

The Cost of Discipleship

Matthew 8:18-22


King of Kings! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

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“Few follow Christ for love, but for loaves, few follow Him for His inward excellencies, but many follow Him for their outward advantages; few follow Him that they may be made good by Him, but many follow Him that they may be great by Him.”

- THOMAS BROOKS (PURITAN PASTOR AND THEOLOGIAN, 1608–1680)

 Open your Bible to **Matthew 8:18-22**. We are continuing in a series through the Sermon on the Mount entitled: “King of kings.” This morning we are looking a message entitled: “The Cost of Discipleship.”

Thus far in **Matthew 8** we have seen three healing miracles. Jesus did thousands of healings, but he chose three to demonstrate who He calls into the kingdom: he calls the lowly – a leper, a Gentile’s slave, and a woman. Unless you have a humble heart, you cannot follow Jesus. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount. So we looked at the **attitude** of a true follower of Christ. It’s humble. Lowly.

The events of Matthew 8 actually happen in Jesus’ ministry in Galilee around the town of **Capernaum** which is our Lord’s ministry headquarters. So after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls the lowly, to demonstrate he calls the “poor in spirit.” Today we are going to see what the call entails. What is true repentance? We are going to see it is a total denial of self.

Following is More than Feeble Acknowledgement

Today we are going to see the **cost** of following Christ. The theme of our text in Matthew 8 is following Jesus. To follow Jesus means more than acknowledging Him as Savior or even Lord. The devils do that and “tremble” (**James 2:19**). Following Jesus is more than a fleeting decision, but it is a total trust of Him. It is a trust that is will to follow Him, even if we have to lose our comforts, lose our family, or even lose our lives.

Scores of men, women, and children have been told that becoming a follower of Jesus simply involves acknowledging certain facts or saying certain words, but this is not true. The call to follow Jesus is not simply an invitation to pray a prayer; it is a summons to lose our lives.¹ Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Reading of Holy Scripture

Matthew 8:18–22, “Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. 19 And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” 20 And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the

¹ Platt, David (2013-10-01). *What Did Jesus Really Mean When He Said Follow Me?* (Kindle Locations 176-178). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” 21 Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” 22 And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

Luke 9:60-62, “And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61 Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Outline

Today are going to see three barriers to following Christ...

- Following Jesus costs personal **Comfort** (Mt. 8:19-20).
- Following Jesus costs earthly **Ambitions** (Mt. 8:21-22, Lk. 9:60).
- Following Jesus costs precious **Relationships** (Lk. 9:61-62).

The Whole City of Capernaum

Matthew 8:18, “Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.” We are told in verse 16 it was now “evening.”

As we go there, we see a beautiful sunset scene at the close of the **Sabbath** day (Mark 1:21). Then the crowds [“the whole city”] came as Jesus stood in the door of Peter’s house (Mark 1:33; Matt. 8:14) as all the city gathered there with the sick, “all those who had it bad” (see on Matt. 4:24) and he healed them “with a word” (λογω [*logōi*]). It was a never to be forgotten memory for those who saw it.²

Massive Crowd

We can assume from all the parallel accounts that this is a massive crowd of people. They followed because of His power over demons, His power over disease, His power over death, His power over nature. They followed because of the astonishing character of His teaching, because of the amazing authority that He possessed because of His compassionate, loving character.

I. Following Jesus costs personal **Comfort** (Mt. 8:19-20).

Matthew 8:19-20, “And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” 20 And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Jesus says over and over in His ministry, if you want to follow me, you have to be willing to lose all personal comfort. Essentially He is saying, “*Will you follow Me, even if it makes you homeless?*”

Meet a Scribe

A scribe meets Jesus and is so completely taken with Him that he says, “I will follow You wherever you go. I’m done with my prestigious past. I’m going to leave my career as a scribe.”

Scribes, Esteemed in Israel

² Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 8:16). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

Scribes were very esteemed people in Jewish life. Scribes were the experts of the Law. They were the religious lawyers who interpreted the Law. They were highly educated and loyal to the Jewish system.

In a sense, he was saying something that was very culturally familiar. Rabbis traveled in those days. They walked and they had little flocks of students that followed them. It was very common in the ancient world, not just in Israel but in the Greek world as well, for an esteemed teacher to have a little group of learners or disciples who followed him around while he walked them through life and taught them.

Jesus, You are My Rabbi

Again, we read in **Matthew 8:19**, “...a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.””

And here is a scribe who by some standard might himself be a rabbi and a teacher saying, "From now on I want to join Your group, You are my Rabbi."

For Matthew says he called Jesus, *didaskalos*, that is teacher, or rabbi. He was literally saying I want to join the group – I think You're the teacher. He was then offering himself as a willing pupil of the miracle worker from Nazareth. What better offer could Jesus have than to pick off a scribe? And then He could have that scribe give testimony to how he had turned from the legalism of his past to the grace that was found in Jesus Christ. What a wonderful testimony that would be. He could headline his meetings, "Hear converted scribe give testimony!"

Meaning of Disciple

Again, we read in **Matthew 8:19**, “...a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.””

Throughout Jesus ministry we learn of His disciples. A disciple means “a learner” or “a follower.” For a Christian it means being like Christ. His life led to death to this world. He calls us to the same path. He did not live for Himself or this world; He lived to carry out the mission of the Father.

Foxes and Birds Have Homes

Here in verses 19-20, we have the cost of discipleship explained. ***If you would be a disciple and learner of Jesus, personal comfort must never stop you from following Him.*** When this distinguished scribe says to Jesus, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” How does Jesus respond? Most today would say, “What a testimony! Let’s give this man a book deal!” Let’s put this man up in the Ritz Carlton or the Hilton or the Westin River North. This man is important. Let’s take care of this man. What does Jesus say? Essentially, “*If you want to follow Me, you have to be like Me, and **this world is not my home.***”

The god of Personal Comfort

He says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (vs. 20).

When you get right down to it, most people in the United States live for personal comfort. Our children are living for Xboxes and Facebook. Their parents work for brick and mortar as their children go to hell. They want to expand their houses and upgrade their cars, all the while their souls are perishing.

Worshipping at the Altar of the god of Personal Comfort

Why do people work so hard? Do they work hard to know God? No they work hard so that they may worship at the altar of the god of personal comfort. The median income in the USA is \$51,000! And that's an 8% decrease from 2007!

The poverty level is officially cut at \$23,000 per family. In the USA, we are so committed to our personal comfort that even our poor are rich! This is in stark contrast to Jesus amazing call. Jesus says in our text, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (vs. 20).

Jesus' Call to Lose Your Life

Jesus says something similar **Luke 9:23**, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

Deny Yourself

Jesus asks us to deny ourselves if we want to follow Him. That's basically what he is asking the people in our passage to do. It is a word that means to refuse to associate with. And Jesus is saying, "If you want to come after Me, you have to come to the point where you refuse to associate any longer with the person that you are."

Luther's Self Loathing

Luther in the fourth of his Ninety-Five Thesis pinned on the church door at Wittenberg called it self-hate which is essentially said to entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. And once you've gone through self-denial, or self-hate, or self-loathing because you no longer want to associate with the sinner you are, you're that desperate. At that point when Jesus says to you, "I'm asking for a whole life commitment."

Slay Yourself! In a world where everything revolves around self — protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself, entertain yourself, comfort yourself, take care of yourself — Jesus said, "Slay yourself."³ Take up your cross!

Paul put it this way in **Galatians 2:20**, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

The Son of Man: God Becomes Man

Jesus says in our text, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (vs. 20). If you follow Me you might be homeless, and I'm the Son of Man!

Jesus favorite title for Himself is "Son of Man." It is a title from Daniel 7:13 which points both to His humanity and His deity. Daniel sees the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great glory and honor. It is clearly a Messianic reference. This is the King of kings and Lord of lords coming, but he is a "Son of Man." In other words, the Messiah is God but He is in human form.

³ Platt, David, *Follow*. (Kindle Locations 165-168).

Jesus clarifies this term in **Mark 14:62** when they asked Him if He was the Christ, the Messiah that was to come into this world. And we read: “Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Jesus Had No Home of His Own

Jesus says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (vs. 20).

At times he would stay with Peter in Capernaum if he was up north in Galilee. If He was down south in Jerusalem, he would often stay in Bethany outside of Jerusalem with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. But most of the time the Creator of the universe slept under the stars with a rock for His pillow.

Forsaking Personal Comfort – No Vow of Poverty

Are you willing to forsake personal comfort, if that’s what it means to follow Christ? This does not mean taking a “vow of poverty” as the false church of Rome teaches.

- **Less Pay:** For some of you, when you came to know Christ, you had to get a different job because you were working for a dishonest employer. Following Christ for some of you had meant working for less pay!
- **Mikelar & Martxeli:** When I was in Spain, there was a couple who seemed to make a profession of faith but would not submit to believer’s baptism. Why? Because the wife owned a beauty shop, and they believed people would stop coming to them if they knew they were Christians. Praise God, they followed Christ anyway, even if it meant they could be homeless.

Christ is Our Comfort

Let me encourage you that Christ is our comfort! You ought to follow Him even if it means losing your personal comforts. Mark 8:36-37, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?”

Jesus is the ultimate comfort for any of us.

Psalm 34:8, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”

Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Jesus gives us “living water” that if we drink it we will “never thirst again.”

Jesus is our “Bread of Life.” Jesus says in **John 6:35**, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

Joyfully Accepted the Plundering of Your Property

It’s not wrong to have houses, and personal possessions. The early believers met from “house to house.” But if they had extra, they sold it. They were not attached to it. And when they were persecuted **Hebrews 10:34** says, “you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”

You Were Not Made to Live for Personal Comforts

Don't live for personal comforts. Live for Christ. **James 1:17** says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." Enjoy God's gifts, but don't live for them. You were not made for personal comforts. You were made for Christ to satisfy your heart, to love Him with all your "heart, soul, mind, and strength."

II. Following Jesus costs earthly Ambition (Mt.8:21-22, Lk.9:60).

The next cost of following Jesus might be "earthly ambition." In **Mt. 8:21** we find another disciple or learner of Jesus. And these likely happened in the same context on the same day. So here is this second man who had been listening. Jesus turns to him and says, "Follow Me." And we read the man's response in Matthew 8:21...

Matthew 8:21–22, "Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 22 And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

Look also at **Luke 9:60**, "And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Follow Me: A Full Devotion, Permanent Following

Three times the word "follow" is used in our passage, and it is always in the present imperative. When Jesus says, "Follow me" He is asking us to follow Him for the rest of our life. He is calling for our full devotion, for a permanent following. It's not an event; it is the rest of your life!

Let Me Bury My Father

The man says, "Let me bury my father." Now you might think that his father's body is lying at the house, dead, waiting for a funeral. That is not at all what he is saying.

If that were the case, the man would have been obligated to bury his father, unless he were high priest or he had taken a Nazarite vow, in which cases he was not permitted to touch a dead body.

But according to Jewish custom, burial took place immediately after death. They didn't embalm, they just wrapped bodies and put them immediately in the grave. And there was a 30-day time of mourning.

Let Me Get My Inheritance

No, to say, "Let me first bury my father" means "Let me go home and wait till my father dies, and collect my inheritance." In other words, the man is saying, "I'll really follow you when I am retired." I'm waiting till all my bills are paid, my kids college bills are paid off, and I have a good nest egg in the bank. He's saying, "I'll pad my own pockets and I'm in a good fall back position, and then I'll follow you."

By the way, "I must bury my father" is a familiar Middle-Eastern statement still used. And when they use it and they say, "I must bury my father," they mean: "I must stay at home until he's passed on so that I can bring his estate to its final point and receive my inheritance."

Called to Live for a Different Kingdom

Matt. 8:22 / Luke 9:60, “And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

And Jesus gives this man a rebuke. Jesus is speaking of the *spiritually dead*. Let the spiritually dead collect their inheritance here and live for this world. Let the people in this world who are outside the Kingdom of God take care of the spiritually dead and their wealth. Leave temporal things to temporal people. Leave the matters of the temporal kingdom to the people who live in that kingdom.

Not Saying Christians Can’t be Rich

He is not saying that a Christian cannot be rich or receive an inheritance. There were some who were rich in the churches, as James and Paul all give warning to how they should live as rich Christians, being generous with the stewardship God has given them (1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17; Heb. 13:5; James 1:11-12). Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man who followed Jesus. John Mark’s parents were wealthy and were likely the one’s who provided Jesus with an upper room. This was likely the same large house with an upper room where the 120 met in prayer before Pentecost. Being rich is not wrong. Loving money and personal ambition is wrong.

Your Purpose for Living – Seek First the Kingdom

Jesus says in **Matt. 8:22 / Luke 9:60**, “And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Or as He said in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 6:33**, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Don’t Serve the god of Personal Ambition

Your primary purpose for living is not to have a plush retirement at age 65. What if God had other things for you to do? Are you going to serve the god of personal ambition?

Lord, Look at My Shells!

In the opening to his book “Don't Waste Your Life,” John Piper recounts an anecdote from Reader's Digest. It goes something like this:

“I will tell you what a tragedy is, I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the February 1998 Reader’s Digest: A couple took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells. ... Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: ‘Look, Lord. See my shells.’ That is a tragedy.”

Nothing Against Collecting Sea Shells

Look, I have nothing against collecting sea shells, but that is not the goal of my life! The goal of my life is to follow Jesus and to burn out for Him!

Jesus’ Demands Seem Too High

We see from these accounts, that Jesus’ demands seem too high to many who might follow Him. Like the scribe, this second of the **disciples** who approached Jesus on this occasion also disappears without further mention. Apparently neither man wanted to discuss the matter further. *Jesus’ demands were too high, and the appeal of discipleship vanished.* Like the rich young

man who asked Jesus what good thing he must do to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:16–22), when the cost of discipleship is understood, people lose enthusiasm for the things of the Lord.⁴

Stony Ground, Thorny Ground Hearers / False Converts

Jesus' demands are high because He knows there are many false converts. He illustrates this with the parable of the Sower and the Soils in **Matthew 13**, there are four examples of the soil of the human heart. **Matthew 13:18-23**, "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

He says there is **soil like concrete** that never receives the Word.

Then he names two false converts: **Stony ground** and **Thorny ground hearers**.

Many people spring up with great joy and "receive Jesus" but their hearts are unchanged. They have not been broken of personal comforts and personal ambition. They still love this world, and their hearts are still hard. Jesus calls us to be "poor in spirit."

Our Ambition is to Please Christ

2 Corinthians 5:9, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim [ambition] to please him." Our holy and all consuming ambition as Christians is to please Christ! It is not wrong to want a solid job and to have a family, but these things are not why you were created. You were created to please and serve Jesus Christ. Make that your ambition

III. Following Jesus costs precious Relationships (Lk. 9:61-62).

We come to a final account, that is not recorded in Matthew 8. So please look over at the parallel account in Luke 9. Luke records a third man in **Luke 9:61-62**, "Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Here we have a different situation – a very noble man. He seems to be going farther than the other two. He says "I'll follow You, and I won't wait till my father's dead, I just want to go home and say goodbye. Permit me to say goodbye to those at home. I want to follow You." That sounds reasonable. But Jesus says, you have to follow me fully, and not even parents or loved ones can get in the way of following me.

The Cost of Precious Relationships

What Jesus is saying is that not even the most precious family relationships can come between you and following Jesus. You may lose your most precious family relationships if you follow Christ.

⁴ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 10:35–39**: “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Plowing Forward

Luke 9:61-62, “Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus responds, verse 62, with a proverb that can be traced back to a writer named Hesiod in 800 B.C. “No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.” The proverb probably said something like, “You can't plow a furrow looking backwards.” Jesus said, “Look, you can't follow Me looking backwards. You can't have a divided heart.” You can't be Mr. Facing Both Ways, to borrow the words of John Bunyan.⁵

Not even your dear and precious family can be more important to you than Jesus. Jesus must have first place!

Tim Williams Story

This is the cost of discipleship is high. I think of the story of Dr. Timothy Williams, our Bible Institute teacher. Dr. Williams was studying for the Jesuit priesthood when he came to know Christ. Even then, that did not satisfy him, and he was ready to commit suicide in the Alaskan wilderness. He was going to throw himself into a freezing river and die falling asleep of hypothermia. Just before he was about to jump, he noticed a Gospel tract. He read about God’s love for him and he was converted at that moment.

Following Christ meant that Pastor Williams would lose his family. He had read the writings of Martin Luther and the falsehoods of the Pope and the church of Rome. When the pope visited Fairbanks, Tim Williams as a 19 year old young man studying for the Jesuit priesthood, but now newly converted, walked up to Pope John Paul II and told him to his face that he believed he was a false teacher and someone opposed to Christ (an anti-Christ).

When his parents got wind of this they threw him out of the house, with all his belongings on the front lawn. He didn’t see or hear from his father or mother until his daughters were teenagers just a few years ago. Almost 20 years had passed and each day he had to count the cost of following Christ. And he was comforted by the verse in **Psalm 27:10** (KJV), “When my father and mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.”

Conclusion – Christ is Better!

We aren't told how these three responded to what Jesus said, but pretty obvious. They left Christ to hold on to their earthly loves. What a sad decision.

Puritan **Pastor Thomas Brooks** said in 1680, “Few follow Christ for love, but for loaves, few follow Him for His inward excellencies, but many follow Him for their outward advantages; few follow Him that they may be made good by Him, but many follow Him that they may be great by Him.” May each of us here count the cost and follow Christ, for Christ is better than personal comforts, better than earthly ambitions, and better than the most precious relationships we have!

⁵ MacArthur, *ibid.*