

Counting The Cost

A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it--lest, after he has laid the 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.'” (Luke 14:28-30)

This passage is peculiar to Luke, and he tells us that at the time when our Lord uttered it great multitudes followed him. It is observable that when our Lord was forsaken by the crowd he was not depressed, and when his ministry became popular he was not elated. He was calm and wise in the midst of the excitement of the thronging multitudes. On this occasion our Lord spoke with a view to the winnowing of the great heap of nominal discipleship which lay before him, that the chaff might be driven away and only the precious corn might remain. The discourse before us reminds us of Gideon's process of diminishing that vast but motley host of which the Lord said, “The people are too many for me.” After having bidden the faint-hearted go, he next brought down the remaining thousands to the river, and bade them drink; and then only kept for himself those who lapped in a certain peculiar manner, which indicated their zeal, their speed, their energy, and their experience. Our Lord tested his followers that he might have only those remaining who would be fit for the conquest of the world. To carry his precious treasure he would select vessels whom grace had made fit for his use, the rest he could dispense with.

Our Lord Jesus was far too wise to pride himself upon the number of his converts; he cared rather for quality than quantity. He rejoiced over one sinner that repented, but ten thousand sinners who merely professed to have repented would have given him no joy whatever. His heart longed after the real; he loathed the counterfeit. He panted after the substance; the shadow could not content him. His fan was in his hand with which to thoroughly purge his floor, and his ax was laid to the root of the trees to hew down the fruitless. He was anxious to leave a living church like good seed-corn in the land, as free as possible from all admixture. Hence in this particular instance, one might even think that he was repelling men rather than attracting them to his leadership; but, indeed, he was doing nothing of the kind. He understood right well that men to be truly won must be won by truth, that the truest love is ever honest, and that the best disciple is not he who joins the class of the great Master in a hurry, and then afterwards discovers that the learning is not such as he expected, but one who comes sighing after just such knowledge as the teacher is prepared to give. Therefore did the Master take most care at the time when that care was most needed, that none should follow him under misapprehension, but should be made fully aware of what was meant by being his disciples, so that they should not say afterwards, “We have been misled; we have been beguiled into a service which disappoints us.” Unlike the enlisting sergeant who sets forth all the glories of military service in glowing colors in order to gain a recruit, the great Captain of our salvation would have his followers take all things into consideration before they cast in their lot with him.

We will divide our meditation into three parts. The first will be headed in this manner: *True religion is a costly thing*; the second shall bear this motto: *Wisdom suggests that before we*

enter upon it we should estimate the cost; and the third shall bear this inscription: Cost what it may, it is worth what it costs.

First, then, it is clear from our text that TRUE RELIGION IS COSTLY. Far be it from us to create any confusion of thought here. The gifts of God's grace cost us nothing, neither could his salvation be purchased with money, nor with merit, nor by vows and penances. The gospel motto is, "without money and without price"; we are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Yet, for all that, if a man will be a Christian it will cost him something.

Consider a moment. Here is a blind man sitting by the wayside begging. He asks to have his eyes opened. Will it cost him anything? No, the Savior would not accept all the gold in the world for the cure; he will freely open his eyes. But when they are opened, it will cost that blind man something. Obtaining his sight, he will be called upon to discharge the duties of one who has eyes. He will not be allowed after that to sit and beg, or, if he tried to do so, he will lose the sympathy which is bestowed upon blindness. Now that his eyes are opened he must use them and earn his own bread. It will cost him something, for he will now be conscious of the darkness of the night which he knew nothing of before. And there are sad sights which now he must look upon which never grieved him before. A man cannot gain a faculty except at some expense. He that increases knowledge or the means of gaining it, increases both sorrow and duty. True religion is the gift of God, and there is nothing we can do to purchase it. At the same time, if we receive it certain consequences will flow from it, and we ought to consider whether we shall be able to put up with them.

You may be sure that the cost must be great, since our Lord compares it to the building of a tower. The word here used for "tower" has often been employed to signify a turreted house, a villa, or country mansion. "Which of you," says he to the people, "intending to build for himself a mansion in which to reside at ease would not first of all count the cost?" The wise man sits down, and like a merchant at his desk, thoughtfully considers the undertaking. He consults the architect and the mason, and calculates what will be the expense of the outer walls, what of the roof, what of the interior fittings, and the like, and he does not make a rough guess, but counts the cost as men count their gold. It is evidently a matter of consequence with him, and so is true religion. It is no trifle, but an all-important business. He who thinks that a careless, hit-or-miss, headlong venture will suffice for his eternal interests, is the reverse of wise.

True godliness is the building up of a character which will endure the day of judgment. It begins in laying deep the foundations in faith and love and a renewed heart. It is carried on by patiently and carefully—and often painfully—putting stone upon stone in the building of the fair edifice, diligently adding "to your faith courage, and to courage knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity."

But, lest we should still think the expense small, our Lord compares it to a war, and he speaks of the number of troops engaged in that war, showing that it is no petty skirmish of two insignificant tribes. He likens it to a war in which upon one side there is an array of ten thousand, and on the other a host of twenty thousand. Now, warfare is always expensive work.

Besides the cost for accoutrements and ammunition, there is the cost of human life and blood. There is the removal of strong arms from work at home, and dire risks of defeat, captivity, and devastation. The Lord compares religion, then, in its externals, to a battle between the gracious man and the evils rampant in the outside world. The disciple of Jesus has to defend himself against a gigantic foe, and he has within himself a power which, so far as he is concerned, is not sufficient for the contest; the odds are fearful--ten thousand against twenty thousand. Well does the Savior say in this case that it is good to sit down to consult. The king with the smaller army consults, asks his sage senators, takes counsel from experience, calls in good advisers, and debates whether the thing can be done or not. So should we consider the matter of our souls, for religion is a costly thing, and not to be entered on with a light heart.

True religion will have to bear a strain, for it is certain to be opposed. This tower will not be built without opposition. True religion must be able to endure hardness; if it cannot do that, it is good for nothing. The old Toledo blade cost the warrior much at first hand, but when he had once procured it, he knew that it would cut through joint and marrow in the day of battle, and he was not afraid to dash into the thick of the fray, trusting to its unrivaled temper and keen edge. Could he not find a cheaper sword? He could have found one easily enough, but then in the moment when his sword smote upon his enemy's helmet, instead of cleaving through the skull, it would have snapped in the warrior's hand and cost him his life. Such is the cheap religion with which so many take up. There is no self-denial in it, no forsaking of the world, no giving up of carnal amusements. Their religion costs them nothing, and at last when they want it, it will fail them; it will snap like the ill-made sword in the day of battle and leave them defenseless.

What, then, is the expense? What is the cost of building this tower or fighting this war? The answer is given by our Savior. What does he say? That if you would be his and have his salvation, you must love him beyond every other person in this world. I am afraid that many professors are not prepared for this. They would be Christians if their family would approve, but they must consult their brother, father, or wife. They would make a stand against worldly pleasures if others would, but they cannot bear to appear singular, or to oppose the view of relatives. Mark this: you will best prove your love to your relatives by being decided for the right, since you will be the more likely to win their souls. Love them too much to indulge the wrong in them; love them so truly that you hate that in them which would injure you and ruin them. You must be prepared to suffer from those who are bound to you by the dearest ties. Sin must not be tolerated whatever may happen.

Another item of cost is this: self must be hated. If I see anything in myself opposed to Jesus, I must do away with it. I must mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts, denying myself anything and everything which would grieve the Savior or would prevent my realizing perfect conformity to him.

We must make an unreserved surrender of all to Jesus. Listen to these words: "Whosoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple." It may come to this, that persecution may arise and you have actually to give up all. You must be prepared for the event. You may not have to give up anything, but the surrender must be just as real in your heart as if it had to be carried out in act and deed. No man has truly given himself to Christ unless he has also said, "My Lord, I give to thee this day my body, my soul, my powers,

my talents, my goods, my house, my children, and all that I have.” You cannot be Christ's disciples at any less expense than this.

Second, WISDOM SUGGESTS THAT WE SHOULD COUNT THE COST. You feel you would like to be a Christian. Dear friend, give me your hand. But as I grasp your hand and would draw you to Christ, I ask, “Do you know what you desire? Are you sure you desire it? There are men lying on beds of sickness who cry for help, but when they recover and have to go out and battle with the world, the time may come when they will say, “I would just as soon be on the bed of sickness again.” No mistake can be greater than the notion that in order to be saved there is only needed a measure of emotion during a few days, and the belief of some one decisive hour. Faith and repentance are not the work of a week or two; they are a life-work. As long as the Christian is on earth, he must repent. As for faith, it is not saying “I believe in Jesus, and therefore I am saved,” but it is a daily grace, the trust of a lifetime. Faith is continually productive of sanctifying results in the life of the believer, or otherwise he is not possessed of the right faith. You must not be content with false and fleeting religion. You are beginning to build a tower of which the top stone will never be laid until you are taken up to heaven. You are commencing a war which will never end until you exchange the sword for the palm branch.

The last word shall be this: COST WHATEVER IT MAY, TRUE RELIGION IS WORTH THE COST. We are like a man with the black plague upon him who knows that he is dying, and yet yonder is a drug which will heal him. “Physician,” says he, “you ask so great a price that each drop costs me a diamond. You are demanding more than its weight in choicest pearls, but it does not matter. I must have it. If I do not, I am a dead man; and than what will it profit me that I have kept my gold?” It is the case of everyone of us here present that we must have Christ or perish forever, and it will be better for us to cut off our right arm and to pluck out our right eye than that we should be cast into hell fire.

At the time of death consider what recompense comes for all the cost, in the consolation afforded by true godliness. To lie a-dying, why it will give no pain to be able to say, “I was cast out of my family for Jesus.” It will be no sorrow to remember, “I was ridiculed for Christ.” It will cause no pangs to say, “I was counted too precise and too much of a Puritan.” No, dear reader, those are not the things which put thorns into death pillows. Oh, no! There we shall see how sweet it was to have borne any part of Jesus' cross. A sliver of his cross will be worth a king's ransom on a dying day. At the judgment, when the trumpet rings out and the dead are rising, we shall not say, “I suffered too much for Christ.” We shall not look back with regret to the fact that we lost caste in society and position among the refined for Jesus' sake. We shall not lament that we attended a despised church and worshiped among the poor of this world out of love to Jesus and fidelity to his gospel. In that day he shall shine brightest who was most beclouded for his Lord's sake. Amid the bright ones, double shall be the brightness of the martyr band of whom the world was not worthy, who were accounted as the offscouring of all things.

Remember that our Redeemer does not ask anyone to do what he has not done himself. What if I be called to bear reproach? They called the Master of the house Beelzebub. What if I be cast out? They also cast Jesus out. When we think of the scourgings, and the shame, and the spitting which the Lord endured, what are our griefs? And if for his sake we should even be condemned to death, we know how he hung on the cross, stripped of his all, that he might save

us from the wrath to come.

Soldiers of the cross, can you follow him? There he is in the center of the battle where the blows fall fastest; will you follow him? Dare you follow him, or do you pine for the tents of ease and the soft couches of the cowards who are shrinking back and deserting to the enemy?

If you have counted the cost, you know by this time that you cannot wage the war. Ten thousand cannot stand against twenty thousand. But yet it must be done. Whatever may be in front, we dare not turn back. What, then, must we do? Hear the Lord's words: "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Are you willing? Then the Spirit of God will help you. You shall give up the world and the flesh without a sigh; you shall fight against your lusts and you shall overcome them through the blood of the Lamb. The tower shall be built and the Lord shall inhabit it. Cast yourself on Jesus by a simple faith. Rest in his power and from day to day believe in his strength, and he will bear you safely through.

Every one of you who would have Christ, come, and have him! You who would have salvation, accept it as the gift of his sovereign grace. But do not receive it under misapprehension; understand what is meant by it. Salvation is not deliverance from hell alone; it is deliverance from sin. It is not the rescue of men from eternal pain merely; it is their redemption from this world's vain and wicked ways. If you would have justification, you must have sanctification. If you would have pardon, you must have holiness. If you would be one with Christ, you must be separate from sinners. If you would walk the streets of gold above, you must walk the road of holiness below.

God grant you his Holy Spirit to enable you so to do, and his shall be the praise forever.
Amen.