

LUKE 14:25-33
SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY!

“There are some things money can’t buy...!” What comes next? “For everything else, there’s Mastercard!” Most of their adverts begin by quoting something you can buy: a new pair of shoes £50; a meal for two in a top restaurant £150; a new football for the children £10; the implication is that Mastercard is the credit card by which you can buy all of these things and others. These are ads that are designed to make you want to have a Mastercard so that you can spend money on these things; so that for everything you want to buy “there is Mastercard”; Mastercard is in the business of encouraging credit and spending and that’s not always a good thing; we might not always want to encourage spending on things!

But these ads usually finish with something else that is priceless. There is even a Mastercard website that is www.priceless.com. Certain things are priceless: there is an ad that is based on plane tickets from all round the world and how much these tickets cost, whether you come from Toronto, Cape Town or Sydney; then comes the last line: “Spending Christmas together – priceless”. There is a whole range of these qualities that according to Mastercard are priceless: being together with the family, friendships, loyalty etc. Go and have a look for yourself.

Now this is not a Mastercard advert. The question is this: how to make a life-long commitment to follow Jesus? Jesus teaches us to see things differently and to understand that some things are priceless! He wants to give the people in the crowd around Him then, and us today, a clearer understanding of what it means to follow Him. Jesus was being followed by large crowds of people: by this time He had developed a reputation; He is a miracle worker and perhaps some of the crowd were there just to see the miracles, being taken by the sensational way Jesus could heal people who were sick; or others who had heard that He could hold a crowd spell-bound by His teaching and they wanted to hear more; for whatever reason there is a large crowd following Jesus almost everywhere He goes.

Jesus is attractive to the crowd; they warm to Him; but what do they expect? Do they expect Him to be a warm and cosy friend all of the time? Do they expect an armchair ride from Him? Do they expect that everything will simply be warm and wonderful all of the time? If so, they are in for a shock because Jesus is about to challenge them about their most important and priceless attitudes. Especially, He is about to challenge them about their attitude to Jesus Himself: the thing about a crowd is, they become spectators; they watch what is going on, sometimes from a distance. Jesus is now challenging people to become more than religious spectators, but to take part in the life of faith and become disciples. Here is what that involves; here is what that means. It means seeing things differently, seeing life in a different way, in a better way. We are challenged to think very carefully about what is important to us; what do we see as priceless? What do we really value in life?

The piece in Luke 14 begins with what seems to be a very strange statement indeed: “*If anyone...*” (14:26) On day when we baptise a child, we affirm the importance of family life and say over again that families are from God, that God is at the heart of our family life and so is a good thing! But here is Jesus seeming to urge us to hate our families! How does that work? Well, let’s be careful about these words. Nowhere does Jesus teach us to hate anyone; He even urges us to love our enemies; if we are to love our enemies, we are certainly to love our families and friends; so this can’t mean what it simply seems to mean. “The love the disciple has for (Jesus) must be so great that the best of earthly loves (seems like) hatred in comparison.” (Morris)

Jesus is comparing things here: "Devotion to Christ cannot be anything less than whole-hearted." (Morris)

For the Christian, Jesus is to be centre of everything. There are a whole lot of different things that go to make up life as we live it: family, friends, work, leisure, money, possessions and all of these parts of life demand our attention from time to time. All of them are important to us and we derive enormous satisfaction from all of these aspects of life. Nothing that Jesus says here is meant to take away from that. In fact, when we get this right, these aspects of life all take on a new meaning. But He does challenge us about what matters; what is important in life. For some people, their family is like god to them; everything revolves round family to the exclusion of most other things; or work is god to us and we spend every waking hour at work; or going to the gym and health and fitness are as god to us and we spend hours there, 7 days a week keeping fit in case we lose our eternal youth. Jesus' challenge is to see life differently by seeing Jesus at the centre, so that Christian faith and the notion that Jesus is Lord actually has an impact on all these other aspects of life. So we live in families in the way that Jesus teaches with love and patience; so we do our work as if serving Jesus, so we see ourselves in a healthy way; all of this shaped by our Christian faith. "*Anyone who...*" (14:27) There are times when we have to be prepared to change the way we think about life and ourselves and let Jesus be at the centre!

The challenge that Jesus is giving the crowd is simple: how to make a life-long commitment to follow the Messiah! Don't rush into that commitment; don't make that commitment on the back of an envelope! Think about what is involved. He tells 2 stories:

1) Man building a tower: "*Suppose...*" (14:28ff) Do you know Edinburgh's folly? It is on the top of Calton Hill and you see it every time you walk along Princes St; it was meant to make Edinburgh look like Athens and was proposed in 1822 at a cost of £42000; the work began in 1826 with only £16000 in bank and stopped in 1829 as the funds ran out. We've all seen projects that have been started and left unfinished; white elephants we call them. Dare one mention trams? Realise what you're letting yourself in for; read small print! Work it out; count the cost; then do it! Jesus says 'this is what it will cost to follow me, whole-hearted devotion and it may even cost your life.' His devotion to God and to us cost Him His life. Peter would have been in the crowd that day; he said 'yes' to Jesus and 30 years later, he died for his faith as a Christian martyr; Andrew, our patron saint, Peter's brother was the same; today there are stories from places like China where people are hearing these words of Jesus to follow Him and to have whole-hearted devotion and they say 'yes' and it costs them everything but they do it because they see that the faith and hope that Christ gives are priceless! They count the cost and say 'yes'.

2) King about to go to war: "*Suppose...*" (14:31f) We can understand the dilemma; the king looks at his situation. His army is smaller than that of his enemy and he says 'what can I do here?' He considers his situation and acts accordingly. The king pursues peace with his enemy because that is his considered option. Plan before acting! Consider your life-long commitment to follow Messiah; ask questions of people who know what this means; ask yourself if this is as important to you as it should be; consider how important Jesus is and then act! Being a disciple of Jesus is not something into which people should rush; it is not to be done half-heartedly, as some faint-hearted attachment; but to be thoughtful; and considered; is this priceless? Is it important? How much does it matter to us?

"Preacher, you're putting people off! You're supposed to make the Christian life attractive; you're supposed to attract people to Jesus and make the Christian life and

Christian faith seem appealing!” Well, yes and we do; because the gospel is good for us and Jesus is good for us. But there is also a time for serious talking about what matters to us; what are our priorities in life. Is there anything we would count as priceless? Well, you say “my family is priceless to me”; or “my work is priceless”, or “my health is priceless to me”. Where does Jesus fit into that picture? Is Jesus priceless? The Church is a place where these big questions about life need to be asked; we don’t come to be entertained or simply to be presented with words that only make us feel good about life. This is a place where big questions are asked, where we are challenged about the way we think and the way we live. Jesus has always taught a distinctive way of life and living, a way that is different from the world, that is somehow counter-cultural, but that allows us to value what is priceless and make most of life in best possible way. So we see family life in a new way, work, health – we see every part of life in a new way when we follow Jesus.

Philemon was a wealthy Christian living in the city of Colosse; he is a slave-owner, as most wealthy people in those days were. He had a slave called Onesimus, who had stolen some things from him and then run away. His running away had taken him to Rome, the centre of the Empire, a place to hide? There, he met Paul, the apostle, Church planter, missionary, letter-writer and friend of Philemon! Paul writes to Philemon about Onesimus; he is sending him back to his master, to the place where he belongs. But he is sending him back with a challenge for Philemon: to see his slave differently. The way of the world would be to punish the slave regardless and maybe even put him to death, but Paul’s challenge is for Philemon to see his slave in a different way, as a brother in Christ. The slave is now a Christian; “so, Philemon, what matters to you? Is it that your pride was hurt when the slave ran away? Is it a sense of revenge that burns most strongly in you? Or revenge disguised as justice for wrongs committed? Paul says put these on my account! For Philemon, there is to be a different way of seeing, that sees something priceless here, a new kind of relationship, a new bond. We assume that he rose to challenge!

There are things money can’t buy? Faith – something to believe in, someone to trust, something to give life shape and direction and meaning? Hope – life is not just a meaningless round of activities that go round in circles, not just about eating, drinking, working, being merry, but has a purpose? Love – someone to love, to whom we can be devoted, someone to love us for who we are without judging us. Money can’t buy these things; they are priceless treasures; Jesus gives us these gifts of faith, hope and love and many others besides. For us, the challenge is to see Him as priceless: how do we make a whole-hearted commitment to follow Jesus as Lord? How does our devotion to Jesus make every other love seem pale in comparison? So often the world we live in counts importance and value by the price tag; the more money we spend on it, the more important it is to us. Jesus’ challenge: to see things differently. Faith, hope, love – these are priceless qualities; are they worth living for? Are they worth dying for? Are they worth following Jesus for?