

What Did You Expect?

Matthew 8:18-22

¹⁸ 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 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.”¹

Context

Set the Stage: There is a crowd around him. He has demonstrated powerful and stirring preaching (i.e., as one with authority unlike the religious teachers of the day). *Then* he has gone and (with only a word) cast out the spirits of many who were oppressed by demons and healed all who were sick. *No wonder there is a crowd.*

What Did They Expect: Pastor James told me a story about his childhood. He was at his grandmother’s house for Christmas and he and his brother unwrapped presents, both in the same size boxes. As the wrapping tore away, they saw identical boxes showing the contents inside were DVD players (this was when that was cool). When they opened the boxes, they found beautiful, plush bathrobes. They expected a DVD player and got a bathrobe (exactly what a 12-year-old wants).

- Jesus had just performed a bunch of miracles, they expected miracles and healings. They longed for it. They loved the idea of a personal genie and a private healer. They love that Jesus’ miraculous gifts are aligning so nicely with their wants and needs.

Follower or Fan: he gave orders to go over to the other side. He is “going away” and most of the crowd can’t go with him (e.g., “crowd” vs. “disciples”). With the authority that only he possessed as God, he gave orders to go to the other side. The other side was a Gentile land (e.g., pigs). Where he was going the crowds wouldn’t follow. The question isn’t “do you like Jesus” or are you “impressed by Jesus”? **Will you follow Jesus where he is leading?**

- Jesus wants more than a fan or a student, he wants a follower (i.e., “disciple”).
- Our modern conception of being a follower (e.g., **Twitter**) feels more like fandom.
- More like Team Christianity with Jesus as our mascot (Richard Ross)?
 - “Knowing Christ as a mascot may be the most descriptive (and most disturbing) of all the self-serving visions” that many Christians (so-called) have of Jesus. Many “believers welcome Him to cheer them on, to inspire their efforts, to give

¹ ¹⁸ Ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὄχλον περὶ αὐτὸν ἐκέλευσεν ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὸ πέραν. ¹⁹ καὶ προσελθὼν εἰς γραμματεὺς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Διδάσκαλε, ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου ἐὰν ἀπέρχῃ. ²⁰ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Αἱ ἀλώπεκες φωλεοὺς ἔχουσιν καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνώσκει, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔχει ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνει. ²¹ ἕτερος δὲ τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ] εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Κύριε, ἐπίτρεψόν μοι πρῶτον ἀπελθεῖν καὶ θάψαι τὸν πατέρα μου. ²² ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἀκολούθει μοι καὶ ἄφες τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς

them confidence.” “But with Christ as a mascot, the ‘game’ is really about [us], not about Him. [We] call the plays, organize the team, execute the strategies, pile up the points, and achieve the wins. Most of the time Jesus is relegated to the sidelines as [our] figurehead — the ‘name’ by which [we] take the field, the definition of all [we] aspire to, the one [we] call on when [we] get behind.”

- Jesus wasn’t trying to please the crowd, he was calling them to costly discipleship. Jesus wasn’t known for crowd pleasing sermons but space-maker sermons. Thousands of people would follow Jesus to see him do miracles and he would say some crazy stuff like, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (John 6:53).” As David Platt says in his book *Radical*, “[That’s] not exactly the sharpest church-growth tactic.” You can picture the disciples rolling their eyes and saying, “Not the drink-my-blood speech again.” “By the end of that particular speech (recorded in John 6), all the crowds had left, and only twelve men remained. Jesus apparently wasn’t interested in marketing himself to the masses. His invitations to potential followers were clearly more costly than the crowds were ready to accept, and he seemed to be okay with that. He focused instead on the few who believed him when he said radical things. And through their radical obedience to him, he turned the course of history in a new direction” (Platt, 2). “After 3 years of ministry, Jesus had about 120 followers. That’s not a successful church plant by today’s standards” (paraphrased from John Piper).

Miracle Seeker or Disciple?: The miracles were supposed to identify Jesus as the messiah, the son of God. They were never intended to be the end. They were supposed to get everyone’s attention and call them to follow Jesus.

- This passage is full of discipleship language: “disciple” (v. 21), “follow” (vv. 19, 22).
- You see, it’s easy to “follow” Jesus when you’re sick and he heals you. It might even give the impression that the goal of miracles is your comfort. But that’s not it at all. The end is not the gift of the miracle but the giver of the miracle.
- Jesus is inviting them to follow *him* not merely receive his gifts. It is a call to discipleship. He is asking them to leave the crowds and become a disciple.
- It’s a costly journey to leave the crowd and follow Jesus.

What is the Gospel and Discipleship?: I’m shocked at how many so-called Christians struggle to explain the gospel and discipleship. What is the gospel? Is it Jesus in your heart, be good, do good, God will bless you, and you’ll go to heaven.

- Moralistic, therapeutic, deism (i.e., be good, feel good, and God will leave you alone). This is wrong on every level.
- But Jesus is not begging for disciples, he is turning some away. He doesn’t need us. We have messed up discipleship by begging every volunteer to give a little rather than it all. Lowest common denominator (e.g., theology, commitment, etc.).
- These disciples loved Jesus *as long* as His priorities aligned with theirs.
- What is the life you think you want? Here’s the truth: you can’t have life without Jesus.

- What is the gospel? What does it mean to follow Jesus? What is eternal life? “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3).
- The goal of miracles are not to free you from trouble they’re to point you to God. And Jesus wants to make sure that these miracles to trick people into missing the point — him. If Jesus is our ultimate goal and our ultimate good then we must value him above ever comfort and prioritize him above everything.

1. Value Jesus Above Comfort (vv. 19-20)

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 Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Scribe: And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher”. This scribe, a man of intellect and letters, a particular (i.e., “certain”) man, was impressed by Jesus, calling him a “Rabbi” a “Teacher”: And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Matt 7:28-29).

Over His Skis: He (over?)enthusiastically proclaim that he wants to leave the crowd and cross the sea with Jesus: “I will follow you wherever you go.”

What Was His Problem?: (1) Was he still looking at himself as important so Jesus puts him in his place (e.g., “Son of Man”). (2) Was he thinking this was a “short term” trip rather than a life-long journey (e.g., “mission tourism”). (3) Miracle worker can surely conjure some money and fame.

Misunderstood: 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.”

- The Son of Man is a divine title (e.g., Dan 7:13-14) that is part of the prophecy of the messianic, victorious figure, enthroned beside God in heaven, ruling over the nations. It emphasizes the human qualities of this divine person (a.k.a., the God-man).
- Even animals have “homes” (e.g., even a home can be a functional savior, you can live for it, worship it, rely on it). How do I identify my functional savior? What is my view of hell? What gives me joy? Comfort? What can I not live without?
- If the divine Son of God has no home or comfort (a fox and bird are better off), then how do you think it will go for you, Mr. Scribe? To follow Jesus we have to be willing to live like him. For many, Jesus is the perfect example never to be imitated. If we want to follow Jesus we have to follow him everywhere he goes.

Do You Really Want to Go?: The bold proclamation of the eager disciple (“I will follow you wherever you go”) is good ‘cause Jesus is on his way to the right hand of the Father! He is headed to paradise. *You should want to be wherever Jesus is and go wherever he is going but*

on the way he is also going to the cross. And Jesus says to follow him means to "take up your cross" (Matt 16:24).

- "[The] expression 'to take up one's cross' is not an idiom [to refer to some annoyance] — a toothache, an awkward boss: 'We all have our crosses to bear.' No, in the first century, it was as culturally unthinkable to make jokes about crucifixion as it would be today to make jokes about Auschwitz. To take up your cross does not mean to move forward with courage despite the fact you lost your job or your spouse. It means you are under sentence of death. You have abandoned all hope of life in this world. And then, Jesus says, and only then, are we ready to follow Him" (D. A. Carson, *Scandalous*).
- Most people want the "resurrection" but they don't want the "death."

Cost of Discipleship: *Read Bonhoeffer's *Cost and Life Together*. "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die... Because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts."

- "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl for which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy... Such grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not consider his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us"
- No house? Jesus is saying, "If you follow me, I'm all you've got" (e.g., some people actually worship their house and most of us metaphorically worship the comfort, security, and prestige it represents).
- This disciple needs to understand, **Jesus is worthy of unconditional trust.**
- Eternal life is *knowing God and the Son he sent* not miracles. Jesus is not a miraculous means to an end, he is the end.
- Loss of comfort forces us to ask, "Where is my joy?" I can say, "I love Jesus," but if all I really want is financial security, a nice family, a respectable career then I am worshipping something else. These functional saviors (i.e., preoccupy our thoughts, consume our time, define our identity) becomes idols blocking true discipleship (e.g., targeted ads might identify your idols).

2. Prioritize Jesus Above Everything (vv. 21-22)

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."

Potential Disciple #2: Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord” Difference between the 12 disciples and the generic disciples. The scribe was a disciple and this guy is a disciple. Calls Jesus “Lord” (recognizes *something*).

Got Some Things to Do: “Let me first go and bury my father.” This could mean that his dad died and that he needs to go bury him (a particularly American way to think about death and burial). But, in the context of Second Temple Judaism, there is no way he would have been out with Jesus if his dad was dead. He would be mourning and preparing for burial. Then what does this mean? He’s saying, I have obligations to my family and when they’re done, I’ll come with you.

- When I grow up, I’ll follow you. When my kids get out of the house, I’ll follow you (e.g., Dad’s motorcycle purchase). I’ll be generous with my money when I get rich, etc.
- There is no later! There is no getting it together. You follow Jesus with everything you have for all of life or not at all.
- Following Jesus is *all or nothing* (e.g., not just a few rooms of your house or a few hours of your week; e.g., married just a few hours a week).

First Place: That’s just it, he wants to follow Jesus *after*. I’ll follow you, “but first” (e.g., sin, experience, stage of life). If Jesus isn’t first, then you aren’t following him (i.e., priorities).

- More than your spouse (sorry honey), kids, family, parents, job. In fact, I love my wife better when I love God first (same with kids, job, etc).

Reasonable Request: This seems like a reasonable request, but the kingdom of God is not reasonable – it is scandalous according to the logic of the world. Reasonable would be Jesus remaining where he deserves, at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Scandalous is Jesus becoming a human being, not to rule but to serve, and not only serve but die a brutal death for sins he did not commit. It’s not that this man shouldn’t be concerned with burying his father, that is in fact a good and right responsibility. **What he is saying is that the kingdom of God is more important than even the good things in our lives — our family.**

- The Kingdom of God is not palatable, reasonable, and comfortable. It is scandalous, transformative, and counter cultural.
- The kingdom of God flips the priorities of the world upside down. The last will be first. The humble will be exalted. The weak will be powerful. The foolish will be wise.

I heard one pastor tell a story about a man he met, had repented of his sins and surrendered his life to Christ. He went from being a casual follower of Jesus to a completely committed follower. Everything changed in his life. He went from spending his days smoking pot, getting drunk, and chasing girls to reading his Bible, coming to church, and telling everybody he knew about Jesus. One day he asked this pastor to have coffee with him and his mom. The mom was a member of another church in town and the pastor thought she wanted an opportunity to encourage him about the difference Jesus had made in her son’s life. Nope. She was upset with him and the church because, in her words, “My son has taken all of this too far.” She was not pleased with how much time he was spending at church, or how he was giving some of his hard earned

money, or was always trying to witness to the rest of the family. Here's what she said: "Can you please tell him the Bible teaches 'everything in moderation'? He needs to understand that it doesn't have to be all or nothing." Unfortunately, the Bible does teach all or nothing. Jesus doesn't say, "Everything in moderation." He says, "Deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow me."

Different Priorities: And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." As citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we live by different priorities. The spiritually dead can worry about the dead. If we've been made alive then we can't be living for the dead things of this world. *This is not advocating dishonoring parents or failing familial obligations.

Fanaticism: Following Jesus demands a degree of fanaticism that disrupts normal rhythms of social life. If everything you do fits into the rhythms and patterns of the world, then you are a disciple of the world not of Christ (e.g., everyone is a disciple). These crowds loved Jesus the miracle worker but their popular enthusiasm for his teaching generally stopped short of full discipleship. They loved a rousing sermon and an amazing miracle but they didn't want him to upset the *status quo*. They didn't want him to disrupt their habits, plans, dreams, desires, etc. *But Jesus disrupts* (e.g., boyfriend, girlfriend, money, house, relationships, schedule, etc.).

Context: In the **first century**, there was no positive value to becoming a Christian. Following Jesus was going to be an act of familial treason. If one desired acceptance by family more than a relationship with God, they would never become a Christian. There could be no casual devotion to Jesus in the first century. **Today**, in other parts of the world it is costly to follow Jesus. Becoming a Christian in some places will get you arrested or disowned by your family.

Oshe and Ethiopia: By David Alan Black, Tuesday, July 12, 6:40pm. "I've been sitting here in front of a blank computer screen, trying to write but finding it almost impossible to do so, my hands trembling, my heart breaking and aching. Yesterday I received news about a co-worker in Ethiopia that stunned me. His name is Oshe. We've known Oshe since we began our work many years ago in faraway Burji, near Kenya, accessible by a 19-hour bus ride from the capital, literally at the end of the world, lonely, forgotten, but deep in our hearts. Oshe has been our point man for many of our ministries to the Muslims in Burji. He is perfectly suited for the job, speaks English well, can understand organization, mechanics, electricity and electronics, how to get things done and how to keep things maintained. He helped us install solar power at several churches, saw to it that the loud speakers played Christian music and Bible teaching day and night, and distributed Bible teaching material. Because of his faithfulness to the Gospel he has been in the crosshairs of the Evil One, the target of opposition and persecution. Last year his cattle and goats were run over and killed by a truck. Then word came on Saturday that his 4-year old daughter was run down and killed by the same driver. 'Oshe's daughter is the second martyr of our work in Burji,' my wife said to me. I struggle to wrap my mind around that thought. James, our 24-year old Burji translator, was murdered for spreading the gospel. Deep down inside my being there is a conversation going on, between me and God. Lord, is this the price of building your church in Ethiopia? Once again I am forced to return to my conviction, reinforced

through my reading of Scripture, that however terrible the tragedy, more important still is the living God in whose hands Oshe's daughter now lies. It forces me to think more deeply about the Great Commission, about Christian discipleship, about the cause of evil in this world, about the love and grace of a God who gave His own child to overcome that evil. For years now I have been unable to divorce my discipleship from global missions, have been learning the blessing of suffering. Nothing that happens, including family tragedy, family separation, family opposition, can separate the true believer from Christ. The church in Burji has no earthly power. It has only the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of love and truth – and of forgiveness. This coming Saturday, during the funeral, it will be evident to all that it is costly to follow Jesus in Burji, Ethiopia. Suffering is normative for the Christian, not an aberration. Nowhere is doctrine and life, theology and practice, so interwoven as in the arena of martyrdom. When a Christian suffers, Christians everywhere should not mourn as if something strange is happening. Instead, we should rejoice just as the apostles of the Lord rejoiced because they were "thought worthy of suffering for the blessed Name" (Acts 5:41-42). Suffering is the price of grace. The demons do not fear denominational programs or initiatives. What they fear is a person who carries on in the midst of pain and heartache, who realizes that nothing can ever separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Conclusion

The call today is to **prioritize and value Jesus above everything**. You won't count the cost and follow Jesus until you treasure him above everything. There is power once you have treasured Christ above all. You know longer fear man or pain or death. Jesus promises, that if you have given up something to follow him you will receive "many times more at this time and in the age to come" (Luke 18:30). **Is this like a divine retirement account? I put a little in and get a lot out?**

- It's possible to embrace the gifts of God and marvel at the miracles of God but forget that **it is God himself that is our highest joy and our greatest reward**. There is a fine line between "God-cherishing gratitude and Gift-cherishing idolatry" (Piper).
- "If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, **could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?**" (Piper, *God is the Gospel*)
- What is the gift of God but eternal life? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). What exactly is eternal life? "That [you] know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ [who he sent]" (John 17:3). "In other words, the gift of the gospel called eternal life is the perfection of knowing **God and his Son Jesus Christ**. **All other gods must go**. All other delights that are not delights in God must go—not because anything good must be taken away, but to make room for what is infinitely best, **God himself**." (Piper).

Invitation: When Jesus speaks, leprosy, paralysis, fever, wind, and waves *obey*. **Will you?** Jesus, the miracle-working, authoritative God, is only one who can make the demand, “Follow me” *and* He is the only one worth following.

- Jesus is calling you from the crowd to become a disciple.
- What is God calling you to leave behind to follow him? What is holding you back? Turn to Jesus. Follow him. Don't look back.