

KINGDOM.

LESSON 33

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] ISAIAH 1 -4
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Isaiah 1, 2, 3 and 4). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN ROMANS] (13) ROMANS 10:9-10
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Review two by two.

(13) Romans 10:9-10. That if you confess with your mouth: “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST] THE RASH BUILDER and THE RECKLESS KING
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“The parable of the rash builder” in Luke 14:28-30
and “the parable of the reckless king” in Luke 14:31-33 are parables about
DISCIPLESHIP IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

A. THE PARABLE OF THE RASH BUILDER

Read Luke 14:25-30.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The tower. A tower may be a structure such as is built in a vineyard to serve as a watchtower and storeroom (Isaiah 5:2) or it may be an entire farm building.

To estimate the cost. Every good businessman figures out the cost of any project.

Everyone who sees. Onlookers are notorious for always being ready to turn situations into a joke or to put another person down, especially when he fails.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 14:25-27.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) through Perea. He was addressing a huge crowd about discipleship. Jesus *teaches* that anyone who wants to become his disciple must realise that there is a cost attached to discipleship. It was not Jesus who estimated the cost of completing the task, because he already knew that in order to save people he would have to die on the cross. And he also knew that the task of building God's kingdom would only be completed with true disciples, not with superficial followers. Not Jesus, but the people who desire to become disciples, must estimate the cost of discipleship. The context of this parable speaks about people who must consider the cost of following Jesus Christ as a disciple.

The teaching of Jesus concerning discipleship is the following:

All true Christians should become disciples. Acts 11:26 relates that disciples were for the first time called Christians in Antioch (Syria). We should be careful not to draw a sharp distinction between a Christian and a disciple of Christ. Jesus Christ did not introduce different classes of Christians, as if a disciple is a higher class than an ordinary Christian!

Confusion often arises because everywhere certain people call themselves "Christians", while they have none of the characteristics of a disciple of Christ. They are in fact only "Christians" in name and not in practice and therefore not genuine Christians!

In the beginning of the New Testament, all the people who believed in Jesus Christ and followed him were called "disciples". And even then, Christ distinguished between those who were true disciples and those who were not true disciples (John 6:60-69). In the book of Acts, a person became "a disciple" when he believed in Jesus Christ (Acts 9:26; 13:48-52). Some of these disciples were still very immature and caused disunity among themselves (Acts 6:1-2), while other disciples were quite mature, like Timothy (Acts 16:1-2).

The specific characteristics of a disciple are clearly taught by Jesus Christ in the Gospels (Matthew 10:24-25; 13:52; 28:19-20; Luke 6:40; 14:26-27,33; John 8:31-32; 13:34-35; 15:5-8). It is the intention of Jesus Christ that all those who by God's grace believe in him should develop these characteristics of "a disciple" or "mature Christian".

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus called various kinds of people to become his disciples. He said to them, "Come and see" or "Follow me". Jesus' call to discipleship had no social barriers. Among his disciples were sinful fishermen, like Peter, James and John, a political zealot, called Simon and a despised tax collector, called Matthew. The call to discipleship was a call to be "with him" wherever he went. The powerful and direct impression of the person of Jesus, together with his powerful teaching, impelled them to become his disciples (John 1:35-51; Luke 5:1-11; Mark 3:13-15).

A disciple is a learner from Jesus Christ. A disciple learns by seeing, hearing and imitating. He learns as he follows Jesus. He observes the life and ministry of Jesus from nearby. He learns from both the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ and the apostles. He also learns through experience and practise (John 13:13-15; Matthew 4:23; Acts 4:13; Philippians 4:9-12).

The first characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to "hate". This means that a true disciple is completely devoted to Jesus Christ. According to verse 26, a disciple must "hate" his family and his own life in order to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that he should hate his parents and family in the sense of dislike, detest or abhor them or abandon them and forget them. The Bible commands Christians to care for their parents, to love their wives, to raise their children in the instruction of the Lord and to even love their neighbour as they love themselves.

The word "hate" means "to prefer less" as the parallel in Matthew 10:37 shows. "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." If there is a conflict between a family member and Christ, and the choice is between "obeying a family member" and "obeying Christ", then the family member's wish, no matter how ardent, should be rejected. The disciple's supreme loyalty is to Christ and no other relationship may replace it. He chooses Christ so unconditionally as his Lord (King) and Guide that he makes all other loyalties and relationships subordinate to his loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must always have the pre-eminence (Colossians 1:18)! Thus, a disciple loves Jesus Christ more than any other relationship. He prefers Jesus Christ above his parents, his own family and even himself.

The second characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to carry his cross.

This means that a true disciple sacrifices his own ambitions and security. He accepts the sacrifice of suffering that a committed Christian must bring when he is turned down, rejected, ridiculed, oppressed and persecuted. This is the real meaning of "carrying your own cross" (Luke 14:26-27).

At this point, Jesus told the parable of "the rash builder".

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 14:28-30.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is not given.

It must be deduced from the context. A Christian must figure out the cost of discipleship before he acts.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes. Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning. The details must be interpreted in relation to the context.

Building a tower. This is a relevant detail. Building a tower is a big project. It costs a lot of money, a lot of energy and a lot of time. In the context it refers to “becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ”. The decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ is an important decision. It may influence your financial situation; your relationship to your parents, wife and children, brothers and sisters; and it may change the direction of your whole life!

Estimating the cost first to see whether he can complete the task. This is an essential detail, because it is the central point or main message of the parable. Every person is responsible to first consider the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. He must decide whether or not he is willing to give Jesus Christ the first place in his life, in his relationships, in his plans and in his decisions, etc.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the rash builder in Luke 14:28-30 teaches about “discipleship in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of this parable is the following. “Every person is responsible to figure out the cost of discipleship before he starts following Jesus Christ. He must look before he leaps.”

Discipleship is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The people of God’s kingdom consider the cost of following Jesus Christ for the rest of their lives. In the context, a person must consider the cost of discipleship especially in terms of his relationship to his parents, his own family (wife and children, his brothers and sisters) and his own life, ambitions and desires. It is possible that he may have to choose against his parents, family and even his own ambitions and security.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

Matthew 6:25-34. The cost of discipleship is to first seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness. It is to seek it above running after material things like food, drink and clothes.

Matthew 10:37-39. The cost of discipleship is to love Jesus Christ more than one loves his parents, wife or children. He is willing to bring the sacrifice of a devoted Christian when he is turned down, rejected, ridiculed, oppressed and persecuted. It is to choose to lose his life for Jesus Christ and the extension of the kingdom of God.

Matthew 7:14; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12. Every person must count the cost of discipleship before he makes a commitment for discipleship. He must look before he leaps. Following Christ is not easy, because it is like entering a narrow gate and walking (climbing) along a narrow path. It often involves trouble and persecution of one or another kind. Some people seem to follow Christ for some time, but then fall away (Hebrews 6:4-8; 1 John 2:19), like Judas (John 6:70-71) and probably Demas (2 Timothy 4:8,10; cf. Matthew 7:22-23; John 6:66). But genuine believers in Christ (Matthew 11:12) will ultimately never fall away (John 10:27-28; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19) even if they stumble for a period of time (Proverbs 24:16), like Peter (Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-17).

B. THE PARABLE OF THE RECKLESS KING

Read Luke 14:31-33.

Luke 14:31-32 says, “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? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.”

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

Kings waging war. Accounts of kings who have waged war with other kings have filled the history books of the world.

Considering the outcome of a battle. This is the main task of a king and his generals before they go out to make war. Especially when they know that they are outnumbered, they are forced to make a decision: either lose the battle or sue for peace.

Sending a delegation and asking for the terms of peace. This is a far better decision than to go into battle against all odds and suffer an irreparable defeat.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

It has the same context as the parable of the rash builder.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 14:25-30.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 14:31-32.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Luke 14:33-35.

The application is implied in the story: If one must act, then act in the most sensible way! If one cannot win, sue for peace!

The teaching of Jesus concerning discipleship is the following:

The third characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to give up everything he has.

This means that a true disciple is totally committed to Jesus Christ. Verse 33 says, “Anyone who does not give up everything he has, cannot be my disciple.” Thus, a disciple prefers Christ above all possessions, relationships and ambitions of this world. He is willing to lay aside (to give up) anything and everything, or to say farewell to everyone or someone in order to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple. A disciple does not allow the love of money, success, fame and power to disqualify him from being a disciple of Christ.

If there is a conflict between pursuing materialism, success, fame or power on the one hand and following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly on the other hand, then the pursuit of materialism, success, fame or power should be rejected. If the choice is between making money and following Christ wholeheartedly, then the attraction of materialism and worldly success should be rejected. The supreme commitment of a disciple is to Jesus Christ and no other commitment may replace it!

The fourth characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to be like salt.

This means that a true disciple has good influence on his society. Verse 34-35 says, “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.” Salt is a substance which combats deterioration on the one hand and which imparts flavour on the other hand. Christian disciples must be like genuine “salt”. They must combat the moral and spiritual decay in their society and their words and actions must be like a pleasant flavour to the people around them.

Salt that has become tasteless cannot fertilise the soil. It cannot do any good, even to the manure pile. The formal, legalistic religion of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who superimposed many of their own opinions and decisions upon God’s law, only burdened the people. It became like tasteless salt. These people had no good influence on the society of Israel and they would be cast out of God’s kingdom (Matthew 8:12; 23:13-15). Jesus warned his listeners that people who were trained in the knowledge of the truth and subsequently resolutely set themselves against the exhortation of the Holy Spirit and became hardened in their opposition against Christ, would not be able to repent (Matthew 12:32; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31). Unswerving loyalty to Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary and can never harmonize with the natural cravings of the sinful human nature. Jesus warned his listeners, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 14:35; Revelation 2:7).” This means that when a person hears the words of Jesus Christ, he should not delay, but act immediately!

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning. The details must be interpreted in relation to the context.

A king is about to go to war against another king. These are relevant details. In the context, the first king represents the person who aspires or intends to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, that is, you and me. The second king, who has a much greater army, represents Jesus Christ!

The first king must first consider whether he is able to oppose the second king who is advancing with a much greater army. This is an essential detail, because it is the central point or main message of the parable. Every king or general first considers his odds and his strategy, before he goes into battle.

The first king must consider the odds. The point of this parable is that every person is responsible to make a decision whether he will become a disciple of Jesus Christ or not. He must realise that Jesus Christ and his uncountable angels are many times stronger than himself! He must realise that he has to make this one absolute crucial decision: to resist Jesus Christ or to submit to Jesus Christ!

Thereafter the first king must choose and must act. He must think carefully before he jumps. But he must jump! He must not delay this, because the second king is already on his way! Jesus Christ is already on his way to meet you and he demands complete submission because he is the King of kings (Revelation 17:12-14). You will encounter him at his second coming, but much earlier when you die! You must choose and act immediately and you must not delay! No one can avoid this crucial meeting (confrontation) with Jesus Christ. You must submit freely or be destroyed!

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the reckless king in Luke 14:1-33 teaches about “discipleship in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of this parable is the following. “Every person is responsible to make a choice for or against becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Although he must consider which strategy is best, he must act! He must choose and submit himself, because the Lord Jesus Christ is already on his way to him! Neutrality with respect to Jesus Christ is impossible!” Choosing is the human response to God’s initial demand to estimate the cost and then to submit wholeheartedly to his kingship. This is what it means to love Jesus Christ with all your heart and mind and soul and power.

The main message of this parable is more than merely considering the cost and consequences of one’s choice. The choice of the first king was not between whether he should attack or remain neutral, but between being attacked (because that was certainly going to happen!) or sue for peace (because that would be the only way to avert the unavoidable attack).

While the rash builder still had a choice to build or not to build, the first king was attacked. He had no freedom to choose to remain neutral. A choice was forced on him! He must choose! Likewise, every human being must choose and act. Resist Jesus Christ or submit to him. Neutrality with respect to Jesus Christ is impossible! Regardless whether someone is religious or not, he must choose and he must act!

All people are again and again attacked by the sinful nature in them (Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:17), by the evil anti-Christian world around them (John 15:18) and by Satan and his army of evil spirits above them (Ephesians 6:12). The sinful nature is crouching at the door and its desire is to possess and destroy (Genesis 4:7). The sinful world and its appeal on sinful desires are very strong (1 John 2:15-17; Luke 8:14). And the enemy, Satan, prowls around, looking to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

But also Jesus Christ himself is on the attack! Since his first coming to the world to save people from sin, guilt, shame, depravity, power and enslavement of sin, he comes to people through his Word, his Spirit and his labourers (the preachers). At his second coming he will come as the Final Saviour for Christians, but also as the Final Judge for non-Christians. He himself is right now standing at the door of the heart and is knocking. He desires to come in (Revelation 3:20). This forces a person to make a decision. His coming to people is unavoidable and irresistible! Man must choose! Jesus says: “Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16). “Repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you” (Revelation 3:3).

Discipleship is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom, confronted by the attacks of their sinful nature in them, the anti-Christian world around them and the demonic world above them on the one hand and Jesus Christ on the other hand, must consider what they must give up, lay down or let go of, etc. in order no longer to suffer crushing defeats and irreparable spiritual and moral losses.

The worst strategy and the most foolish thing they can do are to think that they can remain neutral and therefore do not have to make a decision! The best strategy and the only wise, sensible and reasonable thing to do are to make a decision, to make a commitment. It is to become reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ and to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple all the days of their life (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

Luke 12:57-59. The best strategy for discipleship is to judge for oneself what is right in a lawsuit. If one cannot win the lawsuit, then sue for a settlement out of court. With respect to the final judgement (the very last trial in human history), the best strategy is to be reconciled with Jesus Christ, the Judge of all judges. There is no other way to escape eternal condemnation!

Luke 13:1-5. The best strategy for discipleship is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ before it is too late! Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."

2 Corinthians 6:2. The best strategy for discipleship is to act immediately and not to procrastinate. "Now is the day of salvation!"

Matthew 19:20-24. The best strategy for discipleship is to give up whatever may be standing in the way of following Jesus as a disciple! For someone it may be to give up certain possessions. For another it may be to give up certain ambitions of power, success or fame. And yet for another it may be to give up certain relationships (Proverbs 1:10,15; Ephesians 5:5-7). By doing this, he will be assured of meeting the favour of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, at his return to this world!

Luke 14:34-35; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 3:2-3. The best strategy for discipleship is to have good influence on one's society, including family, neighbours, opponents and even enemies. The best strategy to win a battle is to combat moral and spiritual decay, like salt. It is to spread the good news of the gospel, like a fragrant aroma. It is to live a transparent Christian life among people, like a letter known and read by everyone.

C. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TEACHINGS OR LESSONS OF THE PARABLES ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM

The parables about DISCIPLESHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM are the following:

- The parable of the rash builder in Luke 14:28-30.
- The parable of the reckless king in Luke 14:31-33.
- The parable of the hand to the plough in Luke 9:61-62 (See manual 11, supplement 11)

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parables about discipleship in God's kingdom? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes. Christians ought to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

(1) A person must consider the cost of discipleship.

Every person is responsible to consider the cost of discipleship, especially in terms of his relationship to his parents, his own wife and children, his brothers and sisters, and his own life and ambitions. The cost may be that he must choose for Jesus Christ and the cause of Jesus Christ above his relationship with his parents, family and even above his own ambitions and security.

(2) A person must choose for or against Christ.

Every person is responsible to make a choice for or against becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, that is, responsible to submit to the King of kings or to resist his demand. Neutrality with respect to Jesus Christ is impossible! He must consider what he must lay aside, give up or say good-bye to in order not to suffer an overwhelming defeat in his relationship to Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as being a Christian for a little bit, like making some kind of a decision for God or making some outward changes in life-style, and then carrying on with his life as he himself decides.

The worst strategy and the most foolish thing a person can do are to think that he can remain neutral and therefore does not have to make a decision! The best strategy is to become reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. The only wise, sensible and reasonable thing to do is to follow Jesus Christ as his disciple. Christian discipleship means wholehearted submission to Jesus Christ and his teachings.

(3) A person must be a disciple every day of his life.

Every person is responsible to make a wholehearted commitment to follow Jesus Christ as a disciple every day and all the days of his life right to the end. Jesus Christ demands undivided commitment in discipleship!

The three parables together teach that a disciple must count the cost of discipleship! He must make a decision for discipleship! Every day he must refuse to look backwards and commit himself to keep on looking forwards as he follows Jesus Christ!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group *to pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study “the rash builder” and the parable of “the reckless king” together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Isaiah 5, 6, 7 and 8** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. **(14) Romans 10:12.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **Romans 9:1-33.**
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.