

“Is it Worth the Cost?”  
Matthew 2:13-23

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Looking back on our lives, I’m sure we all remember something we had been really looking forward to, really wanted to do, and it proved much, much harder than we thought it would. It made us ask if it was even worth the cost.

One of my most vivid and horrible memories is of my first class in seminary. I had been looking forward to seminary. I was convinced it was what I was supposed to do. I started off taking summer Hebrew and half-way through I was on verge of getting an F. I was just inches away from flunking out. I had left a paying job, moved my wife and dog to New Jersey, living in a tiny apartment in married student housing, and I was on the verge of flunking. Elizabeth was looking for a job, I was doing nothing but study, both sets of parents were giving us money, and here I was about to fail. I had to honestly ask myself, is this worth it? Is it worth the cost?

Think about it and we’ve all had that happen. Most people who have ever been in a long-term relationship have had a moment or two when they realized, ‘This is hard! Is it worth it? Is it worth the cost? Is this relationship worth it?’

We’ve all been there. Relationship, school, a new job, breaking the bonds of an addiction. This is tough! Is it worth it? Is this thing I want to do worth the time and energy and pain? Is it worth it? Is it worth the cost?

It’s a question people ask about Christianity. Is it worth the hardship? Is it worth the cost? Making time for Bible study and prayer, loving someone who is hard to love, forgiving someone who is hard to forgive, is hard. It’s work!

Isn't Christianity supposed to be easy? All that love and peace and joyfully telling it on the mountain, isn't it supposed to be easy?

In some ways, Christianity is very easy. No expensive pilgrimage. No walking across hot coals or fasting for months on end. Christianity is not a particularly arduous faith.

But Christianity also has a cost. Is it worth it? Is it worth the cost? Today's text asks that question. Is it worth the cost?

Let me take a moment and explain we have absolutely no evidence Herod ever ordered this massacre. There is absolutely no evidence this ever happened, though it is the kind of thing Herod would do. We actually know quite a bit about Herod from a number of sources. They tell us Herod was a cruel, violent, and extremely paranoid man. He murdered a number of his own family members with his own hands. But there's no indication he ever ordered these murders. No evidence this ever actually happened.

Remember, Matthew is not writing what we call 'history.' Matthew's goal is to present Jesus as a second Moses. Reading this text, Matthew wants us to think about Moses. Remember, Pharaoh ordered all the boy babies to be killed when Moses was born. Moses spent time in Egypt. Moses also spent time in exile, just as Jesus was 'exiled' to Nazareth from his native Bethlehem. The point is, Jesus is a second Moses. This meant a lot to Matthew's readers.

But our text also makes two very important points.

The first is power resists God. Our God is a God of love, equality, and compassion. Power, Herod, will always resist love, equality, and compassion. Power is always paranoid, and it will resist anything even coming close to threatening it. We saw what happened when power was threatened in the Tiananmen Square uprising in China in 1989. We saw it in the Arab Spring uprisings. We see it today in Myanmar where the military junta is fiercely suppressing calls for freedom, in Iran where women are protesting for their rights, and of course we see it in the war in Europe. Power always resists equality, compassion, and love. Power always resists God. That's something worth keeping in mind.

The second important point is having Jesus with us has a cost. Just because Mary and Joseph are his earthly parents, just because they have Jesus in their care, does not mean their life is easy. They have to flee to Egypt in the middle of the night. They don't know anyone in Egypt! But they have to go.

And when they finally come back, after Herod has died, they can't go home. They can't settle back in Bethlehem. They have to go way up north, to Galilee, and live in Nazareth.

Did they wonder? Did they ask if it was worth the cost? They could have stayed in Bethlehem and let Jesus die. They could have sold him into slavery in Egypt. They could have stayed in Egypt. Lived out their lives there. Lots of options open to them.

Did they think about that when they were slogging their way to Egypt? Making a new home in Nazareth? This is hard. Is it worth it? Is it worth the cost?

You would think having baby Jesus in your care would have some benefits, but it doesn't seem that way. Having Jesus with them had a cost. And so it is for us, as well.

Disciplined Bible study and prayer take time. Loving someone who is hard to love is not easy. Forgiving someone who has wronged us can be surprisingly difficult. We may even need professional help. Believe me, I know. It's hard.

Mary and Joseph stuck with it. They did as they were divinely told to do. Did they ever regret it? We don't know. The text doesn't say. It leaves us hanging. It invites us to decide for ourselves.

What have we decided? We're starting a New Year: new projects, new visions for the future. Perhaps embracing our faith with new earnestness and commitment. Perhaps consciously, deliberately, holding Jesus with us even when it's hard. Is it worth it? Is it worth the cost?

Are you struggling with your faith? Are you adding up the cost in your mind? The witness of our faith says Christianity is well worth the effort. Not only in the next life but this one as well. But the witness of our faith is also 'Yes, there are times when it's hard. There are times we are inclined to stop and count the cost.'

Friend, if that's you, talk about it. Share your concern and your burden with others. There's nothing shameful about asking hard questions. It really is perfectly normal. For sure and for certain you're not the only one wondering if it's worth the cost.

A new year, new beginnings, new projects and possibilities. Do we go forward? Do we go back? Do we keep on keeping on? Do we give up? Is it worth the cost? Is it worth it?

Praise God, most of us will not have to go running to Egypt in the middle of the night. Most of us will never spend years living in exile. We will keep Jesus in our midst and never experience anything like what happened to Mary and Joseph.

And yet, and yet, Christianity has a cost. Those with ears to hear, let them listen. Christianity has a cost.

Is it worth it? You tell me. Only you can decide. Amen.