

The Gospel of Luke 14.25-35: Jesus & Cost | Kirsten Anonby

November 13, 2022

We are continuing in our study of the Gospel of Luke. And today we're looking at Luke 14:25-35. Some of Jesus' quotes find their way onto greeting cards – or decorative signs. Our text for today is not one of those quotes.

This is one of those "in your face" moments with Jesus – and when we read it we can feel it. Because the theme for this section is all about cost: *What does it cost us to follow Jesus?*

It's important to know the value of something – preferably before you buy. It's important to know what it's going to cost us. And that's what Jesus is making clear in our text for today.

If you think about the Gospel of Luke as a play, Luke 14:25 marks a change of scene.

In the first half of Luke 14 we've been watching Jesus at a dinner party, held at a notable Pharisee's home. But now we are back on the road, on the long journey to Jerusalem that takes up this whole middle section of Luke (Luke 9 -19).

Verse 25 tells us that large crowds were following Jesus, which is probably not surprising. By this time, he's fed the 5,000, has healed many. And there's a stir of excitement about Jesus: about the way He teaches with authority and challenges the religious leaders. You can imagine a crowd of people who are curious, excited, engaged with Jesus' teaching and asking questions about who He is. They may even be excited enough to leave their homes to travel with Him – hungry to know more. So here they are, travelling with Jesus.

Notice how completely unfazed Jesus is by his popularity. If I had a massive group of people following me, I think I just might be narcissistic enough to like it. But Jesus isn't like that. There's a similar moment early on in the Gospel of John. Many people began to trust in Jesus because of the miracles he did, but it says that Jesus didn't put his trust in those people, because he knew what the hearts of people were like. (John 2:23-25) And that's what Jesus is concerned about – the hearts of people.

In this moment, Jesus' concern is that the people following him might think that simply traveling alongside him is enough. He wants to make sure that they understand what it really means to follow him—to bring clarity to what it means to follow. So that's what we're going to talk about today. Because I think that when we read Jesus words here we have the same kind of questions. This passage makes us wonder what it really means to follow Jesus?

One of the things I loved that Dave said last week is that this passage is not about hating people, it's about putting Jesus first.

When Jesus says that loving him means that we need to *hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life*, he's using **hyperbole**.

- Hyperbole is **the use of exaggeration for effect**.
- You can see another example of this in Matthew 5, when Jesus says that if your hand is causing you to sin, you should cut it off.
- So how do we read Jesus' use of hyperbole?
 - o Well, we recognize that we aren't to take it literally, but we are to take it seriously.
 - o When Jesus tells us to cut off our hands if it causes us to sin, we need to hear that He takes dealing with sin in our life so seriously that we need to cut it out of our life.
 - o Similarly, when Jesus tells us that loving him means hating mother, father, wife, children, brother, sister, and even our own life . . . what we need to hear is how critical it is that He be first.

This is not the first time in Luke that Jesus has talked about how following him needs to come before any other relationship.

- In chapter 8, some of his followers say "hey Jesus, your mom and brothers are here." Jesus response is that *"My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.*
- And in chapter 9, Jesus tells a man to follow him, and the man says "let me first go bury my father." Jesus has no patience for this delay, even though what the man was wanting to do was likely the appropriate obligation of a son to his father.

Why is Jesus pushing repeatedly against obligations to family?

I think it's partly because of the culture he was speaking to. 1st century Mesopotamian cultures were shame & honour cultures. We might place our sense of worth or value in society through markers such as wealth and popularity. A shame and honour culture was much more focused on the worth you had due to your lineage (your position in society was in many ways determined by the family you had been born into). And you also acquired greater honour (and therefore status) by doing your duty towards your family and towards your community. For example, having wealth didn't necessarily increase your status (hence a Jewish tax collector was despised even though he was wealthy). But if you used your wealth to better your community, you were highly esteemed and honoured.

So when Jesus is telling the crowd that following him means hating their family, he's pushing buttons. He's telling them that if they're going to follow him they have to let go of what gives them their status and identity within society – and for the Jews – even what gave them a sense of identity with God. And I think that's why he so emphasizes that he must be before family.

Some of this might be much more understandable in other cultures, where children grow up with actual cultural expectations of what it means to care for their parents in their old age.

And it's interesting to consider what Jesus might have said to a crowd of groupies following him around Vancouver or Langley. What are the identity markers that he would have pushed against in us?

I also think, though, that Jesus talks about family because it's important for almost any person in any society. And Jesus is really saying here that we need to place him before everything. If you look at this passage as a whole, and particularly at vs. 26-27 and vs. 33, you get a pretty clear picture of what we need to love Jesus more than:

- We need to love Jesus more than family (v.26)
- We need to love Jesus more than our own lives (v.27)
- We need to Jesus more than our possessions (v.33)

He wants to be first – full stop.

Then Jesus gives us 2 examples, or stories:

- ²⁸ *"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?"²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you,³⁰ saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.*
- ³¹ *"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?"³² 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.³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

Let's break down what Jesus is telling us through these two examples:

First, the listener – the person considering what it means to follow Jesus, is the main character of each of these stories. Jesus says "suppose one of you" when he talks about the person building the tower – so we are the potential builder. And the listener is also in the position of the king.

Second, both examples describe a situation that is dire. If the person building the tower doesn't have enough money to finish the work—it simply won't get done (there's no mastercard or visa in the ancient world.) The situation for the king is even worse, because he's considering going to war against an army that is twice as large as his own.

Third, both the builder and the king will, if they are wise, consider whether they have what it takes to complete the task. They will consider if they have sufficient funds for the tower before they break ground. They will determine if they are able to win the war before they enter battle and begin to pay the high price of soldiers' lives.

What point is Jesus making through these examples?

You know, my initial reading of these two stories is that they're all about me deciding if I'm willing to pay the high cost. Will I take the call of Jesus seriously and be willing to pay the price? This is one way that we can read the text, and there certainly is an element of this in what Jesus is saying.

But He also could be saying something else.

He also could be saying that all of us, when we try to be God's people based off our own merit, are in the position of a builder who can't finish the tower, or the king who is lacking the soldiers to win the war. The Jews who were following Jesus would have assumed that their identity as an Israelite who went to synagogue and followed the law would have given them a place as one of God's people. Jesus, through these stories, might just be saying that none of this is enough. There is only one way for us to enter into relationship with God. Every other option leads to us discovering that our own resources are not enough. The only way for them, or for any of us, to be one of God's people is to lay down everything we have to follow Him.

And if we try to follow God without really following him, we become like salt that loses its saltiness. We fail to be what we were meant to be, the presence in culture that preserves and brings flavour.

Disciples who aren't actually ready to be disciples serve no purpose in the Kingdom. We cease to be who or what we are meant to be.

So what do we do with this passage? What is Jesus telling us about what it means to follow Him?

I think when we look at this passage it's easy for us to focus on specific, technical questions:

- What does it really mean to give up everything we have? How much wealth is ok? Can I even live out this passage if I live in North America?
- How do I know if I'm placing certain relationships over and above Jesus?
- What does it mean for me to lay down my life?

I can't answer those questions, because, to be honest I don't know the answers. I don't know what Jesus will ask you to lay down in your life. I don't know if we're ever really able to know, what it looks like for another person to bend the knee and say to Jesus "you're my king."

- But we know He is saying that following him means that we must place Him first.
- He is first, before mother and father, siblings and children, spouse, possessions, even our very lives.
- The cost is going to look different for every person.
- But for every person, it is going to cost you your life. This isn't a comfortable cost – the cost, say, of a king who is going to war with an army of 500,000 to battle 100,000. This is a battle where the cost is high – where you will feel it. If we are really following Jesus there is going to come a time when the cost hurts.
 - o It might cost you your reputation or your career
 - o It might cost you your comfort, your luxuries
 - o It might cost you your selfishness, your unforgiveness
 - o It might cost you a relationship.

The thing is that the costs of following Jesus aren't things we go out and look for. They're sitting there on the path as we follow Jesus – like giant rocks we have to scramble over. They are a part of the journey as we follow: as we choose to be honest when it's costly, to be generous when it hurts, to do the right thing when no one else, to be loving when it feels exhausting, to be about the work of the Kingdom of God. And what keeps us going on that journey – when our stomach feels sick at the thought of confessing a sin, confronting a friend, giving something away, or standing up for what's right? What keeps us going?

I've been there, I know the feeling of looking at that rock in the path and feeling like there is no way that I can do what Jesus is asking of me. What, in those moments, has helped me to say yes, to stay on the path?

1) **The presence of the Holy Spirit**

I actually find the whole invitation of Jesus to count the cost to very encouraging, because the very question implies that each of us has the option of saying yes to Jesus.

My husband and I found ourselves helping a young person come to faith over several months. One of the things I found interesting was his deep concern that he did not have the capacity to follow Jesus. Whenever we fear that we don't have what it takes to walk the path Jesus has for us, we have to remember that we don't walk the path on our own strength. Only through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, that same power, Ephesians 1 tells us, that raised Jesus from dead, are we able to walk the path of discipleship. Be encouraged – if you want to follow Jesus there is a great power at your disposal that will give you strength in your weakest moments – that will help you love Jesus even when it feels like he's asking you to do is as painful as cutting off your hand.

The Holy Spirit helps me to follow

2) **Second, I find I can face what Jesus calls me to when I remember the great paradox of the Christian life: that losing our life leads to finding it.**

In Luke 9 Jesus says "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. – Luke 9:23-24

When Jesus says this he is not just talking about eternal life. He is also talking about right now. The great paradox (the surprising irony) is that Jesus doesn't want us to follow Him so He can use us. He wants us to follow Him because that is the direction of the abundant life He has promised us. Yes, there is real cost and real loss – but on the other side of that loss is transformation, purpose, and a joy that no one can touch.

Following Jesus costs us the things we are holding right now – and we may go through a time when our hands feel empty – but on the other side of that emptiness is something new – the gifts that we will only be able to receive if our hands are empty enough to receive them. I think about the incredible joy it must have been for Peter to participate in the incredible explosion of God's goodness that we read about in the book of Acts. When Jesus told him to lay down his fishing nets and follow him, he could have never imagined what it would have meant to become fishers of men.

This path to the abundant life involves carrying our cross. There is no other way. It is not an easy path – it's a path that has a cost. But it's the only life worth living.

3) **And finally – the thing that keeps me on the path to discipleship, more than anything else, is the nature of the One who calls me to follow Him.**

Do you know what comes after Luke 14? Luke 15!

Right after this call to follow we are given 3 stories, that we'll get to look at in the coming months – but here's a sneak peek:

We have the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. And each of these stories are overflowing with the sacrificial heart of our God.

This is the God who calls us to give Him everything! He is trustworthy! He is loving! He is the good father, the good shepherd! He is the one who has given up everything to bring us to Himself.

When Jesus calls us to give Him everything I think that the deepest fear we have is that we are entrusting our lives to one who is not good – who doesn't have our best interest at heart – who won't treat us with care – who does not love us. But here we see the heart of God on full display – pouring himself out for us – the Father looking for His lost son, day in and day out.

When I remember who Jesus really is I am able to follow Him, because I remember that I can trust Him. And I remember that when Jesus looks at me and says "you can't play at being my follower. You have to mean

it – you have to be all in.” – I remember that He’s calling me to follow Him because He’s good – and because He loves me.

He is the way, the truth and the life.
Let’s Follow Him
He’s worth the cost

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think about the cost of following Jesus, what do you think of?
2. Jesus emphasizes that he needs to be more important than our familial relationships, in part because of the role those relationships played in a person’s status in society. What gives us a sense of significance and status in our culture? Do you think that Jesus would say something different to us?
3. Have you ever felt afraid that you won’t be able to follow Jesus? What was that like?
4. How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit to help you to be faithful?
5. Do you really think that if you lose your life you’ll find it? Have you ever experienced this paradox in your life?
6. What do you need to hear about God’s character than will enable you to follow him?