

Sermon for Sunday, October 12, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE HIGH COST OF BUILDING TOWERS"

St. Luke 14:25-33

Text: "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down
and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?"

St. Luke 14:28

Last Tuesday at the Businessmen's Lunch, a young man from Peru was the speaker. He had an incredible story to tell. In Peru he had been a dedicated communist. He had been a militant, a subversive, a revolutionary. His whole life, his total being, had been dedicated to communism, to the overthrow of the governing regime of his country. He believed deeply in what he was doing and he was a dangerous threat to the government. His friends were also communists and they were hunted by the police. When one was captured, it was not unusual for him to be killed before he was brought in. But something happened to that young man. Someone confronted him with the claims of Jesus Christ. Now he is in this country getting a theological education so that he can go back home. He is still a revolutionary. He is a man whose life is still total commitment and absolutely dedicated. The only difference is, he is now committed to revolutionizing the lives of men through the power of Jesus Christ.

When our speaker was a communist, he was willing to pay the price of his commitment. Now that he is a Christian, he has even more total dedication to serving Jesus with his whole life. The cost of tower building for him is very high. It demands his life. And he is committed to finishing the tower. Never in his life has he been a fellow-traveler. Do you know what a fellow-traveler is? A fellow-traveler is one who believes in the principles of some ideology, he believes in the goals and objectives of some philosophy of life, but he himself is not a member of the particular party. He accepts the beliefs, but not the discipline and devotion demanded of a full-fledged member.

The world today is not being won by fellow-travelers. Hitler came into power because of the fanatical commitment of Nazis. Russia fell to communism because of totally devoted ideologists. Iran has fallen into the hands of its present leadership because of fanatical loyalists to the Islamic faith. Israel was created as a nation because there were Jews who were willing to pay the price to create it. The civil rights movement was born because there were brave black men and women who were willing to be abused, beaten, jailed and even killed for their cause. No cause--whether for good or for evil--has ever been successful apart from total and complete commitment.

Mainline Protestant churches today are in serious decline. Many of us who claim to be Christians are living unhappy, defeated lives. Why is this so? Could it be that we are fellow-travelers? Could it be that we believe in the principles of Christianity; that we believe in Jesus as God's Son, but we are fellow-travelers who are not willing to pay the price of total commitment.

A German writer of our day has said, "Even people who pay little attention in either their speech or their life, to the fact that there is a God, have a curious propensity for keeping some kind of connection with the holy, even if it be only a very thin thread." How true that is. There are so many who claim to be a Baptist or a Presbyterian or a Catholic and have their names on some church role. Yet, they rarely attend, going only on some special occasion such as Easter or Christmas. Yet these same people would be appalled if someone suggested that we abolish the churches. You see, the fact is very few of us are willing to be totally submerged in a godless world. We want to keep open a view to one very, very tiny star.

Is that sometimes true in your life? I know it is in mine. We don't want to abolish God, but by the same token we don't want enough of him to disturb our lives. But let me tell you something. The struggle that we see going on in the world today--the struggle between Iran and Iraq, Israel's struggle for survival, the threat of Russia, the battles raging in many parts of Africa, all are a struggle far deeper and far more profound than we realize. Actually, what is raging in the world today is a struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. It is a struggle for the souls of men. That's what the great historian, Arnold Toynbee, meant when he wrote in his book, The World and the West, "the present encounter," he said, "is now moving off the technological plane on to the spiritual plane."

But there is a struggle going on on a more personal level. There are more marriages breaking up today than ever before. In just one of our Sunday School classes here at Central I discovered the other day that about a third of the children in the class are from one parent homes. There is more mental illness today than at any period since such records have been kept. There is more crime--more murders, more rapes, more violent crimes--than ever before. America has more crime and has more persons locked up behind bars than any country in the free world.

Are you sensing something of that struggle in your life? I suspect so. I suspect most of us are. It is a time of tension, a time of uncertainty, a time when individuals feel they are the helpless pawns of events over which they have no control.

Do you know why Christians are faring little or no better than anyone else in these times of crisis? It is because so many of us are fellow-travelers. Back when we first made our commitment to Jesus, back when we first dedicated our lives to the Lord and said, "Yes, I'm a Christian", we had grand visions of our lives being a tower built for God. But now we either don't have the spiritual resources or the commitment or the will to finish building what we started.

Do you know what the Bible says about fellow-travelers--about people with limited commitment? The Bible says, "Because you are neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth saith the Lord." Yes, I suspect a lot of us are a bad taste in God's mouth.

Do you realize how radical the demands of Jesus are? In our Scripture for this morning he said, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and everything dear to him he cannot be my disciple." And that means simply that if Jesus isn't first in our lives, he won't be second and we can't be his disciple. Let me ask you, what is first in your life this morning?

So the first point I want to make this morning is that there is a great struggle going on between the forces of light and the powers of darkness. It is a struggle for the souls of men not only world-wide, but individually and personally. In that struggle there is no place for fellow-travelers. Either a person makes a total commitment to Jesus or he decides for the other side.

The second point I want to make is this: the person who can't or won't decide will be torn up internally. Ambivalence is a terrible thing. It does dreadful emotional damage to people. You know what ambivalence is--that's when you see your mother-in-law drive over a cliff in your new cadillac. But spiritual ambivalence is when I have enough of God to bother my conscience, but not

enough of God to control my life. In our day it is the Christian fellow-traveler who is anxious and concerned and uneasy. He is always running at half-steam. He always has a dirty conscience and a wounded heart. He wants a bit of God and eternity, but he is not willing to pay the price of a changed life. As a consequence, he is leading an unhappy and defeated life. As Jesus put it, "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Things go wrong in life and we say, "Where was God? Things turn out differently than we had hoped and we say, "Why did God let this happen?" A marriage breaks apart, a business venture fails, a relationship fails, someone lets us down, and we want to put the blame on God. Actually, the blame is in our own divided hearts. And that brings me to the third point I want to make this morning which is this: Only the single-hearted man has a clear and unfogged and unobscured goal. Jesus knew that. That is why he insisted that to follow him was a total decision, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God," he said. He said, "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will cling to the one and despise the other." Or, as he put it in our Scripture this morning, "Would any of you think of building a tower without first sitting down and calculating the cost, to see whether he could afford to finish it?"

Does that make sense to you? Only the person who is totally committed; only when we follow Jesus with a clear vision and a single-hearted commitment will peace and healing come into our divided hearts.

On our trip to Europe this past summer I discovered a man named Domenikus Zimmerman. In Bavaria--located out in the middle of nowhere between Steingaden and Rottenbuch--is a picturesque church called the Wies Kirche, the church in the meadow. How did that church get there? In the mid 1700's, Zimmerman was German's foremost church architect and even today he is listed among German's 25 top all-time artists. But he was also a civic leader and served as burgomaster of the town of Landsberg.

Two Silesian Wars and an Austrian invasion in the 1740's were more than he could handle for those were tough times. So when he was commissioned to build a church in the middle of a clearing in a Bavarian forest, he was delighted. With the help of his brother Johann Baptist, a fresco painter, he built the Wies Kirche, the finest example of rococo architecture in all of Europe. The white nave with its touches of gold, the richly colored sanctuary and the vivid ceiling fresco make Die Wies an unforgettable experience.

But the architect thought so, too, He was so pleased with his work that he quit everything and moved to the church and lived next to it for the rest of his life. No more labor, no more political turmoil, no more dealing with the problems of people or the troubles of the world. I can sympathize with old Domenikus, can't you? How wonderful it would be to settle down away from demands and duties and responsibility. It is more fun to be a retired architect in Die Wies than a beleaguered burgomaster in Landsberg.

Yet, the peace that Jesus offers those who follow him is not found there. No, it is found out in the tribulations and problems and troubles of the world where the single-hearted man, with his eyes fixed on Jesus, lives out his commitment. How about you? Are you an enemy of Jesus, opposed to him? No? Then are you a fellow-traveler with an unfinished tower? Would your life work better if you turned your life over completely to Jesus? If you have a divided heart, try giving it to Jesus and let him put it back together for you.