

Count the Cost

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[0 : 00] I will say that upon writing this sermon, I realized that I've been very much influenced by the observations and reflections of a couple of other pastors, one named Daryl Johnson, one named Andy Palmer. So you'll find your fingerprints all over my message this morning.

As always, there is also a sermon outline in your bulletin that might help you to follow along, and if you're someone who takes notes, you can use that to take notes as well. But let's approach God now. Let's pray.

Let him who has ears to hear, let him hear. And so Father, I pray that indeed today we would have ears to hear. I pray for engaged minds and soft hearts, so that what Jesus says today would be something we are willing to wrestle with and not just brush off, something we are willing to do rather than ignore.

And I pray that your Holy Spirit will be powerfully at work in us today, causing us the desire to take the path of Jesus, knowing that he will hold us fast and it will be for our true joy.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Accounts executive needed. Degree holder preferred minimum five years experience.

[1 : 27] Must demonstrate diligence and ability to work in a team. Competitive salary offered along with a great working environment. Now that's probably what you expect to see in a job advert, right?

A job description along with the requirements. But what did Ernest Shackleton do when he put up a job advert? Now Shackleton was a famous 20th century explorer of Antarctica.

And when he was recruiting people to join his crew, how did he advertise? Like this. Man wanted for a hazardous journey.

Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

Not the most enticing ever, is it? But it was truthful, and it did mean that it only attracted the people who really wanted to go on the journey.

[2 : 33] Shackleton only got men who really believed in what he was doing. And perhaps that accounted for what happened later. Famously, one of his expeditions ended up with his ship stuck in ice and members of his crew trapped on a blistering coal island before Shackleton finally escaped and managed to rescue the rest of his crew.

And amazingly, although this took many months, not one of them died. He got a crew that knew what they were in for, that counted the cost, and that helped them to persevere to the end.

Well, today Jesus is going to put up the description of a Jesus follower. And he does so so that everyone will know what they are in for.

Let's recall the context. Last week, Jesus told us God's going to throw a party. And this party is for everyone. You don't have to pay an entrance fee or beg for a special VIP pass because God has paid for and prepared everything.

And it looks like people have been getting the message. At the beginning of today's passage, we're told, verse 25, that large crowds are following him. Clearly what Jesus is saying is attractive.

[3 : 57] But don't forget from the last two weeks that Jesus has also been in the business of exposing. He's been exposing the hearts of the Pharisees, revealing their pride, showing how their reasons for avoiding Jesus' claim on their lives are nothing more than flimsy excuses.

And he isn't done yet. Jesus now turns to the crowd, and this time he seeks to expose those who simply want to be Jesus groupies.

You see, why do people come to Jesus? Some come because they simply want a divine doctor. You know, we are sick, we want to be better, so we go to Jesus to be healed.

But that's it. We're not interested in getting to know Jesus personally. After all, how many of us want to have a deep, meaningful friendship with our doctor?

Others come to Jesus because they simply want a divine TikTok video. You know, like TikTok, perhaps Jesus can provide some entertainment, perhaps even an inspirational soundbite that would help me get through the day.

[5 : 15] But like TikTok, I can always swipe Jesus away whenever I like. But today Jesus is going to teach us it doesn't work like that.

He says, yes, becoming part of my kingdom is free. Really. But at the same time, you've got to count the costs.

Now, is that contradictory? It doesn't have to be. Perhaps think of it a little like this. God was very kind to allow me to do my theological studies in Sydney.

I got a partial scholarship, so I didn't have to pay the fees. And through the generosity of his people across the world, God made sure that I had enough to cover accommodation, cost of living, all those kind of things.

In that sense, my education was free. But did that mean I could sit back and relax? No.

[6 : 19] I might not have paid for it, but by going to college, I had just committed myself to years of hard work and study, having to learn stuff like Greek and church history and systematic theology.

I had to say goodbye to my KL church family and uproot at that point for the sixth time in ten years. I had to count the costs. And actually, perhaps my wife, Chin Yin, counted the costs even more. She gave up her job and her friendship groups to go to an unfamiliar country with me. Things can be free yet costly.

And that is true too when it comes to being part of Jesus' kingdom. It is free yet costly. You see, Jesus wants to be clear.

He doesn't want to trick you or mislead you. He says to us, yes, Jesus' followers are party-goers. That is absolutely true. But you need to know the full job description of a Jesus follower so that you don't get the wrong idea.

[7 : 30] So what does the job description say? Let me sum it up this way. And this really is the main point for today. Following means forsaking.

That's the job description. Following means forsaking. Did you notice that three times in the text, Jesus says, cannot?

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.

It's there in verse 27. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. And also down in verse 33, in the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Three times Jesus says we cannot be his disciple. We cannot be his disciple if we do not hate. We cannot be his disciple if we do not carry our cross.

[8 : 40] We cannot be his disciple if we do not give up everything. So what is Jesus saying? Is he saying, look guys, there is no way you can be on my guest list unless you withdraw from society to become a modern day monk?

Unless you give up your job and your studies to become an itinerant evangelist? Unless you perform, you can't be kingdom people?

No, he cannot be saying that. After all, from Luke's gospel, we've seen Jesus hang out with lepers and tax collectors and sinners.

We've seen him eat and drink extravagantly. We've just seen him say last week that he wants to compel people to God's banquet, even if they can't pay.

It just doesn't fit. So what in the world is Jesus getting at? Here I think the veteran preacher Daryl Johnson is of immense help here and I'll follow his line of thinking.

[9 : 58] I think Jesus is using his cannot here in a definitional way. So he is using cannot the way we say a mammal cannot be cold-blooded, a chicken egg cannot be a duck egg, a triangle cannot have four sides.

And Jesus is saying that unless verse 26 and 27 and 33 defines the trajectory of your life, unless you hate and carry your cross and give up all, you cannot properly be said to be a Jesus follower. The definition doesn't fit. Let me try to illustrate. Let's imagine a very literal scenario.

Imagine two people, Allison and Leonard, standing on opposite sides of the room. And they are a group of kids lining up behind Allison and following her wherever she goes.

But suppose I say to the kids, line up behind Leonard and follow him. To do that, they have to not line up behind Allison.

[11 : 19] They have to give up their position behind Allison to be able to take up their new position of lining up behind Leonard. Leonard, they have to forsake following Allison.

And that is how it works with Jesus. By definition, we simply cannot follow behind him if we are following behind someone or something else.

As Johnson says, we simply cannot be said to follow Jesus unless we stop giving in to the claims of other things on our lives.

Because the truth is, we are always lining up behind something or someone. We are always something or someone's disciple, whether we realize it or not.

We are never not disciples. So if that is true, then what we need to ask ourselves is, whose disciple am I?

[12 : 30] Whose disciple will I be? And Jesus says, I really want you to be my disciple. Because I know full well that following me leads to eternal life and the fullest life and the best party ever.

But, by definition, following me means forsaking completely. A child cannot have one foot following Allison and another foot following Leonard on the other side of the room.

No, their whole self needs to be following Leonard. So it is with Jesus. But what does Jesus call us to forsake?

Verse 26 tells us, Firstly, it means forsaking relationships. 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.

Can you feel the shock of what Jesus is saying? Now, maybe by this stage, you have gotten a little used to Jesus saying provocative things.

[13 : 56] So, to make sure that you really do feel the shock, I want you to imagine being at your family dinner, maybe a reunion dinner like during Gawai or Chinese New Year or something like that.

And at that dinner, I want you to picture yourself saying, Papa, Mama, Coco, Cheche, Hey, you know, I'm a Christian, right?

Hey, can I share something that I learned from Jesus recently? Hey, this is what he said. Now, look again at verse 26 and read it out loud.

Can you feel the awkward silence filling the air? So, just what is Jesus getting at?

Is he rejecting one of the Ten Commandments to honor your father and mother? Has he decided to conveniently forget what he taught back in Luke 6 and Luke 10 to love your neighbor as yourself and even your enemies?

[15 : 05] No, Jesus is employing a rhetorical device here as people in the Middle East tend to do. He's not talking about quipping yourself into some psychological state of hostility towards your family members.

And he is certainly not talking about what some cult leaders encourage you to do, to cut off all contact with every one of your family members. Rather, he is talking about the decisions we have to make whenever we have to choose between Jesus or family.

Who commands your loyalty? Who will have precedence? Perhaps one helpful parallel comes from traditional wedding vows.

At weddings, the pastor will ask the husband, will you love, comfort, honor, and keep your wife in sickness and in health?

And forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you shall live. Did you notice the language of forsaking all others?

[16 : 19] So is the pastor asking the husband to completely forget his parents or his siblings or his best man for the rest of his life? No.

Of course not. But he is asking the husband to promise that this relationship is going to be the most important relationship here on earth under God for the rest of his life.

His loyalty is first to his wife. And that is what Jesus is telling us here. He is saying that to be a Jesus follower, we must recognize that our love and our loyalty for him is so great and so

unqualified that by comparison, even our love for our family will look like hatred in comparison.

He is saying that sometimes if presented with a stark choice between Jesus and family, we must choose Jesus. If you were in the crowd at that time, that must have been pretty confronting. There were surely some, perhaps even many, who might have had family who are Pharisees or were sympathetic to them. And Jesus is putting them at odds with their family.

[17 : 53] The same way he does today in those from Muslim or Hindu or atheistic or even nominally Christian families. He is saying, yes, family members are to be honored and loved, but they are not to be used as an excuse not to participate in God's kingdom or from devoting oneself to Jesus.

This, Jesus says, is what it means to be a Jesus follower. Is it costly? Yes. And that is probably why Jesus mentions family specifically at this point.

Imagine if Jesus said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate cockroaches or mosquitoes or migraines, he cannot be my disciple.

Well, that wouldn't be a problem, would it? We all naturally hate such things. We all love Jesus more than such things. But Jesus is not asking us if we love him more than things we naturally hate. He's asking us, do we love him even more than the people we naturally love? And why can Jesus ask of us such a thing?

[19 : 25] because really, Jesus is claiming to be equal with no less than God himself.

What he is doing here is not asking us to disobey the fifth of the Ten Commandments, but to obey the first of the Ten Commandments.

You shall have no other God besides me. Jesus is really asking, do you truly believe I'm God?

You might sign off on the doctrinal statement, but by your life, am I really your God? Or is your mom or dad not just your mom or dad, but also your God?

Are your spouse and children not just your spouse or children, but also your God? My friends, do you feel the weight of Jesus' words?

[20 : 35] I hope you do because remember, unless you renounce the claim family has on your ultimate loyalty, you cannot be Jesus' disciple.

people. And yet, this is precisely where many Asian Christians in particular struggle, don't we? We like the idea of following Jesus until it touches upon our children and our family, and sometimes family wins.

Sometimes a believer might not do what Jesus asked them to do simply because mommy or daddy said no. Now, of course, we want to honor our parents, Christian or not.

We need wisdom. It's not always straightforward. But could it be that sometimes we have allowed our parents or our spouse to stop us from serving the Lord Jesus in church or outside church, not so much because that is a wise witness to them, but simply because it's more convenient?

That way we don't have to have conflict. Could it be that our love for Jesus doesn't actually run deeper than our love for our family?

[22 : 00] Could it be that we are lining up, not behind Jesus, but behind our human family? family? And what about if we are the father or mother?

How does this apply? Well, verse 26 reminds us who it is that has ultimate claim on our children's lives, doesn't it?

As much as I like to think so, ultimately, I don't have the final claim on the lives of Lucas, Louisa, or Linus, my children.

No, verse 26 means I need to recognize that their unqualified loyalty is actually not to me. Only Jesus gets that. And if I am a parent, and I am a Jesus follower, then my job is to help them know Jesus and direct their loyalty to him.

Now, do I have hopes and dreams for them? Of course I do. But if Jesus calls them to a different path, then we must give up our hopes and our dreams and say, I know Jesus' ways for them are better.

[23 : 21] So for me, I would love it if one of my kids wants to become a pastor, and ends up being a better pastor than I am. But if Jesus says differently, if he wants them to be, you know, I don't know, a mathematician and, boy, am I hopeless at maths, then I've got to say, Jesus knows better.

And for some of you, maybe it's the other way around. You want your kids to be a scientist, a lawyer, or something. But if Jesus calls them to be a pastor, or a missionary, then you let go of your dream for the sake of the kingdom.

That is how we follow Jesus and love him. But you know what? It is so much better that way. When we try to play God in our kids' lives, and control them to an extent, so that they will fulfill our dreams, we often end up angry and stressed and hurting our relationships with our kids because we are playing a role we are not meant to play.

But if we just concentrate on helping them know Jesus and give them up to him, we end up less stressed and controlling and able to love and enjoy our kids more.

So following Jesus involves forsaking relationships in this way. And you've probably noticed that I've spent a disproportionate time on this point because I feel like verse 26 is where we are likely to feel the wake of Jesus' words the most.

[25 : 11] And where I think the Holy Spirit wants to do his convicting work in us the most. So those who has ears to hear, let him hear.

But secondly and more briefly, to forsake completely means forsaking self. Verse 27, and whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

It makes sense, doesn't it? if Jesus is Lord and we follow Jesus, then of course, just as our Lord carried his cross, so do we, his followers.

But what does it mean to carry our cross? Sometimes people say they are carrying their cross when they have to put up with some colleague or some relative that they don't like or they have to carry out some unpleasant tasks.

Now, those are certainly things that we might have to tolerate from time to time, but they fall short of what it means to carry our cross here. You see, if you were in the crowd that day listening to Jesus, you wouldn't be thinking of those things.

[26 : 29] You know very well that people did literally carry their cross. You know that they were suffering rejection and pain.

And if you saw someone literally carrying their cross, you know they were as good as dead. They're going to their deaths. And that's what it means to carry our cross.

It is to say that we are as good as dead to our self-interests. But we are alive to the interest of Jesus, even if it involves pain and rejection along the way.

God now here's another way to put it. When we become Christians, the New Testament says we die with Christ.

He dies and our old self dies with him. That's how the New Testament sometimes puts it. So what does that look like? Now Paul Miller, who is the author of a very thought provoking book called The J-Curve, you can find it in our church library, he gives us an example.

[27 : 38] He tells us of a young woman named Kayla, who has chosen to give up some of her vacation time to volunteer to serve at a Christian camp for disabled children.

So just as Jesus carried his cross out of sacrificial love, Kayla carries her cross by choosing to love sacrificially in this way.

When we make sacrificial decisions like this, out of obedience to and love for Jesus, we are carrying our cross.

But that doesn't exhaust the meaning. At this camp, one of the parents started complaining about Kayla, accusing her of talking bad about this parent.

Now this was an unfair accusation, but unfortunately rumors had begun spreading about Kayla. And so certainly, despite her good intentions and actions, she is suffering unjustly.

[28 : 46] And that's what it also means to carry the cross. Her choice to follow Jesus faithfully has resulted in suffering. She suffers as Jesus does.

The pattern of Jesus' life is beginning to map out onto Kayla's life. She is carrying her cross. But that is still not all.

In the face of this injustice, what choices can Kayla make? She can respond with bitterness, what a stupid parent that mother is.

She can respond with resentment, I never volunteer at this camp, I try to obey Jesus, I'm trying to help, and this is what I get. She can respond with revenge.

Let me spread rumors of my own. Or, she can choose to absorb the cross and keep loving this parent. She is, in a real sense, sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

[29 : 52] She is carrying her cross. So, when you love as Jesus does, which might then result in suffering as Jesus does, which then results in you making the choice to keep loving despite the suffering, that I think is what it looks like practically to carry the cross.

cross. And Jesus says, unless you carry your cross, you cannot be my disciple.

Those of us who do not give up everything cannot be my disciple. This, my friends, is the job description.

So, it is no wonder Jesus then tells us, make sure you consider carefully what you are getting yourself into. If following Jesus means forsaking, then following Jesus requires considering.

Following means considering. Now, I wonder if you've heard of the Melaka Gateway. Launched in 2014 by our former Prime Minister, it was meant to be this huge new urban area with four artificial islands positioned in the streets of Melaka.

[31 : 27] There was going to be luxury condos, a glittering business district, even the largest cruise ship terminal in Southeast Asia, built around a massive industrial port.

But, unfortunately, like many projects in Malaysia, it wasn't well planned. So many things were not considered. People living nearby were not consulted and began to protest.

The land reclamation resulted in environmental disaster. The new port wasn't actually going to be attractive anyway, given that Singapore's ports were nearby. So no surprise, costs balloon, and eventually it was abandoned, and it became just another white elephant.

Just some half-completed reclaimed land, doing nothing more than polluting the sea. And that perhaps is a modern version of the parable Jesus tells in verses 28 to 30.

Jesus says whenever anyone plans to build a tower, they would make careful calculations.

Otherwise, they will end up with something that is both non-functional and an eyesore, and the builder will face ridicule and suffer loss.

[32 : 48] Or verses 31 and 32, whenever a king goes to battle, Jesus says, he too will make careful calculations so that he doesn't suffer big losses on the battlefield. And Jesus says he doesn't want us to be thoughtless when it comes to following him.

It will be costly, so it's better for us to sit down first and work out the price we will have to pay to follow him. Otherwise, we might be taken by surprise and we'll end up like a white elephant project, all show and little substance.

We'll become someone who might wear the label Jesus follower, but we will actually be one. So make sure you consider carefully and count the cost.

Perhaps you've been someone who's grown up going to church all your life, but you haven't actually realized until today that this is the job description of a Jesus follower. Or perhaps you said yes to Jesus at some evangelistic rally where the speaker told you of the difference Jesus can make to your life.

But as you put up your hand, you didn't realize what a different life you are now also to lead. But now you do. You see, Jesus tells the truth in his job advertisement for one very simple reason.

[34 : 18] He wants you to be a completed tower. He wants you to win the battle. He wants you to be there at the party in the end. And so he says, count the cost.

Not because he wants to discourage you from committing to him, but because he wants to deepen your commitment to him. He wants to urge you forward by telling you that this is what it means to sign on to team Jesus.

Otherwise you'll be deceived, thinking that all will be easy, and stumbling badly at the first sign of difficulty. And that will do you or Jesus any good.

So make sure you consider carefully. So following means considering the cost of following Jesus, but actually it also means considering the cost of not following Jesus too.

You see, at first glance, the second parable seems to make exactly the same point as the first parable, doesn't it? Consider carefully and count the cost. And yes, that is part of it, but the second parable takes it one step further.

[35 : 39] You see, faced with a superior army, this king also has to consider the consequences of inaction. What if he doesn't side with the other king?

He will face catastrophic loss. And so better to take positive action as he does in verse 32. Better to side with this king.

And so the second parable is also asking us, consider the cost of not following Jesus, of not taking positive action, of not siding with God's king.

Wouldn't that be catastrophic? For what is the cost of not following Jesus? And that is where the final mini parable of verses 34 and 35 comes in.

Now, I like salty food, I'm quite liberal with the soya sauce, and perhaps Jesus does too. After all, he says, so it's good. And really, that is the point of salt, to make food salty.

[36 : 51] So, if it loses its saltiness, what's the point? How can it even be called salt at that point? And similarly, what's the point of a Jesus follower that doesn't follow Jesus?

What use is a Jesus follower who isn't doing the basic stuff that Jesus is calling us to do? Who isn't planning with God in mind? Who isn't pursuing godliness with contentment?

Who isn't magnifying God with their money? What use is a Jesus follower who isn't blessing their fellow Christians in church with their gifts or seeking to be distinctive out there in the workplace? And whenever things are of no use, verse 35, you throw it out. After all, what is salt that isn't salty? Whatever it is, it's not salt.

And what is a Jesus follower that isn't following Jesus? Whatever they are, they're not Jesus' followers. That makes sense, doesn't it?

[37 : 58] And Jesus says, what use are such people for his kingdom? No use. So out they go. That is the cause of not following Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. Again, my friends, can you feel the wake? Can you feel the wake?

And I want you to see that these words are not for some special class of Christians, as if it applies only to people who are really keen. Now look back at verse 26. Jesus says, if anyone comes to me, or look at verse 27, and whoever does not carry their cross, so anyone, whoever, Jesus' words are for everyone and anyone who wants to wear the label Christian.

There are no two categories of Christians, committed Christians and uncommitted Christians.

There's only one. The category uncommitted Christians does not exist, biblically speaking.

It's either you follow Jesus this way, or you cannot be his disciple. Now at this point, I'm aware that there might be some of us with tender consciences.

[39 : 27] You're sitting here this morning and you are someone who truly does love and follow Jesus. And you're more than aware of the many, many ways you've not done what you know you should. you want to count the cost, but you struggle at times.

And so you feel maybe a little condemned at this point. And if that is you, then I hope you remember that Luke 14, verse 25 to 35 comes within the bigger picture of Luke's gospel.

The Jesus who asked you to count the cost is also the same Jesus who showed great tenderness to the sinful woman at the dinner party and the demon possessed man living in the wilderness.

The Jesus who asked you to count the cost is also the same Jesus who himself counted the cost, separated from his earthly family and literally not just carried his cross, but died on the cross.

And he bears on that cross every failure of our discipleship. When we are back in Luke's gospel later on this year, we'll learn about the heart of God who enthusiastically welcomes back even the wayward son who went off the rails in every possible way.

[40 : 47] So if you are already seeking to count the cost of following the Lord, however imperfectly, well be assured of that. Don't lose heart and be assured that he's also the same Jesus who can calm storms, cast out demons, and conquer death.

And so he is powerful enough to help you keep counting the costs. But remember that Jesus is also seeking to expose our hearts.

And so my friends, if today you are someone who needs to hear the force of Jesus' words here, don't brush them off too lightly. Remember, these are Jesus' words straight from the scriptures. You know, it's easier to do so in a place like Sarawak compared to other places in Malaysia, can't it? Because it doesn't cost us as much to be a Christian here. It's comfortable, in fact. If we go by the senses, we are more or less the majority. And so it's so easy to follow Jesus without feeling the need to give up something.

But as John Stott, one of the most insightful pastors of the 20th century, once pointed out, when thousands of people do not understand what it means to be a Jesus follower, and to count the cost, what results is many, many half-built towers?

[42 : 18] What results is people who like the respectability of religion but not the discomfort of following Jesus? And half-built towers will accomplish nothing for the kingdom.

What costs nothing is probably worth nothing. So my friends, if God is asking you to give up certain relationships, certain comforts, certain sources of pride, certain benefits you currently enjoy, will you?

If Jesus asks you to be his disciple according to his definition, will you? Or will you be contented to be salt that isn't salty?

If so, then I urge you stop now to count the cost of not following Jesus. Jesus. So before I pray, I just want all of us to sit with what Jesus is saying to us.

Maybe there are many things going through your mind now, but I want you to take just one thing that has struck you or challenged you today, maybe write it down in your sermon notes if you have a pen, and I want you to take that one thing before the Lord, and I want you to ask him to help you to count that particular cost, to help you as you struggle with that cost, to help you as you maybe even grieve that cost.

[43 : 50] I want you to ask him not to let Satan make you forget the words of Jesus today. So soften your hearts and let the Lord do his work in us today.

So let's take a few seconds now and then I'll pray. don't trim gossip 1 went memes It's long and dann pull home freestyle quand Blazte ■■■■■ heeftpic cooperate mat ■■■■■ tim comment Maps ■■■■ ■emp overs whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

And so, Father, I pray that we would hear today. Help us to really listen to the voice of our shepherd, knowing that you are the one who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. You are the one who leads us through every difficulty. But, Father, help us not to take that for granted. Instead, help us to sit down and help us to count the cost, help us to forsake whatever we need to forsake to wrestle with that today.

Hearing your words, knowing that unless we forsake and line up behind you, we cannot be your disciples. So help us to be people who indeed will follow you so that we might be at your feast in the end.

[45 : 27] We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.