

“Am I Willing To Pay The Price?”

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Luke 14:25-35

A movie released in 1999 called “The Matrix” became a smashing box office success prompting two additional movies making a trilogy. Keanu Reeves played the main character named Neo. At the beginning of the first movie, Neo is living a very ordinary life, but is swept away into an underworld where he has an encounter with a man named Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburn.

There is a classic scene in The Matrix where Neo sit across a small table from Morpheus in a dark room in a run-down mansion with thunderstorms rolling in the background. Morpheus, wearing his very cool black leather trench coat and mirrored glasses, stares at Neo. He opens his hands and offers Neo a choice. In one hand he holds a blue pill and in the other he holds a red pill. He says,

“This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you

stay in Wonderland and I'll show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

There is a pause as Neo considers his two options. Dramatic music rises and he reaches for the red pill. Morpheus stops him. “Remember,” he says, “all I'm offering you is the truth, nothing more.”

The choice that Neo has in front of him has permanent consequences for his life. If he chooses the blue pill, he must say “no” to the hidden reality just below the surface of the world that he was just beginning to see, and must go back to life as it was before.

But if he chooses the red pill, he is saying “no” to the status quo of his ordinary life. His eyes would be opened to see a reality that will forever change his perception about the reality of everything about life, including himself. There would be no going back.

He would have to say “no” to one option in order to say “yes” to the other.

Perhaps not with the impact of Neo's choice, but we have in front of us choices like this all the time. We must say “no” to some things in order to say “yes” to others.

Jesus talked about the cost of following him in just this way.

READ LUKE 14:25-35

Jesus was teaching here about choosing.

When two people choose to get married they are not only saying “yes” to one person for life, but “no” to every other person in the world.

When we purchase something, we are saying “yes” to that item, and we are saying “no” to other items we could have purchased.

Choosing always costs us something.

As editor for the school newspaper in college, my staff and I published weekly, every Wednesday morning. That meant on Tuesday evening we needed the final layout with finished and edited stories, pictures and graphics, as well as ads completed and ready to go to press.

Every week, I needed to make a call about whether or not we had done enough to ensure we had stories that were fact checked with corroborating details, and in some cases even if we had a story worth publishing.

One time, Julie, our News Editor came in with a story late on Tuesday. It was an important and impactful story, but it wasn’t complete. It needed more quotes and details before we could in good conscience publish the story.

Julie was out of commission and couldn’t do the leg work necessary to finish the story. So, I had a choice to make.

On a tight deadline, I could say “no” to my other editing responsibilities with the rest of the paper, in order to say “yes” to get this timely and important news story completed on deadline. Or I could say “no” to the story so that I could pay attention to all of the many details with the rest of that issue.

My first inclination was to try to do both. But if I tried to say “yes” to both, neither would get the attention they needed to be done well.

Churches face this same reality. A handful of years ago, I visited a very large church that started in Brighton called 2/42. A group of leaders from Chilson Hills Church, where I grew up, met with a few of their leaders so that we could learn from them.

One of their primary leaders told us that with such a large congregation they were continually being approached by people from inside and outside the congregation with new ministry ideas. He said that many of these ideas were wonderful ideas that could really help people and make the world a better place. They had a biblical foundation, and could be done with energy and heart to serve God.

However, he said that they would say “no” to just about all of these ideas because as a church they had clarity about who they were and were clear about the vision and work God called them to accomplish. If they said “yes” to these good ideas, it would water down their focus of ministry and render them ineffective with their primary work.

He said that they needed to be very clear and laser focused on their unique vision and allow other churches or other ministries to carry the torch for those other good ideas.

I think they were onto a very important idea. They needed to say “no” to many things in order to say “yes” to a few.

In this passage from Luke, Jesus was teaching about not only choosing, but the cost of choosing.

Following Jesus has probably been communicated by the church for far too long as an easy choice for people that doesn't come with much of a cost. In certain places we still hear people say that all you need is Jesus and your life will be great — every day with sunshine and roses.

However, many who have gone before us (dating all the way back to Jesus' 12 closest friends) have found that following Jesus is much more costly when the path is taken seriously.

In fact, most of those 12 close friends of Jesus were killed for their faith.

We have in this congregation's history those who willingly said “yes” to Jesus and it cost them something. I'll highlight a few.

If we talk with Leona Frost, our church archivist, she will take us back into our archives 90 years to find a group of people in 1928 who sacrificed by choosing to mortgage their homes to build this sanctuary.

They said “no” to many luxuries and amenities in their personal lives, in order to say “yes” to the greater call of building a place where people in future generations might come together as a

community to experience the presence of God. That faith-based “yes” cost them something.

There was also a time when, if people did not give money regularly to this church, designated leaders would strike their name from membership. I would not recommend this practice for our congregation today, but it highlights how strongly some felt that being part of God’s family needed to mean something and cost people something.

Others in our congregation’s past have said “yes” to God and “no” to preserving their reputation. During World War II, when it wasn’t popular, people from this congregation housed refugees.

A bunch of years later, when an independent living home called the Baldwin House was proposed two blocks south of this building, people of this congregation said “yes” and stuck out their necks to advocate for making the facility accessible to people of lower income.

People of this congregation have set us a good example in faith by saying “no” to many things in order to say “yes” to God.

Is there anything that you are saying “no” to in your life, in order

to say “yes” to God? If your only answer is sleeping in on Sunday mornings, then consider what that means.

Consider that being truly committed to serving God, may be the most costly choice you ever make.

Are you willing to pay the price for following God and aligning yourself with God’s purposes in the world?

It could cost you everything ... and if it does, do you think it will be worth the cost?