

Theme Sentence

I can only enter God's kingdom/be a disciple of Jesus if I put him and his kingdom ahead of everything else that I (and our culture) considers valuable.

Launching Question

There is a memorable outline that presents the gospel as an A, B, C, D: something to *admit*, something to *believe*, something to *consider*, something to *do*. What is the cost of discipleship you'd spell out as the 'something to consider'?

READ Luke 14:25-35

Get people to work on their own to divide the passage into sections, and to give a title to each section (*eg note 28-30 and 31-32 are giving us two examples*). Get people to feed back.

*This passage is about the question: **how does someone enter God's kingdom?** which is the question that 13:22-30 left us asking ... how do I 'enter' (24)?*

Questions

First of all, how might people think that they enter God's kingdom? What do you think is the basic message in our verses today ... and how does that differ from what people might think about how they enter God's kingdom?

What criteria does Jesus give us (in 26) for being a disciple? What does Jesus mean by these criteria (particularly since the NT also tells Christians to love our spouses, and honour our parents [cf Eph 5:22-6:3])?

What would 27 mean to someone in the first-century? So what is Jesus asking would-be-disciples to do? How do I actually do that?

In 28-32, Jesus gives two examples to illustrate one general principle: what is the principle? How do the examples illustrate it? What does each mean?

In 33, what does Jesus say that it will involve to be his disciple? How does this passage follow on from 14:16-24 (and v21, 23 in particular)? Is this passage inviting more to come in ... or is it discouraging people by telling us how hard it is?! So how should we read these verses?

Thinking it through

(cf *Launching Question*) What are we to do when we 'count the cost' (28)? Let's 'count the cost' together: what does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus?

What 'all' (33) do I and our culture consider valuable that I should renounce? In practise, what does this passage mean that we should do/not do?

In what ways do you find yourself settling for a less-demanding discipleship? How can we help one another to keep salty – to remain a genuine disciple (in the terms this passage defines for us) to the very end?

Luke 14:25-35



Where are we in *Luke*?



At 9:51, Jesus began his final journey to Jerusalem, and therefore to his death. He is still travelling there now.

Before this journey began, he concentrated on teaching about **who he is**, but ever since 9:51, he switched to teaching about **eternal life**. So far he has taught:

- **eternal life comes through Jesus alone** (10:16-24). For this to make sense, he could only begin to teach it after revealing who he is, and after his disciples became clearer about who he is. We need to ask God for eternal life (11:9-13) and listen to him/fear him (11:28; 12:4-10).
- **eternal life cannot be obtained any other way**, and certainly not by good works (10:25-37) or religion (11:37-12:3).
- **eternal life is about life in the next world, not this one**. This has been the big theme. Our natural tendency is to focus on life in this world, but it is transient (12:16-20) and a place of conflict rather than peace (12:51-53). Instead, we should set our hearts on heaven (12:33-34), striving to enter there (13:22f), always ready for Jesus' return (12:35-40). Repentance (13:1-9) ... and not religion (13:10-17) ... is how to be ready.

In the section that began at 13:22, two big themes are introduced, and then examined in more detail.

13:22-30	the two issues introduced
13:31-14:24	<u>issue one</u> : who will enter God's kingdom?
	• 13:31-14:6 not the Jewish religious establishment • 14:7-24 but 'outsiders' who are compelled/exalted
14:25-35	<u>issue two</u> : how does someone enter God's kingdom?

[NS]

Theme Sentence

I can only enter God's kingdom/be a disciple of Jesus if I put him and his kingdom ahead of everything else that I (and our culture) considers valuable.

Application

Jesus spells out what it means to be his disciple: this passage is all application!

- let's 'count the cost' together: what does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus?
- what 'all' (33) do I and our culture consider valuable that I should renounce?
- how can we help one another to keep salty – to remain a genuine disciple (in the terms this passage defines for us) to the very end?

Commentary

Jesus has been explaining why *many ... will seek to enter and will not be able to* (13:24). Jesus is referring to those who assume that they would get into God's kingdom/have eternal life but discover, to their horror, that they cannot. Prominent in this group will be many Jews who think too highly of themselves, and so do not *strive to enter through the narrow gate*. They do not actually produce *the fruit of repentance* that God is looking for (13:6-9 cf 3:7-9), as 13:10-17 made very obvious. Through the OT period, God had been issuing invitations to this *many* (14:16) to come to the great feast/banquet (- an OT symbol of the blessings of God's kingdom when it is finally consummated at the end of time [eg Isa 25:6-8]). But when *the servant* (ie Jesus himself) arrives to say *Come, for everything is now ready* (14:17) they make the most absurd excuses why they will not come. Here is the real problem: they reject Jesus (as will become obvious when they kill him) who is God's invitation to eternal life.

Therefore, God will fill his kingdom with other people who, in this world, are of little account (14:21-23).

Having explained why many people who thought that they would get into God's kingdom will not, Jesus now looks at what we need to do if we are to be his disciples and so be among those who will get into God's kingdom.

25 Note who Jesus addresses in each of the preceding paragraphs (since the distinction of 12:1). Here, Jesus pointedly addresses *great crowds* - the very nobodies that he has just explained are now to be invited to the great banquet: *come in, one and all ... for still there is room* (22-23).

26 Here are the criteria for being a disciple of Jesus: it begins with the issue of allegiance. Elsewhere, the NT will tell us to love our neighbour (Lk 10:25f), spouse, and parents (Eph 5:25-6:3). So, *hate* here means something like being so committed to Jesus that we will take everything that our culture considers most valuable and use it for him. Or even, that we will be ready to give it up for him. Including the closest relationships in the world, and everything we possess, and even our own lives.

Yes, really!

It is worth remembering what Jesus has already said about these very close family relationships (in 12:53): from his distressing death (12:50) to the longed-for fire of judgement at his return (12:49), there will always be division between those living for his kingdom and those living for this world (cf 12:29-34). Every would-be disciple must make a choice between those two: which world will I live for?

The NT word for *deny* is the same in *let him deny himself* (Matt 12:24) as it is in Peter's denying Jesus (Matt 26:34f, 75) for that is the same choice expressed in other words: which will I deny - myself or him?

27 In the first-century, to *bear his own cross* did not mean our contemporary, rather enfeebled, 'everyone has their own little difficulty in life'. It's the man condemned to crucifixion who must carry his own

cross as a sign of his death-to-come: it meant that you had no future, no control over your own circumstances, no way out. And this is about an ongoing 'bearing', not just an initial decision to start to 'bear'.

Even though Jesus doesn't explicitly refer to his own crucifixion here, the meaning is clear. But consider how the impact of this saying would have intensified after Golgotha: what he did is what we too must do.

In Mark 8:34-38, cross-bearing is further explained as a choice between where I am seeking to save my life: do I want to gain the whole of this world now, or do I want to save my life for all eternity? That choice - this world or the next world - has been the theme in Luke since 12:13.

28-30 Example 1 (to illustrate the general principle): building a tower
28 links to the previous verse with 'For ...': 'this' will explain 'that'! Jesus asks us to imagine someone who starts well, with bold plans and strong intentions, but who subsequently gives up (note how each of these three verses includes the idea of not completing/finishing). Such a person would be a laughing stock. If we are a 'giver-upper' like that, then we cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Or, to turn the illustration around: to become a disciple of Jesus, I will *sit down first and count the cost*. So that when I agree to follow this man, I am deciding that (from now on, consistently, and until the very end) I will put him and his kingdom ahead of everything else, including my own life. A high cost indeed!

31-32 Example 2: going to war
Again this example includes the idea of sitting down first before embarking on something. But here, the 'something' is a completely lost cause. Any king, with the merest modicum of competence, would carefully assess the situation before rushing into a battle he couldn't win! (Is Jesus suggesting that when we weigh up the cost of discipleship, we should consider what refusing the 'more powerful king' might mean?)

33 This verse restates what it takes to be a disciple. So this verse should control how we understand the examples of 28-30 and 31-32. We might expect this verse to read: 'so weigh things up carefully before you start'. But instead the key idea is 'renounce everything'. The focus is not so much on the act of careful consideration (which of course is absolutely necessary), but on the act of renunciation that should follow that consideration: to be a disciple of Jesus, we must do what 26-27 has described. There is not a 'less full on' form of discipleship!

34-35 These verses are a summary of 26-33. Salt that is chemically pure cannot 'lose' its saltiness, but 'salt' in first-century Palestine was far from pure. The sodium chloride could be leached out, leaving something which looked like salt but which, in fact, contained no true salt. Jesus' point, therefore, is that what matters is not outward appearances or good beginnings, but remaining a genuine disciple to the very end. And Jesus underlines this in point in his customary way, by exhorting those who are listening to do exactly what he is describing.