



Part 2: Counting the Costs of Discipleship

Matthew 8:18-22

All true disciples of Jesus embrace the cost of following Jesus, because they see the beauty of his invitation.

I. The Gift of Lent

Lent series: "Following Our Crucified King" offers us the opportunity to intentionally reflect on our need for a Savior from sin and the costs to Jesus, our Lord, to save us from our sin.

Last week: the pattern is life through death...

II. Confusion & Recalibration

Honesty may lead us to admit that we find Jesus' words (last week and today) surprising, confusing, or hard to accept or embrace. Jesus' demands are challenging and countercultural in any generation and culture, but they are especially challenging for us formed by a host culture that elevates the individual and the "sovereign self" as the only legitimate authority.

Ex. "You Above All" banner at UCCS.

We may also find Jesus' demands confusing or hard because of the way the Gospel or Christianity was offered or explained to us. It's been common for the last 75 years to explain the Gospel without using any words of Jesus.

EX. "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" is true, but its incomplete. It risks misleading people or leaving them vulnerable to confusion, disappointment or deconstruction of their faith.

We need to be honest about where we find ourselves in the American Church today. We need the help of the Lord to hear and accept the challenge by Dallas Willard.

“The greatest issue facing the world today with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who are identified as Christians will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ steadily learning from him how to live the life of the kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence. That’s it. Jesus is not looking for converts to Christianity. He is looking for apprentices to the Kingdom of God.” – Dallas Willard

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III. Counting the Costs

A. Jesus is honest about the reality of being his disciple.

“When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’” Matthew 8:18-20

A “teacher of the law” or “scribe” was a religious professional trained in the Jewish law to guide the Jews into faithful living. Previously, he would have been a disciple to a rabbi. His professional status appears to have tempted him to think that he could simply pick Jesus rather than Jesus pick him. Perhaps he thinks he has much to offer Jesus or that Jesus is a way to advance his professional career and status.

Jesus’ response to this religious professional is surprising. Jesus responds in a way that is designed to confront this man with his false expectations. Jesus discerns this man has not understood the kind of commitment and costs that are required in following Jesus.

This man is likely an idealist. He has likely observed Jesus’ miracles and concluded the Kingdom of God is present in Jesus. But he has not seen the reality that the Kingdom of God is not fully present in Jesus. There will still be hardship, opposition, and suffering. This King will be crucified!

In the language of our cultural moment, following Jesus is not all “up and to the right” into greater success, status or comfort. Inconvenience, hardship and trouble are actually promised by Jesus – “in this world you will have trouble...if they hated me, they will hate you.”

“If Jesus was a pastor, I don’t think his church would have grown very fast. Any leader of a movement wants to make it easy for people to enter, but Jesus acts in a completely different way. People come and say, ‘I want to join up,’ and Jesus says, ‘Get back. Think!’” – Tim Keller

I love that Jesus does not make a sales pitch to us. He doesn’t use gimmicks or slogans to get us to accept his deal. He’s honest. We should be too.

Ex. My recent experience with an AT&T rep in King Soopers lied to me to get me to sign the deal. Jesus never does this.

“Jesus wants disciples – that is clear from the whole Gospel – but he does not want them at any cost.” – Dale Bruner

B. Jesus is honest about his demand for our ultimate allegiance.

“Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead [but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God].’” Matthew 8:21-22 [Luke 9:60]

Here is an even more confusing and challenging response from Jesus. What does this mean?

“Bury one’s father” was an idiom for fulfilling one’s family responsibilities for the remainder of your father’s life even without the prospect of his imminent death (based on the 5th Commandment to “honor father and mother”).

It’s very likely that this man’s father had not died, or this man would not have been hanging around Jesus. This man is telling Jesus that he will follow him later when its convenient.

By any account, Jesus’ response to this man is shocking (especially in Jewish culture that elevates family above all).

Q – What does Jesus mean by “let the dead bury their own dead”?

There are a couple of options:

- First, most commentators think Jesus is using metaphor and possibly hyperbole to suggest the ludicrous image of literally the dead burying one another. This is a shocking way of saying – “leave such matters alone. I’m here offering you new life in the Kingdom.”
- Second, others see Jesus saying, “leave the spiritually dead to bury the physical dead.” Jesus sees people outside the Kingdom as the “walking dead.”

Ex. My experience immediately after my conversion at happy hour in Nashville bar – receiving a sudden and unexpected vision of beautiful, successful people as skeletons!

Jesus has come announcing the offer of new life with him now and forever in God’s beautiful Kingdom. To be “born again” spiritually into the Kingdom is to be transferred from spiritual death to spiritual life.

“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” 1 John 5:11-12

Jesus is saying – “The Kingdom of God is here with me. You must be willing to arrange your priorities to enter the Kingdom to live with me under my rule.” Jesus is clear that he demands our

allegiance to him as Savior, Lord, and King. This is what it means to “receive Jesus and believe in his name” (John 1:12-13).

I call these men the “almost disciples.” They came up to the border of the Kingdom, but they apparently did not cross over. Honesty leads us to say that there must be many in America who have done the same thing.

Jesus invites us to do a “cost-benefit analysis” of following him. He invites us to count the costs. There are costs no matter how we choose.

“Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10). The cross-shaped yoke of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul...The correct perspective is to see following Christ not only as the necessity it is, but as the fulfillment of the highest human possibilities and as a life on the highest plane.” – Dallas Willard

IV. Jesus’ Beautiful Summons

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought the field.” Matthew 13:44

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Back to the way we communicate the gospel to others in evangelism:

Jesus invites you to consider his incredible offer of life with him now and forever in God’s beautiful Kingdom. He loves you so much that he went through death to pay for your sins and was resurrected so that you might experience life with him now through the Holy Spirit. He also loves you enough to be honest with you. His invitation will require you surrender your allegiance to him as your Savior, Lord and King. He wants you to live as his disciple in God’s beautiful Kingdom. Jesus and His Kingdom are truly the greatest treasure anyone can ever find.

Discussion Questions:

1. How was the Gospel or Christianity explained to you? Did anyone use any words of Jesus?
2. What was communicated to you in terms of your required response?
3. Was the invitation or summons more transactional or relational? Were you invited clearly into a relationship with Jesus or were you invited more to trust a transaction secured in the cross? What difference do you think this makes?
4. Read Matthew 8:18-22. Does your understanding of the “gospel” or “salvation” include the idea of living as a disciple of Jesus?

5. Has your understanding of following Jesus included an honest assessment of the cost of following him?
6. Consider the quote by Dallas Willard about the cost of non-discipleship? What are your thoughts?
7. Read Matthew 13:44. How has the Lord enabled you to see him and His Kingdom as the greatest treasure?
8. In light of these scriptures, do you have any sense of what Jesus is saying to you?