

Count The Cost – The Cross Taking Life

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Luke 14:25-35

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Turned to Luke chapter 14. It's a great honor. It's rare that January 1st lands on a Sunday. So what better way to start the new year than worshipping Christ together and getting this year started off on the right foot? So it's exciting. This is my first New Year's in Arizona and I did the east coast version of it and went to bed and at midnight, I thought Armageddon had started in my neighborhood. So I woke up startled and then once I figured out it wasn't Armageddon, thankfully, I enjoyed it, looked out the window and saw lots of things that they definitely don't have in California. That was a lot of fun too. So glad to be here and glad to be able to open up God's word today as we take a look at it and see what God has to say for us as we look to another new year right ahead.

And in doing so, I want us to take a little tour in your garage. So let's use our imagination now. Go to your garage. Is there anything in your garage that represents an unfinished project or a hobby? Is there some cobwebs on some exercise equipment maybe in the corner somewhere or a half-made wood thingy? You don't even know what it is yet, but you've started it. Maybe it's a sewing or knitting project or a car project and the list goes on, right? So if that's you, would you raise your hands for that? Oh good. Another honest congregation. Our four o'clock, we got to work on them. It was like two people raised their hand and I rebuked them for lying. Then I had to repent because I might have been bearing false witness. But you guys were honest and there's things unfinished and undone in our lives as far as projects go. We've moved and got here six months ago and there's about still 2% that's not unpacked that we've got to do. So that's one thing for us. So I resonate with that.

Now let's get serious for a moment. We can kind of laugh at those things and those things ultimately, it maybe not matter if we finish them or not. But for many what I've just described describes many Christians faith. It's well intended, but it looks more like a hobby than it does life. A half-finished project, something that's definitely important but there's other things in life in the busyness of life that take precedence. We are called to be busy. God made us to be busy to work and have a calling and to use the gifts and skills that he's given us. But oftentimes in the busyness of it all, we get things out of priority. So our lives sometimes look unfinished, not quite there.

I want want you to brace for this next quote I'm going to give, it's a little bit lengthier. I think we got a slide for it. But it comes from John Stott, a very well-known, recognized Anglican pastor from the last part of the 20th century and on into the 21st century. In his classic book, Basic Christianity, says these words and they're intense.

He says this, "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers, ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish, for thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, a so-called nominal Christianity in countries for which Christian civilization has spread large numbers of people have covered themselves," and listen closely, "with a decent but thin Christian veneer. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the heart unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrisy in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."

We got to take a breath after something like that, don't we? Because it resonates. It kind of hits home a little bit. Now here's the reality for us as Christians, those of you today who've placed your faith in Christ, you're an unfinished project. You're not done yet. Philippians 1:6 reminds us of this and I've been here in the last six months, and I know I've said this, it's my favorite verse. "He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ." As long as you are living from the moment of salvation, the moment that you were justified, you are in process. And that process that God is doing in your life, he not only saved you to go to heaven, but he saved you to conform you into the image of his son Jesus. The scripture tells us that.

So we're not done yet. Nobody here can be mistaken for Jesus. I haven't been yet. And so we're in process and what happens? We come to faith and there's an excitement. It's a transfiguration really in some ways. Definitely a transformation. Maybe that's a better word. And there's habits that maybe overnight are gone. Bad habits, sinful habits. Maybe there's other things in life. You change your view the way you see life and you should because you're a new creation in Christ and that should happen. So there's changes made and we look back and go, "Oh, I'm not the person I once was. Praise God, he's changed me." And we've changed and then something sometimes happens. We plateau. We have some change and it kind of feels like enough. Okay, I've changed enough.

So maybe you're not who you once were before Christ, but your kind of the same person you were 10 years ago or five years ago or three years ago. We stagnate. We become unfinished, but we're not working towards finishing it and that becomes real. Now, worse, for some it's counterfeit faith. And that gets revealed over time that, yeah, I like Jesus. There's an excitement to it. I believe the Bible, but there's been no transformation that takes place. So there really is no change. Is there a remedy? Well, of course there is, and that's what we're going to look at today in Luke Chapter 14. There's a remedy, one of many in scripture and there's one specific today that we're going to look at. Jesus calling us to count the cost of what it means to be a true disciple.

Now for many of us, and the reality is today, it's just a calendar flip. Maybe we don't feel different. It's just another day. It's another year. And this week's going to look like a lot of weeks

have already looked this last year. However, I think it's also wise that in a calendar flip like this that we take time to evaluate. Take a look at last year, take a look at the coming year in all the things we can't predict and consider Jesus' call to count the cost so that we can address maybe some unfinished things in our life as Christians. And if you're not a Christian today, maybe today is going to be just a huge transformation for you.

Our main point as we look at this passage today is this counting and accepting the cost of following Jesus prevents a half-hearted and/or unfinished task that must persevere till the end. If you are in Christ, you are united with Christ and indwelt by his Holy Spirit. We have been given this book. We have everything we need for life and godliness, and yet we don't oftentimes actively pursue that like we should. And today is going to be a reminder of that as we start a new year. Now this is the fourth part in a series that I get to do when I get to preach and that's on The Cross-Taking Life. If you haven't been there for any of the other three or maybe you were some of them and you don't remember, I'm just going to give you a brief overview of where we are.

In the first message in the series, we talk about the radical call where Christ calls us, those who want to follow him to take up their cross and following him. That is essential for every Christian. It's mandatory for every Christian. We do not take our cross to save ourselves. That's not what Jesus is saying. He calls Christians to take their cross and follow. His cross was unique. He went to the cross to die for our sins and pay the penalty for our sins to meet out the justice of God in order for sinners to be saved. So he took on our sin and as a gift, he gives us his perfect righteousness and that's how the Father sees us. And as a new creation in Christ, then we are marked by a life that follows Him in taking up our cross. There is sacrifice in our life, a reminder that in following Christ there is tension with the world and it's best described as a cross that we bear.

The second message then, we also see in that and the second time Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross. He tells them to do it daily. It's an ongoing process. It's not just a one-time take up, but it's an ongoing process. The third message, we look at three almost Christians who like Jesus, they want to follow Jesus, but they end up having three excuses of what would keep them from fully following him. What we learn about the almost Christian is that they're not a Christian at all. So here we are at the next juncture of this, the third time that Jesus calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

Now we're here in Luke Chapter 14 and I want to give us a context of what happens just before we get to the passage we're going to look at today. In this particular case, Jesus tells one of his parables, one that may be familiar to many of you. It's the parable of the Great Banquet where there's a master of the banquet and he sends out invitations for those to come to his banquet. And like those almost Christians in Luke Chapter 9, there are three of them that say they can't come because they've got other things to do. Well, the master says we're going to have this banquet and we're going to get someone to fill it. So he sends his servants to the highways and the hedges to find those who will come to the banquet and they do.

And then he says this about those who got the initial invitation. He says, "For I tell you," verse 24, "none of those men who are invited shall taste my banquet." That sets up the stage, what we're going to look at in verse 25 through 35, where we see those who accept the invitation and what accepting the invitation looks like. Would you please stand? It's our tradition here that in honor of this book, which we believe it to be God's infallible inherent word, we honor it by in initially reading the passage, by standing and showing what it is and what it is is God's word. We're going to hear from God.

Now, great crowds accompanied him. That's Jesus. And he turned and he said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the costs whether he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation is not able to finish all who see it begin to mock him saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000. And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

You may be seated. Wow. Strong words, right? These are incredible words to us and what a way to get our attention on the first day of the year, right? And here we go. We're going to look at three considerations and counting the cost of discipleship. It's quite a simple process, but we consider these three areas in light of taking up our cross, understanding what it means. Here's the reality. This isn't meant to talk you out of this. Jesus isn't trying to deter you, but rather so that you understand so that you're not a counterfeit, that you're not someone who believes that you're a Christian but not actually one. So it's not to stir you up and cause doubts in your mind and heart, but rather to shore up and make clear that you're one who's accepted that invitation to his banquet.

So the first consideration we're going to look at is the estimation of the cost of discipleship. In order to count the cost, we have to estimate what the cost is. Let's say you're going to go buy a car, you sit down, you take a look at the price that's usually on the car. Sometimes it's not. You try to negotiate. In this case there's no negotiation when it comes to Jesus. But in buying a car there often is. And then you think about down payment. If you want to go that way, pay in full, monthly payments. You got to estimate all of those things to try and figure this out and see exactly what this costs. And a lot of times, and no offense to anybody in the car business, there's hidden costs that aren't printed on the label, but rather you go to checkout and then you got to pay for taxes and licensing and undercoding. Don't pay for the undercoding. That's not real, but some people have paid for undercoding and other things like that. And then you look at it and go, "Whoa, that was a lot more than I thought."

Jesus doesn't do that to us. He puts the cost up front. It's there. We've talked about that. There's no asterisks. There's no fine print. He tells us. In fact, the marketing consultants would say, "You might want to dial this back a little bit," but that's not how Jesus builds his kingdom. He's upfront and he's clear and that's why we read this and we go, "Wow." Because it's clear and it's intense and it's meant to be. In fact, this journey here began in Chapter 9 of Luke where Jesus has his face set to Jerusalem knowing that he's headed to a cross. This is the third time through the gospels that he calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

Now why does he keep saying this? Well first of all, we see in verse 25 there's some new people there. He's gaining a crowd and he wants to make sure that all the new people understand the essential of what it means to be marked as a Christian, as a follower of his, and that's cross taking. Now some of those folks in that crowd, this is the second time they've heard it, and when it comes to the disciples and maybe a few others, this is the third time. So what do we make of that? This is important. You better pay attention because this is the third time now Jesus has said it or at least the third time recorded. It might even be more than that. He might have started every message that he gave to people. But these are the ones recorded that we may believe. So this is important.

There's three estimates here that he talks about. And man, he starts right off, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters." The first one is to deny family. And that word hate just pops out, doesn't it? And it's meant to. Jesus is getting our attention here. It's a word that often makes some of us squirm. Maybe you're squirming. You're like, "I brought some people today and this isn't what I was expecting that was going to be said." Well, let's take a look at the context of this and understand what Jesus actually means by that. He does not mean emotion. He's not saying, "Go to your family and tell them that you hate them." It's not what he's saying. "Mom and Dad, I hate you. I'm following Jesus." That's not what's going on here. There's no malice. There's no ill will in what he's saying here. The context and the culture would've understood it to mean love less.

That's how Jesus started in the first time that he told people to take up their cross and follow him. In Matthew 10:37, he said it this way, "For whoever loves Father and Mother more than me is not worthy of me." Here He amps it up and uses the term hate to get our attention. John MacArthur helps us understand this. He says this, "To hate one's family in this context is to prefer God over them by disregarding what they desire if that conflicts with what God requires. It is to love God more and them by comparison less." So what he's making here is comparative analogy saying that you are to love God so much that your next best love looks like hate comparatively to it.

Why even bring this up? Why is this even necessary to talk about this way? We'll look to Luke Chapter 2, verse 51 and we see the tension that arises where Jesus would even need to mention this. It's not the only reason, but it's a clear one and some that you have felt very real maybe even in the last week, especially. Verse 51 of Chapter 12, he says, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on Earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Okay, hold up. Hopefully you were here

for Pastor Darrell's message two weeks ago where he explains this idea of peace on Earth because we've been singing it all week at Christmas, right? Peace on Earth.

And Jesus just said, "I didn't come to bring peace on Earth." Wait a minute, that's not what the angels said. 'Peace on Earth, goodwill and those with whom God is pleased.' Is what it's talking about as Pastor Darrell shared a couple weeks ago, that peace on Earth that the angels declared was peace between God and man that Jesus would fill that gap in. A Holy God saving, sinful man. Jesus going to his cross to die for our sins that we might have life. That's peace.

Now once that happens, we have peace with God that creates division with others, maybe even in your own home. And I know some of you know this and you can share testimony to this, that once you have declared that you have peace with God, they're not happy that you become one of those Christians. So maybe your Christmas was a little tense because you are a believer, maybe your immediate family but maybe some of the other family isn't. So there's an elephant in the room. At best, others, maybe you spent a lonely Christmas because you've been rejected by your family. This is what Jesus is talking about here ultimately. That following Christ may mean losing everybody, but it will be worth it because he's Jesus. Not only that though, it also calls us to evaluate how we live our life and denying family. Family is a gift from God. And of course his word tells us on several occasions, honor your father and mother, don't provoke your children, provide for your family.

We get lots and lots of instructions about properly caring and loving for our family. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. And yet God's love has to be above all of that. And so even when we say things like, "Oh, we have family priorities or we're having family time," but that family time or those priorities get in the way of following Jesus, things are off. It could be a lot of things in our life. So we evaluate then denying family. Then the next one it gets worse. To deny self. He says, "And yes, even his own life, if he doesn't deny, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Not only hate family but self. Now got to clarify, this is not self-loathing or self-hatred. No. This is that natural tendency for us to be self-interested, selfish, self-centered. Self needs to fade as we follow our new king. It should fade as we follow new king.

We have to resign as the reigning monarch of our life, recognizing that it was his cross that purchased us, purchased us back from sin and death and hell and ourselves. They haven't gotten to that point of the story yet. We have. So we get to cheat a little bit. Paul tells us in Corinthians that, "You are not your own. You've been bought with a price." And what is that price? It's the most precious currency in the universe. It's the blood of the God man who saved us. Jesus Christ. It's precious to us. So following Jesus is an incredible dividing line. He tells us for the third time to take up our cross.

Well, the first two times he says, "Take up your cross." This time, he says, "Bear or carry your cross." And it pretty much means the same thing. There's a nuance though. Bear and carry means to sustain a burden which indicates that daily cross that he's been talking about. That this is an ongoing thing. When you follow me and you make me a priority, you're going to find tension

with the world, your family, with yourself because of it. It's going to feel like a cross and it's meant to because it's a completely different way of living. What he's saying here, as intense as it seems, is this: He is worth it. He is the treasure that we've been looking for that we try to find in so many other things.

Let me read to you another great very similar passage from J.C. Ryle, another Anglican bishop this time in the late 1800s. And it's as if he could have written this yesterday morning, he says it this way in regard to this, "I grant freely that it costs little to be a mere outward Christian, but it does cost something to be a real Christian. According to the standard of the Bible that is, there are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made and Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried and a race to be run. Conversion is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict in which it costs much to win the victory."

So our daily decisions in life is not about self. We bring them all under Christ and his lordship in our life, Him as our king. It may not mean that you change a lot of things in your life. Maybe you'll feel convicted on this and realize there's some sinful choices that I make all the time. But for most of us, it may just mean changing the way we do what we are already doing. The way that we serve has a different view. How you use your body, how you use your mouth, how you think. Every decision that you make, you're confronted with. Who is king of my life? Is it me or is it my savior? That's the decision that needs to be made. Is truly He greater than I? Maybe our daily prayer in 2023 should incorporate the words, "Reporting for duty, sir. What does this day have that you would want me to do?"

And guess what? Listen closely on this. You know this. If you're a Christian, you know this, but sometimes we forget. And if you're not a Christian today, hear this and you go, "Well, that's pretty costly." And it's meant to get our attention. But here's the reason. Your life is better in his hands. That's what he's saying. As the king of the universe, he's saying, "Let me take over. Give this to me. It's going to cost you but it's going to be worth it because your life is better in my hands than yours." See, Jesus isn't being mean or unkind here. He's being beautifully gracious to us because we make horrible gods and he's a magnificent one. That's deny self.

And then deny possessions. If there's anything left, he hits it here in verse 33. There's the therefore, so it's the conclusion. We'll go back to the part that we skipped over in just a minute. But he says here again, "So therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." That's deny possessions. These are the estimates. Deny family, deny self, deny possessions. His conclusion in all of this, any of you, all that you have, this is the whoever and the whatever of your life, it must be renounced. Now what does that mean? What way do we renounce it? That word in the Greek means to express a formal farewell, to sign off, say goodbye or as I might say it, kiss it goodbye, blow it, a kiss.

Your ownership. Now Jesus is not like some have thought through history mandating, selling all your possessions, giving away all your money, abandoning your loved ones, becoming a holy hermit in some cave somewhere or becoming some sort of spiritual ostrich where you bury your

head in the sand waiting for Jesus to come back. No, it again changes our perspective. Listen to what one commentator says that he helps clarify. He says it means that man in his ordinary life places his all at Christ's disposal to such an extent that while still remaining in possession of his goods, he honors and serves him by them. They're his. That means you're owners of nothing, stewards of everything.

I saw this in a beautiful illustration to me and I learned a lot from this example about 20 years ago. I was a youth pastor and we were going on a youth activity and I needed to rent a bus. So we rented a bus and I actually had a little more than that would fit on the bus, but not enough to get another bus. So I kind of was toying with what do I do? I don't want to rent another bus. I'll just ask some of the parents. "Hey parents, any of you have a minivan or a van or a SUV that we could borrow?" Well, this family stepped forward. They were the first and only family actually to step forward and said, "Hey, last week we just bought a new minivan and we want you guys to take it." And I said, "I don't think so. These are youth."

No offense here. That was California. They were California youth. And I'm not talking about anybody here. Okay? I said, "I don't think you want to do that." And they said, "No, listen, this is Jesus' fan and it's meant for you to use that." So that blew me away and taught me a huge lesson about what I have is all of Jesus's and we brought it back in one piece without any scratches on it. So whew, that was all right. And they would've been fine if we hadn't. That's the beauty of it.

These three denials that we see here, they're reconstruction of how a disciple is to view their world, their family, their life, their things. If Jesus is in the right place, then family, life and things are better. And that's what Jesus is saying here. Trust me with this. I'm the author of life, but I just want you to know what the cost is upfront. You don't get to keep the parts that you want to keep. It's all mine or it's all or nothing. That's the estimation. Now we get to the evaluation of the cost of discipleship. Once we know how much the car costs, then we evaluate, and this is the difference here between estimation and evaluation, we get the estimate and then we evaluate it and go, "Can I buy this? Should I buy this? Will I buy this?" That's what's happening here.

And Jesus gives two illustrations, two little parables here to help us make the evaluation clear of what's at stake. The first one, the first evaluation is the foolishness of not finishing. Versus 28 through 30. And this is the more well-known part of this. He says, "For which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether it has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him." What kind of cost goes into building a tower? Now that word tower was a tall structure. That's pretty good there. And it was used possibly as a lookout. Maybe a lookout over a vineyard. It could have been a farm building, maybe like a silo. But what kind of building it was isn't really the point, but rather the planning and the cost that goes into that. Do you have enough money to finish it?

And he says, "Which of you?" Which is in a sense, this is rhetorical. It should be obvious. No one would do this. This would be such a mockery and a shame. As you drive by, well in those

days walk by, and see this unfinished. "Wow, that guy. What was he thinking to start that and not be able to finish it?" I saw this modeled in a church that was across from my high school. It was a charismatic church, and I'm not here to just pick on charismatics, but sometimes in the more crazy charismatic side of things, you get a pastor who has a vision. We got a vision, we're going to build a bigger building and even though we don't need it when we build it, God's going to fill it. So they begin building this building and then they run out of money and he loses his vision and goes to another church. You have rebar and brick that sat for almost two decades as a testimony to the community of what faulty faith looks like.

I graduated high school, college twice and still drive by. That church isn't finished yet. That's awkward. I hope they don't think all Christians are like that. But that's a perfect display of sometimes what our faith looks like to others. "Hey, I'm a Christian," and then nothing really happens or nothing's really too different in it. What Jesus is doing here in this evaluation is saying, "You need to think about this." We can get caught up in the emotion. Woo, I want to follow Jesus. I'll go to the ends of the Earth. You're excited. You're cage stage. There's a crowd pressure maybe. You know that if you declare this, this crowd is going to be excited for you and that's fun and they will be and they should be. But then that emotion dies down. We get the camp high, I'm going to serve Jesus. We get down on Monday, it's back to the grind and it's difficult. There's tensions. We see problems. Wow, my family doesn't like me anymore. My friends don't like me anymore. The world doesn't like me anymore. This is a little tougher than I thought.

Jesus is preparing us for this past the emotion. There's emotions. We have the joy of our salvation, we have that, but it's more than just the feels. It's one thing at New Year's to resolve to lose weight and not do it and even to read our Bible more and not do it. That's good. That's even better. But it's another thing to claim Jesus and to treat him like he's a hobby or an unfinished project. Following Jesus isn't easy, and that's what Jesus is reminding us of. Taking up a cross has all the cost of taking up a cross, splinters, scars, vinegar to drink, hurt, abandonment. What Jesus implying here is it's worth it. It's worth it to follow me, whatever it costs. So he's not trying to deter us but he's telling us what the stakes are. The second evaluation is a foolishness of fighting against the odds.

Here's what we look at here in this next illustration. He says, "What king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000? And if not while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace." In the second illustration, it's obviously a similar point, but this time it kind of raises the stakes on it. This is more than just building a tower. This is a huge battle. This king facing off in this war has a battle that is two to one odds against him. It would be suicidal folly to engage the enemy. The only option is to negotiate peace. What does that mean? Surrender.

If the king tried to fight, he would not only be mocked like the one who didn't build a tower, he would be put on exhibit, tarred and feathered, dragged through town, paraded through town. And then after that, he would either be executed or sold into slavery. Now we've gone beyond

mockery to death. It's foolish. You count the cost but also understand the cost of not following. Before anyone undertakes something important. And in this case the most important thing, they evaluate to make sure... I got your attention. See that was all planned that way. Before anyone undertakes something that's important, and of course this is the most important thing, they have to evaluate to make sure that they can complete it. Failure to do so can result in shame or death.

Christian, listen closely. It costs everything. It demands total surrender, and you'll regret neither. Let me say that again. It costs everything, it demands total surrender, and you will regret neither, but you will regret the opposite. An unfinished tower and going into battle with two to one odds is disastrous. So then we get to the third, the surprise here because they haven't read these verses yet. So we have the estimation and the evaluation and now the very essence of this, what Jesus is getting at. It almost seems like these two verses are kind of out of place here, but they're not because there's a context here and it flows and we see it in light of these verses here. Let me read to you 34 and 35. We haven't read those yet. He says this. "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Okay, what's going on here? This is the very essence of what it means to follow Jesus. He says the essential nature of salt is what? To be salty. Yeah, it's in the title, it's in the word. Unsalted salt makes no sense. In fact, that word there it says lost its taste literally means to make foolish or show to be foolish. Unsalted salt is foolish. Unsalted salt is an oxymoron. It can't happen. For the Christian not to take up his cross and follow and count the cost is like unsalted salt. It makes no sense. Here's the epitaph of a gravestone of the life of the unsalted salted person. I'm going to put my name in it so you're not offended. "Here lies Todd, a follower who did not follow. He was like salt without saltiness." The opposite, "Well done. Good and faithful servant." Now which do you want to hear?

This is the essence that Jesus is getting at. This is about being a Christian or not being a Christian. You either are or you're not. And you need to evaluate that. You need to see the estimate of that, but understand that this is the essence. I'm not trying to talk you how to being a Christian. I want you to understand what's at stake and that you should count the cost and accept it because you will not regret it because of it. Do there is three responses to it to accept the cost, understand it and go, "But where else would I find life? There's no other option. Only Jesus saves." Or to reject it and go, "You know what? I'm going to take my chances. I'm going to forget it. It's too costly. I'll take my chances against that two to one odds." And it will not go well.

Or a third option, which is actually like the second one. And that's to pretend to be a Christian, to kind of put on the trappings, talk the talk, walk the talk, but not actually be it. And still end up being unsalted salt. So the point here is don't take this call lightly. Don't dismiss this call because it's all about eternal life and that starts now. Counting and accepting the cost of following Jesus prevents a half-hearted and unfinished task that must persevere until the end. This cost

demonstrates what's valued. Whatever it costs, it's worth it because it's Jesus. And that's what he's telling us here.

Look at what J.C. Ryle says again here. He says, "A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing. A cheap Christianity without a cross will prove in the end a useless Christianity without a crown." So Jesus tells us to count and consider what's at stake. There's no plan B, there's no bronze package. What's the estimate of the cost? Denying family, self, stuff. We love Jesus more than those things. It tests us. We evaluate the cost. It's foolish if we don't finish. It's foolish if we think we're going to not surrender. Our goal is to hear, "Well done. Good and faithful servant," because we understand that this is essential. This is the essence of what it means to be a true follower. And Jesus in his kindness has made it clear for us.

I love Psalm 90 at New Year's. That's Moses' only Psalm that's recorded in the Book of Psalms. And it says Psalm 90, Verse 12, something familiar. Some of you may have written this down or even memorized this. He says, "So teach us God to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Now we look at our calendar and our days are already numbered 1 through 30 or 1 through 31 or 1 through 28 depending on the month. That's not what he's saying. He's saying make those days count. And here we have Jesus saying what you need to do to count the cost.

So Christian, you're not finished yet, but are there some unfinished projects in your life that you've laid aside that are actually more important than a hobby? Here's a good time to take a look and see where you may have plateaued in certain areas of your life. For you who aren't a believer today, understand this cost, but here it's loud and clear. Take it. Take it. There's no better road. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today. Start this year off like no other year and give your life to Jesus. You will not regret it. Oh, it will be hard. It will be filled with splinters, scars. There might be some in your life that hate you tomorrow, but it will be worth it because you will be right with the God of the universe. Believe in Him. Repent and receive the gift of grace today.

Because what we find when we look at this cost and look at it, what we're supposed to really say is, "I can't pay that. I'm bankrupt." Because what's saying here is it's like we need a savior. We have one. And he's saying, "Here's what it costs and I will be with you and it will be worth it." Christian, be encouraged by that today. And if you're not a Christian today, see it and take it. Let's pray.

Jesus, we are so grateful today that you have made it clear what it means to follow you. And as we look to this new year, we don't know what's coming. We have no idea. And yet we can know this, that we can trust you with our life, that we can place our life in your hands and our life will be better for it. So I pray for those who are on the teetering fence today who resist time after time that today, Lord, you would soften their heart, give them eyes to see, and the ears to hear the gospel message and to place their faith in you.

I pray for those Christians who've been plateauing or wavering. There's all areas of our lives that we've neglected. Lord, help us to shore up some things and to be reminded that we still have work to be done, and we want to work alongside you as you work within us to make us the people that you want us to be, to conform us to your image. We need your help in doing that. We

need each other in our help in doing that. We pray for a great year this year, Lord. And we want to count the cost and number our days. And we pray this in your name. Amen.