

Story Time With Jesus: Tales of the Kingdom

Discipleship and Commitment

July 5-6

Introduction

Hey everyone, I'm Mark, and I want to welcome you to our service! Today, we're continuing our series called *Story Time with Jesus: Tales of the Kingdom*.

Imagine a penniless carpenter from a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire—no wealth, no army, no social media account—yet His words reshaped the world. Two thousand years later, they still echo across continents, languages, and hearts. His teachings have been memorized by billions and have inspired, healed, and transformed countless lives. His listeners were set ablaze because they sensed it—He held the words of life.

But what's remarkable is this: Jesus didn't reserve His teachings for religious experts or ivory-tower scholars. His words reached farmers, fishermen, beggars, and even sex workers. How could one man speak in a way that crossed every social, cultural, and moral boundary?

He told stories.

What Is a Parable?

Jesus' stories came to be known as *parables*. The word "parable" comes from the Greek word *parabolē*, which means "to cast alongside" or "to throw next to." It's the combination of *para* (alongside) and *bolē* comes from the word (to throw or place). In other words, Jesus would take something familiar from everyday life—a seed, a feast, a building, a father and son—and place it side-by-side with a spiritual reality.

By doing so, He wasn't just illustrating a point; He was inviting people to *compare and consider*. To lean in. To discover. These weren't just moral lessons—they were Kingdom revelations. And they came with a choice: *Will you see it? Will you step in? Will you respond?*

Series Recap

In Week 1, Pastor Earl walked us through the Parable of the Soils. It's the first major parable Jesus tells in all three Synoptic Gospels. And it's not just a story about farming—it's a mirror for the heart. Jesus even says, "*If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? (Mark 4:13)*."

That's because everything Jesus teaches us about the Kingdom hinges on our ability to receive His truth. If our hearts are hardened, distracted, or shallow, the seed of His Word won't grow. But if our hearts are good soil—soft, humble, and open—then something supernatural begins to take root.

Last week, Pastor Glenn explored the breathtaking nature of God's forgiveness. In His Kingdom, grace doesn't play by the world's rules. God doesn't guilt us into obedience—He forgives radically, like a Father sprinting toward a wayward child. That kind of grace doesn't excuse sin—it melts hearts. It reorders lives. It changes everything.

Today's Focus: Discipleship & Commitment

So, Jesus' parables first invite us to *hear* with an open heart. Then they call us to *receive* His grace by faith. But where does it all lead?

Today we're going to explore what happens after we receive grace. Jesus is going to tell stories that place the casual crowd beside a committed disciple. Because in the Kingdom, grace is free... but following the King will cost you everything.

It's like a marriage: the ceremony might be simple, but the covenant costs a lifetime. Today, we'll sit at the feet of Jesus and listen as He invites us to build something lasting, to count the cost, and to walk—not as casual listeners—but as true sons and daughters of the Kingdom.

Before You Say 'I Do'

It's Summer, which means beaches, camping, and barbecue. Another thing that Summer brings are weddings. Every Summer our Pastors have the privilege of officiating weddings. Last month I had the privilege of officiating the wedding of a former youth I've known from 5th grade. He was assigned to my tent at youth camp and now he's a grown man and a loving husband. Ideally, when our Pastors walk with a couple through this momentous occasion, we not only prepare them for the wedding day but the marriage that comes after. Not only the ceremony but the covenant.

One of the greatest resources we've found is a workbook called, *Before You Say 'I Do'*. Just as the title implies, this workbook covers, or should I say *uncovers*, some of the most significant issues young couples will face in their marriage. It covers finances, expectations, roles, conflict resolution, sex, and so on. I always tell couples that marriage is like having a baby, you'll never be fully ready but helps to be prepared. I see it as helping couples defuse potential landmines that could destroy their marriage down the road.

The content of this workbook is deep and couples sometimes have to revisit painful experiences that have shaped who they are today. I once had a couple begin the workbook and then come to the realization that they actually weren't ready to be married because there were things they had to work on. "Wow Mark, didn't that feel unloving? You broke up their marriage!"

When I was in Bible College, the President of the school said that when he did pre-marital counseling with a couple his goal was to help them find any reasons they should not be together. It sounded unloving at the time. But in hindsight, I realized that was the most loving this he could do! He wasn't breaking up their marriage, he was saving them from a lifetime of misery and regret! These days anybody can get married. It's not hard. In fact, anybody can perform weddings too. You just need a little slip of paper. Getting married isn't difficult, staying married is. So many people are infatuated with the wedding that they don't think about the marriage. The wedding is a day, a marriage is forever.

Count the Cost

Just as we try to be upfront about the responsibility and cost of marriage, Jesus was upfront about the cost of following Him. Like marriage, anyone can start their walk with Jesus but to actually stay the path is much more difficult. Satan is upfront about the rewards of following him, but then you spend a lifetime reaping the cost. Jesus is upfront about the cost of following Him, but then you spend a lifetime reaping the reward.

²⁵ "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them He said: ²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple," (Luke 14:25-27).

The Bible says that large crowds were following Jesus. And Jesus turned to them and said, “I’m glad that you’re here and that you want to follow Me but before you say ‘I do’” there are some things you need to know.

Jesus said to follow Him you need to leave and cleave. There can be no other voices that are above His. Not your husband, or your wife, or your parents, or your children, not even you. In fact, your love for Jesus might even look like hate toward them. Has that ever happened to you? Has your love and obedience for God ever looked unloving to others?

Maybe the amount of time you spend serving Jesus or the sacrifices you’ve made feel unloving even hateful to your friends and family. Maybe people have labeled you unloving, hateful, or bigoted for holding to the truth of God’s Word. Jesus is asking, “Are you willing to be hated by the world and even your friends and family if it means following Jesus?” The moment I said, “Yes” to Jalee I also simultaneously said, “No” to billions of other women. I’m sure they hated that. But Jesus is saying that in order to follow Him we can have no other earthly relationships before Him.

He goes on to say that whoever does not carry their cross — in another passage He says, “daily take up your cross” cannot follow Him. Following Jesus is a daily choice. The moment you said ‘I do’ was like your wedding day but now comes the marriage and it involves daily taking up your cross.

Marriage only works when both people commit to die to themselves every day. The moment you stop fighting for your marriage is the moment it starts to unravel. That’s why Jesus said, *‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.’*

Following Jesus is not just a one-time decision—it’s a daily choice of surrender. And like a marriage, if we stop dying to ourselves, our walk with Jesus grows distant, strained, and lifeless. Discipleship is love in action. It is a daily choice of surrender.

Count the Cost

Before you come to the altar, before you say, ‘I do’, consider the kind of covenant relationship Jesus is calling you to. Pardon my language, but Jesus isn’t looking to be an open relationship or your friend with benefits, He is madly in love with you and wants to spend an eternity together. So now Jesus is going to tell (you guessed it) a story. In this parable, Jesus places two things side by side — the casual crowd with a committed disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² 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. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be My disciples,” (Luke 14:28-33).

Every one of us faces countless little choices that must be made on a daily basis — Do I eat oatmeal or cereal, do I wear my brown shoes or black shoes, etc.

But Jesus is saying that there are certain milestone decisions that will alter the course of our lives and greatly impact the lives of the people around us. When it comes to these milestone decisions — buying a house, who to get married to, etc. don't we consider if we have what it takes to finish well?

Last month our family sadly transitioned from our 4Runner, which we loved, to a more practical family car with more seats for our growing family. The car salesman didn't just say, "Well, you look like you really want this car and I can see you're excited so here you go!" No, the dealership spent a considerable amount of time gathering information from us and looking into our background to see if this was really something we could do. They sat with us and gave us the breakdown of what this decision would look like over the next few years.

Same thing when Jalee and I started our relationship. We knew we were interested in one another but we didn't just rush to the altar. We did the work, we went through the workbook and we had countless conversations about our expectations, and values to see if there was any legitimate reason we should not be together. We seriously had to wrestle with the question of whether or not we were called to be married. Could we be more effective for the Kingdom if we remained singles or did we truly believe God was calling us to serve Him as one. There were a couple of times when our values and preferences didn't seem to align and we thought maybe we'd reached an impasse but we were able to work through our differences. And after leaving no stone unturned we determined that there was no significant reason we should not be together.

Conclusion

We commit ourselves to the long-haul for so many areas of our lives — big investments, parenting, marriage. But there is not greater decision than the one that will impact eternity. Will we give our lives to follow Jesus? Have you really asked yourself why you follow Jesus? Is it for blessings, good community, belonging, etc.? Or do you follow Jesus for Jesus? If all those things get stripped away will you still follow Him? Are you willing to place Him above every other person or relationship? Are you willing to surrender daily? Will we remain part of the casual crowd or will we count the cost of being His committed disciple?

Jesus tells us that if we would come after Him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. If we try to save our own life we will lose it but if we lose our life for Him we will find it. Once we fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith we will receive the crown of righteousness and join the Groom at His banquet feast on the day of His appearing.

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Are there any voices that are competing with the voice of Jesus? These could be internal or external voices, (Relationship, Family, Social Pressures, etc.)
2. In what ways is saying 'I do' to Jesus like saying 'I do' in marriage? What does it mean to be in a Covenant Relationship with someone?
3. Jesus asks a lot from us in order to follow Him but what have you received in return? What else does the Bible promise we receive from our relationship with Him?