

COVENANT PULPIT



“So You Want to Follow Jesus?”

Luke 14:25-33

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His name was Sgt. Cooley and he walked through the doors of my high school at just the right time. You see, at this point in my life I was fed up with studying for the SATs, applying for scholarships, and filling out endless college applications. The thought of four more years of school at great personal expense was overwhelming. And that's when I met Sgt. Cooley. Sgt. Cooley was a Marine, and true to his name he was very cool, which is why I suspect they made him a recruiter in local high schools. While the piles of financial aid papers, essays, and applications suggested that college would lead to a dull and boring life of pushing paper, Sgt. Cooley promised a life of adventure, excitement, and challenge. It seemed to me that the Marines offered what I was looking for. I was set. I was going to join the Marines. So without telling my parents, I invited Sgt. Cooley over for dinner.

On the day of our arranged meeting, I mentioned to my parents in passing that a Marine recruiter would be joining us for dinner. As you might expect, they were slightly irritated that I had not told them I was doing this, but they were kind to Sgt. Cooley and allowed me to explore the option further. During dinner he told us about the mental and physical challenge of boot camp, the array of job opportunities I could have after my term of service, and the money that would be available to me for college. I was more convinced than ever that this is what I wanted to do.

Later on that week, before I had the chance to sign on the dotted line, my parents decided to have a family movie night. And the movie we were going to see was *Saving Private Ryan*. It really is an excellent film, and one of the things it does very well is portray the true cost of joining the Marines. And for many, the true cost of joining the Marines, or any other branch of the armed forces, is your life. This is what my parents wanted me to understand. They were not opposed to me joining the Marines, but they were opposed to me joining the Marines without understanding the true cost. The Marine recruiter was only giving me one side of the story, and consequently I was not able to count the cost.

Sometimes whenever we think about our own faith or we are sharing it with others, we only give them one side of the story. We only tell them what they're going to get out of being a fully devoted follower of Christ. But following Jesus also requires that we love and choose him over everything else in life. It requires death. So when these great crowds begin to follow Jesus, he doesn't want them to be ignorant. He doesn't want them to sign up for something which they later regret. And so he tells anyone who thinks they are a follower or who might want to follow him: "Before you decide to follow me, count the cost."

People of Covenant Church, do you want to follow Jesus Christ? If so, there's only one way to follow him. There is not a multi-track

approach for those who want to be nominally devoted, moderately devoted, or fully devoted. Either you are a fully devoted follower of Christ, or you are not a follower of Christ at all. It sounds harsh, but this is what Jesus requires. So, do you want to follow Jesus? Then,

I. Count the Cost. As I was saying earlier, that Marine recruiter wasn't interested in me counting the cost because he knew once I was signed up, he wouldn't have to deal with me anymore. But Jesus doesn't work like this. He knows disillusioned followers aren't worth much when times get rough. So right up front, Jesus wants you to understand what it costs to follow him.

First, if you want to follow Jesus, then you must love Him more than anyone. He says this in verse 26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." This is a remarkable statement, is it not? For some of you, this challenge isn't so remarkable because you already hate your family. And you're thinking, "Great, following Jesus should be easy!" But of course Jesus isn't teaching that we should actively hate our families. This is the Jesus who commands us to honor our father and mother, and to love even our enemies. So what does he mean by saying we must hate our parents, spouse, siblings and children? He is saying that our love for him must be so great that every other love we have is tantamount to hatred when compared. If we want to follow Jesus he hasn't asked us to love him over the devil, or over people we don't like, but he's asked us to love him over the people we hold most dear. This is the cost.

But that's not all it costs. Jesus goes even further. When Jesus says that following him means we must love him more than any person, he also means that we must love him more than we love ourselves. In verses 26 and 27 he says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." If you want to be a follower of Jesus you must love him more than you love your own life. Listen carefully to the implications of what these words mean. When Jesus says that if you want to follow me, you must love me more than your family and love me more than your own life, he is saying "Don't even think about coming to me with your own agenda. Don't come to me with your plan for your life and expect that you will fit me in around it. Don't follow me because I'll make you a better husband or father or wife. Don't follow me because it will make your family life better. Don't come because I'll fulfill you. Come to me for *me*. Follow me because I am the Lord."

When Emily and I were dating in college, I had no interest in following Christ and for the most part, neither did she. But there came a point in time when our relationship started to get more serious and the possibility of marriage and starting a family became a more and more likely scenario. Up to this point, I had been absolutely comfortable living like I was an atheist. But when I began to think about getting married and having children, I was suddenly very uncomfortable about not having any moral or ethical compass with which to raise my children, or to govern my marriage. And so we decided that we needed religion. Since we had both been brought up in the church, it made the most sense to us to go ahead and be Christians as we were familiar with that religion. It was practical. The whole point for us in becoming Christians was because we thought Christianity would be the means by which we could get what we really wanted: a good marriage and a happy family. But it wasn't long before we realized that these cannot be the terms under which we come to Christ. Jesus absolutely will not be the means to your own ends in life. Rather, what Jesus says in these verses is that your life is the means and he is the end. And until you come to him on those terms, you have not come to him at all. Are you using Jesus as a means to another end? If so, then you cannot be his disciple.

Jesus wants us to love him more than we love our families. Jesus wants us to love him more than we love our own lives, and more than we love living. And do you know what the implication of this is? If Jesus asks us to love him more than we love our families and living, it means everything which is less important than our families and living must also be loved less than him. It means that you must love Jesus more than you love being approved and commended by people around you. Do you? It means that you must love Jesus more than you love whatever success you are ambitiously pursuing. Do you? It means you must love Jesus more than your money, what your money can buy, and what your money has bought you. Do you? It means you must love Jesus more than you love being comfortable, safe, warm, healthy, and well fed. Do you?

And if it means that we must love Jesus more than these things which can be good, it most certainly means that we must love Jesus more than wicked things. You must love Jesus more than you love those lustful thoughts or that sinful relationship. You must love Jesus more than you love to be the person sharing the latest piece of gossip. You must love Jesus more than what you can get out of the bottle of pills or alcohol. You must love Jesus more than you love wasting your life away in front of the television or computer. If you don't love Jesus more than these things, according to him, you CANNOT be his disciple.

Jesus doesn't want you to be deceived. He tells you up front what he requires of disciples, and if you will not love him more than

your closest relations, your sins, your own life...then you cannot be his disciple. So you want to follow Jesus?

II. Consider Your Resources. In this call to discipleship, Christ gives two illustrations that have been variously interpreted. Most argue that the point of these illustrations is this: you need to consider what it's going to cost you before you commit to following Jesus. I do think that this is half the emphasis of these illustrations. But the other half which is often neglected is that these illustrations direct us to consider our resources. Let's look at the illustrations now.

We find the first illustration in verses 28-30, "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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'" His point is clear. If you enter into a building project and you have not first established the fact that you have enough resources to complete it, you look a little bit silly. Your partially completed building stands as a monument to your foolish lack of planning.

Jesus doesn't want this to happen in our walk with him. He wants us to not only begin the journey of discipleship, but he also wants us to complete it. And so he says, before you even get started on this walk, first look at your resources and see if you're willing to spend what it takes to follow me. And what does it cost to follow Jesus? It costs us everything. He's already said it several times, if you want to follow me you must put me first and you must be willing to lose all for my sake, even your life.

Many of us think that we have given all over to Christ and that we are willing to lose all for his sake, when in truth we have only given over what we are comfortable giving over. But the cost of following Jesus isn't just the comfortable things...it's everything. He wants you to say, "If it costs my house, I'll follow you; if I have to sell everything, I'll follow you; if my family will never speak to me again, I will follow you; if my dreams for my life are never fulfilled, I will follow you." Are you willing to pay this cost to follow him? This is the cost of discipleship. Everything.

Consider Jesus' second illustration about counting the cost in verses 31-32, "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? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace." This little illustration is much the same as the one before. Any king setting out to battle would be a fool if he did not first

consider his resources and whether he could spend what it costs to win the war. Therefore, before setting off to follow Jesus these verses teach us that we must count the cost, and consider the resources available to us to cover that cost.

But before moving on from this, I want to throw you a curve ball. What if Jesus' point in telling these two stories is not simply for us to count the cost of following him, but also for us to consider the cost of *not* following him. Look again at story of the builder. This man wants to build a tower, presumably to either enhance or protect his property. However, before he builds it he wisely considers whether or not he has enough to finish. Though he wants the tower, if he does not have the resources to complete it he wisely does not begin the project.

We are like that man. Each of us is going through life attempting to build a tower out of what we've been given. It may be a tower of success, it may be a tower of personal fulfillment, it may be a tower of wealth, it may be a tower of power, it may be a tower of family. But unlike this builder, many of us are foolish enough to believe that if we just work hard enough, if we just set our minds to it, then when our tower stands complete we will be happy. But we fail to realize that we don't have the resources to complete that tower. And no matter how hard you try, when you come to the end of your life you will find that your life project stands incomplete. One day your building project will fail you and you will stand before the judgment seat of God and be ashamed of the monumental waste that was your life.

Others however, will be wise, and recognizing that they do not have what it takes to build a meaningful life on their own, will give themselves and their resources up to another builder and building project much more likely to succeed. Count the cost of building a meaningful and successful life apart from God, and if you don't have what it takes-- and you don't-- then don't start. Give your life up to the builder and the building project that cannot fail.

In the second story Jesus talks about a couple of kings on the verge of war. Why do kings go to war? Control. Sovereignty. Power. Kings go to war so they can stay kings and stay in control. But Jesus says that a wise king will examine his army before he heads into war to determine if he'll actually be able to win. If he knows he can't win, he'll try to make peace rather than fight a battle he has no hope of winning and every guarantee of being destroyed.

We are like that outnumbered king. Though we want sovereignty and control over our own lives and kingdoms, there is another King coming. Jesus wants you to examine yourself and consider your army. When the Day of Judgment comes, will you have what it takes to stand up to the armies of the living God? Honestly consider your resources.

And be wise like this king. Before King Jesus gets here, consider the terms of peace. What are the terms to have peace with God? The only way to have peace with God is through Jesus his Son. If you want peace with the King who is coming, then you must surrender your whole life to him today. You must give up your rebellion against him. You must give up your authority to determine what is right and wrong for your own life, and you must be his disciple.

So there you have it friends. Jesus looks at the crowd--he looks at you, and says, "Count the cost of being my disciple. It may cost you everything in this life. But don't stop counting there. Count the cost of not following me. It *will* cost you everything in this life and the next. You think you can't afford the cost of following Jesus? Then consider once again the cost of not following him. So what do we do?"

III. Pay the Price. Look with me at verse 33, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Jesus calls his disciples to give up everything, because if you don't give up everything you cannot be his disciple. Why? Because whatever it is you're not willing to give up in order to follow him, *that* is the true god in your life. That's why you can't come to Jesus as the means to some other end, because he will not be the means by which you get your idol. Whatever it is that you won't renounce to follow Jesus, that is the god you are trusting in to give you the peace, joy, security, and fulfillment you are looking for. It might be a person. It might be a possession. It might be a place. It might be a dream. It might be a fear. It might be a sin. But whatever it is, you need to understand that this is your true god. And it's an idol. And this idol will fail you. It cannot deliver what it promises, because the only one who can deliver the deepest desires of your heart is God himself. So when Jesus says, "anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple," he is declaring that you must quit trusting in anything else to satisfy the desires of your heart. To renounce everything else and follow him is to believe in your heart that if you have him, then you have all the peace, joy, security, and fulfillment you could ever dream of. Renouncing our idols requires us to trust that God will give us what our idols can't. But can we really trust God to deliver? Can we have any confidence that if we renounce our idols in order to take hold of him, that he will give us all things?

Absolutely we can! How can we be sure he will not withhold any good thing from us? We can be sure he will not withhold any good thing from us because he did not spare his own Son. He proved that he will not withhold any good thing from us when he gave us his best in giving us his Son to die on the cross in order to reconcile us to himself. He could not have done anything more to prove his love for us than give us his

Son. And now we know, that because he has given us his best, he will also give us all the rest. Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things?" When Jesus calls us to renounce everything to follow him, he is calling us to let go of what we can never hold onto in order to gain what we can never lose. This is the true cost of discipleship. *This is the price you must pay if you want to be a fully devoted follower of Christ: giving up the idols that will never satisfy the infinite desires of your heart, in order to take hold of the infinite God who created your heart and its desires.*

But for some of you, this price is too high. You will trade in the truth for a lie, and exchange the true God for an idol. You will sacrifice the peace, security, and fulfillment that only God can give, for the disappointments, fear, and destruction your idols will deliver.

So you want to follow Jesus? Then what's it going to be? Will you continue to build your own idolatrous tower that will never satisfy the deepest desires of your heart, and at the end of your life will stand as a monument to your foolishness? Or will you renounce all to take hold of Christ? Count the cost today of following Jesus. Assume that it will cost you everything: your family, your possessions, your dreams, and even your life. It will cost every idol. And with that cost in mind, tell Jesus that come what may, and whatever the cost, and however many idols have to fall, by his grace you're going to follow him because you want to, and you can't afford not to. Exchange your idols that will never satisfy you, to take hold of the true God who can never fail you. And then do it. Follow him. Follow him wherever he leads you, and ultimately...he'll lead you home.