

The Cost of Following Jesus

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Date: 20 October 2024

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0 : 00] Well, I wonder what your experience of being a Christian is like, if you are a Christian, or what your experience of Christians has been like, if you're not a Christian.

Has it been easy? Has it been hard? Has it been easy all the time? Has it been difficult all the time? What kind of a life have you been promised, or have you been looking forward to, to being a Christian?

What has been promised to you? There's a type of Christianity that says being a Christian is easy. A type of Christianity that says to you, you can get all your blessings now.

Full of goodness, full of promise, full of good things, all the time. Everything you've always wanted. The money, the car, the business, the wife, the family, whatever you think that you've wanted. There's certain churches that you can go to, and a certain Jesus that you'll hear about, that promises those kinds of things. Maybe epitomized by smiling pastors with their megachurch looks and their megachurch bucks.

[1 : 09] Sort of like this guy. We know him well. There's a reason they don't put me and Nick's face on our Facebook page.

Guys like that can get a really good following. And the thing is, the Jesus they offer is a very easy-going Jesus. He's undemanding.

He's a pick-your-level-of-commitment kind of a Jesus. He wouldn't interrupt or disrupt your life in any way. He'll let you live your life your way.

In fact, he's there to make sure you can get everything that you want. Live your life your way. Just add a sprinkling of Jesus. A sprinkling of religion.

A sprinkling of something. A strange thing is, is that the Jesus of the Bible is very different, if not the exact opposite of that kind of a Jesus that so many Christians believe in and so many churches teach about.

[2 : 19] In today's lesson, Jesus tells us that he doesn't come to make people's lives easier. It's going to be demanding and costly to follow him. Jesus and his agenda needs to be the top priority in your life, not you and your agenda.

But in fact, if you don't let him be the top priority in your life, you might just find yourself not worthy to be his follower. So we're going to spend our time thinking about the cost, what it costs to follow Jesus.

The first question we're going to look at is, are you ready to pay the cost? Are you ready to pay the cost for following Jesus? Following Jesus is not going to be easy.

We know this because Jesus himself tells us this. If you read in the scriptures and you read the stories as they appear to you in the gospel, you will come across a Jesus very different to what many Christians preach about.

We know that from our own experience. At some point in your walk with Jesus, you've realized that it's not all fun and games. It's not just a walk in the park.

[3 : 35] There's some very difficult times that one goes through as a Christian. But it's still the truth that takes us by surprise. And it's unexpected to hear these words, especially the passage in front of us today, from Jesus.

So let's read that story again. I'm just going to read verse 18 and verse, just that first bit, the first person that comes along to Jesus. So, when Jesus saw the crowd around him, verse 18, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.

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.

Well, Jesus is in his kind of rock star phase of his ministry. If I can put it like that, we've seen how he's been doing healings left, right and center. And huge crowds are beginning to follow him. Later on, he'll be, he'll be preaching and there'll be 5,000 people there sitting and listening to him. And so, these people are coming and they're following him.

[4 : 53] And Jesus gives this amazing answer. You'd have thought by this stage, he'd be like, yes, anyone who wants to come, come and follow me. The more, the merrier. He started this new movement. And the one thing you want when you start a new movement is people to follow you.

Jesus gives this weird, strange, slap down of an answer. He's approached by one man who wants to stick out from the crowd. He's very eager to follow Jesus.

He's keen. He's ready. Any modern political leader, or church leader, would be happy to have followers like that. Not Jesus. He doesn't want people to follow him under a false pretense or for the wrong reasons.

And, you know, this is one of the things that makes Jesus so unique. He's not dying to have people follow him. You'd think that's the case. But he, he almost picks and chooses.

He does want people to follow him. But here he's got a lesson. Make sure that people follow him for the right reasons. And why does Jesus give an answer like that? And what does he mean?

[6 : 02] What Jesus is saying, that is his new movement, this thing that God has started, the kingdom of God, there are going to be costs involved to being part of this movement. Jesus himself, as the leader, will be homeless.

Now imagine, in a modern political leader, trying to do the same thing. You know, we all know about the elections in America. One of the candidates got his own private jet plane.

And if he says, follow me, I've got a better life waiting for you. And the guy that drives the jet plane, I'm going to listen to him. But imagine a candidate that was homeless, had no money, and says, I'm going to make your life better, follow me.

You're like, oh, you've got to make a choice here. What does it mean that Jesus talks about himself as the son of man, but he's got nowhere to lay his head.

He doesn't have a home. What Jesus is talking about, is that he himself, as the leader of this new movement, as the king of God's kingdom, is not going to have a home.

[7 : 12] And everything associated with having a home, being accepted, being welcomed, being comfortable. He's saying that following him will include, will include a bumpy ride.

In fact, the bumpy ride got so bumpy for his 12 disciples, that only one made it to old age. And he was in exile and in prison. Going on a journey, going, having a bumpy ride, and not having a home. You know, camping is nice. It's good fun to go camping, isn't it? Most of us will enjoy a nice camp away over the weekend. But you know the nice thing about camping?

Not packing up, but going back home. Imagine what it must be like to always be camping. Whoa, what a mission. It's just so nice to get home, flop down on your couch, and sleep in your own bed. You know, you can visit any place, but there's nothing like going home, and sleeping in your own bed, isn't there? Well, Jesus says, following him is going to be like a, a camping trip. Yeah, it's going to be exciting, but there's going to be some uncomfortable bits to it.

[8 : 32] Like that time when you go camping, and you take your air mattress, and it's always at two o'clock in the morning, the thing runs out, and there you are, sleeping on the floor. But some bits are going to get really uncomfortable, following Jesus.

Now, this is not the kind of Jesus we often hear about. It tells you that there's something of a mismatch, between the Jesus of the Bible, and the Jesus that is offered from so many modern pulpits.

And so, I want to just wrestle with this question, of which Jesus do you believe in? Which Jesus do you trust in? Which Jesus are you following? Are you following the Jesus that is here to make your life, as comfortable, and nice, and easy, as possible for you, all the time?

Are you going to follow the Jesus that you encounter in the Bible? The one that says stuff like this, from Matthew chapter 5, we've seen it already, the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are you, when people insult you, and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of me. Rejoice, and be glad. Rejoice, and be glad. But he gives the reason for that. Because great, is your reward, in heaven, if you're willing, to go through that, for me.

[10 : 02] Some of you may all be going through that in your life. If you're a Christian, maybe you're at home, and one of the, you know, your partner might not be as strong a follower.

Why, why, why, church? Why are you going to church a lot these days? Hmm. Maybe at work. Oh, you're a Christian. Okay, but we don't want you to be a holy Joe now.

They don't want you to go all in. It's okay to be a little bit, but don't go all in. Well, we all know that Jesus here is speaking the truth, about how difficult life is.

About that he doesn't promise you, an easy road. But he does promise you great reward, if you stick it out. We know he's speaking the truth.

The thing that counts is, do you believe him? So, do you believe that the reward is great? Do you believe that it's, it's good?

[11:09] We sang it. I will give up, we all said it, I will give up every treasure to know Jesus more. Yeah.

But then we passed the money bin around. Okay. We say we're ready, but when it comes down to the crunch, which one do you believe in?

Do you believe that there's great reward in heaven for going through really hard times now? Are you ready to pay the cost of following the Jesus of the Bible, to face ridicule, to face discomfort, to be unwelcome?

Sometimes in your own home. You're going to see that in the next story. Often in the workplace, certainly online. But more and more in the West than the real world.

if you trust in the easy-go-lucky kind of Jesus, you need to be careful because when the going gets tough, your faith could easily stumble and then you fall short of the goal.

[12:27] You want to follow the Jesus of the Bible that gives a realistic picture of what it's like to follow him because your faith will remain stronger when the road gets bumpy. And you need that. You want that and you need it because the road always gets bumpy.

But particularly so if you're going to follow Jesus down the narrow path and not just wander around on the highway that leads to destruction. So, you may be willing to pay the cost of following him, but the next disciple, the next part of our story, the disciple is going to learn that you can only really call yourself a follower of Jesus when everything else in your life takes second place to him.

Everything in your life needs to take second place to him, but that will only happen when you realize the value and the worth of Jesus. And so our next question is, are you undervaluing Jesus?

Are you undervaluing Jesus? And so, just that next story, verse 21, one, so Jesus has chased away one disciple potentially.

We don't give the answer, we don't know what these guys did, but Jesus is saying, listen, this is me, you know, take it or leave it. The next guy comes along, another disciple, verse 21, said to him, Lord, first, let me go and bury my father.

[13:53] Now, if you're on a church WhatsApp group, hey, we need you to do something, but I just need to do this, especially if someone said to me, you need to go and bury your father, I'd be like, cool, understandable, smiley face, prayer hands, halo emoji.

But inside, I'm like, but never mind. Jesus says, follow me, let the dead bury their dead.

Okay, but this disciple is ready to follow Jesus, but he's, but not to put Jesus first. He's going to follow Jesus on his own terms. First, I'll follow you, but first let me go.

And bury my dead. He knows where Jesus is going. He's on the other side of the lake. I'll just get you on the other side. I'll catch you later. I'm coming. I'm just doing a few things first. Not unimportant things.

But he's going to follow Jesus on his terms when he is ready. And then Jesus gives us another of his baffling, if not downright offensive responses. How can you say that?

[15:09] Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead. We all know, what a sacred thing it is to go and attend to your family's funeral, especially if it's your father.

Jesus makes a claim that following him is more important than any other activity in your life.

Following Jesus is more important than any other activity in your life.

Jesus takes the most important thing a man can do and then says, he is more important. Don't let anything get in the way of following him.

He's saying, not even the most sacred of family commitments. It's a breathtaking claim. Jesus demands total and absolute loyalty from his followers. That's why we follow him.

And why we do go all in. And why it's baffling for outsiders. Why are they so blinding? Maybe they think of it like a chess club.

[16:11] Imagine you joined like a chess club. And then the chess club totally overtook your life. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, they'd be like, well, sure, okay, but you know, it's just a chess club, dude.

But this is not like a chess club. This is life-changing stuff. And so that's why it's worth it. Now, the only reason we find this kind of thing to do this kind of thing, it's not because Jesus is not worth it. Of course he's worth it. It's because we place worth on the things that Jesus says are worthless compared to him. We place too much worth on the stuff in our life compared to following Jesus. So notice what he says. Verse 22. Let the dead bury their own dead. You know, he doesn't say, let your family bury the dead. Let your family bury...

He says, let the dead bury the dead. Jesus is making a huge claim here. Anyone that doesn't follow him is a dead man. One of the most...

[17:27] Well, not one of the most fun shows. A fun show on social media, online, is the Antiques Roadshow. It's an English show. They have it all over the world where some arbitrary Aunt Mary brings along her mother's tea set that's been gathering dust in the shoebox in the cupboard.

And, you know, they want to get rid of it. It's taking up space. And then look at this tea set. And, you know, the other thing is worth 250,000 pounds.

You take anything to anyone and they value it to that. And your relationship with that thing changes on the spot. Right? I will... Now, I'm also loving tea sets if that tea set is worth 250,000 pounds.

What value you place on something or when you realize how valuable it is, it changes your relationship with that thing. We often do the very opposite. That's like taking something to this Antique Roadshow.

It's a picture. And you... Well, you've got two of them. You've got a poster from the 80s with one of those 80s glam rock bands.

[18:40] Is it worth anything? And you take another picture and this guy says, you know, that's a Monet. That's a Van Gogh. And you say, oh, yeah, cool. But I prefer the 80s rock band.

And everyone would be like, no, dude. Or give me that Monet. So what Jesus is saying here, it's the same how we prioritize Jesus and the things of the kingdom in our lives.

Jesus is asking, just how valuable do you think I am? And the opposite of that, to prioritize anything or anyone other than Jesus, especially if they're not a follower, is to put yourself in that direct firing line of Jesus' judgment.

Because the world who doesn't follow Christ is the world of the dead and dying. He came at a crisis point in history. That's why he arrived at that point. And his first words, repent, boys!

Change! This thing is going down! Down! Down! You need to escape! And I'm the escape route. the story in the Old Testament with Elijah and Elisha was also at a crisis time in the life of Israel.

[20:02] Elijah is told, well, go and get this new guy. And he says, hey, but just let me go and talk to my parents.

He says, okay, off you go. That's a crisis point. And he had time to go and speak to his parents.

This is different. This is way more of a crisis point with way more valuable things on the line.

Your life, Jesus is saying, is on the line. Those who don't follow Christ remain in the world of the dead and dying.

So, let me ask, what are you valuing in your life more than Jesus? We all have something and it's not just one thing.

It's many things. You need to keep checking your priorities against that of Jesus. Is he truly first? Or are you letting something else determine your level of service to him?

[21:16] Is Jesus first in all things, all the time? What else are you letting determine your level of service to him? Maybe you're letting your feelings of fear and loss.

Fear and loss. Fear of losing out on money. Fear of losing out on a business opportunity. Fear of being rejected by your family or your friends.

Fear of losing face. Fear of death and dying or pain. fear of losing out of being rejected. Jesus says, don't worry about those things.

You follow me, I'll take care of the details and even if you lose your life for me, you're going to gain it. You're going to lose your life either way. If you lose your life with me, you get to keep it.

Now, there's a, you know, Jesus makes these crazy claims, these massive claims. The reason we know we can trust Jesus when he says that, well, they killed him and in three days later he stood up again and regardless of that, just look at all these miracles.

[22 : 31] The people who can do that, yes, they're worth listening to. That's the point of the miracles. But the main one is his death and his resurrection. That's how you know that if you follow him, you're not going to stay dead.

Yeah, the dead can bury their dead. They're going to come with me and you get to have life, difficult life, but ultimate life in the world to come. Another way to look at this, to rejig our priorities, how disruptive is Jesus in your life?

What actual difference has he made to how you act, how you talk, how you think, how you react to whatever life throws at you? What plans, what life goals, what relationships, ooh, that's a stingy one, have you changed because you're following Jesus?

If you can't think of any, you need to question which Jesus you're following. The biblical one or the Jesus that you've been taught about, well, not here, but that often gets spoken about in the world. Now, this is not a call to go out and be as offensive as you can to your unbelieving family. Don't take it as an opportunity to drive a wedge between you and them. You're called to love them. It is a call to not let anything be more important to you than trusting in and following Jesus.

[23 : 57] I just want one last question for us to grapple with today. If it's going to be so costly and Jesus is going to be so demanding, why follow him.

Is the cost worth it? What exactly is Jesus worth? And Jesus gives us two things but I'm just going to highlight them as we end. The thing is, what is Jesus worth to you?

You'll be much more willing to pay the cost and put Jesus first if you know his worth and his value and who he is. And he gives us a clue when he talks about the Son of Man.

So have a look at verse 20. His answer is foxes have holes, birds of the nests have their air and he doesn't say yeah but I've got nowhere to lay my head. He says no, the Son of Man doesn't have anywhere to lay their head.

Now as a Christian we're like, okay cool, Son of Man, you know, whatever. This is the first time that this, we're following the story, following the storyline of the Gospel of Matthew. The first time this phrase is used of Jesus in the Gospel every Jewish person, Jesus doesn't unpack what that means here but every Jewish person knows that the Son of Man is this mysterious earthly figure with cosmic significance from the book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 7.

[25 : 17] We're not going to go and look at it now but it's a picture of there's the Son of Man who is ushered into the throne room of heaven and given dominion and power and authority over the kingdoms of the earth.

That's who the Son of Man is. And then Jesus, so that's why it's so striking, they know, Son of Man! He says, yeah, he's going to be homeless. Now what? That, what? It doesn't, they don't understand how that works.

It turns out, Jesus is the homeless man that owns the universe. So he's testing his people here. Are you going to follow me for the right reasons?

You don't know who I am. I'm telling you who I am but you're not going to see it. So what is required is now trust that you do know who he is because you don't see it. It makes total sense to him, it makes total sense to follow this kind of a person because Daniel 7 goes on to say how that Son of Man hands over those kingdoms that are given to him to his followers who get to inherit kingdoms at the resurrection.

Jesus is a homeless man that owns the universe so he can give you the stuff that he says he can give you because he is the Son of Man. Then secondly and lastly, if the world is full of dead people who are not following him it means that those who do follow him are given life.

[26 : 56] So if you want to experience real life, life changing life, not an easy life but a true life then you've got to stick with Jesus. Later on in Matthew he's going to say this Matthew 20, 28 the Son of Man didn't come to be served the Son of Man this great figure didn't come to be served because it sounds like we should serve that kind of a figure but to serve.

And how is he going to serve? He's going to give his life as a ransom for many. If you trust him that Son of Man came to die and to serve you and to pay your sins so that you can have life and be connected to him.

I mean that is the coolest place to be. He's the dead man who gives people life.

So friends when tempted to put other things first don't focus on what you're missing out on. Remind yourself of who Jesus is and why it's worth following him.

He's totally more worthy infinitely more worth than the 10% salary increase you might get if you tow the party line. The promotion yes the family peace being accepted in certain circles what is what's what's keep your 80's rock poster I'm going for the Monet.

[28 : 30] Are you going to stand out from the crowd? Are you going to follow Jesus or are you going to just play games with him? Dip your toe in. Jesus is not he's an all or nothing type of guy.

Get in get going or to quote a famous line from Shawshank Redemption get busy living or get busy dying. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus we know what you're worth and yet we chase after the things of this world because we want to find comfort and have an easy life.

Lord we're just so sorry that we don't follow you like we should. Lord will you give us a vision and a hunger and a thirst and a of who you are a picture Lord an experience of who you are so that we follow you that we're happy to give up the comforts of this world and to follow you through all the bumpiness of life knowing that as the son of man the kingdoms of the world belong to you and you make these promises of great rewards one day help us to trust you.

Amen.