

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: Discipleship *
* Topic: Count the Cost * Scripture: Luke 14:15-35 * 8/11/2024 *

MAIN POINT

Being a disciple of Jesus requires that we love Him more than anything else. It would be good if we count the cost before committing to follow him as one of his disciples.

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Timothy 4:16, the apostle Paul tells Timothy (whom he had discipled), “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

What two things does Paul tell Timothy to watch closely?

His life and his doctrine.

Note to study leader: Write these two items on the whiteboard as the headings of two columns. As participants answer the second question, fill in their ideas in the appropriate column.

As you embark on the process of making disciples, what do you think some essentials to pass on in each of these two areas would be?

Under the heading of “Life”, the list should include things like, Keeping Christ as Lord of my life, The Word, Prayer, Fellowship, Evangelism, Saying “no” to sin, and Living a gospel-centered life.

Under the heading of “Doctrine”, the list should include things like, The Trinity, Salvation by grace alone, The inspiration of scripture, Humanity and sin, Sanctification, and The second-coming of Christ.

Note to study leader: Recommend the students in the class who are growing as a disciple or who are involved in making disciples of others know that “The Six Conversations” and “The Gospel-Centered Life” covers the items in the first column. For more information on these resources, stop by the “Next Steps” desk. Also, a Wednesday night class starting in late August and running to Thanksgiving is being planned that will be looking at Core Christian Doctrines, which will be covering doctrines in the second column.

We have defined a disciple as “someone who is growing in their relationship with Jesus and helping others to do the same.” In today’s final lesson on the “Be a Disciple, Make a Disciple” sermon series, we will be discussing the importance of counting the cost when we choose to embark on the process of becoming a disciple, and making disciples.

“Jesus.... is something—someone—worth losing everything for. And if we walk away from the Jesus of the gospel, we walk away from eternal riches. The cost of nondiscipleship is profoundly greater for us than the cost of discipleship. For when we abandon the trinkets of this world and respond to the radical invitation of Jesus, we discover the infinite treasure of knowing and experiencing him.” David Platt, “Radical”

UNDERSTANDING

THE COST OF SALVATION

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ ACTS 8:20-21, ROMANS 6:23, AND REVELATION 22:17

Christ paid an unimaginably high price to pay the ransom for our sin and purchase our redemption. According to these verses, what does salvation cost us?

Salvation is a free gift from God (See also Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 5:15-18)

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 4:18-22 AND LUKE 9:57-62

How would you contrast the responses of the disciples Jesus called in Matthew 4 with the would-be disciples in Luke 9?

The disciples Jesus called immediately left everything, including their possessions, careers, and even their father to follow Jesus, while the would-be disciples in Luke 9 came with excuses to not follow Jesus.

What overall issues that kept each of the three would-be disciples in Luke 9 from following Jesus?

Foxes, birds, and other creatures had places of rest and safety to claim as home. However, Jesus—and by inference His disciples—had no such place. His disciples must be willing to sacrifice comfort to follow Him.

Jesus' responses to the men who requested to first go and bury his father and the man who said, "Let me first go back and say goodbye to my family" might seem callous and uncaring. But God knows our hearts, and like always, there's a divine purpose behind Jesus' words. He clearly doesn't mean to abandon family members who need us, since this does not align with other scripture verses (Matthew 8:14-15, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Timothy 5:8). There is likely a play on words when Jesus used the word "dead", suggesting that those who are dead spiritually have priorities that are different from those who are following Christ.

The main message here is, following Jesus is more important than everything else. Jesus is calling for wholehearted and immediate obedience.

When we give into our distractions, what are we saying about following Jesus?

What are examples today where people tell God "First let me" go and do something else?

What point was Jesus making with his analogy about putting one's hand to the plow, and looking back?

The analogy of putting one's hand to the plow and looking back could picture someone committing to the life of a disciple and then longing for one's previous lifestyle. In choosing to follow Jesus as his disciple, we are choosing to serve Him without letting anyone or anything interfere. Our families and careers are important, but our priorities have changed. Following Jesus is our highest priority.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 14:15-24

What three excuses kept the invited wedding guests from attending the banquet?

One bought a field that he wanted to inspect. Another bought some oxen that he wanted to test out. The third had just got married, so he couldn't come.

How do these three excuses compare to excuses people may come up with today for not following Christ?

These could be summarized as possessions, careers, and relationships.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 14:25-35

What's your initial reaction to these words from Jesus?

Considering the definition of a disciple being used at The Heights, what cost should we be willing to pay to grow in my relationship with Jesus, and to help others do the same?

Why might discipleship cost you relationships?

What did Jesus mean by bearing one's own cross and following Him (v. 27)?

In addition to putting Christ above family, Jesus added a second requirement for discipleship. The disciple must put Christ above self. What Christ has in mind is the absolute nature of His demand to follow Him. Jesus Himself was committed to His Father to the point of sacrificial death.

What point was Jesus making through His illustrations about the tower builder and the king?

What did Jesus advise anyone to do before making a commitment to follow Him?

Jesus' two parables in these verses stress cost analysis. Jesus' point in these two stories about the builder and the king is aimed at those in the crowd who were considering becoming His disciples. They should count the cost of following Jesus before they embark on a life of following Him.

What does the salt analogy emphasize about discipleship?

THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ LUKE 18:29-30 AND ROMANS 8:18

Jesus is calling us to make Him and His Great Commission the highest priority in our life. What does he promise us in return?

He promises us that we will be blessed way above anything we are being asked to give up. Despite what "prosperity gospel" preachers teach, this isn't a promise of material blessings (consider the lives of Jesus, Paul, and the eleven disciples whom Jesus trained). But the spiritual blessings will far outweigh whatever we have to give up in this lifetime, and in heaven, we will be blessed way beyond anything we have to deal with in this life, to the point where they two are not even worth comparing.

APPLICATION

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 17:31-37

What lesson are we to learn from Lot's wife?

The words "turn back" in verse 31 led naturally to the illustration of Lot's wife. Although Lot's wife only looked back (Gen. 19:26), she was feeling a tug toward what she was leaving behind. This warning exhorts us to leave our old life behind without hesitation when we choose to follow Jesus.

What can I do to "Watch my life and doctrine closely"?

How can you help others at our church in the discipleship process?

What distractions can I remove from my life to better grow as a disciple of Christ, and help others do the same?

PRAYER

Praise God for the string of disciples and disciple-makers that has stretched from the original 11 disciples of Jesus, right down to the disciples and disciple-makers at The Heights. Ask Him to help us count the cost and choose to whole-heartedly choose to grow in our walk with Christ, and help others do the same. Ask Him to help us discover and eliminate the distractions from our lives that are hindering our walk with Christ. Pray that God would reshape our priorities to reflect that of a committed disciple and disciple-maker of Christ.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 9:57-62

9:57. As Jesus and His followers traveled, they met three people who desired to become His disciples. Jesus' response to each of these individuals emphasize the stringent demands of discipleship. The first would-be disciple proclaimed his willingness to follow Jesus anywhere. Such an expansive claim was intended to demonstrate total devotion. The man, however, probably thought Jesus was moving toward some glorious destiny. He had no idea that Jesus had already set His face toward His crucifixion.

9:58. Jesus pointed out to this would-be disciple that He did not even have a place to lay His head. Christ did not even enjoy the comforts of the wild animals and birds. The primary emphasis in the words, however, may be on Jesus' rejection (see 9:22,44). He was constantly rebuffed and as a result He moved from town to town (9:52-53). In any case, His followers must be willing to accept a lifestyle that involves both denial of physical comforts and rejection for their faith.

The designation Son of Man was Jesus' favorite way of referring to Himself. Although He clearly knew Himself to be the Messiah, the term Messiah held connotations Jesus wished to avoid. First-century Jews were preoccupied with dreams of a conquering warrior-king who would deliver them from Rome's dominion. Jesus was not that kind of Messiah.

9:59. Another man, when called to follow Jesus, replied that He must first bury His father. Some interpreters hold that this would-be disciple meant that His father had just died and he had to attend his funeral. If such were the case, the man would fulfill his duty in the next few days. Because first-century Jews lacked embalming procedures, they generally buried their dead within 24 hours.

Other Bible scholars believe this man meant that he could not follow Jesus as long as his aged father continued to live. It was the duty of a pious Jew to care for his parents in their old age and then to provide them with a proper burial. In any case, this individual made it plain that his duty to family took precedence over his devotion to Jesus.

9:60. Jesus told him there were plenty of spiritually dead people who had no comprehension of what God was doing. They could care for his father. The kingdom of God must take precedence over every other loyalty and duty, even that to family members.

9:61. Another aspiring disciple requested permission to first say good-bye to those at his house. While his request does not seem unreasonable, it evidently concealed some unstated reluctance to take the decisive step of discipleship as indicated by Jesus' response in the following verse.

9:62. Jesus replied with an illustration from farming. In order to plow a straight furrow, a farmer fixes his eyes on a point ahead of him and moves toward that point. Jesus said that no one could plow a straight line while looking backward instead of forward. In other words, this man did not have his eyes set on the kingdom of God. He was still looking back at all the things and people he was leaving behind. Such a person was not suitable to serve God's kingdom.

In each of these three cases, Jesus made shocking demands. Through these demands He pointed out the urgency of the coming kingdom and the stringent requirements of discipleship. Christ's disciples must be willing to give up all the comforts of home. Those who follow Jesus must place Him above even their most precious family loyalties. His disciples must follow Him wholeheartedly, moving toward God's kingdom without bemoaning what they are giving up. Discipleship requires a radical shift in an individual's priorities.

LUKE 14:15-35

Background: In contrast to Luke 6:20-22, which speaks of a present blessed state, this parable looks to the blessing that occurs in the future at the resurrection. Jesus' belief in the resurrection coincided with that of the Pharisees as opposed to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Jesus' teaching drew a comment from the crowd. A dinner guest pronounced a blessing on those who joined the heavenly banquet (cf. Isa. 25:6; Pss. 22:26; 23:5). Luke again does not concentrate on the man or his motive. Jesus remains center stage. The metaphor of the feast speaks of the messianic banquet and refers to participating in the resurrection of the righteous (14:14). This is another way of describing salvation and the inheritance of eternal life (cf. 18:18, 25-26). While sounding devout, the statement assumes that God's kingdom is a distant abstraction rather than, as Jesus had been teaching, a present reality brought about by his coming.

14:15-20. Jesus illustrated spiritual truth through a parable of a great banquet. The host issued invitations. Then according to custom, at banquet time with the meal ready, he sent servants to remind the invited guests. Apparently, the gossip line had found something amiss with the banquet. Everyone quickly found an excuse not to come. The host was thoroughly snubbed. No one came. The excuses were ridiculous. You do not make financial deals of such magnitude without having assessed the value of the property purchased. You do not accept an invitation to a banquet in conflict with a wedding. Jesus was showing how easy and absurdly finances, careers, and family matters get in the way of more important things. They can cause you to miss God's final heavenly banquet. The invited guests represented the religious elite of Israel who had rejected their Messiah.

14:21. The host's response was predictable: rage. Still, he said, we will have a glorious banquet. Go out in the streets and get anybody you can get to come. Those people in rags invited as second thoughts represent the very ones Jesus had reached with the good news of the kingdom. While the religious elite had rejected him, common people from Israel accepted him. This included fishermen, demon-possessed people, prostitutes, and tax collectors.

14:22-24. He could not find enough of this class to fill his banquet hall. So, he sent a second invitation in order to find more people. These people represent the gospel message going out into the gentile world.

14:25. Jesus was back on the road again and heading toward Jerusalem. Great crowds were accompanying Him but were not following as learners of Him or committed believers. They simply were hanging around hoping to benefit in some way from Jesus' ministry. Jesus' desire was not for the followers to remain as they were but to draw them to a choice of personal commitment. An open invitation—anyone and comes to Me—begins the message, and its difficult stipulation is to hate one's family. The list of family members includes the closest of family ties such as father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. As the crowd was trying to absorb this teaching, Jesus added the additional requirement of hating even one's own life. Then Jesus concluded that anyone who does not comply with His words cannot be My disciple.

Matthew's Gospel (10:37) reveals that Jesus meant His followers were to love Him above everyone else, including their own families. Following Christ is giving Him primary allegiance. Christ followers understand and accept that their relationships with Jesus take precedence over all other relationships. Jesus made it very clear that if family attraction keeps us from following Him then our not following Him is evil with a pleasant face. His voice does not waver when claiming priority even over family loyalty—Follow Me (Luke 9:59).

14:26-27. In addition to putting Christ above family, Jesus added a second requirement for discipleship. The disciple must put Christ above self. Specifically, the stipulation is to bear one's own cross, a requirement that pictures the crucifixion. In fact, a crucifixion victim carried his own cross beam to the place of death. It was the death Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem to face. If anyone does not put Jesus above any cost, Jesus said he or she cannot be His disciple. Again, the inclusive offer whoever ends with the negative exclusion cannot be My disciple.

14:28-30. For which one of you is a rhetorical question that begins the first story and draws Christ's hearers into the plot. A builder, probably a farmer, had an idea—he wanted to build a tower. It must have been enormous because the foundation alone depleted his funds. His start did not have a finish. Such a project needed a first sit down decision. He did not plan to fail, but he failed because he failed to plan. The embarrassment—begin to ridicule him—could have been avoided if the man had thought through (Jesus' word was calculate, meaning "count with pebbles") the amount needed to finish the construction. The builder fell victim to rushing into a project before counting the cost.

14:31-32. The second parable introduces a similar story, but the main character is a king, going to war against another king. This king, who had 10,000 troops, was being invaded by a greater king, who had 20,000. Here was another sit down decision that called for thinking first before acting. Adding up the obvious, the king's decision was to send a delegation while the enemy was still far off and ask for terms of peace.

14:33. Then Jesus began to apply the two parables to discipleship. The phrase So then unites the two stories. The phrase every one of you is an inclusion without exception, and the phrase does not give up describes an attitude that refuses to let go. We should understand Jesus' command to give up their possessions as a willingness to do so whenever necessary to follow Him faithfully (Luke 12:33).

14:34-35. In His concluding remarks about discipleship, Jesus compared discipleship to "salt." Salt was important to the people of the ancient East. It retarded decay in food, and of course it flavored food. In the first century most salt came from salt marshes rather than from the evaporation of salt water with the result that the salt contained many impurities. When salt got wet, it lost its flavor and its effectiveness. It was no longer salt at all. Similarly, a disciple who values his or her earthly possessions more than Jesus is really not a disciple at all. In a world full of competing voices, the disciple as well as the would-be disciple should give full attention to what he/she has just heard. This ending encourages ears to hear, to listen. This challenging statement moves information to application—put this to work in your life.

LUKE 17:32-37

Background for these verses: The setting of this material is unspecified, and as the introductory seam reveals, there is no necessary tie with the preceding material. Luke wove this section from various traditional materials and placed it here for reasons other than chronology. Why he placed this material at this point, however, is unclear. The account consists of two different sets of material. The first speaks of the “already now” or realized aspect of God’s kingdom (17:20-21). The second speaks of the “not yet” or future aspect of the kingdom (17:22-37). The two sets of teachings are connected by catchwords: “come” (17:20)—“is coming” (17:22); “here it is” or “there it is” (17:21)—“there he is!” or “here he is!” (17:23). Similar material is found in 21:7-35.

In this section Luke argued in the following manner: God’s kingdom would not be preceded by signs that could be calculated and observed. On the contrary the kingdom was already present in the coming of Jesus Christ (17:20-21). As to the consummation of the kingdom brought about by the return of the Son of Man, this would not come in the disciples’ lifetime (17:22). The Son of Man will furthermore not come in some secret fashion (17:23), for His coming will be observed by all (17:24). Yet before all this, the Son of Man in His present ministry faced rejection and death (17:25). As for the Son of Man’s coming, it will be unexpected, and people will be unprepared (17:26-30). In that day the final separation will take place dividing even families (17:31-35). Just as one knows the presence of carrion by the attending vultures, so the return of the Son of Man will be clear to the whole world (17:37).

17:31-33. The second coming of Christ will be no normal event. Do not think you can see the disaster coming beforehand and go back to retrieve something before it strikes. Whether you are on the flat roof of your house enjoying the afternoon sun or out in the field working, the coming will be so quick that you will not have an opportunity to go back for something you forgot. Possessions mean nothing in the face of the kingdom. Only faith in Jesus determines your fate. The specific concern here is the invasion of Jerusalem by the antichrist in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period, which was pre-figured by the invasion of Rome into Jerusalem in 70 AD. Remember how Lot’s wife looked back at the destruction of Sodom. She suddenly became a block of salt. Without faith in Jesus when he comes, you will be destroyed. When Jesus returns, those on earth must not be attached to their possessions and earthly comforts, as was Lot’s wife (see Gen. 19:26). Commitment to Christ involves attachment only to spiritual and eternal realities. These provide the greatest security available.

17:34-36. The three aspects of life mentioned here cover the normal routine in an agricultural society: sleeping, grinding grain, and working in a field. Some commentators consider the one taken will be a believer taken by the Lord during the rapture (see 1 Thess. 4:15-17), and others consider this to be an unbeliever taken in judgment at the end of the tribulation (Matt. 25:31-46). The first interpretation seems more likely, since it is highly unlikely that there will be any fields or mills left at the end of the trumpet judgements and bowls of wrath in the second half of the tribulation.

17:37. The disciples had as much trouble learning about the kingdom the Messiah would set up as the Pharisees did. The Pharisees wanted to know when this would happen. Christ’s kingdom is already here and you do not see it, Jesus told them. The disciples wanted to know when this would happen. Christ’s kingdom is already here, and at His second coming, you won’t need to go out searching here or there for it, since his return will be obvious to everyone, like a brilliant flash of lightning lighting up the night sky.