

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”

“#7 Cost: How Much Is That?”

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How much is that? Have you ever wondered that? Plenty of times we have! It is a bit frustrating to go to the store, see something we would might well like to buy, and to have no price on it. E.g., I have been to Walmart when I have had that frustration, but there were times a worker there pointed me to a price checker on one of the columns of the store. Admittedly, at times even when we know the price, we can't help but wonder, can I get it for even cheaper? E.g., I recall reading advice from a guy who said while shopping, why not ask the salesman, “Can I get it for less than the price tag? Is this price negotiable?” and often times the answer is yes— we only needed to ask! I recall years ago I was shopping for a basketball goal for our family, and when I found the one I wanted, I asked if I could get a reduced price for it, and to my surprise, the salesman said yes! Now, there have also been times when I understand the answer is no,— the stated price is the final price. Sometimes when people consider following Jesus, they too want to know the price, the cost of following Him. And often times, people would like to know if they can get a reduced price. Jesus basically gives us the answer in our text today.

READ Luke 14:25-33 (p. 78)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just told the parable of the great banquet where many who are invited to attend cannot come for various reasons— one person had just bought land, another bought five oxen, and another had just gotten married. So the master told his slave to invite anyone and everyone to his banquet— but those who refused his invitation will not be allowed.

READ vv 25-27. “In our passage it is abundantly clear that Jesus was no politician! Cf. Matthew 23:25-26.” Now, I must admit that not all politicians are bad. Many of them earnestly want to do what is right and are willing to pay the political price to stand up for their convictions. E.g., I recall a member of the U.S. House of Representatives whose district was in New Orleans East and he stood up for the pro-life position, and as a result of that in large part he only served one term. But I have found such politicians rare. E.g., I recall a politician who once stood steadfastly for decades for the Hyde Amendment, which restricted government funds from supporting abortion, and when his party told him he would have to reject the Hyde Amendment if he wanted to be endorsed by his political party, he reversed his previous position and is not against the Hyde Amendment. We can understand the lure of political power. The desire for power and control can be all-consuming, and the experience of power and control can be intoxicating. Jesus was not like this. Notice our passage begins with *large crowds* traveling with Jesus. He is quite popular indeed! And yet what does Jesus do? He could have said, “Thank you for following after me! God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life. Just think positive thoughts, appeal to your inner goodness, and you will have length of years!” But no! Jesus is more interested in what people need to hear, not what they want to hear. Notice what He says to the religious leaders in Matthew 23:25-26, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but

inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may become clean.” Sometimes car mechanics are like that. E.g., I recall not too long ago our car mechanic said our van was in serious need of CV joints and rods, and the cost was pretty expensive, and it would not be good for the car if we did not have this repair done; my heart sank at the price, but eventually Elena and I said ok; when we got the van back, I have been amazed at how beautifully it rides! Jesus is kind of like that car mechanic— He sees serious things need changing in our lives, and if the changes and repairs are done, great things will be coming our way. But also, like the car mechanic, there is a significant cost, as Jesus explains in vv 26-27.

“Jesus makes clear that the cost of following Him involves loving Him, for to know Him is to love Him first. Cf. Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 9:21-27,57-62; 16:13; Philippians 3:10.” Admittedly, some of this language is at first glance off-putting. We are to hate our father and mother, children, brother and sister, and even our own lives? We need to recognize that Jesus is using Jewish hyperbole here. If we look at the parallel to this passage in Matthew 10:34-39 Jesus said that whoever loves father or mother, etc. more than Me is not worthy of Me. We see Jesus’ stark statement is meant to shock us out of the notion that following Him is a light matter— in fact, following Him is ultimately the *only* matter. We in the U.S. Christian Church need this reminder. E.g., I was talking with a wise Christian recently, and she told me that not too long ago George Gallup did a survey of the U.S. Church and found that American Christianity is basically an inch deep and miles wide. I.e., we have an opinion on a lot of issues, but our knowledge of how they relate to biblical Christianity is extremely shallow. The reason for this is we don’t know our Bibles. My own thinking about United Methodists of my own generation and thereafter is that we are basically biblically illiterate. We are in love with the things of God, not the God of the things. In

Luke 16:13 Jesus said, “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” How do we get to this commitment? By knowing Jesus. To know Him is to love Him. It is like that in all our love relationships, isn’t it? E.g. I recall C.S. Lewis wrote that when his beloved wife Joy was dying of cancer, his prayer was that, if possible, her illness could be transferred to him. That is how enormous his love was for his wife. For those of us with children, we know what such a prayer could be like, don’t we? The only way we can be willing to die for the Lord, to take up the cross and follow Him, is to *know* Him. I love the way Paul expresses his relationship with Jesus: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. . .” (Philippians 3:10). Thankfully, we don’t usually face such a severe penalty for following Jesus in the U.S. But there often is a penalty, a cost in following the biblical Jesus. E.g., Elena and I have just finished reading the main text of the book by Nabeel Qureshi called *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (3rd edition), where his friend Mark Mittleburg on p. 300 shares that our text this morning in Luke 14 truly spoke to Nabeel, because the first year of his life as a Christian was extremely difficult for him, since his beloved parents viewed his conversion to Christianity as tragic and wept much in front of him, but God used this time to shape him in his faith, that his first love was to be Jesus. E.g., I recall a pastor who took a stand against racism in a very large church in Shreveport, and he knew it would mean people pulling out of his church and loss of income, but he stood firm for the gospel. E.g., a woman who has a sister who is a lesbian who goes to a church that affirms her same-sex relationships, but the sister was a committed Christian and knew that to share the gospel on how such relationships were not in keeping with the Lord’s will, she risked losing that relationship, or the closeness

of it; nevertheless, she shared with her sister in a loving way that the practice of lesbianism is against God's will, and there has been friction between her and her sister, as well as their mother. There are costs for you and me in following Jesus as well, and perhaps the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you during this message on that. What are we to do?

READ vv 28-33. "Jesus' two examples communicate the same truth: one does not become a follower of Jesus by being born into it, but rather it is an act of the will, albeit through the Holy Spirit. Cf. 24:49; 1 Corinthians 12:1-3." At the end of Luke's gospel the resurrected Jesus promises the disciples are to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high—the Holy Spirit. The ability to say yes to Jesus is an act of the will, informed and guided by the Holy Spirit—but not forced on us. All major decisions in life are acts of our wills, aren't they? E.g., I recall before I asked Elena to marry me, I was pretty concerned about this decision—a once-in-a-lifetime decision from what I could see. So I recall reading part of a book on finding God's will, and a booklet on how to know whom we are to marry. I recall the booklet coming to the conclusion that the way we definitely know God's will on whom we are to marry is this: we know this after we say, "I do"! It means when we have disagreements, there will be a solution, and the "D" word—divorce—is never an option. Those of you who are married know what that is like. And this is what Jesus is saying here—we count the cost when we come to follow Him, just like building a tower or going off to war. And I can tell you that following Jesus for the past 42 years has been the *best* decision I have ever made.

"Have you and I counted the cost?" I invite you to ask yourself this question this week. If you are not a follower of the biblical Jesus, I pray you say yes to Him. If you are following the biblical Jesus, I pray you and I come to a better understanding of what this cost is, and how very much it is worth it!