

Matt. 8:18-22 - The Cost of Discipleship

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 22 February 2009 02:00

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Body

1.

The Cost to Your Home vv. 18-20

1.

Text. First Jesus presents the cost to your home.

1.

18 Now when Jesus saw a great crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.

2.

19 And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

3.

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."

4.

Call to cross the Sea of Galilee. Jesus creates the setting for His teaching by first ordering His disciples to prepare the boats to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It is surprising that He plans to leave precisely at the moment when a great crowd was following Him, and even apparently because the crowd was following Him. Wasn't His purpose—even in this passage—to call men to follow Him? Yes, but not everyone in

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this crowd was following Jesus as they ought. Jesus is no local deity, but the God of the whole earth. He intended to teach others also, on the other side of the lake, and He intended to test the faith of those in the crowd. Think of what this crowd had learned in recent days, and what you have learned from the beginning of Matthew 8. Do you really believe Jesus can save the untouchables, the lepers, the Gentiles? Do you really believe He can make you a son of God by faith? Do you really believe He can heal your diseases, and save you from your sin? "Then," Jesus says, "I'll see if you still follow me when I'm not in this town anymore."

5.

Two potential followers. Before Jesus and His disciples depart for the other shore, two potential new disciples approach Jesus. Both are on the verge of following Him, but neither is fully committed to Him. The first is bright, quick, and ready. The second is dull, slow, and delaying.

1.

The scribe

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The first is a scribe; a Jewish scholar whose job it was to copy and know the OT scriptures. We could compare him with a seminary student or Bible teacher today. He's smart, knows his Bible, and should be committed to serving God.

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The scribe's proposal

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The scribe makes a proposal to Jesus. "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."
The Greek actually reads, "
I will follow you wherever you
may
go
," which is exactly the same as the line in the song by Ricky Nelson! Wow! What excellent

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priorities this scribe appears to have! And he expresses his commitment absolutely, certainly. The NT generally condemns the scribes, but this one appears sincere. He wants Jesus to accept him as one of His closest followers.

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Jesus' challenge.

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However, like the rich young ruler, there is one thing this scribe lacks. Jesus replies to him simply by describing the difficulties of His own experience, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

" If you want to be my follower, are you willing to be homeless? To not even have a pillow at night? The birds have nests of sticks and mud, and they line their finest nests with their own feathers. If you follow me you may sleep on the ground in your own clothes. No more books, no more buildings. In a few minutes I will sleep through a violent rainstorm in an open boat. Will you follow me? You will have no predictable resting place. What will your wife say? Young man, have you considered the cost of following me? But I tell you, my message and mission are more important than having a home; more important than having roots in this world.

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During His ministry Jesus lived like a soldier, but unlike the Boy Scouts with their motto "Be Prepared," this scribe was not prepared to sacrifice his comfort for the sake of Christ's saving mission. Discipleship cost too much.

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Jesus' blessings.

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But what does discipleship cost you? Do you remember Jesus words in **Matt. 10:39**?

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Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

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With Christ as your Savior, you lose your life. And you also find it. You lose your life where you are lord, and where your sin reigns supreme. You gain your life where Jesus is Lord, and His blessings outweigh the cost of following Him. Consider then Jesus' blessings. Let me ask you, what is your home?

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A home with God today on earth. Jesus gives you a home with God today on earth.

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John 14:23

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Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

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A home with God in heaven. Jesus gives you a home with God in heaven, where your true treasures lie already.

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Matthew 6:19-21

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19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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People say "Home is where your heart is." Is your heart set on the treasures laid up for you in heaven? Christ said "I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:3) Paul tells you in

2 Corinthians

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2 Corinthians 4:14, 16-5:9

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14 he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

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16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

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5:1 For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened--not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

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6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

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Application. If you have saving faith in Jesus Christ, you know pleasing Him is worth the loss of all things in this earth, for the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and even of sharing in His sufferings. Christ in you today is the hope of glory tomorrow. It is in Christ's presence in glory alone that you will be finally and fully at home. And Christ's presence with you today is what makes any place of service to Him a home.

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The use of your home. You have a home in glory-land that outshines the sun. Consider then the use of your home

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The more you follow Christ in it, the more it will be a home. The more you and your children will belong in it, and the more your relatives and friends will be welcome. It is in a home that exalts the God who is both just and merciful through Jesus Christ that true fairness and kindness will reign. It is in homes where the gospel spreads that your formerly unbelieving friends will be saved, and one day welcome you into your heavenly dwelling. Use your house, and your activities in it, to honor Christ. You can make this kind of home anywhere. You can pick up and move this spiritual core of a Christian home from here to the other side of the sea at the drop of a hat. By His divine power the Son of man

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needs
no place to lay His head.

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The loss of your home. Consider the loss of your home. Sometimes houses burn down. The one down the street was torn down this week because it burned. If Christ calls you to suffer that painful providence, do you still have a home? With Christ your Savior, you do

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We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

" (

2 Cor. 4:18

)

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Being willing to move. Consider being willing to move in order to better serve the Lord.

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I wanted to serve the Lord as a pastor. If I was not willing to move I would not have gone to seminary. I would not have come here. If Christian missionaries were not willing to move their Christian homes overseas, there would be no Christian homes overseas. I saw an elder in our OPC in Glenside, PA move in order to be closer to the church where he served.

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We have seen one of our members move in just the past month from the Guest Homes Estates to Owasso because it was the best way for her to continue receiving God's care. If God calls you to submit to that kind of move one day, will you still have a home?

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Choosing a college or job. Consider your choice of a college, or a job. If using your gifts for the Lord and His people requires a move, will you move? Or in the case of my father, if your job

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moves out of town but your church and your best means of serving the Lord stays where your home is, will you stay? You follow Jesus Christ. Don't follow the money, the friends, or your house.

Follow Jesus

. If you consider a college or a job out of town, do not take it until you find a faithful Bible-believing church of Jesus Christ and plan to attend it, or you're not following Jesus.

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The Cost to Your Family vv. 21-22

1.

Text. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." (**Psalm 127:1**) The same is true of your family. The cost of discipleship includes a cost to your family

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1.

21 Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

2.

22 And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

3.

The disciple. This man was not a scribe; rather, Matthew calls this man a "disciple." To one extent or another, this man was already following Jesus.

4.

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The disciple's request. But before he is willing for Jesus to leave, and by implication, before this man is willing to follow Jesus physically, and to follow Jesus' teaching spiritually, this man asks permission to attend to obligations to his family. The obligation would appear to be innocent—it was the strongest of social customs and morally upright for Jews and Gentiles to honor their parents by giving them a proper burial. It is hard to see how it would be right for this man not to bury his father! But let me ask you this—why does this disciple believe there is a conflict between following Jesus and burying his father? Did Jesus travel too fast for this man to catch him? No, because one time a crowd followed Jesus' boat from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other. Was it that he couldn't find Jesus after a week's time? No, Jesus would be easy to find. Why could not this man's extended family bury his father? That job could be done by someone else. But Christ called him to "

Follow me

," so his calling and task before God was to follow Jesus. In reality this man used his real obligation to honor his father as an excuse for not following Jesus. Not following Jesus now is tantamount to not following Jesus ever. But we can have more hope for this disciple than for the scribe. Christ discouraged the hasty scribe, but encouraged the hesitating disciple.

5.

Jesus' challenge. So Jesus challenged him to bring him to his senses. "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

" Jesus' words would be shocking if He meant this man should not honor his father and mother, but Jesus did not mean that. He means we must not follow the spiritually dead when they lead us away from following Christ. Jesus called those who are physically alive "

dead

" because they were
spiritually

dead. Would Jesus' disciple follow their lead, or Christ's? Matthew Henry writes, "Piety to God must be preferred before piety to parents, though that is a great and needful part of our religion. The Nazarites, under the law, were not to mourn for their own parents, because they were *holy to the Lord*

(Numb. vi. 6-8); nor was the high priest to

defile himself for the dead,

no, not for

his own father

, Lev. xxi. 11, 12."

[1](#)

Jesus said in

Matt. 10:32-38

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32 Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who

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is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. 34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For 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.

2.

Jesus Christ can bring a division in your family. But the only right kind of division He brings is fundamentally a division between being for or against Christ. Christ takes a family whose every member is anti-Christ, and turns some of its members to follow Him. Those who do not love Christ will oppose those who do, and Christ's call for unbelievers to repent will offend the unbelievers. You will no longer approve of their sin or your own. Whether overtly or subtly, unbelievers will try to turn you away from acknowledging Christ as your Lord. That is the nature of the conflict Jesus described. This is what following Jesus costs your family.

3.

This is true of any family, but there are many stories of Muslims and Hindus who have been completely disowned by their families for becoming a Christian. Our missionaries in Japan tell the story of a man whose aged mother is committed to a shelf of false gods. He says "I want to be a Christian, but I can't leave my mother." His statement is nearly the same as the man's in our passage. I don't think he would have to leave or neglect his mother in order to be a Christian. But he would have to leave his mother's gods, and perhaps she would disown him. This is part of the cost of discipleship.

4.

Jesus' blessings

1.

Can anything good come from this situation? Much in every way. Consider not only the cost, but also the blessings, of discipleship.

2.

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The Family of God. The first blessing is the family of God. In **Matthew 19:29**, Jesus said,

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Matthew 19:29

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And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

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You will suffer a loss within your family relationships as a Christian, but you gain communion with Christ, and with the saints; you receive even a hundredfold more houses and brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers and children and lands, and what is more, you inherit eternal life. I experienced a small taste of how great these blessings are when the Covenant College Chorale sang at PCA churches from Chattanooga to Miami one year, and Chattanooga to Denver the next. People we had never met before provided the most generous hospitality to us because of their joy that together we were fellow members of the family of God. I have a thousand contacts in my address book and more than 200 friends on FaceBook because the bonds of Christian love in our common Savior Jesus Christ are deep, and lasting. We have received a hundredfold, and have hardly seen the tip of the iceberg of the blessing of the family of God.

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Salvation in your family. A further blessing of discipleship is salvation in your family. Your family comes that much closer to salvation. God saves unbelievers through the witness of a believing family member. "

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word.

" (

1 Pet. 3:1

) Paul even says an unbelieving spouse and children are made holy by the believing spouse's presence in the family. The children of a believer are part of the covenant community, and thereby often are brought to faith in Christ.

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Reconciliation in your family. Another great blessing God gives is reconciliation in your family. The only means of true reconciliation in our families is for you, a sinner, to forgive as God has forgiven you. Jesus does not only tear apart unbelieving families. He puts together believing families. "God sets the lonely in families...but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land."

" (

Psalms 68:5

) You say "I lost my family when I gained Christ." Pray that your family will gain Christ, that you may also regain your family. When that happens, you regain them as brothers not only for this life, but also for the life to come.

Conclusion

1.

Consider the cost of discipleship. You may lose your home, and your family. But the Christian home and the Christian family you gain are of eternal value. Following Jesus can bring much suffering upon you. But your suffering will never amount to what Christ suffered for you. It was fitting for the captain of our salvation to suffer for us, because we suffer from our sin and the misery it brings. But because He chose to take on our flesh and blood, to bear our sin, and our misery, He is not ashamed now to call us His brothers. He bled and died so "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death...and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

" (

Heb. 2:14-15

) He made you His disciple at the cost of His life. He now calls you to be His disciple at the cost of yours. But He gives you this assurance, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

" As you now receive the Lord's Supper, consider the cost, and the surpassing blessings, of discipleship.

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[1](#) Matthew Henry, 109.