

The Cost Of Following Jesus

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Matthew / Matthew 8:18–22

INTRODUCTION

› **Matthew 8:18–22 (2016 ESV)** — Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, He gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” 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.” Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

Jesus **spoke** with tremendous authority in the Sermon on the Mount; He spoke as not merely the new Moses with a New Covenant; He spoke as the Author Himself.

Jesus then **acted** with incredible authority by healing the leper, the centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law; He cast demons out of many, and healed them of the afflictions that had resulted from demonic possession.

He astonished the crowds with His teaching; He amazed the crowds with His miracles; great crowds followed Him to see what He would do next.

THE CROWDS

The Gospels present the crowds as a single character in the story of Jesus’ earthly ministry; the crowds **move** as a

group, they **speak** as a group, they **react** as a group, they **are afraid** as a group, they are **hungry** as a group, they are **sick** as a group, they **complain** as a group, they are **amazed and astonished** as a group; they are like a massive flock of birds in the sky, moving as a single individual.

But the crowds never **trust** Jesus, never **love** Him, never **follow** Him faithfully. The crowds **mock** Jesus in Matthew 9 when He says that the little girl is not dead, but merely asleep. When the two blind men of Jericho cried out to Jesus for mercy, the crowds **rebuked** them and **told them to be quiet**.

Now, Jesus clearly had compassion on the crowds; He saw them as a flock of sheep that had no shepherd; He healed them and fed them; but He did not come to save the crowds; groups and crowds and hordes and mobs don't get saved, don't get transformed, they are never born again.

It is said that there is safety in numbers, but the opposite is true in the spiritual realm; the Hebrews in the wilderness could not enter the promised land because of their shared unbelief; their unbelief was contagious.

In the same way the crowds of Jesus' day – and the crowds of our own day – will never believe and be saved; crowds have always kept people from genuine faith in and love for Jesus Christ.

So He gives the order to the twelve to leave for the other side of the Sea of Galilee; while they are making

preparations to leave, two brief conversations take place, with a scribe and a disciple.

THE SCRIBE

› **Matthew 8:19 (2016 ESV) — 19 And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”**

Let’s recognize that the scribe took a bold and courageous step by leaving the crowd and speaking to Jesus himself. There were no seminaries or Bible colleges at that time; religious and theological education was offered by rabbis, who established small schools in their own homes; disciples would attach themselves to a particular rabbi, live with him, work with him, and in the process, learn from him.

Because this scribe calls Jesus “Teacher,” or rabbi, he seems to think that Jesus is going to set up a rabbinical school of his own; people will come to Him to be taught; the scribe wants to be part of that.

I believe that the scribe made some assumptions when he approached Jesus.

The scribe assumed that he was welcome to join Jesus’ band of disciples; that there was an “open door” policy, and Jesus would take anyone He could get.

But Jesus chose His disciples deliberately and carefully; He never held open auditions or tryouts; the Huskers have been known for having walk-on tryouts for the football team; Jesus has no walk-on tryouts for salvation.

The scribe assumed that he could insert himself into

Jesus' band of disciples; it was up to him, and he had the power to make himself a disciple of Jesus Christ if he chose.

But Jesus says that the Father must draw us and enable us to come by the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that He chose us, we did not choose Him.

And the scribe assumed that Jesus was going somewhere he would want to be; he is so confident that he says he'll go wherever Jesus goes. That sounds like he is ready and willing for anything, but Jesus' response to him tells us what he was thinking: Jesus was going to a place of His own, a place the scribe would find acceptable.

But Jesus, the Son of Man, has nowhere to lay His head. Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but Jesus is essentially homeless; Capernaum was His adopted hometown, but there is not a hint that Jesus owned or rented a home; He seemed to have stayed with Peter and his family while in Capernaum.

What's more, Jesus is about to leave for the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which would put Him in Gentile territory. He would free two Gentiles from demon possession, and cast the demons into a herd of pigs, which would then rush into the lake and drown themselves. The scribe would not have been happy with this.

The scribe was like us; we want some certainty, some guarantee that the Lord will see to our comfort, and honor our interests, and meet our expectations; but following Jesus, even today, means accepting uncertainty, having no

guarantees about this earthly life, giving up our interests for the sake of His glory.

We are not promised comfort, but suffering. This world is not our home; we are exiles and strangers and sojourners and wanderers. Like Abraham, we look forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10).

The more closely we follow Jesus, the more we not feel at home here in this world. He sends some far away to serve Him; He leaves most where they, to live and work and do what they were doing, but for His glory and for His Kingdom.

THE DISCIPLE

› **Matthew 8:21 (2016 ESV) — 21 Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”**

This disciple is most likely one of the casual followers of Jesus, not one of the twelve; there were a number of people who followed Jesus in a casual way, from a distance; some of them would prove to be genuine believers; there were 120 gathered together in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren – believers – at one time after His resurrection. But most of them were not serious, and were not committed to Jesus; they were ready to re-join the crowd the moment Jesus offended them or made follow difficult.

This man wants to bury his father before going with Jesus;

this does not mean that his father had died, but that he was waiting for his father to die before making a true commitment to Christ; in other words, his family is just another crowd that determines his behavior and his life; the crowd of his family, led by his father, was his spiritual authority; he was saying to Jesus, “I will follow You when my family says I can.”

Jesus’ response is clear, and might even seem harsh:

› **Matthew 8:22 (2016 ESV) — 22 And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”**

Jesus won’t accept second place; Jesus won’t honor this man’s request; He demands first place over the world, and the crowds, and friends, and neighbors, and family, and even this man’s own father. The time to follow is now, not at some point in the future when you think following will be easier or less complicated or non-controversial.

There is an infinite chasm that exists between holy God and sinful man. The only bridge across that chasm is the cross of Jesus Christ. When we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ, the Father adopts us as His own, and fills us with His Spirit, and He moves us from the far side of the chasm to His side. Once that happens, there is a chasm between ourselves and those who remain on the dead side. The chasm that once separated us from God while we were part of the world, now separates us from the world and those in it. Jesus demands our loyalty and faith and obedience, even above family:

Matthew 10:37 2016 ESV

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.

This is offensive to many people; some will even say that this is not true, that Jesus didn't mean that we are to love and honor Him above our loved ones, even at the expense of our relationships with loved ones. But that's what Jesus said, and that's what Jesus meant. No one can serve two masters; we can't serve God and money; neither can we serve God and the world, even if the world is our closest family.

No crowd, no matter how large, no matter how intimate, has a higher claim on our lives than Jesus Christ; no one on earth deserves more honor and respect and love than Jesus Christ; no one has ever loved us as much as He does; no one has ever sacrificed as much for us as He did; no one is more deserving of our worship and our obedience and our love; in fact, the best way to love and serve those around you is to honor Jesus Christ as Lord of your life and heart and soul.

Bringing it Home

These two men seem to represent, in broad terms, every selfish approach to Jesus.

Some, like the scribe, want to follow Jesus because of their own ambitions and goals; they expect Jesus to meet their expectations and assumptions; they want Him to make their dreams come true; they will abandon Him if

they feel that He has let them down. They don't realize that, while God is a promise-keeping God, the promises He keeps are the promises He makes, not the promises we want Him to make.

And some, like the disciple, want to follow Jesus, but on their terms, in their own time; they will delay full faith and obedience until it costs them little or nothing.

J C Ryle wrote about these people, "It is not open sin, or open unbelief, which robs Christ of his professing servants, so much as the **love** of the world, the **fear** of the world, the **cares** of the world, the **business** of the world, the **money** of the world, the **pleasures** of the world, and the desire to **keep in touch** with the world. This is the great rock on which thousands are continually making shipwreck. They do not object to any article of the Christian faith. They do not deliberately choose evil and openly rebel against God. They hope somehow to get to heaven at last, and they think it proper to have some religion. **But they cannot give up their idol: they must have the world.** And so after running well and bidding fair for heaven while boys and girls, they turn aside when they become men and women and go down the broad way which leads to destruction. They begin with Abraham and Moses and end with Demas and Lot's wife."

Jesus gives His attention to His disciples because of His deep love for them; He does not love the crowds in the same, saving way. He brings us as His people into a deep, intimate, inseparable relationship with Him; that

relationship is not open-ended, or defined by us; Jesus determines who will come in; Jesus determines the terms of salvation.

On my trip I listened to some sessions from last year's Shepherds Conference. On the second-to-last day I listened to a message called "Holy Affections," by Paul Twiss. It seems that once every few years I heard a sermon or read a book that has a deep, profound impact on my life, and this message is one of those. The message was on the fact that we love because God has first loved us, and most of the message was a meditation on the love of God. Twiss quoted from the Heidelberg Catechism, which, of course, I've heard of, but never actually read.

The Heidelberg Catechism begins with the question, "What is my hope in life and in death?"

The answer given by the catechism is,

"That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him."

Why do we belong to Jesus Christ, body and soul? Because the love of the Father has been poured out upon us. God

has shown His love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) This is love, not that WE have loved GOD, but that HE loved US, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (First John 4:10). As Paul Twiss said in that message, while we did nothing to prompt God's love for us, we have done thousands of things worthy of His condemnation and judgment, yet He continues with us, faithfully. If we could swim in the ocean of His love for a thousand years, we would never reach the shore. If we could dive 10,000 fathoms into the ocean of His love, we would never reach the bottom.

So while Jesus felt compassion for the crowds, He didn't love them like He loved His disciples. When Jesus sees the world today, He doesn't love the world like He loves us. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that the one believing in Jesus – whether Jew or Gentile – would not perish with the world, in the judgment to fall upon the world, but be brought out of the world and have eternal life.

Our prayer, of course, is that He would continue to save sinners; that the Father's love would not end with us, but draw all of His elect through the Gospel. And we rejoice that, undeserving as we are, unworthy as we are, we have been made the objects of the eternal, saving, transforming love of our God.