

Counting the Cost 7-11-04

Matthew 8:18-22 (NIV)

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ²¹Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ²²But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

The Gospel writer, Mark, tells us that after Jesus' long day of ministry into the evening hours, He rose while it was still dark and found a place of solitude where He could pray. (Mark 1:35) The disciples came to look for Him because from the crack of dawn the crowds were clamoring for more. That is when Jesus said it was time to get into the boat and go to the other side of the lake. This tells us a lot about Jesus' motivations. If He was after the praise of men, He could have stayed right there in Capernaum. Instead, He insisted on leaving the crowds that had already heard the message and moving on to those who had not yet heard. (John 12:43)

In the process of making that move, some people wanted to declare their allegiance to Him. Perhaps they were moved by the miracles or by His teaching. Something stirred their heart to declare a commitment. Most of us have stood in their shoes or we wouldn't be here this morning. We saw something of Jesus and it stirred us to make a commitment to Him. But following the Master can entail a lot more cost than we are willing to pay. (Acts 14:22)

The first person was a teacher of the Law. Maybe he recognized the fulfillment of prophecy taking place before his eyes, but I don't think so. The scribal tradition was so ingrained in these men that they could not see past their training. He was probably moved by the very personality of Jesus. It is hard to imagine being in Jesus' physical presence because all our comparisons and examples fall so far short. This is what really draws people, a confrontation with the personality of Jesus. We don't have to convince people of the truth of Jesus so much as we need to just introduce them to the wonder of His personality that demonstrates truth. (John 14:9)

The scribe made a very bold and seemingly earnest statement. "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." I wonder if he would have said that if he knew Jesus was on His way to the cross. It is easy to swear an allegiance to a rising star.

Jesus' response was apparently enough to turn him away for much less reason than the cross. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus was telling him that he could follow if he didn't mind camping out. The disciples didn't have enough money for the Economy Inn.

Jesus' followers had various levels of commitment. Some were glad to show up if He was in town. They would say good things about Him because they liked His message and were astonished at His miracles. But they wouldn't change their life in any way.

Commented [notes1]: ³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁴³for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. John 12:43 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ²²strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Acts 14:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁹Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" John 14:9 (NIV)

Still, they weren't against Him. They were like the crowds that followed Him down the mountain after the Sermon on the Mount. "If He's headed our way we'll enjoy His company and maybe see another miracle."

Then there were those who followed Him at a distance. They would find out where He was teaching and make the trip to hear Him. They took His side when debates arose. But when hard sayings came their way, they went back to their former life. He was great, as long as He didn't challenge the issues they treasured in their hearts.

Then there were disciples. These were those that followed Him everywhere. Disciples are learners. They want to learn to be like the Teacher. But even among the disciples there were those who wanted to follow more closely, others who were content to have a little space, and others still that wanted some distance. It really boiled down to how much they valued His teaching. How much were they willing to give up to be close?

Jesus asked the Teacher of the Law if he realized he would have to give up his comfortable bed. Apparently he was not. It is interesting to me that Jesus didn't start with the most difficult thing, but instead with the littlest thing. Can't give up a comfortable bed and roof over your head? Perhaps it was to make him consider how shallow his commitment really was.

If we were to speak to Jesus an expression of our commitment, what would He respond to us? I'm not speaking of salvation. That was all His work. I'm talking about following His plan for our life. We sing, "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow", but would we really go anywhere? What is the least thing that Jesus could ask that we would draw the line at? Does that make you uncomfortable? I'm sure it made the Teacher of the Law uncomfortable. (Matthew 10:37-38)

That is good for us. It is a reality check. Sometimes we think we are a whole lot further down the road to maturity than we really are, and then Jesus asks us something simple like, "Speak to that man about his spiritual health." Or maybe He has asked us to give up something for the sake of someone in greater need. Maybe He has even asked us to tithe. Such basic things, but we find our commitment level is lower than we thought it was. Don't worry. Discovery is a good thing. Now you can let Him work on the root cause. Jesus doesn't want to force you to do anything. He wants you to respond because of faith and love. The root is often misplaced affection. We need that pointed out and dealt with. (Proverbs 9:8-9)

The next man came to Jesus with conditions. "*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*" Jesus didn't offer his condolences. No, in this culture, even to this day, the same expression is used. It means that one cannot be free to do their own thing until their father has passed away. Until then, they are duty bound to remain at home and attend to their father's directions.

Jesus knows the heart of man. He knows that the impulse to do something good, especially when it is costly, will soon fade. Let those who have never been challenged with a life commitment to the Lord of the Universe take care of your father. You are called to

Commented [notes5]: ³⁷"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
³⁸and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.
Matthew 10:37-38 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁸Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.
⁹Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.
Proverbs 9:8-9 (NIV)

follow. Which father is more important, the earthly or the heavenly? The moment of opportunity lies before you, and if you do not choose now, you will never choose it.

Careers have been changed on one moment of impulse. H G Wells was an apprentice to a draper. *"There came to him one day what he called "an inward and prophetic voice: 'Get out of this trade before it is too late; at any cost get out of it.'" He did not wait; he got out; and that is why he became H. G. Wells."*—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

These two men had come to the crossroads of their life. They could go on their meaningless ways, or they could turn and follow Jesus. They could live lives of mediocrity, or they could become household names. There before them stood the one Man that would change the entire world without an army or even writing a book. They were standing before the most influential man in all of history. But even more than that, they stood before their Creator who knew their design and purpose. They were standing at the edge of darkness, about to step into the light. (1 Peter 2:9) As Plato would have put it, they were at the mouth of a cave in the depths of which they had spent their entire life and were gazing out at dazzling light and color. Yet, they chose to turn and go back into the darkness. (Luke 9:62)

Jesus addressed this same issue in Luke 14:25-33(NIV). ²⁵*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:* ²⁶*"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

Church growth experts today wouldn't be very excited about Jesus' tactics. It was when He saw that large crowds were following that He uttered these hard sayings. In Matthew, the issues were comfort and family obligations. This passage in Luke begins with the place of family. It has to be second to Jesus at best. It is our obligation to have a healthy godly home. But if our family comes before our Creator then our family has become our god, replacing the God who gave us our family.

Then in verse 27 Jesus tells us that if we would follow we must take up our cross. The Roman procurator would sentence someone to death by crucifixion by pronouncing, "Put the cross on the man." When Jesus said to take up your cross, He meant to welcome the death penalty to your will and ways. Consider yourself on the way to your execution. Your life is no longer your own. (1 Corinthians 7:23) If anyone other than our Creator made such a demand, we would be furious at their arrogance. But our Creator has every right to make such a request. It is only in letting go of our will for our life that we are able to hear and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. If you want to be a disciple, you must take up the cross.

Commented [notes7]: ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ⁶²Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ²³You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23 (NIV)

It begins by counting the cost. What are you willing to surrender? How much are you willing to pay to build that house? How much are you willing to give to stop that war? You have to come to the bottom line of how far you are willing to go. Jesus tells us exactly where to draw the line in Luke 14:33. All! If you are going to be a disciple, you have to be willing to give it all. It is because Jesus is who He is that anything short of all is an insult. Anything short of all leaves room for the destructiveness of evil.

Remember, we aren't talking about salvation. This is about following Jesus as a disciple. There is only one price tag with the same price for every disciple, ALL! You can't reserve anything for yourself, and yet everything is yours. (1 Corinthians 3:21-22) You give up your freedom but find for the first time you are really free. (John 8:31-32) You lose your life but for the first time you find it. (Matthew 16:24-25) So let me ask you, are you a disciple?

The two men in the Matthew passage came to Jesus and said, "I will follow you, but..." I will follow you but I need acceptable conditions for lodging. I will follow you but I need to take care of some things first. Conditional Christians can't be disciples. There can be no "but..." for the disciple. Nothing short of your all is worthy of discipleship. Anything short of all will eventually cause you to turn from following, because it represents another god in your life. What is your exception to following Jesus? Family, friends, job, security, comfort, income, control, what is the impediment for you? What is the god that gets in the way of Jesus Christ being Lord in your life? (Ephesians 5:5)

I would ask you to take a close examination of that thing or condition and ask yourself in the light of eternity is it really worth it? Is it that fulfilling? Like these would be followers of the Lord of Lords, Jesus asks you about the lowest common denominator. What will it take to buy you off? What pleasure will cause you to turn you away from following Jesus? Recognize that it is a good thing to be honest about your priorities. Then go on to dealing with that fear or desire in the light of eternity. Draw closer to Christ until by His grace you can let go of all else.

Some of you stand at the crossroads this morning. Interesting term, the crossroad. ALL or nothing are really the only options. To be a disciple or not to be? Jim Eliot declared, "He is no fool that gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." He should know. He gave his life in missions and gained a place with the martyrs for the cause of Christ. He sparked an explosion in missions. (John 12:24)

Of these two men in Matthew 8, one was hasty in his declaration. He hadn't really counted the cost. The other wanted to put his actual following off to a later time. Neither was ready to let it all go and follow the only One who is worth everything. Ultimately they both were saying something else was more important in their life than Jesus. That may be honest, but it is a foolish place to stay. (Matthew 16:26)

What is the bottom line for you today? Have you seen that Jesus is worth everything or are you clinging to something? (Mark 10:28-30) Will you take the time to make an honest evaluation of that thing in the light of eternity and let the Lord show you how

Commented [notes10]: ²¹So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Ephesians 5:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ²⁴I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. John 12:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" ²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. Mark 10:28-30 (NIV)

to deal with it? His grace can help you put things in proper perspective. Sometimes there is nothing evil about the thing that distracts you; it is just that you have made the gift more important than the Giver. In the light of His love and with an understanding that the gift is from God, you can then start to allow God to help you put it in its proper place. (1 Timothy 6:17) You may have to set it aside for a while until its hold on your life is broken. You may need prayer and accountability to help you stay true to your convictions. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Will you be a disciple? Do you want to be close to Jesus or are you satisfied with following at a distance? "Follow me!" (Matthew 8:22) Jesus demanded. But how closely will you follow? What lines will you draw?

This story was written anonymously by a person that compared discipleship with a bike ride. I think it pretty well sums up what I've been trying to share with you. He writes, *At first I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him. But later on, when I met Christ, It seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don't know when it was that he suggested that we change places, but life has not been the same since. When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable. . . It was the shortest distance between two points. But when he took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds, It was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!" I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light. I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but he knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion Jesus Christ. And when I'm sure I just can't do anymore, He just smiles and says . . . "Pedal." - author unknown*

Discipleship is when Christ takes the front seat. Where are you on this journey? The Holy Spirit invites you to take the next step, to come closer to Jesus.

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ¹¹Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹²Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ²²But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Matthew 8:22 (NIV)