

## Hearing the Call ... the Cost

### LUKE 14:25-35

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This morning we come to the third sermon in our series in Luke's Gospel on Hearing the Call and our title today – *'The Cost of the Call'*. One of the things you have to say about Jesus is that he spoke the truth forthrightly without any sugar coating. He came proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and it is indeed good news, but He wasn't afraid to talk about the cost of accepting the good news and joining the Kingdom.

Most organisations these days are guided by public relations and marketing departments carefully crafting their communication to emphasise all the positives and dismissing any negatives.

Can you imagine a politician sacking their public relations department and addressing a crowd exactly as it is, "If you vote for me there is going to be higher taxes to pay for all my promises. The industry you're working in is not my priority and you may lose your job. And what's more I want you to join my political party to achieve this great vision. You will have to leave your family and friends and go wherever the party sends you until we have won victory throughout the land.

-How many people would join the cause?

-How many people would vote for that politician?

But isn't that what Jesus is asking people who want to join his movement? Jesus is saying it'll cost you everything. You have to be prepared to leave family, hate your own life, and carry a cross. And back in those days a cross wasn't just a nice piece of jewellery it was a cruel means of torture and execution. Jesus was asking people who wanted to follow him to lay it all on the line.

But imagine for a moment, rather than a politician calling for people to deny themselves; it was the leader of a great expedition. Imagine a remote village in the Highlands has been struck by a terrible earthquake. People's homes have been destroyed, many have died and most of the survivors are suffering terrible injuries. Food supplies are dangerously low. The people need help.

The earthquake has made the track into the village extremely dangerous. The expedition has to forage its way along where the track used to be, to bring food and shelter and medical aid to the villagers cut off from the rest of the world. The leader announces to the volunteers, *"If you want to come you will have to travel light so that we have maximum provisions for the villagers. What's left of the track is very steep and dangerous, and it is likely not all of us will return. Write your last words to your loved ones and post them home now. Are you up for the challenge? There's no time to delay, come follow me and let's save these poor villagers before it's too late."*

In that circumstance we can understand the call to commitment. We can understand the need to count the cost and to be ready for sacrifice.

Jesus of course is much more like this second scenario than the first. He is proclaiming a wonderful Kingdom in which people are saved,  
-saved from the ravages of sin,  
-saved from the pangs of death,  
-where no one has to feel threatened anymore, or be victimised, or go without, or suffer in any way.  
-A place of God's Shalom, God's peace.

But Jesus is saying there is a cost to joining this Kingdom, joining his movement. You have to put him first in everything, including family. Jesus in fact uses the very strong language of "hating family" compared to our allegiance to him.

The Jewish rabbis had a tradition of using exaggerated language in order to make a point, and that's what Jesus is doing here. In other places Jesus taught people to honour their Father and Mother. And parents should love their children. In the normal course of life this is the right thing to do. There will be crunch times, however, when you have to pray hard and make a choice.

A Christian family contemplating missionary service has to count the cost of moving away from parents and taking grandchildren to places where they won't see their grandparents so often. I'm sure the Collings family had to carefully weigh that up when they accepted the call to Moranbah, when they had many family in Sydney. Or likewise with the Lovell family hearing the call to serve at the George Whitfield College in South Africa when they have so many family and friends here in Australia. Or Margie Grainger serving in Thailand. There is a cost for her but we are also aware of the cost for Phil and Margaret with their daughter so far away.

I also think of the horrible circumstances in so many countries around the world at the moment where Christians are martyred. In many cases these people have the opportunity to renounce their Christian faith, embrace the faith of their attackers, and they could go back to their families. They choose to hold on to their faith in Jesus Christ. They trust their families to His care.

Jesus says in chapter 21 of Luke, *"They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to the synagogues and put you in prison and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.... And they will put some of you to death."* Jesus was very upfront about the possible cost of following Him. We don't think this way in Australia but in many parts of the world it is the reality of embracing faith in Jesus Christ.

When you first read this passage, you get the impression it's about a crowd who don't know much about Jesus but are travelling with him and showing interest. They are thinking about becoming followers, but Jesus is wanting to make them fully aware of the implications if they do make that decision.

At the end of the passage Jesus talks about salt losing its saltiness. This seems to be talking about people who have been followers for some time, (sometimes we call them salty saints) but have grown cold and are not out there for Jesus like they once were. So maybe Jesus is also speaking to people who've been following him for a while, and asking, what's the price you've paid recently, are you out there on the edge for me now. Do you need to regain your saltiness?

So whether you're just starting out or been in the faith for a while this passage speaks.

I want you to think back to our reading from last week, The Parable of the Great Banquet. The invited guests knocked back the invitation, making various excuses. So the host tells his servants to go out and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

-At one level this parable is a story about God inviting us to come to his banquet and warning us not to make excuses.

-At another level this is the story of a man who has understood the radical nature of Jesus call. He has cottoned on that the Kingdom is for everyone from the lowest to the highest. He was about to have a beautiful dinner with the well off, with friends and family and people who probably would have been able to return the invitation. He now associates with the lowly and the poor. In the society he was living in, it probably meant a great loss of face and honour. It probably cost him something to take this action.

But he is now living out the values of the Kingdom by mixing with a different social class. His actions show what it truly means to hear the call of Jesus, and to do something quite different from the mainstream. This Host knows what it means to count the cost.

Jesus goes on to tell two stories which illustrate something of the practicalities of counting the cost in v's 28-33. Firstly a building illustration. If you want to build a tower you better make sure you've got a good quantity surveyor, who is going to estimate all the costs correctly, so that you know that it can be completed within budget. If you haven't carefully counted the costs, quite literally, then you might find the money runs out halfway through the project. And how many developers have come a cropper there.

Likewise with faith in Christ. Be aware from the beginning, there is a cost and make sure you've taken that into account in your decision to follow Him.

Then there is the illustration of the king going out to war against another king. Before any leader considers going to war with another nation they way up the strength of their army compared to the army of the other nation. They try and assess all of the other internal and international political risks. They draw up likely scenarios and what their response might be if that's the way it unfolds. And only when they've done a full cost/benefit analysis and decided the benefits of going to war outweigh the costs do they then engage in the battle. An obvious example of failure in this regard at the moment is Vladimir Putin. He has grossly miscalculated the cost of going to war with Ukraine. And sadly it is a high cost for Ukraine but also obviously an enormous cost for Russia, and the ordinary people of Russia.

So the simple lesson for discipleship is don't enter into the spiritual battle unless you've first considered there will be a cost and you're prepared to pay it.

Someone who is in the thick of the spiritual battle at the moment is Andrew Thorburn - the former CEO of the National Australia Bank and CEO of Essendon Football Club, for all of 30 hours. I doubt you missed the news this week, but just in case, when the Board of Essendon Football club were told that Andrew Thorburn was Chairman of the Board of 'City on a Hill' Anglican Church he was sacked by Essendon. And it was all to do with the church's conservative view about homosexuality and abortion.

I'm sure we're all aware of a growing tide of anti-Christian sentiment in our society. It means there is a cost to following Jesus in Australia today. It may mean a gentle ribbing on social occasions, or it can mean loss of employment and a political firestorm that sets the media alight..

So are you hearing the call and are you prepared to pay the cost?

Jesus is not calling for spectators, he's calling for recruits, people who will actively stand up and be counted for him. And the cost of making a public stand for Jesus in Australia is rising.

Winston Churchill in June 1940, when Germany was marching through Europe looking invincible, gave one of his famous speeches,

*"...We shall not flag or fail.*

*We shall go on to the end,*

*we shall fight in France,*

*we shall fight on the seas and oceans,*

*we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air,*

*we shall defend our island,*

*whatever the cost may be,*

*we shall fight on the beaches,*

*we shall fight on the landing grounds,*

*we shall fight in the fields and in the streets,*

*we shall fight in the hills;*

*we shall never surrender...*

*until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the old."*

Winston Churchill says, "whatever the cost may be."

-The cost is enormous in war and especially in the Second World War.

-The cost of being a Christian is enormous in Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and many countries in the Middle East today.

However, whatever cost we're asked to pay in Australia, is piece-meal.

So to sum up this morning.

The call of Jesus is the call to belong to the Kingdom of God.

-It is a great adventure.

-It is not for those you just want to play it safe.

-It's like the call of the leader of the expedition I mentioned at the beginning. We're on a mission to bring God's salvation to people who desperately need it.

There will be a cost!

- Are you prepared to be called names because you also wear the name Christian?
- Are you prepared to be written off as a God botherer.
- Are you content being in the minority and the odd one out.

Can you hear the call.

- To stand up for Jesus.
- Living to love and proclaim Jesus  
and are you prepared to count the cost?