

Matthew 8:18-34

"Counting The Cost"

"Believer *in* Jesus," or "Follower *of* Jesus," which phrase gages *you* more accurately? Believing *in* Jesus is one thing, but following *after* Jesus is another thing altogether.

Now, pertaining to the next level (presuming you answered "follower *of* Jesus) we have to consider the question, "Why are you following Jesus?" Because motive matters doesn't it? Though I'd never seek to belittle "what" we do, the truth of the matter is that "what" we do typically isn't nearly as important to God compared to "*why*" we do it.

Understand that by the time we're catching up to the context here in Matt Ch 8, *multitudes* of people were following Jesus. But represented in that multitude were all kinds of *motives*. Some had a genuine heart *for* Him. Others had different reasons they were attracted *to* Him. **Perhaps some enjoyed being associated w/His fame; others couldn't wait to be wowed by the next miracle, some were digging the occasional free meal... Different people had different reasons for following Him. The question that confronts *me* & confronts *you* is, "What is *your* reason?"**

As we fall back into the flow of Matt Ch 8, Jesus begins to touch upon the matter of motive, notice.

Vs 18-20

This is where we begin to get a glimpse as to why Jesus wasn't impressed w/big crowds. Because He knew what was in the heart of man, the motive of why people were attracted *to* Him, or always wanting to be *around* Him. John tells us, "**Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.**"¹

Jesus wasn't nearly as concerned w/the quantity of disciples as He was the *quality* of His disciples. He was looking for a people who'd considered things carefully & had *counted the cost*, who were willing to forsake all in order to follow Him.

& I want to come back to that in just a moment but here's something else I want us to see here as well. Embedded w/in the fact that He knew what was *in* men was the fact that (as it pertained to *that* region) He'd just ministered extensively in that area & had met the all the needs *for* those men, those people.

In other words He'd met the needs there, it was time to move on to where the next needs lie. Jesus was always about meeting the need.

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 2:23-25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He said, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."*² Later on in Ch 8 He said of the Father, *"I always do those things that please Him."* *Jn 8:29* Now you & me, we can't say that. I can't say that I *always* do those things that please my Father who is heaven, I would *love* to, I can't. Jesus (on the other hand) would follow His Father's lead, go to where the need is...

It's interesting to me how many people feel called to ministry, but they don't really go where the need is, they just move down the road & minister where needs are being met. Often times they wind up establishing a new church by splitting an existing one & far from meeting needs they wind up creating problems, confusion, people get hurt & it can be a real mess... But Jesus was always following His Father's lead, moving in the direction of the need.

He didn't need big crowds to validate Him, more than not He sought to avoid them. Why? Well, as I mentioned He wasn't nearly as concerned for the quantity of disciples as He was the *quality* of disciples. & What we discover is that Jesus was very honest w/people up front about what it might look like to commit your life to Him... He wanted them to consider their commitment carefully, to count the cost before they signed their name on the dotted line. He understood the excitement people felt watching Him work & seeing God move, but it's as if He would say, "Hey, wait a minute, think this through..."

I mean, here comes this scribe, this guy was an O.T. scholar, if you were a scribe you were highly valued for your knowledge of scripture. It seems like Jesus' opportunity to begin to build a "dream team" of ministry. It's like a guy w/a master's in theology, scripture was his life study & he comes to Jesus (who has just said, "Hey, we need to be moving out, let's get to the other side of the lake) & says, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!" It doesn't matter if it's here, or there, or wherever, count me in!

And we have to admit, from the outside it seemed exciting! God was moving. There were healings, demonic deliverance, miraculous things were happening, the teaching was unparalleled, "sign me up", "count me in", "I'll follow You wherever You go!" After all, it must be a glamorous life, right? Fame, (you're thinking/fortune), prestige, & p.s. "I'm a bible scholar!" – Maybe he thought Jesus would be stoked to have a guy like him on His team, perhaps He'd delegate him over His little ragtag band of fishermen & have him teach them or something... It seems as though He anticipated Jesus to respond, "Right on! Let's do this thing!" (& Truth be told, Jesus probably had people say things like this to Him all the time).

² The New King James Version. (1982). [Jn 6:38] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But look at what Jesus says to him, (Vs 20, rd)... Today we might call this a “buzz-kill”, right? “Man, this party just died...” Here this guy seemed ready to sell out for Jesus & Jesus immediately puts him in check & says (in essence), “Hey, you better stop to consider what you’re really saying. Think this through before you get on board.”

Now Jesus *didn't* tell him *not* to follow Him, or that he *couldn't* follow Him... Only that he shouldn't make a snap decision on the basis of a few exciting moments of ministry that really stirred him emotionally, but he needs to evaluate what this might cost him personally, more deeply.

Jesus is telling him not to expect no problems & 5 star hotels wherever they go. Today many pastors/preachers/evangelists want to glamorize what it looks like to follow Jesus, but Jesus didn't do that... Now He didn't say that there weren't great things about it, only that we should never take such things for granted. You might know prosperity, or you might know poverty, are you prepared for that? **There are no guarantees; many believers have a sense of “entitlement” about them, thinking that there are certain things that should just be granted to them because they follow Jesus... But what Jesus says is that we can count on a life of difficulty that's filled w/uncertainties but beyond that... no promises. He says, “Even animals have a place they abide, birds have nests, foxes have holes; I don't know where I'm gonna sleep tonight... just remember what you signed up for.”**

Here's what Jesus is saying, “If you can't handle hardship in this world, than I may not be the One you want to follow.” Again, Jesus isn't discouraging us from following Him, to the contrary He *calls us* to follow Him. But don't be too quick to sign on w/out considering carefully the reality that you need to maintain an *eternal* perspective. If what you're after is a plush, problem free life in *this world*. **Than Jesus may not be your Man, to follow Him is to lead a life of faith, trusting *God* for your every need rather than our reserves of material resources. & It's not that as a believer you can't enjoy life, or certain comforts this world may have to offer... it's that those things are peripheral, the primary thing is obedience to the word of God, the will of God for the glory of God wherever that may take you & whatever that may look like, in *your* life. Because God's plan for *my* life will vary from God's plan for *your* life... count the cost; & commit your life to J.C.**

Btw, here in Vs 20 Jesus refers to Himself for the 1st time as “The Son of Man”. It was His favorite self-designated title (used over 80 times in the gospels & about 30 times in Matthew alone). It identified Him w/His humanity & pointed back to Daniel Ch 7 & spoke of power & the glory of the Messiah.

So every time He spoke of Himself this way He was sharing w/His listeners the fact that He was the Messiah, just not in the way that they had anticipated.

Vs 21-22

Again there is a cost to count in following the Lord. Now, Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus called to this man & said, "Follow Me". To which he responded, "Let me 1st go & bury my father."

Now if you're not familiar w/this eastern mentality this might seem kind of *harsh*. Like he's saying, "Listen, my dad just died. Let me take care of that & then I'll be right back to follow you." & Jesus is like, "Hey, let the dead bury their own dead, you follow Me!" But this man isn't saying, "My dad just died." As a matter of fact it's more than likely that his father was in perfect health. Had his dad died he wouldn't have even been there, in that day they buried their dead w/in hours, not days.

This was a way of saying, "Hey, I need to stay at home & take care of the farm. But when my dad dies & I receive my inheritance then I'll follow You." You see, if he were to skip out on tending to the farm he might be cut out of his inheritance. He wants to shore that up, then he'll be ready to go. But what Jesus is saying is that when He calls you, that's when it's time to follow Him. Don't put it off till another day thinking that when you get certain things taken care of, then you'll follow Jesus, do it now.

Or another way to understand that, Jesus has to be 1st in our lives or anything or anyone else... This guy was all, "I just need some more time, I need to work things out at home." Listen, don't let anyone else come between you & Jesus. Don't put Jesus on hold to foster *that* relationship, put them on hold & pursue Christ. Some relationships *affect* you, others *infect* you, but we're not to let anything stand between us & following the Lord. Send that unbelieving boyfriend/girlfriend packing & follow J.C. w/all your heart! Don't let other people become your excuse for why *you* don't follow Jesus.

It's amazing how many *adults* are still bound by their parents wishes, still living under their shadow, or their heavy hand, maybe they're indebted financially to them, or hope to one day please them. You've got to let the priority of your parents fall to the wayside *in relation* to the priority of Christ. I'm not saying family isn't important, of course it is. But family mustn't keep you from following the Lord.

It's very common that people will use their family as a constant excuse as to why they can't do anything, serve anywhere, or be more committed to ministry.

& In the light of, “family 1st” they talk themselves out of serving the Lord altogether. There’s no time to even help out at church once or twice a month... Most of us in ministry have family, it can be done (& needs to be done). Let’s not blame *someone* or *something* else because we don’t want to serve, or answer that call.

We’ve become masters of procrastination, “we *need* to get to it,” “we *want* to get to it” & “we *will* get to ... one day.” Jesus is saying, “Today is the day, answer the call.”

Here’s the point, we can’t have another priority. Jesus says, “Let the dead bury their own dead.” The idea here is that the spiritually dead can tend to the physically dead, those who are alive in Christ need to be about their *heavenly Father’s* business.

Also notice real quick in Vs 21, in his procrastination he says, “Lord, let me first...” Listen, when we’re serving Christ it’s never “me first...” So a quick self evaluation in our attitude toward serving the Lord, following the Lord fully might be to ask ourselves, “Am I postponing serving God (in truth) due to a ‘me first’ attitude?”

If the 1st man was too fast, this man was too slow. When the Lord calls us, that’s the time to obey.

Vs 23-25

Few quick things of interest here. #1 We want to note that there’s no mention of the 1st 2 following Jesus, but in contrast in Vs 23 Matt is careful to note, “When He got into a boat His *disciples* ‘followed Him.’” Regardless of the cost, wherever He went, they would follow, neither circumstances nor the things of this world would get in the way.

The 2nd thing we want to see here is that in following Him, they were led right into the heart of an intense storm. For some reason we can have the idea that storms only come into our lives when we *disobey* God (& sometimes that’s true, Jonah would be a good case in point for that). But other times storms come because *we do* obey God.

We might refer to them at times as “growing pains”. God is bringing us to a place whereby we’re being tested, stretched, we’re seeing “what we’re made of” so to speak, where we’re at as it pertains to our trust in the Lord.

Now evidently this was an unusually violent storm in that even these seasoned fishermen (who spent the lion-share of their time upon these waters) were hitting the panic button. We read that the waves were crashing over the side of the boat, evidently it was filling up w/water & they were freaking out! They begin crying out to the Lord (who in radical contrast was asleep in perfect peace), “Lord, save us! We are perishing!”

Btw, that's a great prayer... Now some people believe this storm was satanically charged due to the ferocity of it, what was awaiting them on the other side, the fact that the Son of God & His select disciples were all in one place & perhaps Satan was seeking to take them out... it's plausible. (Awfully convenient this storm arises when they're out there in the middle of the sea).

But be that as it may God would take this & turn this as an opportunity to teach them about faith. Jesus had told them that they were going over to the other side. & When Jesus says, "Let's cross over" you can rest assured you're not "going under".

& As much as it blows our minds, I'm sure it doubly blew their minds that He could sleep at a time like this! The storm raging, the disciples panicking... & there's Jesus; sleeping.

One thing this speaks of is the humanity of Jesus. Anyone who's spent any time ministering to people in a spiritual way will tell you that it's physically exhausting. & Here we see Jesus just physically exhausted, & He would catch a few hours sleep here & there, just whenever/wherever He was able to... In the boat, a few hrs reprieve, He's out... But equally we're impressed that He *could* sleep, that His mind/heart were peaceful enough, He trusted so emphatically in the loving care of His Father that He could sleep in the midst of a life threatening storm like this.

Here's what we want to see. The wind didn't wake Him, the waves didn't arouse Him, the boat filling up w/water didn't get His attention, it wasn't the crashing of the waves that caused Him to deal w/the situation, it was the cry of His disciples...

In Luke's gospel we read that they accused Him of *not caring if they were perishing*. Isn't that the 1st thing Satan whispers in your ear in the midst of the storm? "God doesn't care about you! He's not even paying attention to what you're going through!"

But their faith is being tested isn't it? When they got into the boat it seemed like "smooth sailing ahead". But now (even following the Lord) they're in a mess & now their whole perspective changes. This is when faith gets real. It's one thing to *learn* a spiritual truth, it's quite another thing to *practice* that truth in everyday life... **Academic truth is no threat to Satan, believe you me. Active truth that's being lived out, that's a different story. So many times it's when we feel fear that we learn faith. Look at Vs 26.**

Vs 26-27

Now we're seeing the deity of Jesus, right? This scene displays His humanity & His deity.

But Jesus is saying something huge here, “There’s no need for *you* to fear as long as *I’m* in the boat.” Now *if you’re afraid* in the midst of a storm, literally/metaphorically, I don’t want you to beat yourself up too bad. You’re in some pretty good company; our Lord’s closest disciples have been there. **But recognize it’s not where He wants us to be. He wants us to trust in Him no matter how bad it seems knowing that *He is w/us* & that He will *never* leave us nor forsake us & He will see us safely through to the other side...**

George Muller wrote: The only way to end up with strong faith is to endure great trials.

Isn’t interesting that Jesus addressed His disciples before He addressed the storm? The matter of our faith is of greater importance to the Lord than sea that may be raging around us. **He can calm the storm w/a word, but developing our faith isn’t that easy... Now He wasn’t angry or upset that they called upon Him, but He rebuked their fear, their unbelief. “Why are you so fearful? Don’t you yet realize that I am faithful?”**

& He *rebuked* the winds & the sea & there was a great calm. Typically after a storm on water the waves will slosh about for awhile afterward. That’s not what happened here. Raging seas to glassy seas in an instant. They went from (the words are) “a great tempest” to “a great calm” because of a great Savior.

They were blown away, “Who can this be?” The psalmist declared, **“O Lord God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them.”**³ The Creator of all things bringing creation into subjection right there in front of them... incredible.

Vs 28-29

Mark tells us these men lived in the tombs having been driven out of town because chains couldn’t hold them. They would cry out day & night, & cut themselves w/stones. Luke tells us that they’d been in this condition for a long time & that they ran around naked. Here Matt tells us they were “exceedingly fierce” & no one in their right mind went anywhere near them.

So we’re beginning to see what Satan & society can do for people who are hurting & in bondage. Listen, the bible says that Satan came to steal, to kill & to destroy (Jn 10:10) & this is a vivid picture of just that.

³ The New King James Version. (1982). [Ps 89:8-9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Satan had robbed these 2 men of their sanity, of their dignity, of their self control. Satan fills man w/fear, robs him of the joys of home, family, friends... He steals their peace & purpose for living, leads them to despair & seeks to destroy/defile their life. It might be through alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual immorality, self-mutilation... He knows that people are in pain & he seeks to get them to deal w/that pain & oppression that they feel in their heart by turning to anything else—other than God.

What does society do for such a man in need? Try to restrain him, threaten him, isolate him, but society is unable to change him. But we're about to see what the Savior can do for man. Satan will enslave you, society cannot change you, but the Savior can deliver you, restore you, set you free & give you peace through the power of His word.

Did you note the double standard here? Here they are tormenting these men, but they're afraid that Jesus might commit them to torment... what do you make of that? Also you might note that the disciples were wonder who Jesus was, but the demons knew exactly who He was, the "Son of God". Finally we see that demons know that they have a limited time & they'll be given over to torment... So even though they didn't want anything to do w/Jesus, Jesus had a little something to do w/them. (Btw, who's in control here?)

Vs 30-32

Why did Jesus allow these demons to go into these pigs? (Mark tells us there was about 2,000 of them). We don't know exactly but it served more than one purpose. For 1 it demonstrated the destructive nature of the demonic, (their agenda is to kill & destroy) it also served to show that they had truly left these men & that Jesus had set them free.

Vs 33-34

Wow... more concerned w/pigs than for people. You would think it would be a glory to God, hallelujah event wouldn't you? But Jesus being there might hurt their economic status, we just lost a whole herd... It seems they were more about profit than they were people. But God has a different priority, He's not concerned w/profit, He's concerned for people. It's interesting though, how often Jesus draws near to people & they choose the things of this world over a relationship w/Him. They don't want to give up their "unclean business" so they send Jesus away.

These men show us that there's no one so far gone but that Jesus won't receive you, touch you, & change your life. When Jesus draws near to you, don't send Him away, don't reject Him, receive Him. Count the cost & commit your life to J.C.

Prayer Points:

Lord we want to follow You wherever You lead us. Increase our faith, may we trust in You & not be afraid of whatever storm may enter the equation of our lives. We thank You for Your willingness to draw near to us, to touch us, change us & set us free.

Is today your day? If Jesus is drawing near to you, He's wanting to heal you, cleanse you, make you clean, restore your soul. Give Him His way in your life today, don't resist Him, don't send Him away, receive Him today. Believe on the Lord J.C. who has died upon the cross for your sin & raised from the dead that you might be made right in the sight of God through faith in Him.