

LUKE 14:25-33
ST JAMES', 8.9.19, 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you're at a children's party, and you're giving instructions for a game of 'follow-my-leader'. What are the rules?

- Do whatever the leader does
- Go wherever the leader goes

Now let's think for a moment about other senses in which we might be said to be 'following' another person, or people, today. One example is as a supporter. I know some of you 'follow' your favourite football team; others might 'follow' a particular film star, musician, or pop group.

Another example of 'following' someone happens when we have a personal hero or heroine. If we admire someone enough, we try to emulate that person, in the way we dress, or the way we behave.

These sorts of ideas came into my mind as I was thinking about what Jesus says here to the crowd and to his disciples: "*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*". The posh word for following Jesus is 'discipleship'. We hear the word 'disciples' often as we read the gospels; what it means is 'followers' and 'learners'.

DISCIPLESHIP

The image of carrying a cross has lost its impact for us. We have two thousand years of Christian history behind us. For us, the cross has

rightly become a symbol of salvation. And this picture of carrying our cross has been diluted to mean carrying a burden through life. That wasn't true for the disciples. In their world, people carrying crosses were people going to execution. That is the cost of discipleship! The rest of what Jesus says here fleshes it out. To be a disciple, a follower, of Jesus, means surrendering the whole of our lives. It's not just about coming to church on a Sunday morning; it's not just about giving some of our 'spare' time to church activities (actually as Christians we don't have any 'spare' time – it all belongs to the Lord!); it's not even just about giving our life in a physical sense, and becoming martyrs – although some of us may find that that's our calling. To be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, means just what Jesus says here: putting our relationship with Jesus before even our closest family relationships; giving up everything we have; forgetting self – all our own material desires, our petty (and no-so-petty!) quarrels, our ambition, our pride, our needs, everything that's about ME – all that we must forget. To be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, means carrying our cross – joining Jesus on the road to execution, with all the shame that brings with it, all the jeers, all the mocking, and all the pain. To be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, means exactly that, to follow Jesus wherever he goes.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

When we think about discipleship like that, we realise just how high the cost of discipleship is. Jesus says here that it's very important that we count that cost. He doesn't want people following him unless they realise just what they've let themselves in for. And so Jesus uses two

pictures to make his point. *Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? . . . Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?* (vv 28 & 31). We could sum up the point of these two pictures like this: "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."

The cost of discipleship is *everything* you have (v 33). Jesus wants disciples who realise what they've let themselves in for, disciples who have thought carefully about what's involved before they've set out to follow him. There's no room for half-hearted discipleship. In Revelation, Jesus has something very harsh to say to the half-hearted, lukewarm Laodiceans: *because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth* (Revelation 3:16).

CONCLUSION

I hope you haven't got the idea that Jesus was trying to discourage people from following him! He wants people to count the cost, so that they can know the exhilaration of true discipleship. One NT disciple who did just that was Paul. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote this: *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I*

have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ . . . (Philippians 3:7-8). The cost of discipleship is all that you have. But once we've realised that all that we have is *garbage* compared with the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, we'll gladly throw it all away.