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What cost to follow Jesus? Matthew 8:18-22

Matthew 8:18-22, *And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side.* ¹⁹ *Then a certain scribe came 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."* ²¹ *Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."* ²² *But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Jesus speaks to the followers after performing the three miracles.

In **Matthew 8:18** we find that once again there was a crowd around Jesus.

Matthew does not follow a strict chronology but selects his material to demonstrate his point. The actual events that take

place here do not occur on the same evening after Sabbath that Peter's mother-in-law is healed, but at another time later in Jesus' ministry.

Matthew introduces the story here to demonstrate the reaction to Jesus' ministry.

Matthew wrote this account of Jesus' life to Jewish people in order to document Him as the Christ, the Messiah.

But just because someone speaks with the air of authority does not mean that they actually have that authority.

In **Matthew 8 & 9** we find Matthew demonstrating Jesus' authority over disease, nature, the supernatural, sin, and even death itself.

Each of these are things only God has authority over, and so each back up Jesus' claim to be God in human flesh. If Jesus is God, then He has authority.

When He says something, it should be obeyed.

Such is the case in **Matthew 8:18**, *"When Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side."*

It was a command to be obeyed by His followers.

Matthew 8:23 we find that the disciples of Jesus did obey the order, for they followed Him into the boat and put out for the other side of the lake.

I hope you WILL choose to be a true follower of Jesus.
If you have already been follower of Jesus, you WILL choose to continue to follow faithfully - no matter where He leads.

It's a wonderful thing to be a follower of Jesus.

The greatest and most joyful experience you can have on earth comes from being in daily fellowship with Him. To follow Jesus faithfully is to tread a path that leads to heaven, and that results in eternal life with Him.

But let us not fool ourselves.
Let us not engage in any false advertising.

To follow Jesus is also to tread the hardest path on earth you could ever take.

- ✓ He leads you to places that you don't want to go.
- ✓ He will show you the truth about yourself.
- ✓ He will call you to deal with some very ugly things in your life.
- ✓ He will demand more of you along the way than you will believe you could possibly give.

- ✓ He will call you to stand with Him alone against the tide of this world.
- ✓ He will press you to change from what you are to what He wants you to be.
- ✓ He will demand that you surrender all to Him and His cause.
- ✓ He will not tolerate you being merely a 'part-timer' or 'partial-follower'.

To follow Jesus is either a total, whole-life commitment or as far as Jesus is concerned, it is not a commitment to follow at all.

1. Following Jesus requires uncommon sacrifice

We meet the first man.

V 19, *Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."*

What a marvellous thing!

This is not just any man, but a certain scribe.

Who are the scribes?

The scribes were the authorities in the law.

The scribes were the ones who had the official sanction in the Pharisees.

The scribes were qualified by Jewish authority to teach.

The scribes were highly educated.

The scribes were loyal to the system.

They were the teachers, and they weren't the followers of teachers.

The scribes were generally hostile to Jesus, especially after the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus has exposed their hypocritical self-righteousness.

John 5:18, *Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.*

Scribes and the Pharisees, with whom they were closely aligned, were already seeking to kill Him if possible. Yet here is a scribe coming to Jesus.

Even more striking is that this scribe calls Jesus, "teacher," and he means it.

The scribes were called "teacher" or "rabbi."

They were well schooled and trained in the law. They took the title seriously and used it only of those that had earned the right to that title which was primarily themselves.

Yet we find here that this scribe has the humility to address Jesus, who had no formal education, as “teacher.”

It would be the equivalent of a university professor who had earned his PhD going out to a farmer who has had no formal education and addressing him as “Doctor.”

It was remarkable that the scribe came to Jesus.

it was remarkable that the scribe addressed Jesus as “teacher.”

But it was astounding that this scribe told Jesus of his unconditional allegiance to Him saying, *“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.”*

There is no indication in this text, or in the parallel passages, of any sort of condition or limitation on his statement. This scribe was serious and sincere in making this statement.

This is the genuine expression of this man’s belief and desire.

I do not doubt that there are many people today who come to Christ in this same manner. They have heard about Him, His life, His miracles, His grace, and His glory and they find Him very attractive. They have met true followers of Christ and have been impressed by the lives they lead. They are attracted to Christ by all the wonderful things about Him and what they have seen Him do in the lives of others.

They want the peace and joy that He offers.

They want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

They respond to the love they have heard, seen, and they profess love for Jesus as well saying, "I will follow You wherever You lead me."

However, the sad truth is that neither the scribe nor the many people today have ever thought through what it might mean to follow Jesus Christ.

The positive things they have seen are so wonderful and they are strongly attracted to them. But following Jesus Christ is not always positive from the human perspective. It often leads to unpleasant circumstances.

Jesus does not speak either positively or negatively to the scribe. He simply tells him what His own life is like with the inference that if the scribe will really follow Him, then Jesus can offer no more than what He Himself has.

V 20, *"And Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'"*

If you are going to follow me, I cannot promise you anything but an itinerant life. Foxes have holes in the ground they call

home. Birds of the air build a nest that they call home. But I will be going from place to place and none of them will be home.

Jesus addressing Himself here as “the Son of Man.”

Jesus is fully human, but He stands apart from all other humans. The phrase, as used of Jesus, is a reference to His being the Messiah.

Daniel 7:13, *“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.*

Matthew 26:64, *Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*

Both passages “the Son of Man” is next to God the Father in the clouds of heaven.

Jesus often used veiled references of Himself as the Messiah for two reasons.

- a) To conceal His identity until the proper time (as throughout John – His time has not yet come).
- b) The term “Messiah” had developed many connotations that were not true of His role as the “saviour of the world.”

Many Jews were looking for the Nationalistic Messiah who would through off the yoke of Rome, but in His first coming, Jesus came as the suffering servant that would take upon Himself the sins of the world. The Son of Man is the Messiah.

We know that the phrase, “no place to lay His head” does not mean that He will not have a place to sleep because Jesus is often in the homes of friends (Peter in Capernaum, Martha, Mary & Lazarus in Bethany, etc.).

Jesus was also no pauper because the band of disciples He led had a purse which had enough money to give to the poor at times, and enough for Judas to steal from.

The phrase was a reference to the fact that this world was not His home. Jesus did not come to gain worldly comfort.

Before Jesus was born, He was turned out because there was no room for Him in the inn. In addition, as we go through the Scriptures, we find that Judea rejected Him.

Galilee casts Him out.

John 6:66,

Gadara begs him to leave its district.

Matthew 8:34,

Samaria refuses Him lodging.

Luke 9:53,

He came to His own and they would not receive Him.

John 1:11,

Even heaven forsakes Him when He bears the sins of mankind.

Matthew 27:46,

Jesus did not go into detail of all the hardships that would come to those that would follow Him.

He did not even remind the scribe that those that would follow Him would be persecuted on account of Him.

He simply stated that if the scribe would follow Him, then He should realize that it would mean following a man that had no permanent home.

The Scriptures are silent about the response of the scribe. Neither in this passage nor in the parallel passages do we ever find mention of this man again.

It is an argument from silence, but the silence here is strong evidence that this scribe was unwilling to follow Jesus if the cost would be that high.

The man said, *“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go,”* but his actions demonstrated that he would not even follow across the lake. The cost was too high.

There are many today that are like that.

They say they will follow Jesus.

Go wherever He wants them to go.

Do whatever He wants them to do.

They profess their love for Him, but once they find out what it means to follow, to truly love Him by being obedient to Him, they depart.

These are the people that have entered the broad gate.

People who have been misled by false prophets proclaiming a false gospel. These are people who have built their house on shifting sand. It is a sad fate they will have in the end.

Too often the gospel has been presented as a scrupulous transaction – a business deal that takes place at a point in time. This emphasis has led to people believing that salvation is a piece of paper that has a fire insurance policy on one side with a ticket to heaven printed on the back.

They forget that salvation is from one nature to another nature, from one master to another master.

The change in final destination is a result of those changes.
It is salvation from sin & death unto righteousness & life
(**Romans 6, Ephesians 2**).

It is salvation from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of
Jesus Christ (**Colossians 1:13**).

If we are going to say we are going to follow Jesus, we had
better remember that means a change in citizenship
(**Philippians 4:20**)

We become aliens and strangers to this world (**1 Peter 2:11**)

We are now here as ambassadors of God (**2 Corinthians 5:20**).

This world is no longer our home, we are just passing through.

If we love the world more than Jesus, then we have yet to
come to grips with what it means to be a Christian. We are like
the scribe who professes allegiance but will not even go across
the lake.

We are like Demas.

2 Timothy 4:10, *for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this
present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens
for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.*

We will strive to be like Him.

1 John 2:6, *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to
walk just as He walked.*

What keeps men away from Christ to receive forgiveness and in living for Him whole heartedly?

They love the comforts of this world more.

Jesus was not as 'desperate' and 'eager' for large crowds to sign up as His followers as we in His churches tend to be today.

We tend to make it all out to be as easy as possible to become disciples of Jesus Christ, so we can draw in as many as we can. While Jesus Himself seemed to make discipleship out to be the hardest thing in the world. The Bible presents more of His 'would-be' followers walking away and leaving Him, than who remain committed and go on to follow Him.

When it comes to His followers, Jesus is not after quantity of numbers as much as quality of commitment.

The New Testament - as well as the history of the church itself - seems to teach us that Jesus is able to do far more through one man or woman who is 100% committed to following Him, than through 100 men and women who are only 99% committed to following Him.

May it be that we, in this church family, would grow to be such 100%-committed followers of Jesus. Not just a part of the admiring crowd that tags along!

This scribe had untrue expectations of what would happen if He followed Jesus. He expected that he would soon receive an exalted position. Receive many of the comforts and treasures that would belong to those who are associated with the King. But Jesus was letting him know that following Him would not lead to the worldly things that He expected. He let him know that following Jesus was to take the hard path.

Many start to follow Jesus with the same sort of worldly expectations. Perhaps they don't seek a position in an earthly kingdom. They expect that, if they follow Jesus, they won't have any more problems.

Some people are even taught that following Jesus will lead to financial and material blessings. Others expect that following Jesus will mean that they won't have as many trials and tribulations in life.

The fact is that following Jesus just may very well lead to more trials in life than you would have had otherwise!

Jesus spoke of those who would be His followers and spoke.

Matthew 5:11, *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

John 15:20, *Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

Acts 9:16, *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."*

2 Timothy 3:12, *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

Now, the eternal blessing that result from following Jesus WILL come!

In the temporal, the blessings that come from following Jesus far outweigh the trials that following brings.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*

But make no mistake about it: Following Jesus is not the pathway to temporal worldly comforts. It's the 'narrow gate' and the 'difficult way' that leads to life.

This is what we learn from the first man about what it costs to follow Jesus. It will cost us in our worldly expectations of comfort and ease.

Now before we look at the second man, let me offer an illustration of how I think that the two men's stories are meant to be related. It's a strange illustration.



Suppose we look at following Jesus as a physical "walk". Jesus calls us to follow Him. Such a call requires that we put our first foot forward and place it where He says to place it.

We may have some expectations that the place He calls us to place our foot will be a comfortable place. In our ignorance, we may be far too eager to place our foot forward, not having realized what it will mean. Then when we find out that He calls us to place our foot in the pathways of suffering for His name's sake, we hesitate to put our foot out at all!

That's what the first man's experience teaches us.

If we are going to follow Jesus, it's going to cost us our worldly expectations of comfort and prosperity because He may call us to put our foot in hard places.

Until we let go of our expectations of worldly comfort and lift that first foot up to place it where He says, we cannot begin to follow foreword with Him.

Think of that second foot: The one that's still behind us. Even though we have begun to follow Jesus with our first foot, that second one is still back there, waiting to be lifted up.

But in order to lift it up and move forward, I will have to separate it from the things that now hold it in place. I must forsake life as I knew it.

- The first foot involves a commitment to say 'hello' to places and commitments I don't yet know.

- The second foot involves a commitment to say 'good-bye' to places and commitments that I know well.

If I am willing to go forward to places Jesus calls me TOWARD; but I am not completely willing to make a complete break with the places He calls me FROM.

That describes the predicament of the second man. He teaches us yet another truth about the cost of following Jesus

2. Following Jesus requires unusual standards

The second man comes to Jesus.

This man also wants to follow Jesus, but he does have one problem. If that problem can be resolved, then he knows he would be free to do all that Jesus would want.

V 21, *Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

This is not one of the twelve which Jesus chose as His disciples, but one of the many that were following Jesus around at the time. They were disciples in the sense that they were seeking to learn from Jesus, but the strength of their commitment to Him was yet to be tested.

Jesus is about to go to the other side of Sea of Galilee.

This man wants to go, but he does not feel he can follow Jesus to that extent until he is able to bury his father. He approaches Jesus seeking His approval for this exemption.

Would Jesus give him permission to join the band of disciples at some later time after he had buried his father?

It seems a reasonable request and his approach to Jesus is good. He is not giving a conditional statement, i.e. "If you let me go bury my father, I will follow you later." Instead, it is a request, "I want to follow you, will you allow me to bury my father first?"

There is some question as to the current actual condition of this man's father. Jewish custom directed burial to take place soon after death. **John 11:1, John 11:14, John 11:17, Acts 5:5-6, Acts 5:10,**

In addition, it was considered both a duty and a kindness that ranked higher than other services requiring attention.

Sons were generally obliged to arrange burial as a final act of devotion.

Genesis 25:9, *And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite,*

Possible that this man had heard about his father's death only shortly before going to Jesus, and so he would be asking Jesus' permission to return and bury his father before following Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

It is also true that the phrase, "*bury my father*" did not mean that the father had just died, but instead referred to a son's duty to help his dad in the family business until after the father died and the inheritance was distributed.

The expression "bury my father" simply meant staying at home and fulfilling his family responsibilities until his father died and he received his share of the inheritance. Therefore, it is also possible that this was the case with this disciple.

He was not asking Jesus to let him go back and bury his father, but to go back and remain at home until his father died and he received his part of the inheritance.

Which is true?

The scriptures do not say.

But we do know that Jesus' reply was specifically to this man, as much as Jesus' reply to the rich young ruler to go and sell all he had and follow Him was specifically to the rich young ruler. Jesus knew the heart of the man and he replied specifically to what was there that would block him from following.

V 22, “Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.”

Regardless of what this man’s actual motives, Jesus cut to the core of the issue when it comes to following Him.

When He commands us to follow, it is time to go and nothing else is more important.

Jesus is not saying that we should not participate in funerals and take care of those arrangements for our loved ones.

What He said here is specifically to this man, because He knew what was in his heart. Either he was greedy and wanted his inheritance before following Christ, or this man was so tied into his family that he valued them more than Christ. In either case the issue is following Christ.

I think we all understand clearly that being devoted to Jesus is more important than gaining the things of the world. Yet so many do forfeit their souls in order to gain the things of the world for the few short years of their lives.

Why talk people out of following him?

Question: Why does Jesus do this?

This is a regular feature of Jesus’ interaction with crowds, with those who would follow him.

In the gospel of John, it was right after gathering a great multitude of followers, feeding thousands with the miracle of the loaves and fishes, that he gave one of his hardest teachings *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*

The result of this teaching, as John records in **John 6:66**, is that *“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”*

Remember the rich young ruler, whom we will meet in Matthew 19?

Jesus told this man to sell everything he had if he wanted to follow him!

Matthew 19:22, *“When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”*

Why does Jesus do this?

The point is twofold:

First, because we must understand the absolute, totalizing, sovereign nature of Christ and His call to discipleship.

To be His disciple means making Him the highest, absolute priority above all else. You cannot worship Jesus as Lord on a part-time basis, or alongside other competing loyalties.

No, even other good and right loyalties—like those to father and mother and children and friends and masters must come under His lordship.

Second, because the way into his Kingdom passes through death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus' Kingdom will come through suffering through death, burial, and resurrection.

Those who would follow him must know is that you can only enter his kingdom through death, burial, and resurrection. There is no such thing as a costless Christianity.

The worst possible outcome for someone who hears the external call of Christ follow Me!

Jesus will never turn away anyone who genuinely seeks to be saved by Him and to follow Him.

John 6:37, *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out"*

No one ever must worry that they must first become "perfect" before they can come to the Saviour. Anyone can come to Him right this minute just as they are.

Once they come, they must not expect to stay as they are. Everyone who seeks to be a follower of Jesus must be totally

committed to paying the price of following Him or they cannot be a 'follower' of Jesus at all.

As you can see, then, it's hard to be a follower of Jesus!

It's far harder than people realize. And that's why it is essential that, before anyone comes to Him for salvation and seeks to become one of His followers, they must first be made to understand the price of following Him and be helped to count the cost.

Application:

A tribe in Africa that elected a new king every seven years. The king would reign for seven years enjoying high honour and every luxury known to the tribe. During those years, that king's authority is absolute even to the power of life and death over the members of the tribe. The only catch was at the end of the seven years when a new king would be chosen, the old king was killed. Every member of the tribe was aware of this provision because the custom had long been practiced, yet there was never a shortage of men wanting the job. They were willing to forfeit their lives in order to enjoy seven years of luxury and power.

Matthew 16:26, *“What will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Yet many do sell their souls for the world's goods. It is possible that this disciple did the same, for nothing is ever indicated about him again.

But consider some of the details.

- For one thing, the man was called "another of His disciples". He had already made the commitment to follow.
- Second, Jesus' command to "Follow Me" was given as a present tense command; and can be translated, "Keep following Me". It was as if the man was already a follower who was confronted with the fact that Jesus was about to leave. He himself was about to stop following for a while in order to attend to his father.
- Third, the man used a key word that pointed out the whole nature of his problem. The word was "first". "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

Put all together, the man had already begun to follow. But was about to stop following because he had a greater priority than following Jesus at the moment - that of attending to his father's demands.

Jesus' answer suggests that other people could have attended to the man's father whatever the concerns of his father might have been. But the man's divided loyalties, and his failure to

make a break from the earthly concerns that held him, brought him to another crises of following.

- The first man, then, was too eager to place his first foot foreword not having counted the cost.
- The second man was too hesitant to lift his second foot up off the ground again, not having counted the cost.

We are not told what happened to either of them.

We are not told if either responded by walking away in discouragement or if either eventually repented, and paid the price, and became devoted followers from then on.

Their stories are left open-ended - like our own personal stories are today!

We are left to wonder what they did with Jesus' high call for total devotion just as it now waits to be seen what we will do with it!

Matthew 10:37, *“He who loved 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.”*

When we come to Jesus for salvation, we not only exchange sin and death for righteousness and life, but we also change families.

We become part of the family of God and our primary allegiance is now to God the Father, not to our earthly dad.

We may love our families very much and be very close to them, but the greater love must be to God.

It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament that neither the High Priest (**Leviticus 21:11**) or a person under a Nazirite vow (**Numbers 6:6, 7**) were allowed to become unclean, as they would at a funeral, even for father or mother. Their lives were to be completely consecrated.

What keeps people from Christ?

For many it is the allurements of the things of the world. They sacrifice the eternal for the only for the moment.

For others, it is relationships with others.

Do not let pleasures, the things of this world, or family pressures keep you away. His claims are true. He is God in human flesh who has the power and authority to change your life.

Confess your sin to Him, ask Him for forgiveness and He will forgive you and start you on a whole new life. His claims are true.

What kind of a follower are you right now?

Have you been thinking that all that was required to become one of His followers was that you simply profess a faith in Him, and that no life change was really required?

Clearly, it costs to follow Jesus! It costs everything!

But by God's grace, may the Holy Spirit deal with each of us uniquely this morning.

May we count the cost, become willing to pay the price, and to present ourselves to Jesus as completely committed followers the only kind of followers our Saviour is willing to accept the kind that He uses to change the world.

A master came to the slave one day, and He said, "You have a joy and a happiness that I wish I had." He said, "What is it?" He said, "It's Jesus Christ." He said, "I want the Christ that you have." The slave said, "Then go put your white suit on, and come down, and work in the mud, and you'll meet Him." He said, "I wouldn't do that. It's beneath my dignity."

A year later, he came back to the slave, and he was in deeper problems, and the same thing happened.

In desperation sometime later, he came back a third time and he said, "I have to have what you have." Slave said, "You get

your white suit on, and you come down, and you work with us in the mud, and you will meet Him.”

The master said, “I will do it.” The slave said, “You don’t have to.” “What do you mean you don’t have to?” “You just have to be willing, that’s all.” **Are you willing?**