, when we follow Christ He lovingly gives us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). He floods us with joy and true pleasure (Ps. 16:11). But, there are times when it is easy to give in to the immediate gratification of the flesh and it is hard to obey Christ. This condition needs to be thought through in advance and if one is going to be committed to follow Christ.

2. Carry our cross (v. 27)

The cross was not an implement of irritation or inconvenience. The cross was an implement of slow, tortuous death. Jesus here is looking at the process of our daily dying to our selfish desires and of our willingness to bear criticism and accusation for His name's sake.

It is possible that in choosing to follow Jesus – we may face similar treatment to what he faced. The uniqueness of the Jesus way is that if we are ridiculed – we are told to bless in return. Romans 12:14 – Bless those who persecute you – bless and do not curse. As we follow – there will be days when we mess up – and time and again we must repent, confess it to Jesus and seek to be obedient the next time we have opportunity to suffer for Him.

The warning in this condition is straightforward - if we are not involved in the process of carrying our own cross in death to self, we are not on the path of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

3. Submitting all that we have (v.33) – This condition is stated in absolute terms.

Following the illustrations of a builder and of a king who did not make the necessary provision to finish their commitments, this condition demands that a believer commit or surrender whatever possessions are necessary in order for them to follow God's will. In Luke 16, Jesus warns that no one can serve two masters "You can not serve both God and money." Pastor Steve will be unpacking this in greater detail as he teaches us from Luke 16 next week. I think typically we believe we can combine them, with God taking the lead: "I'll serve God mostly, but I'd also like to serve money." But Jesus says that won't work.

Jesus did not say one must only be *willing to* forsake everything. This is something that must be done. All we have was given to us by him and is therefore all his. In other words, you can't just add Jesus to your already materialistic lifestyle as a way of rounding out your spiritual needs. To be a Christian means that you have been bought with a price and you are not your own.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

SLIDE #7 [19]Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20]for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

In preparing for this message I found an illustration by Juan Carlos Ortiz who re-imagines the story of the pearl of great price. A man sees this pearl and says to the merchant, "I want this pearl. How much is it?"

The seller says, "It's very expensive." "How much?" "A lot!" "Well, do you think I could buy it?" the man asks.

"Oh, yes," says the merchant, "everyone can buy it."

"But I thought you said it was very expensive." "I did." "Well, how much?" "Everything you have," says the seller.

"All right, I'll buy it." "Okay, what do you have?"

"Well, I have $10,000 in the bank." "Good, $10,000. What else?" "That's all I have." "Nothing more?" "Well, I have a few dollars more in my pocket." "How much?" "Let's see … $100." "That's mine, too," says the seller.

"What else do you have?" "That's all, nothing else." "Where do you live?" the seller asks. "In my house. Yes, I own a home." The seller writes down, "house." "It's mine."

"Where do you expect me to sleep—in my camper?" "Oh, you have a camper, do you? That, too. What else" "Am I supposed to sleep in my car?" "Oh, you have a car?" "Yes, I own two of them." "They're mine now."

"Look, you've taken my money, my house, my camper, and my cars. Where is my family going to live?" "So, you have a family?" "Yes, I have a wife and three kids." "They're mine now."

Suddenly the seller exclaims, "Oh, I almost forgot! *You* yourself, too! Everything becomes mine—wife, children, house, money, cars, and you, too." Then he goes on, "Now, listen, I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don't forget that they're all mine, just as you are. And whenever I need any of them, you must give them up, because I am now the owner."

(Adapted from *The Disciple* [Creation House], pp. 34-35.)

SLIDE #8-9 Pastor Steven Cole summarizes it like this: "That's what Jesus means when He says that we must give up all our possessions in order to be His disciple. He isn't just Lord of a tenth; He is Lord of all. We are just managers of it for Him. Of course, in return we gain all the riches of heaven for all eternity. But, still, we need to sit down and determine if we're willing to follow Jesus as Lord of everything from our families, to our possessions, to our very lives."

SLIDE #10 "Because Jesus is the Christ, He has the authority to call and to demand obedience to His word. Jesus summons men to follow him not as a teacher or a pattern of the good life, but as the Christ, the Son of God." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

3. COST:

[28]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? … [31]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? [32]And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. [33]So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Today is about counting the cost – when we make the choice to follow Christ, it should not be uninformed or unintellectual.

Ancient Rome was filled with gods – and if our early Christian brothers and sisters had proclaimed that Jesus was a way, they wouldn't have been ridiculed, tortured, and killed. The Romans were happy with many ways. But they proclaimed the words of Jesus – that he was the <u>only</u> way. That is what is so radical and offensive to the world. It means that everyone else is wrong.

This issue faces us today … increasingly I hear of self proclaiming Christians conditioning the statement that Jesus is the only way. There appears to be a growing uncertainty … is he the only way? How could I know for sure? During my preparation for this message I read some troubling statistics. Pollster George Gallup contends that fewer than ten percent of evangelical Christians could be called *deeply committed*. I recognize that statistics can help us paint a picture of a story we want to tell, but if these figures are accurate, it is sobering to learn that most of those who profess Christianity don't know basic teachings and don't act differently because

of their Christian experience. George Barna found that almost half (46%) of evangelicals read their Bible only once a week or not at all. This is a symptom of a watered down and diminished discipleship that apparently no longer counts the cost laid out by our Lord and Savior.
As we fill ourselves with the messages of the world and diminish our intake of the Word of God, we are going to lose confidence in the fact that this Word – inspired by God – is in fact infallible and even more than that – sufficient.

How privileged are we? We can read this freely – and we have the Holy Spirit to understand it. Why are our Bibles collecting dust on our shelves? If we pick the Word up – if we blow the dust off – and if we resubmit our lives to it's teaching and instruction – we will bring into submission our attitudes, thoughts, behaviours – it will change us inside and outside. Yet too often it appears that we don't give a rip – so we look exactly like our culture – no one can see the difference that Jesus and his Gospel makes.

What I appreciate about the words of Jesus in this passage is how he highlights the necessity of making an informed decision. Both the builder of the tower and the man going to war refer to careful, detailed, rational thinking in which you consider all aspects of what you're getting into before you make the commitment. Such careful thinking is opposed to an impulsive decision made in a moment of intense emotion, without much thought about the consequences. You may be attending Central this morning for a variety of reasons – obligation, routine, passion, love, obedience, worship, refreshment, top-up – but it's critical for us all to recognize that Jesus is not asking for our allegiance blindly. It's an invitation given with the costs and rewards laid out for us.

As pastor Steven Cole states: "Our evangelistic methods today are big on emotion and little on reason. We get people into a stadium to hear testimonies from famous athletes or movie stars about how Christ changed their lives. Then they hear a rousing speaker promise how Christ can meet the person's every need. Then the invitation is given and counselors are primed to get out of their seats and walk forward so that people on the verge of a decision think that others are going forward. The choir or band is playing a song of invitation. Going forward feels like the right thing to do. In a swell of emotion, the person gets out of his seat and 'decides for Christ.'

But did the person get saved? By God's grace, some do. But even the well-known evangelists admit that the long-term "stick with it" rate for those who make a decision is only about 10-15 percent. All too often, their decision was based more on emotion than on careful thought about what it means to follow Christ. Here in Luke 14, Jesus says to the crowds who were interested enough to be going along with Him, 'Consider the cost of following Me.'"

Our text last week presented God's free invitation of the gospel. He has provided everything at His expense and He invites sinners to come to His great feast. You and I cannot bring anything nor do anything to deserve an invitation to this feast. God provides it all by His free grace.

(Handout) Salvation is both absolutely free and yet it costs you your very life. You receive it freely at no expense to you, but once you receive it, you have just committed everything you are and have to Jesus Christ. You may protest, "That's a contradiction! How can something be both free and costly at the same time?"

Pastor Steven Cole illustrated it this way. Suppose I want to climb Mount Everest. But it costs about $70,000 to do it and I don't have that kind of money. Suppose a wealthy businessman heard of my desire and offered to pay for the entire expedition. He would buy all the expensive clothing and gear, he would pay for my transportation, the guides, and the training. It's totally free for me. But if I accept his free offer, I have just committed myself to months of difficult training and arduous effort. It could even cost me my very life, as many good climbers die trying to climb Mount Everest. It is free and yet very costly.

Another thing to consider is the cost of <u>not</u> following Jesus or turning away from him.

[29]Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, [30]saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Is it too harsh to say we deserve this mockery if we do not accomplish what Christ has set out for us? Apathy stops us from taking up the challenge … Fear of the opinions of other men and women stops us from standing up for what is true and right … Idolatry redirects us and Hypocrisy kills our credibility and integrity.

These two verses state a cost of <u>not</u> following or giving up on Jesus. If we make a profession of following Christ, but then go back on our commitment, people will ridicule us as they would mock a man who started to build a tower but couldn't complete it: "He claimed that he became a Christian, but look at him now! Some Christian he is!" Or, we will face the damaging effects of being defeated by the enemy because we did not consider the intensity of the battle we were facing. **Satan loves it when a Christian's testimony is ruined because they did not consider the demands of following Christ in this evil world.**

Friends the Christian way – the Jesus way – is hard. It's a rough and difficult way – it's a battle – it's the way of through the narrow gate – and few enter in.

It's against the world. It's against culture. It's against our own flesh. It's against everything outside of Scripture.

Christianity is not just I prayed the prayer, I got dunked in the tank, I went to church.

This is a sold-out life … it's an all-in decision. And, this IS a good thing.

If your life meets resistance and you are on the broad path – you will be quickly derailed and discouraged. Yet Jesus gives us a glimpse of the good in Matthew 16.

[24]Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**[25]For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** (Matthew 16)

Jesus is not solely calling us to a future life in heaven where things will finally be easy and wonderful. He's calling us to life now. From life to life. What he's calling us to is the best way of living – a life in alignment with the will of God. Being conformed to Christ is evidenced in the spiritual fruit of our lives – which is described in Galatians 5:22-25:

> *[22]But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24]And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25]If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. [26]Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Paul Washer shared an illustration about a young man who a pastor was meeting with. As the pastor confronted the young man on a variety of life choices that were not helping his Christian walk the young man kept saying, "Yes, you're right pastor, I do need to give that up." It was a constant acquiescing to a church-ianty. But this life Jesus is inviting us to is <u>not</u> just stopping all the wicked things I love and starting all the righteous things I hate.

I'm not standing here preaching this message to manipulate you or guilt and coearse you into the trusting Jesus. But I am imploring you to take stock of the state of your heart and soul.

Jesus Christ isn't offering you religion – he's freely offering *life* to everyone who is willing to receive it. But, we need to understand that when we receive His free offer, we are no longer our own; we have been bought with a price. Thus, to truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and not begin to follow Him superficially, only to turn back later when things get tough.

Knowing this doesn't really make a difference until it impacts our life practice.

SLIDE #11 Ted Ward: "To know and not to do is not to know."

Jesus offers even more sobering words in Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

We are not promoting religion here – we're not promoting a works-based salvation. Let me be clear that we believe in salvation by grace (the undeserved favor of God towards us) alone. But Scripture is also very clear that the response of a heart captivated by Christ will have tangible evidence. Do you regularly test your faith? Do you spend time in examination and reflection, inviting the Holy Spirit to do his refining work in you? If not, how will you know whether or not you are truly saved? Those who are deceived never even check to see if they are deceived.

Jesus' words in Luke 14 are tough and sobering…no two ways about it.

Is there any relationship that comes ahead of Christ in your life? If He is first, then obviously you will be spending consistent time alone with Him in His Word, in prayer, and in devotion. You will be fellowshipping with Him every day. You won't allow any other relationship to draw you away from obedience to Him. You will confess and forsake every sin that hinders fellowship with Him.

Is He the Lord of your plans, your thoughts, and of all that you do? Or, could you selfishly be clinging to *your* plans, to *your* way, instead of seeking to please Him in all things, beginning with every thought that you entertain? If you don't hate your own life and daily carry your cross, you're not His disciple.

Is He Lord of your finances and possessions? Are you faithful in managing these things for *His* purposes? Do you give generously and faithfully to His work? Or, could the love of money be choking out the Word in your life?

Salvation is absolutely free, but once you receive it, it costs you everything. To truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Before we conclude with a final song and closing thoughts, I wanted to play this short video for you. It was produced by Deidox, a company that has produced some wonderful testimonies that give us a glimpse into what God is doing all over the world in a variety of contexts. I think this video is appropriate for todays theme. The team will lead us in a closing song after the video.

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.