

The Cost of Mission

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Preacher: David Trimble

[0 : 00] I wonder, have you ever been in a situation where you started to feel uncomfortable because you realised that you were going to have to do something that you really didn't want to do.

Maybe sitting in a meeting and realise that the boss is about to call on you to take on a big responsibility. Or perhaps you're sitting in the middle of an awkward conversation between friends or between family and you're realising that you're going to have to stand up and intervene to stop things blowing out of proportion or you're going to have to try and heal the peace.

Or perhaps you've been called out by someone for something you've done, a teacher or a parent or a spouse or a colleague, and you feel uncomfortable knowing that you have to change. These sorts of scenarios are unpleasant, aren't they? No one likes to be put in a position where they feel uncomfortable.

And yet, this is exactly what Jesus does in Luke 14. We care a lot about our comfort, don't we? But I wonder, do we sometimes care too much?

Comfort or the desire to avoid discomfort can so often drive what we do, possibly, possibly more than any other motivation.

[1 : 15] We live in a culture that speaks a lot about ensuring that we have good boundaries, a culture that warns against burnout, that prioritises self-care and looking after ourselves. These are not bad things, these are good things.

But they do have a flip side. The flip side is we live in a culture where risk and sacrifice are often discouraged, where we're often only encouraged to do those things which are of benefit to us, and where anything that makes us feel uncomfortable, we're told to jettison it, to get rid of it.

In short, we're often inclined and encouraged to do what's right for us. So the message of the age is, of course, you do you. And what's usually right for us, in our minds, is usually what causes us the least discomfort.

The challenge that Jesus puts to us is this. If you want to follow me, you have to be willing to give up your comfort, to give up your preferences, to give up your hopes, your dreams, your plans. Because what he says here in Luke 14 is that following him is going to be costly. The mission of Jesus, this idea that we're thinking about over these past few weeks, the mission of Jesus is one that will cost you.

[2 : 41] And so together, we want to think about the cost of following Jesus. Why is it so high? Why is it so worth it? Why is it so much better than staying in the comfort zone?

And I want to think about three things. They're probably not going to come up because I forgot to add them to the PowerPoint. So hopefully we'll all remember them anyway. Jesus wants us to see and understand the cost of following him.

He wants us to count the cost of following him. And he wants us to live the cost of following him. Firstly, understanding the cost of following Christ.

Before Jesus begins, Luke tells us that there's large crowds traveling with him. Now at this point in Luke's story, it's clear that Jesus is a teacher with profound insights into scripture and a deep understanding of the human condition.

It's clear that he's got supernatural power. He has released people from the power of demons. He has healed the suffering of their sicknesses. And he's even raised the dead.

[3 : 40] So no wonder he's got this massive group following him and hanging on his every word. What's perhaps surprising then is that he doesn't tell people what they want to hear.

He doesn't butter them up. He doesn't play to the crowd. He tells them bluntly. If they really want to follow him, well, this is what it looks like. And what it looks like is nothing short of radical.

His first statement is probably the most shocking. He says in verse 26, 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.

Jesus is being deliberately shocking here. But what does he mean? How does this square with the Jesus who calls us to love even our enemies? Well, when Jesus talks about hate here, it is hyperbole.

He's using a characteristic Hebrew exaggeration to make his point. But let's not miss the point. The word that he uses is no accident. Why does Jesus use that word hate?

[4 : 52] Well, it's because as one commentator writes, where there's hate, there are no ties that bind, which would limit our freedom of action. To put it another way, Jesus here is demanding absolute devotion and total loyalty.

He's saying that to follow him, you've got to be all in. And no one else can have a claim on you that would trump his claim on you. He's saying that following him leaves no room for others to make demands of you that contradict Jesus' demands of you.

He's saying that nothing else can take first place in your life. It's really pretty startling. He's saying, contrary to what our worldly experience might tell us, put everything on the line for me.

So what gives Jesus the authority to say that he deserves first place like that? What gives Jesus the right to say that if you're forced to choose between him and your spouse, or him and your parents, or him and your children, you have to choose him?

Let's park that question. Just let it percolate for a while. We'll come back to it in just a minute. Let's see what Jesus demands next. In verse 27, Jesus gives us the second demand for being his disciple.

[6 : 18] Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. The cross, as you know, was a Roman method of execution. It was an unimaginably painful way to die.

It was brutal. And it was, of course, how Jesus died. It was also customary for those who were about to be crucified to carry their own cross to the place where they were going to die.

We see this, of course, at the end of Jesus' life. Though Jesus, he actually was too weak and worn out from the beatings of the soldiers to carry his own cross. So he had his cross carried by another, by Simon of Cyrene.

And Simon really becomes a picture for us of what Jesus calls his followers to do. Simon literally took up the cross of Jesus and followed him to the hill of crucifixion.

And that's what following Jesus looks like. Jesus demands a willingness to endure a life of suffering in his name. The way of the cross is hard.

[7 : 23] It's a way of suffering and painful endurance. In the words of John Calvin, the Reformation theologian, Those whom the Lord has chosen and condescended to welcome into fellowship with him should prepare themselves for a life that is hard, laborious, troubled, and full of many and various kinds of evil.

And notice the emphasis here. It's not on the taking up of the cross, though that is, of course, important. It's on the carrying. It's on the long haul.

Lifting a heavy weight is one thing, but then to keep on carrying that weight, that's a different challenge altogether. Discipleship, mission, Christianity is a life of cross-carrying.

And it can be a long road up the hill. The third thing that Jesus demands is found in verse 33. Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

We live in an age where we have access to an awful lot of stuff. We're surrounded by choices. And many of us will be blessed in having solid paychecks, a good car, maybe even two, a nice house.

[8 : 43] Now, these, of course, are not bad things. Every good gift comes from God above. But us in the West, in comparison especially to the folks that Jesus was talking to initially, we are often incredibly well off.

And that comes with a challenge. And Jesus asks us, where is our treasure? And where is our heart? Jesus famously says elsewhere that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of God.

The reason is because the more we have, the more we find ourselves tied to worldly possessions and to money. And the more we have, the more we tend to trust and rely on ourselves for everything.

And if you have money and possessions, why would you need God? And so Jesus says, we've got to give up everything. That is, we must be prepared to give up whatever God asked us to give up for his sake.

Would you be willing to give up where you live for Jesus? Would you be willing to give up holidays or good schools or your salary? Would you be willing, if Jesus required it, to live on the poverty line? [9 : 57] These are hypotheticals, but they're important questions to ask ourselves. What is the defining driver in our life? How much is our comfort worth in comparison to Christ?

Would we be able to give up the good things we have for the sake of following him and becoming his disciple? What's more important to us, Jesus or everything else? The cost of being Jesus' disciple is high.

I wonder what the crowd who'd followed Jesus thought when they heard these three requirements for following him. Perhaps they were repulsed. Or perhaps they wrote Jesus off as mad.

Or perhaps they realized that actually they're dealing with something much greater than they perhaps comprehended at first. But here is something radical, something new, something hard, but also intriguing and entrancing.

And I wonder what you think as you hear them. For both the Christian and the one investigating Christianity, these words are shocking. They're hard.

[11 : 03] Maybe it's a jolt to wake up and see Jesus afresh. James Edwards, a biblical scholar, writes, And Jesus says, Jesus says, If you want to follow me, you need to count the cost.

And so that's why he tells us these two stories. This is our second big point, counting the cost. The first story he tells is about a man building a tower. Let's read it again. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower.

Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you've got enough money to complete it? If you lay the foundation and aren't able to finish it, well, everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying, This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.

This is a scenario that Jesus' first audience would have been able to relate to quite easily. The word for tower, that could refer to a small tower that you might build on your farm, for example. An equivalent for us would probably be like building an extension.

Whatever it is we might be building, it costs money. If you just start before you've worked out how much it's going to cost and whether you can cover it, whether you need a budget for it.

[12 : 30] And if you've not done all that work and you start the work and discover halfway through that actually you've not really thought this through, you don't have the money and the funds to complete it. Well, the work's not going to be finished.

You've got to count the cost of something before you start the work. The next story Jesus tells makes the same point. He says, suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000?

If he's 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 story, two kings are going to war, but one has an army that's half the size of the other.

And so the king with the smaller army has to count the cost of war. If he loses, he loses everything. It would be a grave mistake for the king to start counting the cost in the middle of the battle.

By then it's going to be too late and the battle will be lost. And so Jesus is saying, if you want to follow me and be my disciple, this is what it's going to cost you.

[13 : 39] So make sure you know what it means to follow me. Make sure you know what it means to be a Christian before you make that commitment. Make sure you know exactly what you're getting into.

Make sure you're ready for what's to come if you follow me, because it's not going to be easy. Know the cost and count the cost. And so at this point we need to start asking the question, why is following Jesus worth such a cost?

And we need to return to that earlier question that we parked. What gives Jesus the authority to say that he deserves to be first in our lives?

These are essential questions because there is within culture a growing interest in Christianity, which is great and wonderful. People are beginning to reevaluate the cultural and moral tenets of Christianity.

And perhaps that's you wanting to know more about what Christianity is. But frustratingly often the Christianity that's being talked about is really nothing more than a return to a kind of cultural conservatism under the banner of Christianity.

[14 : 49] Jordan Peterson is a good example of this. He was interviewed by The Spectator last week where he described himself as a new kind of Christian. What the interview makes clear is new kind of Christian means not Christian at all, actually.

Because what he sees God as, he doesn't see God as the God that we find in Scripture. God for him is just the voice that's in here. This is a Christianity which tries to take out the crucial component, which is Christ.

Real Christianity is a life of devotion to Jesus because of who he is and what he's done. So let's use these words here in Luke 14 as a lens to think about why Jesus is worth everything.

Because the cost that Jesus calls us to count hinges on our confidence that he is worth the cost. So if Jesus calls us to be devoted to him and give him priority in our lives to the extent that it's almost as if we hate everyone who isn't him, well, it's because he is devoted to us.

Paul tells us that Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness.

[16 : 21] Jesus is God. Only God, incidentally, has the right to claim such devotion. But it's not just that Jesus is God. Being God, he did what he didn't have to do.

The Son of God was born as a human in order to restore us to the Father. He chose to give up his rights and his power and his heavenly majesty because he is devoted to his creation.

He loves you. And if Jesus calls us to carry our cross, it's because he carried his cross for us. He died on his cross so that your sins would never be counted against you by God.

Paul again tells us, when you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And if Jesus calls us to give up everything for his sake, consider how much he has given up.

[17 : 36] Paul again, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

And Jesus, who tells this story of a man who failed to build a tower because he didn't count the cost, well, Jesus is building something much greater.

He's building a kingdom that will never, ever end. A kingdom where wrongs are righted and where forgiveness and the love of God are freely offered to messy people who recognize their need of them.

A kingdom of sacrifice and a kingdom of goodness. And Jesus paid the cost to make this a reality. The cost was the cross and Jesus paid it all.

And Jesus, who tells this story about a king going off to war against an adversary who seems much more powerful. Well, he's the king who has won a much more staggering and glorious victory.

[18 : 49] Through the cross and through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has been declared the victor over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is like the rider on the white horse who rides heroically into battle to defeat all of our enemies.

Even enemies we might not have known that we had. The burdens of our sin, our dark and awful thoughts, our harsh words, our disordered desires, they're all covered by his blood on the cross. And we're also enabled to become better, holier people in his power and in the spirit. The devil, the enemy of all humanity, who wants nothing more than for us to be disconnected from God, well, he's crushed under his feet.

And death, the last enemy that comes for us all, is only a temporary thing for the one who follows Jesus. Jesus, he promises us resurrection and new creation.

Jesus paid a price that is higher than you or I could ever imagine or truly comprehend when he died on the cross. And in him are blessings and benefits that the world just can't even come close to offering.

[20 : 11] But there is a cost if we want to follow him and receive those benefits. And so Jesus asks us, have you counted the cost? Of course, there's also a cost if we don't follow him.

A cost that we might not feel now, but we will feel it forever when Jesus returns in judgment and our whole life is laid bare before him. If you've never counted the cost before, don't delay.

There's an urgency because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. We don't know when Jesus will return. But we do know that none of us can stand the judgment of God and be counted righteous unless Jesus has paid the price for our sins.

Jesus challenges us on two fronts. If you've never counted the cost of following him, he's challenging you to consider it and to consider how much he has given for you.

But for those of us who are already followers of Jesus, and that's probably most of us here this afternoon, well, he challenges us to consider whether we're still willing to give everything for him.

[21 : 23] Jesus ends this slice of teaching with an odd little phrase. In verse 34, he says, salt is good. But if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap.

It's thrown out. Well, this is about keeping going. Keeping going in the Christian life isn't always easy. In fact, it's frequently very hard.

It's a costly life. That is a life of constant sacrifice and selflessness and worship. It's not going to be easy. Remember, it's no accident that Jesus characterizes the Christian life as carrying a cross.

So the question that he asks is, are you still willing to carry that cross, to give everything for him? Or is Jesus just one part of a number of things in your life? Where does Jesus actually sit in your priorities? Where does worship sit in your priorities?

[22 : 27] Where does church sit in your priorities? Where does mission and evangelism sit in your priorities? Because that's really what this image of salt is probing.

The salt is distinctive. It adds flavor to food and it preserves food. Salt brings food alive. I know that for a fact because Eden's saltless food is really not very appetizing.

Jesus is saying that the Christian is to be like salt. We're to bring flavor, to bring distinctiveness, even to bring preservation into the world.

The Christian is to be a positive influence that points to Christ. And when we first follow Jesus, especially if we became Christians at a young age, it can be quite easy to be salty and distinctive Christians who are ready to give everything for Jesus and the gospel.

But then life gets busy, doesn't it? And life gets crowded. And life gets messy. And life gets tiring. And then the demands of life increase.

[23 : 33] And then that subtle draw of comfort just becomes a lot more attractive in the midst of all the busyness and the stress of it all.

And what can easily happen is that life gets less distinctive. And life gets less obviously focused on Christ. You'll know this.

It's a pattern that becomes all too familiar. Zeal that then turns into apathy. But Christ calls us to a whole life lived for him.

A life of continual sacrifice because of the sacrifice which he undertook for us. Now we believe the gospel. We believe that we are brought back into a relationship with God because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross.

We believe that we are saved from death by the power of Christ's resurrection. It's a wonderful declaration of good news. And Jesus has paid it all.

[24 : 43] Jesus has done it all. Our salvation and our hope rests only on Jesus and only on what he has achieved. We can't add anything to that.

So what Jesus is calling us to is not salvation by what we do. It's important to stress that. He's already done that. And if you're thinking of taking up that call for the first time, this is, it's really important to grasp.

Jesus has done it all. But he asks us, because he has done it all, will you give your all for the long run?

Will you not just take up your cross but carry it the whole way? Will you continue to be full of salty flavor, full of passion and zeal and desire to see Christ glorified, willing to give up all our comforts for the sake of the beauty of Christ and the wonder of the gospel?

And we should think about what Christ might be particularly calling us to as individuals, remembering that he doesn't call us to things which are necessarily easy or necessarily comfortable.

[25 : 59] Is he calling you to serve more within the church or in different ways, to volunteer your gifts and your time? Is he calling you to give financially to the church, perhaps for the first time, or perhaps to give more from what God has given you?

Is he calling you to cast down certain idols that have crept into your heart, or to kill a particular sin that's just been weighing you down, or to devote more of your time to prayer and to the word? Perhaps he's calling you to make worship more of a priority. Maybe he's calling you to a particular work, to be part of a church plant, or to go off onto the international mission field, or perhaps even calling you to pastoral ministry.

It's important that we pray about these things and that we learn as a church to have a real willingness to do what the Lord might be calling us to do.

To be bold and to say, Lord, whatever it is you might be calling me to, here I am. Send me. And might I add a word of caution?

[27 : 12] We're often content with comfortable service. I say that as a rebuke to myself as well. What would it look like to serve Christ in ways that genuinely make us feel uncomfortable, genuinely cost us, genuinely hurt?

Because that's what Jesus calls us to. Not a comfortable Christianity, but a zealous one, a passionate one, a cross-carrying one.

It's not an easy thing to be a Christian on mission. Jesus never said it would be easy. He did, however, say it would be good. Let me finish with another story that Jesus told.

Jesus once told a story about a merchant. Now, this has been on my mind a lot just because we're in the merchant city, our little core team. And it's a few places in Scripture where merchants are mentioned.

So Jesus told this story about a merchant of the finest pearls. One day he came across a pearl whose value outstripped every pearl he'd ever encountered.

[28 : 26] It was beautiful. And the way the light played on its shimmering surface was like nothing he'd ever seen. Nothing could compare to the value of this one pearl.

And the merchant had to have it. And so the merchant made sure that he would. He went and he sold everything he had, every last item that he'd acquired across his whole life.

He sold it all. All so he could have this singularly beautiful and costly pearl. When everything was sold, finally he had enough to buy it.

The pearl was his. And when he finally had this pearl that he'd been longing for, that he'd given everything for, he looked at it and he was content.

It was worth sacrificing everything. Jesus and his kingdom are that pearl. He is worth that kind of singular, sacrificial, costly devotion.

[29 : 38] And as the merchant gazed with adoration at that pearl, well, I want us to end with our eyes fixed on Jesus. As we close, just in your mind, gaze on the Son of God.

Consider him as an infant born in a manger, God humbling himself to that low status because he loves you. See him bleeding on the cross, dying, bearing the wrath of God for sin in your place. Look at the empty tomb, a promise of eternal life in his name, a new creation. And look upwards. Look upwards to where he is standing at the right hand of the throne of God, to where he is interceding continually for you and for me because he loves you.

This is Jesus. This is Christ. He has paid the dearest cost for you. What cost will we pay for him? Let's pray.

Dear Lord, our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for Jesus. Lord, nothing can compare with what he has given us.

[31 : 07] Nothing can compare with the sacrifice that he has made on our behalf. Lord, help us to grasp that truth afresh, to see Christ afresh, to see the depths of his sacrifice.

And Lord, help us to be willing to do whatever you would have us do. Lord, help us to see where you might be calling us.

Help us to be passionate, zealous servants of your Son, of you, who are walking in step with your Spirit, in power and in confidence and in passion.

Amen. Amen. As we go from the word preached to celebrating the Lord's Supper together and reflecting further on Jesus' death on our behalf, we're going to sing When I Survey the Wondrous Cost, just reflecting more on what Jesus has given for us and the way in which he invites us to receive him because of what he has done.

Let's stand and sing. .