

“Count the Cost...And Follow Me!”

Matthew 8:18-22

September 16, 2018

Scripture Reading: Matt 8:18-22

There has been a tendency in the evangelical world (and a temptation among gospel preachers) to present the gospel in the most appealing way possible, removing every potential obstacle so that someone might have a favorable response to Christ, at least in the moment.

When I was just getting my feet wet as a young pastor, we were doing youth ministry and had been invited to an evangelistic youth event at a neighboring evangelical church with a good reputation in our community. We watched a drama and then the youth pastor got up to give an invitation, to which a handful of kids responded by going forward to “make decisions.” The problem was they were never told what they were making a decision about. Nothing was said about sin or repentance, not to mention the kinds of demands that Jesus Himself issued for those who would follow Him.

Now I’m sure this youth pastor meant well, but in the end he did a disservice to them by giving them the impression that they were on good terms with God without calling them to forsake their sin or count the cost of following Christ. He led them to believe that all was well with God because they had had an emotional experience. He made it too easy for them to become a Christian.

But the reality is that Jesus didn’t make it easier for people to follow Him. In fact, He seemed to make it harder. He said things like,

- *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”* (Matt 16:24-25)
- *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not*

worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matt 10:37-38)

- To the rich young ruler, He said, *“sell your possessions and give to the poor...then come and follow Me”* (Matt 19:21). Jesus demanded that this young man give up the one thing he loved more than God.

Why does Jesus speak this way? Doesn’t He want people to follow Him? Of course He does! And that is precisely why He puts these challenges before us. He wants us to follow *Him*, as He is as Lord with all that demands as well as all the benefits. Jesus speaks this way because He doesn’t want people to follow some vain imagination of what they think the kingdom of God will be.

It’s important to remember where we left a couple weeks ago. Large crowds were following Jesus because they were fascinated by His miraculous works. He has been healing the sick of every kind of disease, casting out demons with a word, and on more than one occasion would miraculously feed thousands of people from just a few loaves and fish. While these miraculous signs attested to Jesus’ authority and the validity of His teaching, the danger is that some would follow Jesus for the surface benefits without truly coming to terms with His purpose and mission and what it would cost to follow Him.

Jesus did not want vague followers who were only interested in a life of health, wealth, and earthly prosperity. He wanted followers who would be willing to forsake the enticements and comforts of this world for the greater treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven—those who would follow Him into triumph through His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13)

As we come to Matthew 8:18-22, Jesus again calls us to embrace the cost of following Him. The main thrust of today’s passage is simple yet sobering: **Count the Cost and follow Christ—at all cost!** There are two emphases in this statement. The first is to *count the cost* of following Christ which is illustrated with the first man Jesus encounters in vs. 19. The second emphasis is the *call to follow Christ* which is stressed in vs. 21-22 with the second man that encounters Jesus. Let’s take a closer look:

1. **Following Christ requires counting the cost** (Matt 8:18-20).

[18-20]

Its interesting to note that this man who comes to Jesus with such enthusiasm is a scribe. By in large the scribes were not fans of Jesus because He was dismantling their Jewish traditions and challenging their authority. But apparently this scribe could not dismiss Jesus as a mere radical. There was a ring of truth in His teaching. He could not deny the hard evidence of Jesus' supernatural healings and authority over demons. He saw remarkable potential in Jesus. He was a leader and teacher unlike any other. He had authority unlike any other human being. His works were supernatural in nature. Oh the potential Jesus had to overcome the Romans, to be the kind of leader the Jewish people needed.

And so He comes to Jesus with great enthusiasm and says, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!" The only problem is that this young man has no idea as to where Jesus is going.

At first, Jesus response seems a bit discouraging, yet perhaps it's actually a compassionate response. In a sense, Jesus say, "just hold on a minute, if you want to follow Me there is something you need to understand first. Foxes have holes that they can hide in for shelter and safety. Birds have nests to make their home in, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head.

He is alerting this man to the reality that following Jesus is not a guarantee of comfort. Self-indulgence is not a part of Jesus's plan. Following Jesus is not a life of ease and luxury. Following Christ means living as a sojourner, as though this earth is not your home.

Jesus puts a halt to this man's premature commitment and rather calls him to a life of absolute surrender. Will he follow Jesus into the wilderness? Will he follow Jesus to Gethsemane where every last loyalty to self must be surrendered to the Father's will? Will he take up his cross and follow Jesus to Golgotha where discipleship

requires death? Does his grand vision for his life on this earth climax in a tomb?

Jesus is not calling us to a life of monasticism or self-induced suffering, but discipleship means that when we have to chose between our comfort and our Lord, we follow Christ.

Jesus is not saying that it is wrong for us to have a house to live in. But He is saying that if we have to choose between a house (or any other earthly comforts) and following Christ, its ok to not have a house (or earthly comforts, or impressive incomes). He's not saying its wrong to have a place we call home on this earth, as long as it doesn't become home in the ultimate sense.

My house feels comfortable to me because it has my couch and my bed and all my basic necessities. If I come to stay at your house, you have a bed and couch too, but it doesn't feel the same to me because its not home. That's the way our lives should be on this earth—we never quite feel at home here because we aren't at home in this world. Christ is our home. We find our comfort in Him now and one day we will find our perfect rest with Him in heaven because Christ is our home.

Still I wrestle with why Jesus was so quick to challenge this man's premature commitment. I think its because Jesus is guarding this man from the danger of self-deceit and disillusionment. He thinks He knows himself well enough to make this commitment—just like Peter. Yet when he discovers that following Jesus is not just about making a better earthly life for himself, but a road of costly discipleship, he is likely to find himself disappointed and disillusioned. Perhaps he's like many today who want all the benefits of Christ without a life of discipleship.

It's interesting that Matthew never tells us what this man's response to Jesus was. Did he follow Jesus or did he turn back. Perhaps Matthew leaves us hanging because he wants us to see ourselves in this scribe. How will we respond to Jesus' call to

discipleship? Have we counted the cost? If we were honest, would we say that we want the benefits of Jesus with out a life of discipleship? We want heaven in the end. We want blessing now. But do we want to live as though our life is not our own and Jesus is Lord of all? Jesus is speaking to us. Being a Christian is more than mere association with Christ. Being a Christ-follower has distinctive demands—to follow Jesus as Lord.

2. **Following Christ must surpass all other earthly loyalties** (Matt 8:21-22)

[vs. 21-22]

If the first man demonstrates premature commitment on the one of a spectrum, this man is at the other end hesitant to follow Christ without reservation. This man is struggling to relinquish competing loyalties for Christ.

When he says, “let me first go bury my father,” he is probably not asking Jesus for just a day or two to attend the funeral of his recently deceased father. It is more likely that his father is still alive, and may possibly live for a number of years. In the ancient Near East, a son was expected to help his father in the family business until his father had died and the inheritance had been divided. The final family devotion was to see that one’s parents were properly buried.¹

So this man is probably expressing an interest in following Jesus, but only after his primary responsibilities to his family have been fulfilled. In other words, this man is saying that following Jesus is important, but it is secondary to other primary loyalties which take precedence over the Lord. [homework vs. family devotions]

Perhaps it is even possible that this man was unwilling to risk the loss of his father’s inheritance. Perhaps he didn’t want to lose his opportunity to maximize his earthly gains

Jesus response is, “Follow Me”—make me your primary loyalty—“and let the dead bury their own dead.” In other words, “let the world take care of the things of the world.”²

Certainly Jesus is not saying its wrong to attend our parent’s funeral. But He is saying that when there is a conflict of loyalty between family and Christ, discipleship means following Christ (including the spirit in which you do it). Most certainly Jesus is not advocating a general disposition of dishonor toward parents or any other family members. In Matt 15, Jesus Himself calls us to honor God by honoring our parents. Only when we would have to sin to honor our parents, are we called to withhold honor—and even then doing it in an honorable way.

The point Jesus is making is this: **You can’t have Christ as second. He must have ultimate loyalty as Lord or you cannot be His disciple.** Discipleship means “all other allegiances are relative to Him.”³ You cannot have Christ as your supreme treasure while always second guessing the value of following Him.⁴ Divided hearts don’t display or delight in the worth of Christ.

Again Matthew does not tell us the man’s response. Perhaps he wants us to see ourselves in this man too. We are quick to say that we will follow Christ wherever we go, but as soon as other loyalties conflict with following Jesus, we hesitate.

What is your first priority? What is your highest loyalty? Is it self? Is it family? Is it earthly gain or status? Is it comfort or entertainment? Jesus is speaking to us, saying, “Follow Me. Count the cost and follow Me.”

¹ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Matthew 8-15*, pg. 24.

² MacArthur, pg. 25.

³ John Piper

⁴ Ibid.

What does counting the cost look like? To answer that question, we must first we must come to terms with the nature of discipleship. Discipleship is not just learning the tenets of the faith. It is learning to follow Christ in all of life. This includes following Christ in:

- What I think and believe (doctrine/theology)
- Relationships (including marriage and parenting); all relationships and now I conduct myself in those relationships should be subject to spirit and character of Christ. [If you are in a potentially pre-marriage relationship with a non-Christ-follower, marriage would mean yoking yourself to conflicting allegiances by being one with Christ and marrying an unbeliever]
- Financial decisions
- Matters of purity, entertainment, hobbies
- Thoughts, actions, desires
- All decisions.

What might it cost to follow Christ?

- The social discomfort of differing values from the world (hatred from the world)
- Life-style changes (as you forsake the values of the world for Kingdom values)
- Strained family relationships
- Persecution
- Your life-long primary loyalty to self (Your life is no longer your own; you will need to daily die to self as you learn to serve God and others)
- Personal control and pride
- Idols (and idolatrous relationships with many things)
- Suffering, imprisonment, death

There is a two-fold cost in following Christ. The first is dying to self because we still crave the very sinful pleasures and tendencies that Christ has saved us from. The second is dying to this world. We live in a world under Satan's dominion, who hates God all who love Him; a world whose values oppose our Kingdom values. Following Christ means fighting the battle within as well as enduring the battles of the world.

So why would anyone choose this road of discipleship when the cost seems so high? Because we see the present and eternal blessings Christ offers us as infinitely more precious than anything it would cost us on this earth. So let me conclude by reminding you of what Jesus offers you:

- Forgiveness of sin which reconciles you to God
- Freedom from sin's guilt and shame
- The eternal security of eternal life in heaven (new bodies; no sorrow, pain, or death)
- Assurance of divine providence and care
- Divine favor in a restored relationship with the Father
- The inheritance of every spiritual blessing (living in the reality of being God's chosen, predestined, adopted, redeemed, Spirit-sealed child with spiritual wisdom and understanding, empowered to live God-pleasing lives for His praise).
- The Spirit's residing power
- A path of righteousness
- The comfort and confidence of God's presence (He will never leave us or forsake us)
- God-given life purpose we were created for
- Joy and peace that supersedes circumstances of earthly life. (*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."*)
- Spiritual sight for increasing ability to know God and delight in Him as we live under the blessing of His covenant love and faithfulness.
- He offers you Himself!

This is Jesus' word to you today: ***"Count the cost, and follow Me!"***