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Consider the Cost (Luke 14:25-35)

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither cold nor hot—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked’”(Revelation 3:15-17). The passive, modern-day ‘Christian’ will be spit out of the mouth of Christ. There’s one main reason that Christians in America are “lukewarm.” People simply do not consider what it will cost. What must one consider when evaluating the price that must be paid to follow Christ? Will it bring hardship? Will it bring abuse and humiliation? Jesus implies in Luke 14:25-35 that those, who have not considered these questions and made a brash decision to follow Jesus, bring about the weak, unbelieving, and unstable Christians we see sitting in the pews of modern day churches.

First however, in what historical context is Jesus saying this? There are two ways to approach this. The first would be through the historical context of the author of the book of Luke. The second would be through the historical context of Jesus.

The author of this book is most certainly written by Luke. This Christian disciple was a Greek doctor, a fellow worker, and a dear and faithful friend of the

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Apostle Paul (Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:11, Phm 24). Luke most likely wrote the book between A.D. 59 and 63 before the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) and before the death of the Apostle Paul (A.D. 67). This was a time when Greek literature and thought dominated the world. The book was tailored to appeal to the thoughtful, cultured, and philosophical Greek mind (cf. Halley, 585) and according to Luke was an “orderly account” (Luke 1:3). Luke weaves throughout his book different themes of Jesus’ life, organized by Jesus’ life sequence and the geographical area of his ministry: first in the area around Galilee, those that took place in Judea and Perea, and those of the final week in Jerusalem. Luke’s main concern when writing this book is to explain the basic identity and mission of a Christian and different forms of discipleship suited in the Roman culture.

Jesus too had to deal with the Roman culture of his day and his own mission and identity. Christ preached with one who had authority. But in what historical context does Jesus give this sermon? He delivered it on his way to Jerusalem through the region of Perea. This journey would eventually end in his suffering, torture and death, perfectly illustrating for his audience what it would mean to follow him. The audience was large and diverse with people from every different type of background, education and socio-economic status, from Pharisees to beggars. There were three types of follower: whole-hearted passionate followers, the casually, curious followers, and then the enemies of Jesus. “At times the Lord Jesus *wooed* men to Himself, but after they began to follow Him, He *winnowed* them.

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That is what is taking place here” (MacDonald, 1426). What Jesus is saying is that what he wants from the crowds is no longer a half-hearted commitment to his person, but rather a fully trusting devotion to him regardless of the cost.

However, in what literary context is Jesus preaching this sermon? The book of Luke fits into the category of ‘Gospel.’ Believers should notice that they should not only observe the life of Christ through the narrative and specific biographical areas of Jesus’ life, but also reach into the heart of Christ by listening to his teaching presented through the Gospel. Also, our pericope fits under the subset category of both a sermon and a parable. Why was he preaching this sermon at this point? Christ is preaching about a specific thing—the cost of following him—and illustrates it with two different parables—the story of a foolish builder and a story of a wise king.

The first of these passages, starting in Luke 14:1, begins with Jesus being invited to a meal at a Pharisee’s house. This was not done as a genuine gesture of hospitality but rather for the Pharisee’s to watch Jesus and find fault with him. Jesus was surrounded by men, looking to accuse and humiliate him. He responds by healing a man with dropsy and telling two different parables.

In the first parable, Jesus talks with the Pharisee’s about taking the places of honor, saying, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). This is a crucial point made by Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God: those who are humble will be exalted. This is also

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decisive in counting the cost to follow the Master because the believer relies not on his own power, wisdom or strength but on the Lord of his ultimate provider.

The second parable Jesus tells in the house of the Pharisee is that of the 'Great Banquet.' A master held a great banquet and invited many guests. However, those guests could not come to the master's banquet because they were busy with a field, five yoke of oxen, or a wife—the things that belong to this world. The master then ordered that 'the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame' be invited to his banquet. This is yet another illustration of the humble being exalted and the exalted being humbled. This also serves as an illustration to the followers of Christ to drop what they're doing and following him. Jesus stated that those who did not drop what they're doing and come to him would not 'get a taste of [his] banquet' (Luke 14:24).

Jesus also has three different parables *following* our pericope: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Jesus has just gathered with the tax collectors and sinners, but the Pharisees and teachers of the law were looking down with judgment upon Jesus for welcoming these sinners. Jesus responds to them with several parables. The first parable is the example of a lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. Jesus leaves those who do not need righteousness and finds those who do need it. "Verse 7 does not actually mean that there are some persons [the 'righteous'] who need no repentance . All men are sinners, and all must repent in order to be saved. The verse describes those who, as far as they see themselves, need no repentance" (MacDonald, 1428). This then

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illustrates two different conclusions: the great rejoicing over the repentance of a lost sinner, and the lack of joy for those who “do not need to repent” (Luke 14:7). This pattern is seen throughout the other two parables. A sinner who repents brings much rejoicing, but those who do not repent bring no pleasure to God.

But what is repentance? “In its biblical sense repentance refers to a deeply seated and thorough turning from self to God. It occurs when a radical turning to God takes place, an experience in which God is recognized as the most important fact of one’s existence” (Brand, 1376). This leads us to a conclusion. God is pleased and rejoices greatly in the sinner who turns to Him with complete abandonment.

How does one do that? What does Jesus mean when he states, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33) What must be given up? Is it a process or a simple decision one must make? What we need to do now is to simply look at the way Jesus explains it.

Jesus gives two different illustrations on what we must do. The first is of a builder who does not sit down and estimate the cost of a building project. And since he is unprepared, he is unable to complete his project. This ill-considered builder is then ridiculed by those who see he cannot finish. Jesus’ point is that those who decide to follow him carelessly will be ridiculed because of it. “This parable of the rash builder has the lesson of counting the cost. *Sit down* (kathisas). Attitude of deliberation” (Robertson, 201). What a considering believer must do is simply consider the cost of following Jesus.

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But what must he consider? The word 'consider' (ψηφίζεαι, *apephizo*) means literally to count pebbles or cast a pebble into an urn. For example, Jesus means that a searching person must take two different urns, 'Messiah' and 'world,' and begin to count the pros and cons to both. The phrase 'first sit down' means taking the time to consider whether one is able to or not. John Nolland says, "Sitting is the appropriate posture for planning and calculation." (Nolland, 763) This posture will help to form a good and accurate decision. Is it worth the cost? Are there more pebbles in the 'Messiah' urn than the 'world' urn? "Count...[an] expense is something which eats up one's resources" (Robertson, 201). Is the commitment so great that it will eat up the entirety of one's resources?

The second illustration Jesus makes is that of a wise king. This parable has a little bit different emphasis. The king first sits down and considers whether he is able to go against a king who has twenty thousand men, and since the first king only has ten thousand men, he sends out a delegation, suing for terms of peace. And he does this when the other king is "a long way off." This passage illustrates the relationship we had with God before we accepted Christ and started to follow him. God is the "other king" who is greater than us, for "no man can contend with one who is stronger than he" (Ecclesiastes 6:10). What Jesus means by "a long way off" is the fact that a decision should be made with urgency. The time must be taken to consider it, but the process should begin immediately after hearing the message. Otherwise, the king will come and destroy his enemy.

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Why did Jesus use these two different parables? “A.M. Hunter [states], ‘In the first parable Jesus says, ‘Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow me.’ In the second he says, ‘Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to refuse my demands.’ Both ways of looking at it are important” (Morris, 258). Both of these points must be considered in depth.

What does it cost to follow Jesus? Can we afford him? He offers three different hindrances that keep us from making the decision to wholeheartedly follow Christ. The first of these hindrances is love of those who are most dear to the heart—father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters. Jesus uses the term hate in regards to loving them less than him because Christ demands his follower’s highest loyalty and complete allegiance. The second hindrance is the accepting of the cross. The believer must deny himself and take up a cross of suffering and walk toward his own torture, humiliation, and execution. Before going to the cross, the Christ Himself prayed to the Father, asking that he not be made to suffer; however, he accepted the suffering he was subjected to and endured it without opening his mouth. The final hindrance is that of material possessions. “There ‘give up’ all possessions is literally “say farewell to” all possessions, as when one departs on a journey” (Tannehill, 236). The believer must say goodbye to everything that belongs to him and subjugate it to the authority of the Christ. The believer must be completely lost in Christ to renounce every other love—family, self and possessions. Richard Longnecker says, “So in portraying what Jesus said...Christian discipleships

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has as its conditions (1) willingness to live an unsettled and insecure lifestyle for Jesus' sake and (2) being unencumbered by other allegiances" (Longnecker, 63).

Jesus then concludes his sermon with the statement, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out." (Luke 14:34-35) During the time of the New Testament, salt was a symbol of lasting concord. The salt itself is that of our allegiance to Jesus Christ, who is the reconciliation to God on our behalf. Also, "With his salt metaphor, then, Jesus calls attention to the urgency of his instruction on the conditions of discipleship and bids his audience to respond" (Green, 566). In its essence Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to perseverance in their loyalty to him, renouncing all others because of him.

The response to this sermon should be guided with both careful consideration and urgency. The road is hard and the path difficult. The rewards, however, are great. In making a decision for Jesus, life itself is gained. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). Additionally, the testimony of the Apostle Paul states,

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“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:7-11)

Paul has found a precious treasure, one that he holds tightly within his grasp and continually looks at in wonder. The knowledge of Jesus, who he is, and his resurrection brings life to the fullest. By deciding to follow Christ, the believer passes from the depths of death to the fullness of life.

We must, therefore, consider what it means to live life. There are three different qualities of life. The first way is to simply exist in life. Sadly, some Christians live simply in this area of life, going through the motions of life. But this is not the life Christ has called us to. He has called us to follow him; he has called his followers to action. The second quality of life is that of action where the believer studies the Word of God, has fellowship with other believers, prays, and evangelizes to the unbeliever, yet this still does not have the life Jesus calls us to. There is yet another higher quality of life. And that is a life drenched in Christ, a life that is completely given over to Christ’s control, a life that is lived in unbroken relationship

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and communication with him. And this is the life that is most effective for Christ.

“Wholehearted devotion, all-out loyalty, and complete self-denial, so that one places himself, his time, his earthly possessions, his talents, etc., at the disposal of Christ, is what Jesus asks” (Hendriksen, 737).

This is no easy life to live, yet it is the life that Jesus calls us to. Consider the life of Christ as an example. He came to this earth as a servant to suffer and die for the people he loved and the world he created. He submitted his life completely to the Father and followed him in complete submission. Laying aside all heavenly pleasures and earthly possessions, the Savior took upon himself all the sins of mankind. This type of exemplary life was rewarded. “...God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...” (Philippians 2:9). Jesus Christ lived for only thirty-three years, yet had a significant impact on the entire world. Historian H.G. Wells once stated, “I am a historian, I am not a believer...but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history” (Williams, 4). No person has been more disputed over, worshipped, or ridiculed in all of history.

Christ is coming and his reward is with him. But there are generally four hindrances that hold many people from moving into the highest stage of life, a life completely devoted to Christ. Firstly, many people are held back because of fear. They're afraid of following Jesus because of the abuse they'll suffer. The second

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hindrance is that of ignorance. They don't follow Christ because they do not know about him or how to pursue him. The third hindrance is that of pride. Many people are too proud to come under the authority of Christ. The final hindrance is that of moral issues. They simply refuse to change their behavior from their sins, no matter how much they say they would like to. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them" (Romans 1:17-19).

What people, even people in the pews, are doing is suppressing the truth when they refuse to follow Christ like he calls them to. These people refuse to give up their families, themselves, and their possessions. Yet Jesus asks the question, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:25). We are called to something more. We are called for a greater purpose. We are called to follow Christ. "Instead of living self-centered lives, we must live Christ-centered lives. Instead of asking how every action will affect ourselves, we must be careful to assess how it will affect Christ and His glory" (MacDonald, 1427).

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