

17 Rebuttals to Count the Cost

How Do Cheap Grace Commentators Explain the Parable of the King's Miscalculation?

If this parable of the king who surrenders in Luke 14 is given any kind of *literal* spiritual application, it undermines the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. It means the *risk* of miscalculation of the costs leads to loss of salvation. Grace is not free. You can go to heaven maimed (a high cost) or hell whole (no cost). (Matt. 5:30; Mark 9:42 *et seq.*)

Thus, we will see often the commentators who are wed to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace try to force unnatural readings on this parable in Luke 14:27 *et seq.* However, sometimes, we find refreshing admissions on Jesus' meaning as to the key elements of the Parable, even from those who defend the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.

The very fact the commentators who defend cheap grace have to distort Jesus' words to conform to their doctrine proves the true meaning of Jesus is impossible to ignore. The more absurd the spin to avoid Jesus' point, the more one can deduce Jesus' meaning is crystal clear.

Barnes: The Issue is Ability to Confront Enemy

Barnes says Jesus' point of mentioning in Luke 14:31 the story of the king emphasizes that some lack an *ability* to count the costs to confront their enemy. This spin is designed to take the focus off of the costs which you must sacrifice in advance so you are ready for the confrontation. Thus, Barnes says the reason we are going to be overwhelmed by our enemy's superior forces is as follows:

With ten thousand to meet... Whether he will be **able**, with the forces which he 'has,' to meet his enemy. Christ here perhaps intends to denote that the enemies which we have to encounter in following him are many and strong, and that 'our' strength is comparatively feeble. 'To meet him.' To contend with him. To gain a victory over him.

But the point of Jesus is not our ability to meet the enemy. It is our failure to count the costs *necessary* to confront our enemy. Jesus implies we *had the ability* all along. We failed to count the costs and sacrifice in advance what would have been necessary to confront the enemy and win.

Clarke Likewise Focuses on 'Ability' and 'Strength' To Meet Our Enemy

In a similar vein to Barnes, Clarke tries to imply that the king's defeat was not the failure to count the costs. Rather, he lacked the **strength** to meet his enemy. He lacked an **ability** to meet his enemy. But if you go back to the parable, Jesus' lesson was about the failure to *count the costs* in advance. Jesus defines this as '**renunciation of all that you have.**' In other words, the King had the **potential** to have more troops than 10,000, but he did not calculate correctly what He needed to sacrifice to face the enemy. He needed to *give up more personally* for the battle than he actually committed. The lesson is about *not counting the costs in advance* by making a personal sacrifice *in advance* of our battle against Satan. Jesus' message was not about lacking strength or ability. Jesus was **not** telling us where to look for more strength. Jesus was telling us simply to count the costs to be ready to face our enemy — Satan.

However, you will see in the next quote why Clarke obscures that Jesus is emphasizing miscalculating costs can lead to a loss of salvation. Jesus clearly believes costs are associated with salvation. Jesus says our incorrectly minimizing such costs will lead to a loss of salvation. Jesus refutes the

Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace which teaches salvation comes at *no cost*. Thus, Clarke must spin this parable to save the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. ***Clarke's spin will take the focus off your mistake in not counting the costs.*** Rather than you needing to renounce anything to face your enemy, ***you need only pray*** and everything is okay. Grace remains free. There is supposedly no cost to associate with grace and your ultimate salvation. Clarke explains:

This parable represents the absurdity of those who undertook to be disciples of Christ, without considering ***what difficulties they were to meet with***, and what ***strength they had to enable them to go through with the undertaking.*** He that will be a true disciple of Jesus Christ shall require no less than the ***mighty power of God*** to support him; as both hell and earth will unite to destroy him.

Clarke is saying that Jesus means that what we need to do to meet our enemies is pray for God's intervention. While this may be a good idea *apart* from this parable, it clearly is not the lesson Jesus intends you take from this parable. Clarke ignores what Jesus says is the *precondition* to be able to call on God for help. The parable is ***not*** addressing the question of the *strength* you must obtain from God by asking for the help of the Holy Spirit.

Rather, Jesus specifies the *condition* that you need *first* to *count the costs* so you are prepared for battle. This focuses on your side of the ledger: what you are *willing to sacrifice and put at risk in your battle*. It is not about what God will supply *if you make no sacrifice*. Instead, this is a parable telling you to count the costs first so you are ready for the battle. Otherwise, you will be overwhelmed and captured by your enemy. Or you will look foolish for starting well, but not having been prepared. Your house remains unfinished. You must renounce all that you have to be ready.

Thus, Jesus cannot possibly be teaching you that God will rescue you in your battles from temptation if you have yourself not already *cut off the body part ensnaring you in sin*. God requires personal responsibility *first*. Renounce all that is ensnaring you, and then you will not suffer defeat to your enemy the devil. Jesus says so!

Gill At First Correctly Sees What Jesus Means: The Professing Christian is Captured by Satan, the Enemy King

Gill recognizes that Jesus' point is a Christian who miscalculates the cost ends up captured by Satan. He says:

The king on the one side, is the Christian professor; ***true believers are kings***....The ***king on the other side, is the devil***; who is the king and prince of the rest of the devils,... and especially Satan, who is to be resisted, and by no means to be yielded to, though there is a great inequality between them: and therefore what man that engages in such a warfare....

Thus, Gill realizes the risk is you are captured by Satan. The risk must mean your salvation is at stake.

Gill Then Improperly Says The Cause of Defeat Is Failure to Consult with Other Christians and Pray to God for Help

However, Gill then does not recognize the costs are a personal sacrifice of "renouncing all that you have." (Luke 14:33.) Contrary to what Jesus says, Gill sees your defeat is due to a failure to ask other Christians and God for help.

[W]herefore ***it is necessary to*** sit down and ***consult***, not with flesh and blood, ***but with other Christians***; and chiefly, and above all, with God himself; what will be the charges of this warfare; the hardships to be endured; in whose name and strength they are to engage; what weapons to take, and how to use them; and how to get knowledge of the designs, meth-

ods, and strength of the enemy, and take every advantage of him.

Thus, for Gill, Jesus' point was that the costs that a Christian must count are *the need for prayer to God and support from other Christians*. The problem with Gill's idea is that this very teaching takes focus off what Jesus literally is insisting upon: *taking on your own cross* of denying yourself, renouncing all that you have, and thereby *counting the personal costs*. Jesus is saying you *must* do this before going to battle.

By contrast, Gill's teaching causes you to be ill-prepared by telling you *not to look inward at your deficiencies*. Rather Gill encourages you to *ignore* them and *count on miracles from God* that are indifferent to your lack of counting the costs which Jesus identifies. If you believe Gill, it is not your personal cross to bear that is Jesus' focus. It is supposedly the cross you failed to shift to Jesus for Him to bear that will make the difference.

Gill's Ideas versus Jesus' Words On Costliness of Following

However, is this what Jesus really means? Listen again to some of Jesus' words in the Parable of Counting the Cost and its context, both in Luke and the parallel in Matthew:

Whosoever doth not bear *his* own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Luk 14:27, ASV)

So therefore whosoever he be of you that *renounceth not all that he hath*, he cannot be my disciple. (Luk 14:33, ASV)

He that *loveth father or mother more than me* is *not worthy of me*; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is *not worthy of me*. (Mat 10:37, ASV)

And he that doth not take **his cross** and follow after me, is **not worthy of me**. (Mat 10:38, ASV)

Gill is obviously wrong. Jesus' message is not about the fact you lack strength due to not praying. The lack of prayer is not the *immediate reason* why you, as a king in the parable, will be captured by your enemy the devil. Rather, the point of these parables is to emphasize your need to "renounce all that you have." (Luke 14:33.) Jesus equates this with the need to "bear" your "own cross," and to love and follow Jesus above all other affections. This is a *cost*. You need to accept these costs before you can be prepared to face your enemy the devil. If you do not take these steps, Jesus says you are not prepared to face your enemy the devil. Your enemy will capture you and defeat you.

Thus, Jesus is actually implying that all the prayer in the world will not help the person who has not renounced all that he has (*e.g.*, sinful practices, and human relationships at odds with service to Jesus). Only such a person is bearing his own cross by preferring Jesus over such a sinful life. *Without these prior steps, prayer will do you no good*. In fact, Jesus is simply alluding to the well-established doctrine that God does not hear the prayers of the unrepentant and contrite. (See the main text in the chapter on *Count the Cost*.)

Final Analysis

When you take all the commentaries and synthesize them, you come up with a clearer understanding of the parable of *counting the costs*. Those who filter Jesus to sound like the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace make crucial admissions which undermine the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. They admit the king going to war in Luke 14 is a Christian. A true Christian. They admit the enemy king is Satan. They admit the cost of miscalculating the forces needed to meet Satan was surrender and defeat to Satan. (See Table 1 on page 8 below.)

However, those who filter Jesus and read Him so as not to undermine the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace try to change the nature of the *costs* so salvation remains free. They insist we know *a priori* that salvation is without personal cost. Thus, they rewrite Jesus' words to match that viewpoint. To them, even though Jesus says in context that the costs involved a renunciation of all that you have (Luke 14:33), the filtering-commentator says Jesus means you did not pray enough to God. Thus, the *cost* is supposedly that you did not depend entirely on God. In fact, you allegedly did not realize there was nothing you *could do* to be ready other than depend entirely on God. They insist you did not realize that there was no cost you could sacrifice to meet your enemy.

But what did Jesus really mean? ***The exact opposite.*** You are not prepared to battle the opposing king because you did not cut off the body parts ensnaring you in sin. (Mark 12:42-47.) You did not renounce all that you have. (Luke 14:33.) You did not take up your own cross and follow Jesus. (Luke 14:27 *cf.* Matt. 10:37-38.) ***You assumed salvation is free, without cost.*** You will suffer certain defeat, Jesus warns. Thus, ***the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace is precisely the message Jesus tried to warn you against.*** The Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace sets you up for defeat.

However, if you simply let Jesus teach you in context, you are prepared for facing Satan. To do this, and lead others to follow Christ, you will have to reject the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. But to do this will expose you to abuse and ridicule from the dominant religious authorities and their followers.

What should you do? *Count the cost, including the loss of friends and social approval.* But Jesus is the better reward. Don't worry. Accept the sacrifices. Following Jesus' words can never jeopardize your salvation. Persecution is just one more cost of following Jesus. Bonhoeffer paid the price for preaching costly grace. You can too.

This is not to say prayer has no role in a Christian life or following Jesus. However, *we need to pray for the things Jesus told us that we need*: the ability to pay the costs that God requires. Ask God to “lead us from temptation.” We also need to pray for the strength to resist the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace itself as a foreign social pressure. It seeks us to believe there are no costs we must suffer. If we fall for this gospel, Jesus says we are not ready to count the costs and suffer the sacrifice necessary to avoid capture of ourselves by Satan.

TABLE 1. Parable of King Going to War in Luke 14

Parable Elements	Modern Gospel Filter	Unfiltered by Modern Gospel
King going to war	Admits king is Christian.	King is Christian.
Enemy king	Admits enemy king is Satan.	Enemy king is Satan.
Petition for Surrender	Some suggest only loss of closeness with God at stake. Most are quiet on implication of surrender to enemy king.	Loss of salvation.
Costs that king did not count and underestimated	Failure to pray to God for strength in the battle. Failure to ask other Christians for help.	<i>Renunciation of all that you have: sinful desires and desire for family/social approval.</i>