

CHRIST'S COUNSEL TO COUNT THE COST

INTRODUCTION: Last Sunday—in recognition of Memorial Day—I had a military-themed message that I introduced with the following quote from Ryle:

“Be ashamed to use the vulgar arts [deceptive practices] of a recruiting Sergeant. Do not speak only of the uniform, the pay, and the glory; **speak also of the enemies**, the battle, the armour, the watching, the marching, and the drill.” (pg 77)

Ryle's point, of course, was to remind preachers to make sure they are **preparing** God's people **for battle**. Just as a military Recruiter can over-emphasize the **benefits of the military**—and fail to **warn of war**; a Pastor can over-emphasize the **blessings of becoming a child of God**—and neglect to **warn them of the battle they are now in**. So we looked at the **battle** we are in against our **adversary the devil**—as well as the battle we have with our **own sinful nature** once we become a child of God.

I want to again use a quote from Ryle as a springboard for today's sermon. It is actually a continuation of the quote we just looked at. Notice on your handout:

“Do not present only one side of Christianity. Do not keep back **‘the cross’ of self-denial** that must be carried, when you speak of the cross on which Christ died for our redemption.

Explain fully what Christianity entails. Entreat men to repent and come to Christ; but bid them at the same time to **“count the cost.”** (pg 77)

Is there a **price to be paid** to be a follower of Jesus? Is there a **cost that needs to be counted**? Jesus said there was—and still is! Please take your Bibles and turn to Luke 14; follow along as I read verses 25-33.

I think you'd agree that Jesus made some rather startling statements here.

--Vs 26. 'If you don't **hate** your family—and your own life also—you cannot be my disciple.'

--Vs 27. 'If you don't **bear your cross**, you cannot be my disciple.'

--Vs 33. 'If you don't **forsake everything you have**, you cannot be my disciple.'

What does Jesus **mean** when He said these things? Does Jesus really want us to **hate our parents** when God's Word says we are to **honor** them? Does Jesus want us to **hate our wives** when God's Word says husbands are to **love their wives** as Christ loved the church? And does Jesus really want us to **give up everything** we have in order to be His disciple? That is some of what we are going to be looking at this morning.

In addition to the startling statements Jesus made in this passage, there are three truths about following Christ—about being His disciple—that I want us to focus our attention on this morning. The questions I raised just a few moments ago will be answered as we look at these truths.

1. Jesus is more concerned about quality than quantity

Before I explain to you **why** I say that, we need to consider first...

A. The setting

Where was Jesus—and what was going on—that led Him to make these statements?

--In vs 1, we see that Jesus is in “the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day...”

Doesn't say which city; only that it was a house.

--In vs 7, Jesus puts forth a parable “to those which were bidden....” To those which were bidden to what?

To “eat bread on the sabbath day” at the house of this chief Pharisee!

--In vs 12, we see Jesus speaking directly to the person that invited Him into his home.

--In vs 15, we see Jesus still at this house “And when one of them that sat at meat with Him...”

--Now vs 25: “And there went great multitudes with Him...”

So Jesus leaves the house of this chief Pharisee and there is a great multitude outside waiting for Him.

G. Campbell Morgan writes: “These were the last months of our Lord's public ministry, and by this time, wherever He went, the crowds went after Him, following Him from town to town, and village to village, eager, keen, interested, loving to hear Him, and to watch Him, and wanting to be near Him.” (Parables and Metaphors; 206). **The setting**, then, is a huge crowd following Jesus, eager to hear what He says.

Next... B. The sifting. Why do I call it “the sifting”? Because Jesus’ statements are meant to thin the crowd! Look again what Jesus says:

--Vs 26. ‘If you don’t hate your family—and your own life also—you cannot be my disciple.’

--Vs 27. ‘If you don’t bear your cross, you cannot be my disciple.’

--Vs 33. ‘If you don’t forsake everything you have, you cannot be my disciple.’

Does He say these things to get **more people to follow Him**; to make the crowd even larger? Obviously **not!** He says it to **whittle down** the crowd—to **separate** the true followers of Jesus from the pretenders!

In other words, Jesus is more concerned about **commitment** than **crowd size!** He is more concerned about the **quality** of those that follow Him than the **quantity!**

Good reminder for **us as a church**—and **me as a Pastor!** Jesus’ priority was not **numbers!** It was not “do whatever you need to do to attract a crowd.” And it was not “**give** them what **they want**—or **tell them** what they **want to hear!**” Jesus’ priority was **speaking truth**—God’s Word—and leaving the results in God’s hands. And that is what **I need to do**—and what you should want me to do—regardless of our size!

Next, let’s consider... **2. Jesus desires informed disciples—not ignorant ones**

Pretty easy to see that, right? Jesus wanted His followers to know “what they were getting into,” so to speak. Jesus wanted them to **be informed.** He wanted them to **know** what it would **cost them.**

--He didn’t want them to be like a man who decided to build a tower without considering how much it would cost—and whether or not he had enough money to finish it once he started!

This is certainly not the only time Jesus warned His followers about the cost of following Him.

Mt 10:16a “Behold, I send you forth as **sheep in the midst of wolves...**” Doesn’t sound like much fun, does it?

Mt 10:22a “And ye shall be **hated of all men** for my name’s sake...” That doesn’t sound very appealing either!

John 16:2 “They shall **put you** out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that *whosoever killeth you* will think that he doeth God service.”

Numerous other verses we could look at, but I believe you get the point—Jesus wanted **would-be** disciples to carefully **count the cost!**

One man wrote: “Unlike many preachers of our day, Jesus did not desire a large following. He would rather have men count the cost of discipleship and **opt to stay out** than to merely go along with Him ignorantly.” (“How to Hate Your Wife,” Bob Deffinbaugh, Bible.org)

Truth #1? Jesus is more concerned about the **quality** of followers than He is about the **quantity.**

Truth #2? Jesus desires **informed** disciples—not **ignorant** ones.

Truth #3? **3. Jesus wants sacrificial followers—not superficial ones**

Is it possible to follow Jesus for the wrong reasons? It certainly is! How do we know? Because Jesus wouldn’t have tried to “thin out” the crowd if it didn’t matter what kind of follower you were!

Let’s consider first the... A. Superficial followers

What is a superficial follower of Jesus? Someone who seems outwardly to be a follower—like the great multitudes—but are **not genuine, true followers.** Jesus warned of superficial followers in the parable of the sower. Remember what Jesus said about the seed that fell on the **stony ground?**

Mark 4:16-17 “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the Word, immediately **receive it with gladness;** ¹⁷ And **have no root** in themselves, and so **endure but for a time:** afterward, when **affliction or persecution ariseth** for the Word’s sake, immediately **they are offended.**”

Notice what Jesus says. They received the Word with gladness—they **loved what they heard;** but they had no root—they were shallow—so when the “**heat**” of **affliction or persecution came,** they were offended; meaning **they fell away.** The affliction and persecution did not **change them**—it **revealed them!** It **showed they were superficial and had no root.** Was Jesus’ warning necessary? Were there superficial followers of Jesus in His day? There sure were! How do we know? I’m going to answer a question with a question. **How many followers of Jesus** gathered in Jerusalem and prayed together while waiting for God to send the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:15 says “the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty.”

Think about that! Jesus had fed thousands—and here in verse 25 it says “great multitudes” were with Him—and yet when all was said and done, there were **only 120** that were doing what Jesus said to do: “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

I see in the Bible two kinds of superficial followers of Jesus.

i. Sensation-seekers

We’ll come back here in a little bit but take your Bibles and turn to John 6. Notice vs 1-2. Here we see that some people followed Jesus because they were **sensation-seekers**; they wanted to see Him do miracles “on them that were diseased.” And, depending on how long they followed Him, they would have seen **many!**

When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: “Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?” Jesus responded with this message for John: **Mt 11:5** “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Why did some people follow Jesus? To see the miracles!

We have another kind of superficial follower, also found in this chapter. I’m calling them... **ii. Selfish-seekers**

In vs 5-12, we see Jesus using a **lad’s lunch**—consisting of 5 barley loaves and 2 fishes—to feed 5000 men—besides women and children. In vs 13, we see that **12 baskets full** of left-overs were gathered up.

Now vs 14: “...when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did,” they believed that He must be “that prophet” which Moses has prophesied about in Deuteronomy 18:15.

Notice now vs 15. “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force” to do what to Him? To **hurt Him**? No; to **make Him a King**! Why did they want to make Jesus their King? So He could feed them and take care of them! Jesus says as much in vs 26!

But Jesus’ priority was not filling **bellies with bread**—it was preparing **believers for battle!**

And to be prepared for battle, Jesus desires... **B. Sacrificial followers**

Let’s turn back to Luke 14 and consider **the cost** that we are **to count**. What do we need to be **willing to give up—to sacrifice**—in order to be a genuine follower of Christ?

i. Family

Vs 26 “If any man come to me, and **hate not** his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

So is Jesus **contradicting the Bible** when He says if we don’t **hate** our family, we cannot be His disciple? At face value, it certainly **seems that way!** Jesus would **not do that**, of course, so what does He **mean**?

There are 2 passages that give us insight as to what Jesus means—1 from the OT and 1 from the NT. **Gen 29:30b** “...and he [Jacob] **loved also Rachel more than Leah**, and served with him [Laban] yet seven other years.” Did Jacob **hate Leah**? No; he just **loved her less** than he loved Rachel!

Gen 29:31 “And when the Lord saw that **Leah was hated**, He opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.”

--But now it says that God says that Leah **was hated!** The explanation is simply this: Jacob’s love for Rachel was **so much greater** than his love for Leah that, in comparison, it seemed as if Leah **was hated!**

Now for the NT example—which is actually a parallel passage of what we are looking at here in Luke 14. For the sake of time we won’t turn there, but notice **Mt 10:37** “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

In Mt 10, instead of saying “hate” your father or mother, Jesus says ‘If you **love them more than me**, you are not worthy of me’—meaning cannot be my disciple. Putting these thoughts together, then, Jesus is saying that our love for our **family** should **be nothing compared** to our **love for Him**.

In other words, we should love Jesus more—**much more**—than even our parents!

So what does that look like? If you are from a Muslim country—and become a Christian—your family disowns you—or worse. One 16-year-old girl I read about wasn’t even a believer yet. She had questions, though, and had met with a Christian Pastor to try to get her questions answered. She also had a Bible.

When her father and brother found out, they beat her—badly. Her father then gave her the following ultimatum: “Either you marry or you die. Your choice. If you are a Christian, then there is no place for you in this city. But if you marry, then you can be my daughter. Otherwise you will die here alone.”

Rather than marry a Muslim man in a forced marriage, she ran away—and eventually did become a Christian. She obviously chose God over her family. (“Hearts of Fire;” pg 70)

What about here in the U.S., in a so-called Christian nation? Are there people who have to choose between their families—and Christ? Yes, there are! You may know of someone—or it may be you! Maybe you “left” the “religion” of your family—and now are on “the outs” with one or more of them.

Jesus warned us that that might happen. Mt 10:34-36 “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I am come to **set a man at variance against his father**, and the **daughter against her mother**, and the **daughter in law against her mother in law**. ³⁶ And a man's **foes shall be they of his own household.**”

Not only does Jesus say we need to **choose Him over our family** to be His disciple, we also need to be willing to choose Him over... **ii. Self**

We see that in the last part of vs 26 “If any man come to me and **hate not...** his own life also” and again in vs 27 “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

“**Hating our life**” does not mean we walk around—like some people do—and repeatedly say, “I hate my life; I hate my life; I hate my life.”

What it means is that we **love Jesus**—and His will for our life—**more than** we love **our own desires** and plans for our life. It means, “Not my will, but thine be done.” It means, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do.” It means, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

What about cross bearing? Steven Cole put it like this: “The cross was not an implement of irritation or inconvenience. The cross was an **implement of slow, tortuous death.**” Paul said, “I die daily.” We need to say, “I am not my own... because I’ve been bought with a price.”

What does Jesus want us to be willing to give up—to sacrifice—in order to be His disciple? Our family...our selves...and thirdly... **iii. Our possessions**

Vs 33. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

Commentators are divided as to whether or not this is a **third thing**—a reference to **possessions in particular—or a summary statement** of verses 26-32. I lean toward it being a reference to our possessions.

So are we supposed to **get rid of everything** we own and live a life of **voluntary poverty**? I don’t believe so. But it is a reminder that we can be **torn between two masters**: God and mammon—meaning money or riches. We can’t serve them both; we **must choose one** over the other.

In the parable of the sower, the seed that was sown **among thorns** were those that heard the word, “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” (Mk 4:19).

Not too long ago, my wife and I watched the Christian film, “Courageous.” In the movie, a Christian man named Javier had finally gotten a good-paying job. He was brought into the office and offered a **promotion—under one condition**. The condition was this: when he did inventory, he had to record that less came in on the truck than actually did. In other words, he was **asked to cheat!**

So... Javier had a choice to make—tell his boss he was **willing to cheat** so he could get the promotion and pay raise—or refuse to cheat...and not get the promotion... and **maybe lose the job** he had now!

He did the **right thing**—he chose God over a promotion—and informed his boss that **he would not cheat** because it was wrong. What did his boss do? Congratulated him for “passing the test” and offered him the promotion and pay raise! That is a movie, of course, and sometimes that happens in real life—but sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes we lose the job—or are thrown into a fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

What about us? How attached are we to money...and possessions...and things? Are we willing to **disobey God** in order to make more money? Will we be **angry with God** if He takes things from us—like Job?

Three truths Jesus teaches us about discipleship.

Truth #1? Jesus is more concerned about the **quality** of followers than He is about the **quantity**.

Truth #2? Jesus desires **informed** disciples—not **ignorant** ones.

Truth #3? **3. Jesus wants sacrificial followers—not superficial ones**

You've been informed; you know now what Jesus expects from you as a follower of His. The question is: are you a **sacrificial follower** of Christ—and thus a real disciple—or are you a **superficial** follower? I cannot answer that question for you. Each of us must answer it for ourselves.

So, what is it that God wants you **to do today**?

1. First, I believe God wants us to be honest about **what kind** of follower we are. Are we superficial—or sacrificial? You obviously can be a pretender—and maybe fool people—but God knows those that are His!
2. Second, be honest about how you are trying to get to heaven. If you believe what **you sacrifice** in this life will pay for the forgiveness of your sins and get you into heaven, you are thinking wrong! The only satisfactory payment for sin is the payment Jesus made on the cross—period!
3. Third, don't look at sacrifice as a sacrifice! Look at it as a gift to God for the sacrifice that He made for you!