



TIME OF GRACE®

Less Me: Christianity WILL Cost You

Study Notes

Summary

Jesus could have chosen comfort. He could have pursued pleasure. Instead he chose the nails, the thorns, the cross. Why would Jesus choose such a humble life?

- **Matthew 8:18-22:** ¹⁸ When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹ Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” ²⁰ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” ²¹ Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ²² But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”
- Big Idea: With Jesus, you must _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Which of Jesus’ teachings is the biggest challenge to your personal priorities? Financial giving? Personal forgiveness? Loving the unworthy? Other? Explain your answer to a friend.
2. Read two of Jesus’ shortest stories in Matthew 13:44,45. What connections do you see between these stories and today’s message? How do Jesus’ words encourage you in your faith?
3. Meditate on Jesus’ epic words in Mark 8:34-37. Do you consider these verses good news? Why or why not?

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 21:1-11.

Time of Grace Ministry
Less Me: Christianity WILL Cost You
Matthew 8:18-22
January 24, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

Are we honest as Christians? Now, don't worry, I'm not going to say anyone is the worst here today but when someone's interested in Jesus, are we upfront with them? And I think my answer to that question, my honest answer, is not entirely.

And if you want self-control in your life, if you drink too much or you get angry too quickly, then get a group. Let us help you connect with other Christians who can know you and pray for you. They can encourage you, they can hold you accountable, and best of all, they can bring you to the cross of Jesus when you fall and fail.

Now you've heard me say stuff like that, right? Get these roots, plant them deep in Jesus, and you will enjoy the fruit of joy and peace and love and self-control. Now is that true? Absolutely! That's not some church pitch that we give to get people to fill these seats; that is absolutely the biblical path of Christianity. That's the promise of the blessing of God. But that's not the whole truth. In fact, when people would show up and want to follow Jesus, when the people who had gathered in the crowds were ready to check a box and make a commitment, Jesus didn't just tell them about the love and the peace and the joy; he also told them about something else. He didn't put it in a fine print; he told it to them right up front. Jesus was the ultimate honest preacher and today I want to share with you his words.

Now I want to warn you upfront, what Jesus is about to say is the true cost of Christianity and it will cost way more of you than maybe you ever imagined. Or a better way to say it - it might require way less of you than you ever imagined. But here's what else I can promise: If you're with Jesus and follow him no matter what the cost is, he is worthy and he's worth it because he offers you the best blessings in all of the universe.

So today we're going to open our Bibles. We're going to dig into Matthew 8 and we're going to see two conversations that Jesus had with two people who were ready to take that next step. We're going to learn the cost from Jesus but he's going to honestly tell us the incredible blessing of being with him. So if you have a Bible with you at home or you want to just follow along here on your screen, let's jump in in Matthew 8 where we find these words: "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.'" So what would you have said to this guy? Imagine if some celebrity showed up at our church and he said, "I'm in." What would you say to a person like that?

Here's what I'd say. I'd look around at the crowds and I would say, "Shh, did you hear that? Sir, could you say that again? Did you hear that? Wherever! This guy will follow Jesus wherever. That, ladies and gentlemen, is faith. That is what God himself is looking for." That's what I'd

say. But that's not what Jesus said. Now check out his response in verse 20: "Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'" Jesus says to this guy, "Do you really want to follow me?" Jesus' response actually makes me think of an experience I just had in Israel. A couple of weeks ago, I was in the city of Jerusalem and I had this really romantic idea that I was going to get up and I was going to run up the Mount of Olives just as the sun was rising and see the bright light shining on the city where my Savior lived and died and rose for me. So I looked it up on Google maps and I found out that from my hotel on the west side of the city, down past the temple mount, and up to the top of the Mount of Olives was only about a two-mile run; so there and back four miles. I run quite a bit; not a big deal.

But do you know what happened? It was way, way, way harder than I ever thought it would be. Do you want to know what I found out as I was running up and down and up and down the hills of that city? Let me show you a picture. In 4.4 miles, this is what happened. You see that? Nine hundred ninety-seven feet of elevation gain! I ran a 10-minute mile; that's crazy different than what I normally run and, honestly, that's not accurate because I pushed paused cause I was not running this race, I was not walking this race, I mean, I was stopping and gasping and almost dying. The city of Jerusalem was one-third the distance of a half marathon but it was 25 percent higher in elevation climb. It was hard. I had this romantic idea of life in Israel but it turned out to be way harder than I expected.

And I think that's what Jesus is honestly telling us. He wants us to walk with him; to run the race of the Christian faith. But he wants to dispel any romantic notion we have of what exactly that's going to be like. He wants us to know this is not a walk in the park. So what exactly is Jesus trying to tell us? I mean, what specifically is the hard part of following him, of being a Christian, and staying a Christian in this life? If you know much about the basics of Christianity, you realize that it's not like we pay money to be a Christian. It's a free gift to be saved and have eternal life through the cross of Jesus. And it's not like you have to pay God with all these good works; you know, like every one is a step up the mountain until you get to see God. Seeing the face of God is a gift that comes through faith in Jesus. It's by grace and it's not from us. So if that's not the cost, what exactly is it? What does Jesus want us to know upfront as we start to follow him?

Well, that's what Jesus explains in conversation number two. Apparently, while the teacher of the law thinks about Jesus' sobering words, another guy comes forward. And in the second conversation, Jesus tells this guy exactly the true, honest nature, the cost, of Christianity. So let's jump back to Matthew 8; here's what we find in verse 21: "Another disciple said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'" Well, that's a pretty good start, isn't it? This guy's called a disciple. In Greek, a disciple is a learner or a follower; that's a good humble start. And even calls Jesus not just teacher; here he calls him Lord. That means, Jesus, you're the master. You get the last word. I'm humbly here to follow you. So this is a great start, right? And the only thing the guy wants to do is to first go bury the father that he loves. But that's not good enough for Jesus because this guy in verse 21 uses a word that offends God more than any other. It's the five letter "f" word. Did you catch it? F-i-r-s-t. First. Lord, first, let me go and bury my father. And Jesus won't have it. Here's his response in verse 22: "But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'"

He probably had an old, elderly, aging father and he wanted time to take care of that before he followed Jesus. So you know, Jesus, give me a few weeks, a few months, maybe a few years but then? Then I'm all with you. And Jesus' answer is kind of confusing, too. "Let the dead bury their own dead." Obviously, physically, dead people can't bury anyone else so what he seems to be saying is let those who are spiritually dead, those who don't care about following me, take care of the priorities of this world. I'm not positive of that interpretation but I do know this. The guy said to Jesus, "Jesus, I'll follow you but first," and Jesus replied to him, "No, no, no. First, follow." If I was going to summarize Jesus' teaching in Matthew 8, it would be with those two words. In fact, if you're taking notes at home, I'd love for you to write this down: That with Jesus, you must first follow. The true cost of Christianity is what has to come first. That's what Jesus wanted both those men to know and it's what he wants you to know today, too.

Maybe I could illustrate it like this. Let's imagine that these books that I have here represent the different parts of your life. This Bible represents Jesus. This book here is about leadership so maybe this could represent your job. This one is about finances so this could represent your budget. This one is a manual for writers; this could represent your education, college, grad school. And this one's called Loved and Respect; let's think about dating, marriage, family, kids. Now Jesus in the Bible is very clear that he is for all of these things. He wants you to study hard, work hard, use money wisely, marriage can be a wonderful gift, having kids, grandkids is amazing. But what Jesus is saying is when you have to choose what comes first, well then what comes first with you? When there's not enough time or money or energy to do all of these things, where does he fit into the stack? Is he somewhere in the middle? Are we pretty much in favor of him except there's this one thing that we just need to do first? Do we have to tackle all the other responsibilities of life and then if there's a little bit of time or money left over, then Jesus, I'll follow you? Jesus is saying in these verses that you can have all these things in your life but Christians are called to do this: To follow first.

Now let me give you a few concrete examples of what this means. Let's talk about your time. God, because he is an amazing God, he wants to spend time with you. He wants you to connect with his word through livestreams and church services, through prayer and Bible studies at home. He wants to hear your voice as you speak to him in prayer and he wants to speak back to you in his holy, precious word. But that takes time. And honestly, there's not enough time to do everything in this life. So if you would say to Jesus, "You know, I want to do that, Jesus! I really want to grow deeper in my faith with you but first, you know, first I've got to get through this crazy season at work." Or, "First, there's basketball; just tournaments every weekend. But once that's over, then Jesus." "Oh Jesus, I have 18 credits and there's just no time so I'll get to that but it's going to take a year or two." "Well, the kids are little, Jesus. We just don't have time; we don't have energy." What would Jesus say to that? Let the dead bury their own dead. You follow me first.

Or think about our energy. Jesus calls us to love people and loving real people with real personalities, real flaws, and real issues? It takes energy. And we're very tempted to say, "Well, you know, Jesus, I'll love some people but you know, she just drains me of energy. And those people at church? I don't know; they're kind of tough to love. And you know, I'd love to join a group and really invest in people but I want to feel fed; I want to get something out of it and if I

don't, you know, maybe I'm going to find different people." And Jesus would say, "Different people? This isn't middle school. This is Christianity. You let all of that go and you first follow me." Or as long as we're being honest, what about money? Jesus is in the business of giving generously. He loves it when his church takes care of people; when we love one another in dollar and cents kind of ways. Read the Bible; he has a great heart for the needy, the poor, the oppressed. But so often do you know what we do? Me too, Jesus! But first - first, I have this budget. And first, I want to take the kids to Disney. And Jesus says, "Disney? Whoever said this was Disney? No, first, you give. First, you serve. If there's some leftover then do that; God bless you. But first, you follow me."

Now that is honest. The other day, I went on a run with my daughters and they were on their bikes and I was running and I asked my youngest daughter, "Sweetie, do you think your dad is honest with people at church? Do you think when people come to our church daddy really tells them what it's like to be a Christian?" And my little girl said, "Kind of but daddy, you don't want to scare them away." And so I told her about Jesus in Matthew 8 and I said, "Sweetie, do you think Jesus should start acting more like daddy or daddy should start acting more like Jesus?"

You know, I can't see to the other side of this lens; I can't read the expression on your face. But I have a hunch I know what it is: First, follow? That's a big cost. That would change our priorities. That would change our lives. That would hurt harder than the hills of Jerusalem. But if you're not smiling right now, you missed something. Because I said the big idea for today is first, follow. Now maybe you got caught up on the word "first" and what it would mean for your life but please, please, please, please do not miss the next word, "follow." When Jesus said to those men, "first, follow me," he said, "follow me." And he says the same thing to us today. Yeah, I mean, Jesus is God. He is completely fine without us. He's not lonely and depressed, quarantined and isolated up in heaven; he's God! He satisfies himself by his own glory and yet, what does he say to you? To me? To little people like us? Follow me. He wants us to be with him. He wants to walk with us through every step of life; through the craziness of a virus, through the pressure of depression, through the hard years of growing old. Every step of the way, he wants to make sure that we're never alone; that we're with him. Jesus, when he invites you "follow me," he wants to take your hand and lead you to green pastures and to quiet waters. He wants to take you to a place where you know that God is with you, that God is in you, that God is for you. He wants to guide you into the presence of our heavenly Father where you can see his face shining upon you and it gives you peace. Jesus wants to lead you to a well of bottomless mercy and forgiveness and grace. Yes, it will cost you your old priorities but what do we get when we follow Jesus? Jesus! We get to have him with us always.

It kind of reminds me of Mount Arbel. A few weeks ago when I was in Israel, we were trying to shoot a few devotions and we, by random chance, stumbled upon a parking lot, which was connected to a path. Now, let me show you a picture of it. There was this stone path that led into this valley and what we didn't know at the time is that this path was the entrance to one of Israel's most beautiful national parks. And the path wound up, up, up, up, up Mount Arbel on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. And as we followed that path, honestly, it was costly. Actually, let me show you the next picture. It was so costly, I was sweating and gasping and dying. I unbuttoned my shirt because it was way harder than I thought it was going to be.

But can I tell you something? It was probably the best part of the entire trip. Every time I stopped on that path and I looked around, I saw the beauty of Galilee. The sun was setting to the west, the Sea of Galilee was just around the corner to the east, the green grass, the plunging valleys, the blue sky. I would pull up my phone and try to capture the beauty and the longer I went, the higher I climbed, the more beautiful it got. Until I finally got to the top. Let me show you a picture of that. At the top of Mount Arbel, you turn around the cliff face and you see the sea; the shore of the Sea of Galilee where our Savior lived and worked and taught and healed and forgave and saved and when I stood there, there were not words to capture the joy of that moment. And that experience reminded me of what it is to be a Christian. You know, one day we're going to get to the top. By the grace of Jesus, we are going to see the full view of our Father's face in heaven and there will not be words for that. But even now, even on the path as we follow Jesus, when we stop and think about who we are, children of God, about what we have, a divine plan for our lives, about what is ours, forgiveness for every sin, mercy for our pride, patience with our weakness, we have a God who walks with us every step of the way. He needs nothing and yet, he gives everything; he gives himself. And so, yes, first is a great cost but first, follow is the greatest reward.

In one of his stories, Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a man who finds a treasure in a field and with joy he gives up everything he has to purchase that field. It's exactly what Jesus is teaching. You have to give up all the priorities of the past - everything has to look different - but when you follow Jesus, you get a treasure. You get the Father and the Spirit and eternal life with all three and joy that will never end.

Do you know how I know that that's true? Because Jesus just didn't count the cost; he paid the price. The Son of God gave up the joys of heaven for an earth where he had no place to lay his head. And with his own two feet, he climbed the hills of Judea and Jerusalem, Galilee and then finally Golgotha. The cross would cost Jesus his comfort, his safety, and even his very life. But do you know why he did it? To put the Father first so that you and I could be first on the Father's mind. So friends, brothers and sisters, wherever you are, whenever you are watching, remember this: Jesus will cost you everything and he will give you back so much more. That's the cost and the reward of following him.

Let's pray.

Jesus, some of us know already how hard it is to put your first. Our lives in so many instances would be so much easier if we didn't have to reorder them and repent of our sins. And yet, every one of us who is a Christian knows that it is absolutely worth it. To know at the end of every day you are there, to know that despite all of our weakness and failures that we are cleansed and washed, we are beautiful, we are yours, and so we are so grateful for you today, Jesus. Thank you for paying the price. Thank you for counting the cost and carrying your cross. Thank you that even if we lose everything, we have to die, in you we will find a life that never ends. We love you, we praise you, and we commit today with your help to follow you first.

We ask it, Jesus, in your beautiful name, Amen.