

# Tally the Total and Compare

Count the Cost Series, November 26 & 27, 2022 | Luke 14:25-33

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

How will we draw a conclusion in our cost-benefit analysis of Christian faith?

## **We began by establishing a framework.**

Establishing a framework meant figuring out the question we're asking.

Jesus requires us to make a decision in Luke 14:25-33, "Can you be my disciples?"

## **We need to ask because being a disciple of Jesus is free and not free, all at the same time.**

Being a disciple of Jesus is free because Jesus paid the price for our sin so that we could be forgiven, adopted as sons and daughters of God, given new life, and given eternal glory.

However, being a disciple of Jesus means that we value him above anyone or anything else.

Being a disciple of Jesus costs us nothing and everything all at the same time.

## **Last week we identified and valued our costs and benefits.**

We identified costs like family impact and taking up our own crosses.

We identified benefits like purposeful existence and eternal glory.

## **We examined what Jesus meant when he said to count the costs.**

We talked about figuratively putting counting stones in piles to symbolize costs and benefits.

We value them by figuratively putting more stones in some piles and fewer in others.

## **This week we will tally the totals and compare.**

If the value of the benefits outweighs the costs of being disciples of Jesus, then the Christian faith is a good decision. It represents a value for our investment.

Hopefully, our decision will become clear. Jesus clearly thought that would be the case.

## What's at stake is life inside the Kingdom of God?

### **Jesus tells us to enter into this cost-benefit analysis in Luke 14:25-33:**

*Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 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.' 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. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

### **Remember, Jesus had just dealt with the question of who is welcome inside the Kingdom of God.**

Earlier in Luke 14, Jesus had been to a Sabbath dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee.

One guest proclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

That guest explicitly turned attention to the Kingdom of God. In response, Jesus told a parable that seemed to throw wide open the doors of the Kingdom of God

Everyone from everywhere is welcome! But is everyone really welcome? And on what terms?

That's what Jesus was addressing as he spoke to the crowds after that dinner as he resumed his journey toward Jerusalem. Who is welcome in the Kingdom of God? On what terms?

### **Life inside the Kingdom of God is another way to look at the benefits of being Jesus' disciples.**

The Kingdom of God is the place where God is in charge, we recognize that God is in charge, and God's rule changes everything about life.

Jesus' disciples get life inside the Kingdom of God.

In some ways, the Kingdom of God begins here and now among us. Inside the Kingdom of God, we get holiness, righteousness, justice, and peace. We become children of God, members of the royal family. We become citizens of the Kingdom of God and part of a very large family. We become ambassadors of this kingdom, who represent the interests of King Jesus now to the kingdoms of this world, so we get a life of impact right away.

The Kingdom of God is a picture of what eternal life will be when Jesus goes beyond breaking the power of sin, death, and evil by defeating them finally and forever. We live in glory with God forever. When Jesus returns finally and forever, he will bring the Kingdom of God in all its fulness. So, the Kingdom of God is also coming; it's not yet.

Jesus' disciples get life inside the Kingdom of God that begins now and comes fully later.

Jesus devotes a significant portion of the parables recorded in the New Testament to helping us to visualize this benefit. He calls life inside the Kingdom of God the pearl of great price, for instance.

Having discovered that this jewel exists, possessing it is worth the sacrifice of everything else we have.

### **The Kingdom of God, then, is a bit like the famous St. Edward's crown.**

The St. Edward's crown is the central piece of the British Crown Jewels. The British Crown Jewels consist of crowns, scepters, orbs, and other regalia used to display and express sovereignty, history, and the identity of a nation.

The St. Edward's crown was created in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for the coronation of King Charles II. It replaced an older crown that was destroyed during the English Civil Wars.

The St. Edward's crown is quite large and heavy. It is used only in the coronation ceremony itself.

During a high point of the coronation ceremony, this is the crown placed on the head of the new sovereign to symbolize their rule in continuity with centuries of monarchs and with the blessing of God.

It's too heavy to wear for any other occasion, though, so it stays locked away at its home in the Tower of London for safe keeping.

If you take the value of the St. Edward's Crown just on the basis of the gold, fabrics, furs, and jewels involved, it is not the most precious of the crown jewels. It's worth only roughly \$4.5 million.<sup>1</sup>

However, the St. Edward's crown's greater value comes from its history and role in British and royal identity. It's priceless.

If the St. Edward's Crown is priceless, of how much greater value is the Kingdom of God?

### **It's more appropriate to think of life inside the Kingdom of God as a treasure we're after.**

Doing a cost-benefit analysis to arrive at a decision implies that we are measuring two columns that could be thought of as being in rough parity. They are alike.

As we think through a cost-benefit analysis on being Jesus' disciples, there are costs and there are benefits. Since we are treating them similarly, we need to identify them both and value them both in order that we might compare them. We act as if a comparison is warranted.

In linking being Jesus' disciples with being inside the Kingdom of God, however, Jesus is suggesting that we are actually thinking about the costs and benefits of pursuing a treasure of infinite value. That begins to recalibrate our calculations entirely.

### **The best way to tally the total benefit of being Jesus' disciples is being loved by God.**

#### **There is an emotion or experience we speak and write about rarely anymore, ecstasy.**

The dictionary defines the term this way:

**Ecstasy:** Rapturous delight.

An overpowering emotion or exaltation; a state of sudden, intense feeling.

Mental transport or rapture from the contemplation of divine things.

#### **In our culture, ecstasy has come to mean a party drug.**

Ecstasy is a synthetic drug that stimulates and causes hallucinations and a sense of euphoria.

For years, ecstasy has been associated with clubs, dancing, and young people going out to have a good time, to get caught up in the beat of the music, and to experience euphoria.

Obviously, that's not what I mean by ecstasy.

However, the drug tries to recreate a feeling that we are supposed to get as humans.

There are times and circumstances when we are supposed to experience rapturous delight; an overpowering emotion or exaltation; a state of sudden, intense feeling, mental transport and rapture from the contemplation of divine things.

The drug, ecstasy, reminds us that some of us try to get through pharmacology or achievements or thrill seeking what we should be getting from God.

#### **The New Testament repeatedly talks about us being filled with the being of God.**

In **2 Corinthians 5:21**, Paul talks about an exchange of natures that happens for disciples of Jesus,

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://britishheritage.com/history/edwards-coronation-crown-worth>

Notice that Paul doesn't just say that we get righteousness. He says that we become the righteousness of God. We are being filled with something new, something beyond ourselves.

Then in **Ephesians 3:17-19**, Paul tells us what he is praying for us,

*... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Paul wants Christ to dwell in our hearts. He wants us to know the vastness of the love of God. He wants us to be filled to the brim with the very being of God himself. He wants us to experience ecstasy. We were built for this kind of ecstasy.

Before we get too mystical, there is an even simpler way to think about the concept.

### **Jesus makes it much simpler when he talks about being loved by God and filled with God's love.**

In **John 14:15-17**, Jesus promises us that if we are his disciples, God will send his Holy Spirit to live with us,

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth ..."*

But then back in **John 14:23**, Jesus broadens the offer. The Father and the Son himself will be with us, and with God present with us, we will know the vast love of God:

*... "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."*

And that's it, isn't it? That's what Jesus is really offering us.

That's what the Kingdom of God is all about. That's what the experience of ecstasy is really like. That's the treasure we are after, the inexpressible love of God.

That's the benefit of being disciples of Jesus. Benefit tallied.

### **The best way to tally the total cost of being disciples is loving God.**

#### **In the Gospel according to John, Jesus links the costs of being his disciples with loving him.**

In John chapters 13-17, Jesus was spending an evening with his disciples one last time before being betrayed by one of them and being crucified the next day.

In what he said that night, he was speaking directly to all of his disciples about the nature of being his disciples. What are the difficulties? What are the triumphs? What are the resources available? What are the costs and benefits of being his disciples?

In **John 14:15**, Jesus summarized the costs or expectations of being his disciples as keeping his commandments, and he linked keeping his commandments with loving him. To love him is to keep his commandments. Jesus said,

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

Then in **John 14:21**, Jesus clarified,

*"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*

Love and obedience are linked, and that's what he wants from us.

### **Jesus called loving God the First and Greatest Commandment.**

In **Matthew 22:37-38**, Jesus was asked by a religious lawyer to say what the most, the greatest of all the commands is. Jesus replied,

*... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."*

Jesus said the same and similar things in multiple places. Jesus really meant this.

### **The first and greatest commandment comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5:**

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

To love the Lord our God is to know the one we obey and love.

To love him is to serve with all our heart (our rational faculties), with all our soul (our being), and with all our might (our strength).

Jesus' commandment to love God is a commandment to love him without reservations, with our whole being, and with everything we have.

### **That's what the Holy Spirit enables disciples of Jesus to do.**

Jesus isn't simply asking us to feel affection for God.

However, neither is Jesus calling us to sign up for a new brand of legalism, a "try hard" religion.

Calling us to love him completely is not just a repackaging of keeping a long list of rules.

We can't do that, which is why what Jesus taught about loving him is intimately tied up with what Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit.

Let's go back to **John 14:15-16** for a moment. Just as Jesus calls us to love him, he promises to send his Holy Spirit to help,

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 1And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever ..."*

We are not on our own. Disciples of Jesus are to love God, and God the Holy Spirit will help.

### **That's the forest of the matter; everything else is trees.**

In counting costs, we've been focusing on the trees.

When focusing on the trees, it is easy to miss the forest.

Let's not miss the forest for the trees.

The cost of being a disciple of Jesus is loving God with all our reason, with all our being, and with all our strength through the help of the Holy Spirit living within us. Cost tallied.

### **It's time to decide.**

#### **We've done the steps.**

We've established a framework. The question we have been trying to answer is, "Can we be Jesus' disciples?"

We've examined costs and benefits. Now we've tallied both and are prepared to compare.

The process is not the point.

The point is deciding, and it's time to decide. Can we be Jesus' disciples?

### **King Charles III is making a cost-benefit decision right now.**

Charles became King of the United Kingdom by law when his mother died.

However, Charles still has to be crowned king at his coronation scheduled for May.

At that point, he will be anointed with oil, the St. Edward's crown will be placed on his head, and he will be given other symbols as well, marking him as King.

The coronation is different in the sense that it is God marking him as king, a marking that cannot be undone.

To take on the St. Edward's crown is to accept not only the mandate of human law but the mandate of God and the full weight of history.

Will he wear the St. Edward's crown? Yes, he will.

It's heavy. It's weighty. But when he wears it, Charles gets a kingdom.

### **As we compare the tallies, we find an entirely different kind of decision than we thought.**

Jesus tells us to perform a cost-benefit analysis on Christian faith, on being his disciples.

As we perform that cost-benefit analysis, we discover that we aren't being asked to consider a normal transaction or a normal business decision. We aren't being asked to give something of modest value in exchange for something of modest value.

We are being asked to give everything we are in exchange for a treasure so vast and precious that everything we are pales in comparison.

Dallas Willard wrote, "One would be quite sure that to belong to him, to be taken into what he is doing throughout this world so that what he is doing becomes your life, is the greatest opportunity one will ever have." - Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*<sup>2</sup>

The Kingdom of God, the love of God is of such unfathomable value that the math involved in this exchange should already be painfully, achingly apparent.

That, Dallas Willard adds, is the true point of the cost-benefit analysis Jesus demands we enter into. He writes, "The entire point of this passage is that as long as one thinks anything may really be more valuable than fellowship with Jesus in his kingdom, one cannot learn from him." - Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*<sup>3</sup>

I will joyfully give **anything** and **everything** to have that thing I value most.

### **Would you give up St. Edward's crown?**

It is the clearest sign of royalty on earth. It symbolizes sovereignty, history, and nationhood.

If it represented everything you had, would you give it up?

If it represented everything you aspired to have and be, would you give it up?

It is priceless. If you owned the St. Edward's crown, would you give it up?

If it got you the Kingdom of God, then yes. Without question or hesitation!

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<sup>2</sup> Page 292.

<sup>3</sup> Page 293.

**Our cost-benefit analysis is complete.**

Can you be Jesus' disciple?

Our cost-benefit analysis should lead us to give anything and everything joyfully to be disciples of Jesus. It's time to decide.