

PARABLES FOR A NEW YEAR

The parable of the tower builder, *Luke 14:25-33*

We are beginning a new year, a beginning we commonly believe contains the potential for many good things. We are using some of our Sundays this month to help us think about what we will do as a church family in 2023. But I do not wish to prescribe a series of goals. Instead, I want to take a few weeks to consider Jesus' parables that he used to offer insights into his kingdom and its expectations for those who claimed citizenship in it. I want us to explore what insights his parables provide to us that will guide us as we navigate the hopes, heartbreaks, successes, and failures we will encounter in the coming year. This lesson continues that series by examining Jesus' parable of the tower builder in Luke 14:25-33.

Setting of the parable

Luke begins his gospel with a record of the events surrounding Jesus' birth that reveal his identity as God's promised messianic king who will usher in God's rule and blessings (*Luke 1-2*). However, Luke's account of Jesus' ministry reveals that Jesus' understanding of the kingdom God commissioned him to establish and the identity of those who would populate it were opposite what many Jews expected (*cf. Luke 16-30; 6:17-49*). Because of the tension between Jewish expectations and the reality of Jesus' ministry, Jesus faced growing resistance from the religious leaders that he understood would result in his death (*Luke 9:21-22*). Rather than run from that outcome, Jesus confronted it. In chapters 9-19, Luke records Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to "be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (*Luke 9:21-22, 51*). Part of Jesus' travel plans included commissioning seventy-two disciples to go before him to announce his arrival in the cities through which he would pass (*Luke 10:1*). Jesus' parable of the tower builder belongs to that setting and records Jesus' warning to those who responded to his disciples' announcement and joined him on his journey to Jerusalem.

The parable of the tower builder

Jesus wanted people to follow him; he wanted people to be his disciples (*cf. Matthew 28:18-20*). Luke introduces Jesus' parable of the tower builder by noting that "great crowds accompanied" Jesus (*Luke 14:25*). While we might interpret "great crowds" as a mark of success, Jesus' response to the crowds reveals that he did not share our perspective - he told them to "count the cost" of following him and then repeatedly stated the high cost of following him.

- Consider the cost Jesus said one had to meet to be his disciple.
 - You must "hate [your] own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even [your] own life" (*Luke 14:26*)
 - You must "bear [your] own cross" (*Luke 14:27; cf. Luke 9:23*)
 - You must "renounce all" (*Luke 14:33*).



- The tension between the crowd's interest in Jesus and his pushback against them frames the parable of the tower builder in Luke 14:25-30.
 - Jesus clearly stated the high cost of following him and told the crowd anyone unwilling to pay that price "cannot be [his] disciple" (*Luke 14:25-27, 33*).
 - Jesus illustrated discipleship's cost and the consequence of failing to pay it with the parable of the tower builder (*Luke 14:28-30*). To appreciate the parable, we need to consider a cultural difference between Jesus' world and our world.
 - Jesus lived in an **honor and shame** culture where the assessment of the **community** determined one's value, an evaluation based on one's willingness to follow their society's rules for acceptable behavior.
 - We live in a culture primarily shaped by **economics** in which one defines their value by their connection to **things** like wealth, power, and appearance.
 - In Jesus' parable, the mockery the tower builder faced was much more than jesting about an accounting error. Instead, the builder's failure created social disgrace that caused him to lose honor and status within his society.
 - Jesus' point would have been clear to his audience:
 - **One must be able to follow through with their commitment to Jesus.**
 - **Failure to follow through with one's commitment to Jesus carries a great penalty.**

Applications

Jesus' parable, and his explanation of it, carry applications beyond the immediate setting of his ministry. Consider a few applications to our efforts to serve Jesus in the coming year.

- Our culture tends to remove challenges; we reduce costs to attract the most people. Jesus took the opposite position.
 - **We must not dismiss nor downplay the cost of following Jesus.**
 - Consequently, we should not make plans primarily based on the ease or perception of our plans but on their appropriateness to Jesus and his kingdom.
- We should expect to lose people - **the cost of discipleship proves too high for many people** (*cf. Matthew 7:13-14*).
- Given discipleship's cost, we should consider the following in 2023:
 - Focus on teaching people to love Jesus rather than merely 'making Christians' (*cf. Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:15, 21, 23-24*).
 - Focus on developing relationships with one another that offer accountability and support (*cf. Hebrews 10:24-25*).

May God help us follow through with our commitment to follow Jesus.

