

SERMON TITLE- "Counting The Cost"

TEXT- Luke 14:25-35

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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I was back home last week already, and as I shared last Sunday had the privilege of attending 2 great churches. In each I came away from the sermon thinking- "I'm going to preach that when I get home!"

Well, that won't happen because next week we begin a series on our MB Confession of Faith and I only have one sermon before that starts. Some time ago Ryan and I had discussed this since things like CoFs often just get stuck on a shelf somewhere and forgotten. Who really reads them?

It is true that few of us, including Ryan and me, spend much time thinking about it. In spite of the fact that we have them in our bulletin and pass them out every Sunday the idea that they make a difference needs to move from idea to reality. But for this to happen, we need to know what our CoF says. That's next week- so there is no time to preach those sermons.

But as I came home I quickly focused on the work at hand, anyway. And as I did this, came to conclude that there is a lot of work at hand. In fact I quickly realized that there is far more that needs doing than I have hours in the day, week, or month.

It was hard not to feel overwhelmed.

And so as I was feeling this I was going through Luke and came upon this text-

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." Luke 14:28-30

It is one of those parables that is doubled up for impact. Don't miss the point, is that the doubling is telling us.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with

twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. Luke 14:31-32

And what is the point? To me it was obvious- there are only so many hours in the day and so many days in a lifetime- don't take on more than it is possible to do. If you try and fail- people will laugh at you. That is not a good thing, so be realistic and smart- something has to go.

Now that is a very sensible way to understand this. Clearly that is what Jesus is saying here. If you read leadership books- you will find some level of- "be realistic about your gifts."

When I look around me, and this particularly struck me in the church in Seattle, which was in Bellevue, the heart of Micro Soft world- was that too much busyness is the plague of our time. In Bellevue, I am sure that the people who get ahead in the world are people who work endless hours. They give everything to their careers. They are very busy people. Somehow church has to fit into that.

So the natural conclusion, as I reflected on this was, "I had better make a mental list of all the things that need doing, figure out what is the most important, and begin prioritizing and then chopping."

I think that this is a very smart thing to do. We need to do it with our time, with our money and with our energy. We need to do so regularly.

"Good sermon material," I thought to myself- "I think I should preach on this. We are all swamped with tasks and it makes a good set-up for fall."

And so I started to think about where I would begin.

And then I read Jesus' conclusion to these to parables-

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33

Now that was not what I expected. Somehow in many times of reading these parables- this closing comment had not stood out for me. So I went back and read the parables again and started just a bit earlier where the parable is set up.

It is in a section of the Gospel of Luke that could be called, “On The Road” as Jesus travels around Palestine and encounters various people and groups.

Jesus was an amazing person and before long huge crowds were following Him.

At this point on the journey this is noted-

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus . . . Luke 14:25

Jesus was very popular.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:25-27

Some years back a woman who went to our church [who has since moved away] went back to school and took a course in psychology. As an adult, education is often far more inspiring than for young people and she often came and talked about her insights. I still remember when she came and told me about a concept called, “self- sabotage.” It is when people do things and then for some reason- rather than building on their success, keep messing up. It is almost like they can’t handle the responsibility of their own success and rather do things that undermine themselves.

Is that what Jesus is doing here? Why would He turn on the very people who think He is so wonderful and say something like this?

This is a very harsh sounding statement. There is a tendency in some circles to say that Jesus is so easy to take while Paul is the problem in the NT. In reality Jesus said as many troubling things, maybe more, than Paul. This is certainly one of them. This is very extreme and will certainly put people off.

Well, one thing we know for sure is Jesus was not sabotaging His success for psychologically suspect reasons. Jesus was making a point that needed making.

And what was the point? Don’t come to the wrong conclusions. Don’t confuse the miracles and the incredible teaching with what the Kingdom of God is all about.

#1. Great Atmosphere Does Not Equal Truth

While I was at the 2 churches I watched for things that we would learn. They are both very successful churches. They are successful because they do things well. One of the things they do well is have very good speakers.

Ryan and I, as the main speakers here, work hard at crafting sermons that are not just full of good content but are interesting and enjoyable to listen to. But a good sermon is not good because it is delivered by a great orator- a good sermon is good because it is the “logos of God”. It is good because God speaks. It is easy to be moved by good music and great speakers- and confuse that with the “logos of God.” There is a saying, “Not everything that glitters is gold.” Similarly, not everything inspirational is the “logos of God.”

Don’t ever get inspiration and the Holy Spirit confused. Rock bands and TV shows are in the business of creating inspiration. Our purpose is to hear the “logos of God.”

Well, to get that point across, Jesus says something as uninspiring as it is possible to say. But He means it.

The Kingdom of God is only for those who are prepared to throw everything into the ring and then pick up their cross and follow Him. Everything has to go in.

So if that is the overriding theme, let’s go back to the 2 parables and see what they say.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Luke 14:28-30

The question that this parable asks is, how much will this project cost and do I have enough money?

There is a choice to be made- go for it or not. Why go forward and just look stupid.

And the point is-

#2. Take Jesus Call Seriously- The Kingdom of God Is Not For Dabblers

This first point is obvious.

We live in a world of a million choices. Every time we turn around someone else is selling us the next big thing. There are a lot of interesting and amazing ideas out there. Some of them become

huge successes- some of course go no where but for most of us the idea of bouncing around from one interesting idea to the next is just how we end up living.

When Jesus comes to town and heals people and preaches awesome sermons people swarm around Him like flies but the reality is- once the next pop star arrives that same crowd will run after them just like they did Jesus.

Of course we know that this is exactly what happened.

The crowd that follows Jesus from that perspective is missing what the Kingdom of God is about.

One clue that Jesus is saying more than first struck me is His comment that should we fail- people will ridicule us. Just avoiding ridicule is definitely not something that any Kingdom person is supposed to worry about. For a teacher who is reminding us that we may not always be popular to remind us that we should do something in case people might laugh at us- should send a little “heads up” signal across our radars.

But it is something that those who run from one grand idea to another can easily understand. Jesus is talking the language that the crowd that is following understands.

Why make yourself look dumb, Jesus asks? Do you have the resources to complete this decision? Don't confuse passionate enthusiasm for a new idea with getting this project done. Building foundations is expensive, dirty work.

If you want to be part of the Kingdom of God it will cost you as much as it is possible to spell out.

Think this through carefully and don't join unless you have what it takes.

So what does it take to build this tower? That's a tough one as anyone who has ever undertaken a building project will know- but we are supposed to ask the question.

The other side of it is- don't start if you can't handle this question.

The second parable has the same message with a different metaphor. This time it is the picture of a war.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with

twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. Luke 14:31-32

Obviously these 2 parables give the same message, but there are a couple of notable different assumptions in the second parable. The differences are very important.

#3. You Don't Really Have A Choice About Engaging This

If an army is coming to attack you- you don't have the option of deciding not to engage. That choice is gone. Someone else has already made it.

So what is the prudent thing to do? Make the best deal you can while you have the most possible time.

Now from one end that makes a lot of sense. The king can decide whether or not he is going to attack his neighbour- but if his neighbour has already made the decision to attack- that piece isn't his to own.

Another principle that I am sure you will find in leadership books is- don't run away from your problems- they rarely solve themselves. Now there are of course exceptions- we don't have to run to the doctor with every ache and pain and fever. Many of those actually do go away if we ignore them. But that is only because of the body's amazing capacity for regeneration.

If your car has a flat tire that tire will never get better if you don't fix it and if you keep driving on it one problem will lead to an ever worse situation.

That is the same in the case of this parable. The farther away the other army is- the better chance you have of making the best possible deal. Make it quickly. Frankly make it as soon as it is confirmed that the other king is planning an attack. Maybe you can convince that king not to attack by paying him off. That was done all the time in war situations.

How does this apply to the Kingdom of God? If there is a Kingdom of God, then frankly it is not about deciding whether Jesus' teaching is appealing or not- the challenge is first of all to decide if it is true or not- and then what one is going to do about this.

Since the beginning of time philosophers have been asking the questions about God as if His existence or not was a mind game. It isn't. He is the way He is described in the Bible- or He isn't.

Put another way- God is the Creator or the Universe is a meaningless collections of atoms. Either is theoretically possible but the question is- which is true?

If God is God then we simply must decide what He wants from us. We are not going to win against God. He is the king with 20,000 men.

There is another difference between parable 1 and 2. The next difference is-

#4. You Don't Have Enough Resources

This parable is clear where the first one wasn't. Maybe you do have enough money to build the tower. If so- go ahead with your plans. No one will be laughing at you. You can be the tower building Donald Trump with towering legacies all over the place.

The second parable is very specific. The other king has 20,000 troops- you have 10,000. You don't have enough with 10,000 soldiers to fend off 20,000. The math is simple. It won't work. You will lose.

Now if you never sit down and do the calculation you can easily delude yourself. Only those who are prepared to do the math will know this. Doing the math is very important.

But what happens now? Is it hopeless? It might look that way but the parable gives us a specific instruction- go and begin negotiations, ASAP.

But how does one negotiate with God? The deck is infinitely stacked against us.

That is true, but incredibly this is something that God repeats again and again in the Scriptures. Last year we did a series in the Book of Isaiah. It begins with-

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. Isaiah 1:18

It is a challenge that goes out again and again. The God of the Scriptures tells us to think and ask questions and to be persistent in this.

But reasoning means reasoning. If we are going to reason with God then we do have to understand we can't "win" in the normal sense of the word. God is God. He created our brains. We are not going craft an argument that will beat Him.

We don't have time to explore this further today but the fact that God want us to bring our case to Him is one of those remarkable aspects that the Scriptures direct us towards.

For today, however we only have time to hear His conclusion on this point. It is this-

You don't have a choice about taking in this war- you can make a deal or you can face defeat. Don't make a deal and you live under the-

fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Hebrews 10:27

That sound's pretty grim. In fact it sounds hopeless. Is it really that hopeless?

Absolutely not. Jesus is not a doom's day prophet- He is the Saviour. What is His solution?

Jesus' solution is very simple- follow Me.

Now let's follow the argument so far-

#1. Don't Join If You Can't Complete

#2. You Don't Have Enough Resources To Complete

#3. You Don't Have A Choice About Engaging This War

So what is the way out of this hopeless tangle? It is listening to the conclusion at the end of the 2 parables-

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33

The inverse of this which is Jesus repeats many times is- those who choose to follow Him are His disciples.

So what's the conclusion?

#5. The Cost Of The Kingdom Is The Same For Everyone- Everything

No person on earth has an advantage in the Kingdom of God. No matter how talented or untalented you are, no matter how rich or poor, how healthy or sick- the only and unavoidable requirement is everything you have.

At first that might seem like an excessive demand. Everything? Yes, Jesus says, everything, even those things that we all agree are of the most possible universal value like family.

Wow, that is a lot, should be our reaction. I'm not sure I can do that. Indeed- but you can. We are all in exactly the same boat on this one- and we are all capable of deciding that the logic of Jesus' parables is overwhelming.

What's the choice anyway? God is going to win in the end. If we make a deal with Him early on life is not only as good as it gets- it is life as God intends it for His prime creation.

So where does that leave us? We are very busy people and now there is one more big thing we have to consider.

Jesus came to bring Good News and it is Good News because of another message He adds-

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Facing reality is a good thing because delusion is deadly and the Good News is that when we give everything up and follow Jesus, we are doing so to serve a God who loves us.

There can be no better plan.

34"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."