

## **When the Kingdom Comes Close: The Cost of Following**

*Luke 14:25-35*

### **Main Idea:**

Jesus does not merely invite people to follow Him; He demands absolute allegiance from those who do.

### **Introduction**

One of the remarkable things about Jesus is that He never tried to lower the cost of following Him in order to increase the crowd. We often assume that if attendance grows, everything must be going well. Jesus often did exactly the opposite.

When the crowds became larger...His teaching became harder. Look at verse 25. "Now great crowds accompanied Him..."

This is exactly the moment when many leaders would begin talking about momentum. This is when marketing strategies begin. This is when expectations soften. This is when difficult doctrines get quietly pushed aside. Not Jesus.

Luke says something astonishing. "He turned..." Imagine that. Thousands are following Him. Instead of smiling and thanking them for coming, He stops and turns around and begins preaching one of the hardest sermons anyone has ever heard. Why?

Because Jesus is never impressed by crowds. He is interested in disciples. There is a tremendous difference.

Crowds admire Jesus. Disciples belong to Jesus.

Crowds enjoy His miracles. Disciples surrender to His authority.

Crowds follow when it is exciting. Disciples remain when it becomes costly.

I wonder how many people that day expected another miracle. Instead they received a warning. Jesus essentially says, "Before you keep walking behind Me, I need you to understand exactly where this road leads."

Imagine walking onto a car lot. You find the perfect vehicle. The salesman tells you everything you want to hear. Beautiful. Reliable.

Great gas mileage. Then, just before signing the paperwork, someone quietly slides the full financial agreement across the table. Suddenly you aren't buying a car anymore. You're making a commitment. Jesus does something similar here.

Many people loved walking behind Him. Few had considered what following Him would actually require. Today Jesus hands every one of us the contract. He says, "Before you continue, count the cost."

That raises an important question. What exactly is Jesus asking for? Many people think Christianity is simply adding Jesus to an already busy life. He's another appointment. Another priority. Another commitment. Jesus says something altogether different.

He is not asking for first place on a list. He is claiming the right to rewrite the list entirely. The issue is not whether Jesus is important. The issue is whether Jesus is Lord.

As A.W. Tozer famously wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Why? Because what we believe about Jesus determines everything else.

If Jesus is simply a teacher...I'll admire Him.  
If He's merely a helper...I'll consult Him when life gets hard.  
If He's simply a Savior who forgives my sins...I'll thank Him.  
But if Jesus is Lord...Everything changes.

My marriage changes. My parenting changes. My calendar changes. My spending changes. My ambitions change. My entertainment changes. My relationships change. My perception of church changes. Nothing remains untouched by His authority. That is exactly what Jesus is confronting in Luke 14.

Here in Luke 14, Jesus makes it clear. Discipleship is not just adding Him to your life. Discipleship is surrendering your life to Jesus.

### **1. Who Has Your Highest Affection? (Luke 14:26)**

Jesus 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."

Those may be the most shocking words Jesus ever spoke. Imagine hearing them for the first time. "Hate your father." "Hate your mother." "Hate your wife." "Hate your children." That sounds completely opposite of everything else Jesus taught. So, what does He mean?

The Greek verb here ordinarily means "to hate." In many places—including Luke 21, where Jesus says His followers will be "hated by all" because of His name—it clearly refers to real hostility and opposition. There is no reason to weaken the word there.

But here, the context shows Jesus is using it comparatively. Matthew records this same teaching with these words, "Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Matthew gives us the interpretive key. Jesus is not commanding sinful hatred toward family.

He is demanding supreme allegiance. The issue is not, "Should you love your family?" The issue is **If Christ and family stand in opposite directions, which one wins?**

Family isn't the target. Competing loyalties are the target. Whenever the claims of Christ collide with the deepest earthly attachments of your heart, Jesus must win. Every time.

On your wedding day, you stand before witnesses and promise exclusive faithfulness. When a groom says, "I choose you above every other woman," he isn't declaring hatred toward every other woman on earth. He's declaring supreme devotion to one. Every other relationship is now redefined by that covenant.

Jesus is saying something even greater. Every relationship in your life must now be defined by your relationship with Him. He isn't asking for one more place in your heart. He claims the throne.

Some in this room know exactly what Jesus means because you've lived it.

Some of you have family members who do not understand why you follow Christ. Perhaps they ridicule your faith. Perhaps they've distanced themselves from you. Perhaps they've told you Christianity is unnecessary. I get that. When I was saved and baptized on Mother's Day in 1988 at FBC Enid, OK, I never, ever told my dad because I was afraid he would make fun of me.

*Maybe some of our younger people feel this tension with friends who wonder why they prioritize worship, purity, or obedience to Christ. Jesus never promised that following Him would eliminate those conflicts. He promised that He is worth enduring them.*

But Jesus doesn't stop with our relationships. He moves even closer. He asks not only who has your highest affection. He asks...

## **Who has your deepest allegiance?**

### **2. Who Has Your Daily Obedience? Luke 14:27**

*"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."*

Notice Jesus doesn't move from family to possessions. He moves from family...to **you**. If verse 26 confronts our greatest earthly relationships, verse 27 confronts our greatest earthly idol. Ourselves.

Jesus says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross..." That phrase has become so familiar to us that we've almost emptied it of its weight. People say, "My job is just my cross to bear." "My back pain is my cross." "My difficult neighbor is my cross." That isn't what Jesus means.

The people standing around Jesus had not yet turned the cross into jewelry. They had seen crosses and tattoos. They had watched condemned criminals carry the crossbeam through the streets. A man carrying a cross had only one destination. Death.

Jesus isn't inviting you to inconvenience. He's inviting you to an execution. Yours.

Imagine standing beside a Roman road. A condemned prisoner comes into view. The crossbeam is across his shoulders. The soldiers surround him. Nobody watching says, "I wonder where he's going." Everyone knows.

He's going to die. He isn't returning home. He isn't negotiating. He isn't making future plans. His old life is over. That is the image Jesus deliberately chooses.

This makes Paul's words much more understandable. "I have been crucified with Christ." (Galatians 2:20) "Put to death what is earthly in you." (Colossians 3) "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh." (Galatians 5)

The Christian life doesn't begin with self-improvement. It begins with self-surrender.

Many people think Christianity is like remodeling a house. Jesus comes in and changes some paint colors, updates the kitchen, cleans up the landscaping. It is why sometimes pastors refer to rededication as "re-decoration."

The Bible says something much more radical. God condemns the old house. Tears it down. Builds an entirely new one. You don't renovate a corpse. You bury it. That's why baptism is such a beautiful picture.

We go under the water, buried with Christ in baptism. We come out, raised to walk in a brand new life. Jesus didn't come to make the old Craig a little nicer. He came to create a new Craig.

The summer before my junior year of high school (1991), I remember dealing with a nagging question: What am I going to do with my life? I thought about a lot of options. But I kept going back to an off-handed remark a college student made about me at summer camp my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. She said that I would make a good youth minister because of certain things she had noticed about me. And when a college girl compliments a junior high boy, he listens.

But I began to consider that. And then, in my quiet times two consecutive days I asked God to show me in Scripture something that would either confirm a calling or affirm a different direction.

I was reading a devotional handout that my youth minister Ken Sheilley provided each week along with our Sunday school bulletin. One of the struggles I had was that I did not really have a strong church background. My mom didn't go to church. I struggled with feeling qualified. There had to be better options to serve the Lord that way. And then I read: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. But set an example for the believers in speech, life, love, faith, and purity." (1 Tim. 4:12) In other words, live for Christ in all I do and say. And love like Christ, believe and trust in Him completely, and be set apart in his holiness. Well, I could do that. I didn't need some sort of insider knowledge to do that.

The next day, again praying for something that would confirm calling or affirm a different path, I began to think who in the world would God even use me to reach? And then I read in that day's devotion: "And all that generation also was gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel." I read that and thought about a generation that grew up not knowing the Lord and it struck me: "They didn't do any youth ministry."

And I was ruined. I remember writing in my shabby little journal, "I don't know much. I can't do much. But whatever I am, whatever I'll have is yours Lord." Whatever path I thought there was, that was done, gone, dead and buried. I kept that decision a secret, hoping God would see how much of a dumpster fire my family was and resend the invitation. It was the smartest move, I thought.

And then, that next summer in 1992, at youth camp, I surrendered to vocational ministry. Following Jesus means surrendering plans you once thought would define your life.

We live in a culture obsessed with self. Follow your heart. Live your truth. Believe in yourself. Protect your peace. Do what makes you happy.

Jesus says something entirely different. Follow Me. Die to yourself. Take up your cross. The Christian life is not self-expression. It is joyful self-denial because Christ is infinitely better than self-rule.

At this point you might be thinking, "This sounds incredibly difficult." Exactly. Jesus agrees. Which is why He immediately tells two stories. Not to discourage discipleship, but to eliminate impulsive discipleship.

### **3. Have You Counted the Cost? *Luke 14:28-32***

Jesus gives two illustrations. A builder. A king. At first they seem unrelated. They're actually saying the same thing. Both begin before the work begins. Both involve calculation. Both ask one question. **Have you thought this through?**

#### **Illustration One: The Tower**

Suppose a man wants to build a tower. Perhaps it's for protecting a vineyard. Maybe it's a watchtower. He lays the foundation. The neighbors gather. Everyone is excited. Then the money runs out. The tower stands unfinished. Like that Noah's ark on the way to Morgantown that's just sitting there.

Now instead of admiration, there is ridicule. Jesus says, "All who see it begin to mock him." Why? Because enthusiasm started something that commitment couldn't finish.

#### **Illustration Two: The King**

Now Jesus changes scenes. A king has ten thousand soldiers. Another king is approaching with twenty thousand. Before the battle starts, he sits down. He evaluates reality. If he cannot win, he seeks peace. Again, notice what Jesus emphasizes. Thinking. Considering. Calculating. Jesus is confronting shallow emotional responses.

He isn't asking for momentary excitement. He wants informed surrender. Salvation is free. But discipleship costs you everything. Those statements are not contradictory. They are complementary. You cannot earn salvation. Christ purchased it completely.

But the Christ who saves you refuses to leave you unchanged. Grace is free. Following Jesus costs your old life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." Not because death earns salvation, but because genuine faith always produces surrender.

This is where we must be careful. Jesus is **not** saying, "Pay enough and I'll save you." He's saying, "If you receive Me, you receive Me as I truly am."

He is not merely Savior. He is Savior and Lord. There is no category in Scripture for receiving Jesus' forgiveness while rejecting His authority.

Faith bows. Faith trusts. Faith follows.

Church, I wonder if we've unintentionally invited people to become admirers of Jesus without becoming disciples of Jesus. We've sometimes preached, "Invite Jesus into your life."

Jesus preached, "Come die, and receive life." Those are not the same invitation. One leaves us in charge. The other crowns Him King.

Notice where Jesus has taken us. He has examined our relationships, our hearts, our ambitions, and our plans. Now He asks one final question.

### **What still owns you?**

And in one sentence, He brings every competing allegiance into view.

"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple."

That final demand doesn't simply address our wallets. It addresses ownership itself. Who owns your life? You? Or Jesus?

#### **4. Who Owns Your Heart? *Luke 14:33–35***

Jesus brings everything together with one sweeping statement.

**"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple."** There it is. The third time. **"...cannot be My disciple."** Verse 26. Verse 27. Verse 33.

Three impossibilities. Three non-negotiables. Relationships. Self. Possessions. Every area of life belongs to Christ.

Notice carefully what Jesus says. He doesn't say you must **sell** everything. He says you must **renounce** everything. That word speaks of relinquishing ownership. It means acknowledging that nothing ultimately belongs to you anymore. Your house. Your career. Your retirement. Your reputation. Your children. Your future. Your time. Your gifts. Your dreams. None of them belong to you. They belong to Christ.

You're a steward. Not the owner. That is the Christian life. God has entrusted us with relationships, resources, abilities, possessions, but disciples recognize that Christ owns everything.

Stewards ask, "What does the Owner want?" Owners ask, "What do I want?" Jesus is asking one question. **Who holds the title deed to your life?**

### **Transition to Salt**

Then Jesus says something that at first seems completely unrelated. "Salt is good..." Why salt? Because salt has one defining characteristic. It is different. It preserves. It flavors. It stands out.

Jesus has just described a disciple. Now He describes what happens when disciples stop looking like disciples.

### **Salt That Loses Its Saltiness**

This is one of the most sobering warnings Jesus ever gives. "If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" In Jesus' day, salt often came mixed with other minerals. When moisture dissolved the actual salt, what remained looked like salt. But it wasn't salt anymore.

It had the appearance, without the substance. It looked useful. It wasn't. It looked authentic. It wasn't. It looked like the real thing. But there was no preserving power left.

Church, does that not describe one of the great dangers facing Christianity today? We know the songs. We know the language. We know when to stand. We know when to sit. We know the stories. We know the traditions. We know how to look like disciples.

Jesus says, "I'm not looking for appearances. I'm looking for transformed lives."

If you ever visit the Simms house, you will see decorative fruit sitting on their dining room table. From across the room, it looks beautiful. Shiny apples. Until you picked one up. It wasn't fruit at all. It was plastic. It looked convincing, until someone expected it to nourish them.

There are people who have learned to imitate Christianity. They know Christian vocabulary. Christian behavior. Christian traditions. But Jesus says disciples are known by something much deeper than appearances. They are people whose entire lives have come under His authority.

So, let's look back over the passage. Jesus asks four questions.

Who has your highest affection? Who has your daily obedience? Have you counted the cost? Who owns your heart? Every one of those questions is really asking one larger question. **Who is Lord?**

And you don't answer that question with just your words. You answer with your life. This is where we must be incredibly careful. If we're not careful, someone will hear this sermon and think, "I need to try harder. Be better. Sacrifice more. Then maybe Jesus will accept me."

That is **not** the gospel. The gospel begins with bad news. You and I have already failed every one of these tests. Every one of us has loved something more than Christ. Every one of us has put ourselves first. Every one of us has failed to surrender completely. Every one of us has tried to sit on the throne of our own hearts.

If discipleship depends on perfect obedience, none of us has any hope. But that's precisely why Jesus came. The One who demanded perfect allegiance gave perfect allegiance to His Father. The One who told us to carry a cross first carried His own. The One who called us to surrender everything first left the glories of heaven. The One who demands our lives first gave His life.

At the cross, Jesus bore the judgment our divided hearts deserved. Three days later He rose in victory over sin and death.

Now He offers forgiveness—not to those who have earned it—but to those who repent and believe.

Notice something beautiful. Jesus isn't inviting people into slavery. He's inviting rebels into reconciliation. He's inviting sinners into sonship. He's inviting enemies into His family.

He is not trying to take life from you. He is giving you the only life that truly is life. The call to deny yourself is not the call to lose joy. It is the call to finally discover it.

Perhaps you've spent years around Jesus, like these crowds. You've admired Him. Respected Him. Even attended church faithfully. But you've never surrendered to Him. Today, Jesus is not asking you to add Him to your schedule.

He is calling you to bow before Him as Lord. Perhaps you're already a believer. But the Holy Spirit has quietly placed His finger on an area you've kept off limits. A relationship. A habit. A dream. A career. A possession. A fear. Something you've said, "Lord, You can have everything, except this."

Jesus lovingly says, "If I am Lord, then there is no 'except this.'"

**If you've never trusted Christ:** Repent of your sin. Believe the gospel. Come speak with me or my wife after the service. Don't leave today merely admiring Jesus. Become His disciple.

**If you are a believer:** Ask one simple question. "**Lord, what part of my life have I been treating as if it still belongs to me?**"

Then obey whatever He reveals.

The crowds that day kept walking with Jesus. Some undoubtedly turned back. Some stayed. But everyone had to answer the same question.

Not, "Is Jesus worth listening to?" Not, "Is Jesus a good teacher?" Not, "Can Jesus improve my life?" The question was—and still is—**Is Jesus Lord?**

Because if He is Lord, He has every right to rewrite your priorities, redirect your future, reshape your relationships, command your obedience, and claim every part of your life.

And here's the glorious truth: The One who asks for everything is the One who has already given everything. He is no harsh master demanding what He has never sacrificed.

He is the crucified and risen King. The nail-scarred Savior. The Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. You will never surrender more to Christ than Christ has already surrendered for you.

So don't merely follow Him in the crowd. Follow Him as a disciple.

Because **discipleship is not adding Jesus to your life. It is surrendering your life to Jesus.**