**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**KINGDOM COST**

**Luke 14:25-35**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke by looking once again at the topic of the Kingdom of God.

So far, Jesus has taught us that the Kingdom of God is already right here in the midst of us. It is here, in this little church. It is here in our world wherever God is acknowledged, obeyed, and revered as the King. But though it is here, it is not yet here in its fullness. That will only happen when Christ returns. But when Christ does return, then all who belong to the Kingdom will finally enjoy the full goodness of the Kingdom forever.

Jesus says that day will be like a great wedding feast. There will be people from east and west, north and south, from every tribe and language and people and nation, and they will gather together to “recline at table in the kingdom of God.” (13:29). They will come from the far off “highways and hedges” (14:23), from among the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame (14:21), and from among all those who lived humbly for God’s glory and not their own (14:11).

And the most wonderful thing about this great wedding feast is that those who receive and accept the invitation do not merely attend as guests. They attend as *the bride*, for this wedding feast is for Christ and his church, the bride he obtained with his own blood, cleansing her with the washing of the word so that she might become holy, like a bride dressed in purest white. This is the great Christian hope, that *one* day, we will celebrate Jesus’ love for us *every* day as we grow deeper in love with him who saved us.

In light of the greatness of the Christian hope, why do so many people who profess faith in Christ fail to make it to the end? If there’s so much for believers to look forward to, then why do so many give all of it up? This question hits close to home for many of us, doesn’t it? I don’t think it’s a difficult question to answer, but it is a very difficult question to ask, because it brings up so much heartache and sorrow. Many of us, including myself, have dear friends and close family members who once appeared to walk with the Lord but do so no longer. There is nothing quite as sad in our lifetimes than that. In our text today, Jesus wants to tell us one of the main reasons why so many people start strong but fail to finish.

The title of this message is **Kingdom Cost**. My aim today is to show you that **Treasuring Christ More than Anything is the Key to Persevering Faith.**

This sermon will be broken up into two parts:

1. The Preciousness of Christ
2. The Perseverance of Christ’s People

(1) **THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST**

Before we get into our text today, let’s first be reminded of the context. Jesus has just been speaking to a group of Pharisees while dining at a ruler of the Pharisee’s home from verse 1 of Chapter 14 to verse 24. During that meal, Jesus challenges the way that the Pharisees were living and shows us just how far they were from God’s Kingdom. They were proud, when they should have been humbled. They were socialites, inviting only those who would bring them worldly gain, when they should have been inviting those who couldn’t do anything to pay them back. And finally, they declined the invitation to enjoy the great banquet in the Kingdom of God when they should have given up everything to participate. And so, Jesus’ last words to them were that “none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.” (14:24).

Luke’s objective here is to show us that Jesus rejected the Pharisees as credible witnesses of God’s ways. The Pharisees were the religious elites at the time. They were the “go to” authority on all things religious, from Sabbath keeping to Kingdom living. So it was a big deal for Jesus to come into their homes and tell them how wrong they were. Jesus was saying to everyone that, if they wanted to learn about the Kingdom, then they shouldn’t turn to the Pharisees.

Now Luke transitions out of the Pharisees’ home in verse 25 and turns our attention to the massive crowds of people who were still following Jesus around and listening to him. And what Luke records Jesus saying next is very intentional on Luke’s part. If Jesus has rejected the Pharisees as God’s spokesmen, then who should they turn to instead?

“*Me*”, Jesus says. “Come to *me*.” We see that over and over again in our text. Verse 26: “come to *me*”. Verse 27: “come after *me*”. Verse 33: “be *my* disciple”. Jesus could have said all sorts of things here about what the crowds should do in light of the Pharisee’s errors. He could have told the crowds that the Pharisees were partially right and partially wrong, and that with a little tweaking they could become trustworthy again, but he didn’t. Nor does Jesus tell them to turn to another religious faction like the zealots or the Sadducees. Jesus doesn’t even tell them to simply turn back to the Scriptures and read it for themselves. Turn to *me*, he says, and you will learn all you need to know about the Kingdom of God.

There’s no doubt about it. Jesus has come to definitively and comprehensively tell us about the Kingdom of God: what it is, where it is, and how to get there. And if you are to get into the Kingdom, you must come to him and become his disciple.

What does that mean, to become a disciple of Jesus? It means that knowing him, following him, learning from him, and obeying him must take priority over everything else in life, no exceptions. Jesus makes this clear in verse 26 where he says, “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.”

At first glance, this is a very puzzling statement. Hate my father and mother? I thought the Ten Commandments said honour them. Hate my wife? Doesn’t Paul say I must love her as Christ loved the church? And doesn’t Jesus say the greatest commandment is to love my neighbour as myself? Yes, yes, and yes, which makes it immediately clear that Jesus isn’t saying that you must *literally* hate anyone in order to follow him.

There are certain sayings that develop within a culture at a particular time that mean something completely different to us now than it did then, and this is one of them. Even today, we talk about “hating” things that we don’t really hate. Saying “I hate brussel sprouts” doesn’t mean that I’m filled with rage at the thought of them.

Likewise, in those days, the language of “hating” something in comparison to one’s love for something else was a common Jewish idiom, or saying. Jesus uses this same language of hatred a little later on in Luke 16 in the context of teaching about money. He says either you will hate money or love God, or love money and hate God. You cannot serve God and money. Jesus isn’t saying that whenever you handle money, you recoil in disgust, or anytime you think about money, you must repent. Money can be a good thing if it’s used for good. His point, however, is that if money becomes the master of your life, if money takes on greater importance to you than God himself, then you have confused your priorities and lost your way.

The same goes for family. Jesus is saying that, if we are to become his disciples and follow him into the Kingdom of God, then nothing can take on greater importance than him, not even family. He’s saying that his disciples must love him so much that their love for the closest people in their lives – parents, spouses, and even children – would seem like hatred in comparison.

This doesn’t mean that we push family away, or start mistreating family, or start neglecting family. It doesn’t mean those things at all. In fact, if we do any of these things, then we aren’t really following Jesus. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:8:

“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Jesus isn’t telling us that we must abandon our families, but he *is* telling us that our families may abandon us.

The sad reality is that some people will hate the fact that you’re a Christian. Even people who once said they loved you, who laughed with you at your birthday, who went away on vacations with you, will come to insult you, mock you, and despise you because of your faith. That’s how divisive Jesus can be.

Sometimes families divide over hatred, but not always. I know some of you have family members who have turned away from Christ and are living in unrepentant sin, but they still want you in their lives. They want you to turn a blind eye to their sin so that everything can just “go back to normal” like it always was. But you can’t do that. You can’t smile at their sin or pretend as if their souls were safe. So you plead with them and you pray for them, but they don’t turn back to Christ. And slowly, over time, they drift away, because they’d rather live comfortably in their sin than have you in their lives.

This is part of the cost of following Jesus. Following Jesus and living as his disciple requires radical commitment to him above everything else, even family, and sometimes this means that you’ll lose people who are very dear to you. If you want to follow Jesus, if you want to be his disciple, then you must be willing to suffer this.

That’s not all. Jesus continues in verse 27: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Disciples of Christ have a cross to bear. We have a cross-bearing Lord, and if we are to follow him, then we must take up our crosses as well. But what kind of cross is it? When Jesus took up his cross, he did so in two ways: as a guilty man, and as an innocent man. Guilty, because he bore our sins on our behalf. Innocent, because he himself did nothing to deserve it. So now when Jesus tells us that if we are to follow him we must bear our cross as well, this isn’t the cross of guilt. Jesus already carried that one for us as he walked up Calvary’s hill.

This is the cross of innocent suffering. It’s the cross of suffering *for doing good*. It’s the cross of being hated for our faith even though we’ve done nothing but love people. It’s the cross of being excluded from our communities even though we only want to bless them.

Following Jesus means walking in his steps, and walking in his steps means living a life in which we are the objects of rejection, mockery, and persecution *even though we did nothing to deserve it.* This also is the call for everyone who would follow after Jesus as his disciple.

And notice that Jesus’ words are absolute. “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me *cannot* be my disciple.” “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.” This isn’t something we can negotiate with Jesus. “If I tithe more, can you spare me from being rejected by my family?” or “What if I read my Bible more? Could you save me from being mocked for my faith?” The answer is “no”. Those who follow Jesus must be willing to give up everything for him, even the things that are dearest to them.

But now we come to the ultimate question. Why? Why would anyone be willing to give up their families, their comfort, their acceptance, even their lives, to follow Jesus? *Because he’s worth it.* You’re not giving up these things and getting nothing in return. You’re giving up these things to get something infinitely more valuable. *Jesus himself*, and eternal life with him in his Kingdom.

Jesus is both the way into the Kingdom and the greatest treasure of the Kingdom. Everyone who trusts in Christ and has tasted his love knows this. We want the Kingdom because we want the King. The Kingdom is only precious to us because our precious King is there. And though we lose everything for his sake, we can say, “It was all worth it.”

John Piper, in his poetic interpretation of what Job would have thought as he surveyed all his riches, his land, and his many children before the Lord took it all away, said it well with these memorable lines:

“O Lord, if this were lost instead,

And all I had was you, I would

Be rich, and have the greatest Good.”

(2) **THE PERSEVERANCE OF CHRIST’S PEOPLE**

Without this, the rest of the text makes no sense at all. If we don’t see Christ as precious, we will not persevere. The journey of faith is long, and many do not complete it. But for those who do, the one thing that sustained them was that Christ was infinitely more valuable to them than all that they lost. This leads to our second point: the perseverance of Christ’s people.

Perseverance is the main focus of our text. Jesus is warning his disciples and those thinking of becoming disciples that they must put him above everything else, *in order that*, when times get hard, or when temptations abound, they would not give up in their fight of faith.

Jesus uses three illustrations to teach us about perseverance. The first is in verses 28-30: “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and 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.’”

It’s heart breaking to know that, all around us, we are surrounded by half-finished towers, people who started well but failed to finish, even people who were *exemplary* in their faith but have since discarded the gospel. Some of the towers are half-way there, others only have a few bricks on the ground, but all of them stand there empty, deserted, and unfinished. Why is that? According to Jesus, it’s because they didn’t “sit down and count the cost”. They didn’t understand how much they would have to give up, and because of that, they didn’t truly understand how much they would be getting in return.

This is a timely word for us. We live in an age when the gospel has been so watered down that people aren’t counting the cost. They’re told all about *gospel* *benefits* and nothing about *gospel suffering*.

Years ago, I remember finding a church bulletin from a large evangelical Chinese church that my parents had recently attended. On the bulletin was Romans 8:16-17:

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

What a wonderful, heartwarming verse. It’s one of my favourite verses in Romans 8. But as soon as I read it, I knew there was something wrong. I was memorizing the book of Romans at the time and immediately knew that they had left out the second half of verse 17! This is what the verses say in their entirety:

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him*.”

We are children of God and heirs with Christ *provided we suffer with him*. Why would they leave that part out? Why wouldn’t they just quote the verses in their entirety? I don’t know their motives, and I don’t know their hearts, but I *do* know that this type of omission isn’t surprising in our day and age.

Suffering for Christ, giving up your life for him, taking up your cross and following him, these aren’t phrases that are heard very often in very many churches today. We hear about blessing. We hear about love. We hear about forgiveness, grace, and provision. All these are good things, and all these are biblical things. Churches should be talking about these things Sunday after Sunday. The problem isn’t that we’re talking about these things. Our problem is that we’re not talking about the *other* things. The persecution for our faith. The rejection by our neighbours. The loss of our families, not because of our sin, but because of our faith.

J.I. Packer, speaking about the trend in contemporary churches to pick and choose which elements of the gospel to teach and which to leave out, put it this way:

“…[P]art of the biblical gospel is now preached as if it were the whole of that gospel; and a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth.” – *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, p. 113.

Half-truths are being presented as whole truths all over the place, and the result is that people are being brought into the church with complete *untruths*. No wonder people give up part-way through. What do we expect when people are being taught that Christianity only offers benefits, but then they go through seasons where all they experience is pain?

If you want to become a disciple of Christ, you must “sit down and count the cost”. And if you’ve already done this, then you must sit down with others and help *them* count the cost as well. This teaching isn’t just for mature believers. It’s for people who aren’t yet believers. Jesus is talking to the “great crowds” that are accompanying him. This is “entry level” talk. It would be utterly misleading, a “bait and switch” as it were, for us to tell people about the benefits to get them in, only to tell them about the cost later.

Jesus uses a second illustration in verses 31-32: “Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

Jesus is upping the ante here with this second illustration. Whereas the first emphasized the long, step-by-step, brick-by-brick process of discipleship, this one emphasizes what’s at stake: *Life and death*. This is a war, and whether we wisely count the cost or not will determine whether we live eternally or die eternally.

Notice that the King in this illustration isn’t doing whatever he can to win the war. He’s doing whatever he can to survive. He has ten thousand soldiers, but the other has twenty thousand, and as he weighs his options, he’s completely open to the possibility that he may have to send a delegation and ask for terms of peace. Jesus’ point here seems to be that the important thing is that you carefully assess and weigh how you’re going to survive the war instead of rushing headlong into a decision.

The third illustration is in verses 34-35: “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.”

In those days, most salt in the region came from evaporated pools around the Dead Sea. This salt was mixed with impurities, so when moisture hit the salt, it evaporated and left behind these impurities, making it useless. The salt had lost its saltiness, and as such, it was no longer good for anything and discarded.

The same is true for us. Our faith makes us salty, but if we lose our saltiness, if we lose our faith, then we’ve lost our purpose for existing and God throws us away.

Three illustrations, but one common message: keep persevering. Keep building, keep finding ways to survive the war, keep your saltiness fresh. How? By counting the cost. We need to understand what following Christ will cost us and be willing to pay the price if we are to persevere, and the only way we will be willing is if we treasure Christ above everything else in our lives.

Too many professing Christians give up before the end. Too many “run out of gas” before they reach the finish line. Why? Because they haven’t put Christ first. They turned lesser things into ultimate things. They’ve taken Jesus off the throne of their hearts and they’ve put something else there instead. It could be money, possessions, kids, a lover, or a career, it doesn’t matter. Once Jesus is no longer the number one priority in our lives, once he stops being our greatest treasure, then it’s only a matter of time before we abandon our towers, we’re defeated in the war, and we lose our saltiness.

**CONCLUSION**

I thank God that he has given so many of you grace to persevere through the fires of suffering. I know some of you have lost close relationships, even among your own families, because of your faith in Christ. You could have stopped trusting Christ because of your suffering, or you could have stopped calling sin “sin” in your loved one’s life so that everything could go back to normal, or you could have abandoned your faith altogether. But you haven’t. You have held on to Christ and suffered great loss for his sake.

Our text today reminds you that *Jesus is worth it.* Don’t just count your loss. Count your gain. Yes, you have lost much through many tears, but you have gained Christ, who is infinitely more valuable than anything or anyone else in this world. And in order for you to continue persevering, in order for you to keep putting one foot in front of another in this long, grueling journey of faith, you must grow deeper in your love for Christ. You must see how precious he is to greater and greater degrees.

When his glory seems dim, you must cry out for eyes to see. When the things of this world seem more attractive than him, you need to get down on your knees and ask for a fresh vision of Christ. Don’t keep your struggles to yourself. Bring Christ into your life through the body of Christ. The church is full of the saved who continue to struggle with sin, so we’re not always going to get it right, but it is one of the most precious means of grace that God has given to us to strengthen us in this journey of faith.

And if you’re here today, and you have never committed yourself to follow Christ as his disciple, meaning that you’ve never put your personal faith in him as your Lord and Saviour for the forgiveness of your sins, and you’ve never publicly professed this faith through baptism, then I urge you to do so now. Following Christ is hard, but it’s worth it. There’s a price to pay, a cost to bear, but it’s all worth it. Jesus is worth it, and he will show you his worth as you walk with him.