

## COUNTING THE COST

Luke 14:25-33

They say there are only two things that we cannot escape—death and taxes. For many now we can add to that inflation. After having to isolate during the pandemic, many workers were glad to get back to the office and work places. But this summer many changed their mind and preferred to work from home to avoid the cost of commuting with the highest gas prices ever. This also has affected the whole trucking business where the past profits have been lost to fuel prices—so adds to the supply chain problems we have had. Many others have asked whether or not it is worth it to work and be stressed when with some cuts in their lives they find that they can retire earlier or find other means of making income. This summer local swimming pools were closed many hours when kids could be enjoying the exercise and diversion from the heat because young people who would otherwise serve as lifeguards did not think it was worth the cost of being out in the heat and humidity to do that work. The people who do so much of the hard labor in our society are immigrants because most of us don't think it is worth the cost of doing that hard work.

Jesus calls our attention to the cost of following Him. He uses two stories to illustrate His point. The first is about a man who wants to build a tower. Before he starts, he needs to make sure he can pay to complete it. Otherwise if he starts and has to stop before finishing, he will look like a fool. The other story is about a king who is about to go to war. When he realizes that his enemy outnumbers him, he decides to negotiate a peaceful settlement. In the same way, Jesus says, before we follow Him, we must consider what it will cost. Can we afford it?

At first glance it may seem like Jesus is making much over nothing. Doesn't the Bible tell us that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life? Jesus did all the work. All we have to do is say "Yes" to Him. How costly is that? That seems like the greatest bargain of all time.

But what does it really mean to be "saved"? It doesn't just mean we will go to heaven. It means that we follow Jesus. Heaven would not be heaven without Jesus. Jesus was talking to people that were traveling with Him. Many of them would discover the cost of following Him. Many would be cut-off from their Jewish relatives because they followed Jesus. Some, like the disciples, would be killed because they trusted in Jesus. People today discover the cost of following Jesus. For many Sudanese it means that they are cut-off from their Moslem families, forced to flee their homeland, and become refugees. For Chinese Christians it means they can't get government jobs they deserve because the Communist government won't allow Christians to hold those positions. For Indian Christians it may mean that their house is burnt down by Hindu extremists.

What does it cost for you and me—an hour less sleep on a Sunday morning? But it can also cause tensions with a roommate because you don't think it is right to have a boy or girlfriend spend the night in your room. Or it could put you at odds with the guys in your Greek

house or dorm floor because you don't drink with them. Or it means that you hold back on marrying someone you are really attracted to because he or she doesn't share your faith. Or it means that you don't make that lucrative business deal because you know it isn't completely ethical. If we look honestly, as Jesus is telling us to do, it does cost to follow Him. But how much does it cost?

Jesus puts it these terms: "Anyone who does not carry His cross and follow me cannot be My disciple." A cross meant something specific to people in Jesus' day. When we look at what Jesus is really asking of us, then the cost gets higher and higher. In fact, it is a cost we cannot pay.

But Jesus paid the price. He looked ahead and saw what lay ahead of Him. On the cross He would not only suffer that cruel death, He would also carry all the guilt of the world on His shoulders on Mount Calvary. He paid the highest price for you and me.

Now we can take up the cross and follow Him, not to pay the price, but to hold to Him as each day He leads us. When we see what the cross cost to Jesus, then we are willing to let go of everything else to follow Him.

Dave Reichert was the King County Sheriff in the state of Washington. On August 12, 1982 as a young detective he was put on the case to investigate the death of Debra Lynn Bonner, whose body was pulled from a murky river in Kent, Washington. For the next twenty years he continued to investigate that death and many others involving bodies discovered in the Green River. Finally in 2001 DNA evidence linked Gary Ridgway to the Green River murders. Ridgway's arrest and confession a year later were, according to Reichert, "What I had been praying for my whole career." He thought, if anyone deserved the fires of hell, it was Ridgway.

During Sunday Bible class Reichert's pastor led a study of Psalm 32. It begins, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." He asked, "Whose sins did Jesus pay the price for on the cross?" Then he asked, "Is there forgiveness for Gary Ridgway?"

That thought stuck with Reichert. Jesus paid the price to forgive all of us. After being involved in many interviews with Ridgway as a sheriff, he asked Ridgway's attorneys for another chance to visit with him. He shared with Ridgway his concern. "I don't like what you did, but my faith tells me that I don't want anybody to go to hell. I don't even want *you* to go to hell. And neither does Jesus." The sheriff was shocked when Ridgway responded by crying. Ridgway pulled out a piece of paper. On it was a prayer he had been praying every day, admitting his sins and asking God for forgiveness. Later one of Ridgway's attorneys told Reichert that she could not believe the change in her client after that visit.

Can we pay the price? How much does it cost? We look at the cross and see what Jesus did for us. He paid the price for Gary Ridgway and for you and me. Then we can follow Him as we are willing to let aside anything that would keep us from Him, and we will share His "costly" forgiveness with others.