

Title: No reserves, no retreats, no regrets
Text: Matthew 8.18-22
Theme: The cost of discipleship
Series: Matthew #48
Prop Stmt: Following Christ is worth the highest sacrifice because he is the highest worth.

Read Text:

When I played sports in high school and college, particularly basketball, I used to play “all out.” I would dive for every loose ball, crash into the scorers table for a ball going out of bounds, and take a charge from a 210 pound opponent. In one game in college, I got jacked on the jaw so hard, I literally bit clear through my tongue. It swelled up so badly I could not close my mouth for a couple of days. But that is how you play sports. You don’t play at it; you play it. Then I got married. Then I became a father. Then I became your pastor. I remember one Friday night playing left field for one of our softball teams. Someone hit a deep fly ball to the fence. I had a choice. I could either go all out and dive into the fence in order to possibly make the catch, or I could slow up, play it safe, let it hit the fence, and play it off the bounce. As I ran toward the fence, my wife, and kids flashed before my eyes. Visions of preaching with a busted up face, and an arm in a cast came to mind. Thoughts of trips to surgeons, hospitals and physical therapy appointments all invaded my head. I pulled up and played it off the bounce. At that moment, I reasoned, it’s a game. It’s not life. It’s not worth it. I threw the ball in and stood there wondering what had just happened to me. Had I gone soft? Was I giving up? Was I letting the team down? Is it even right to play the game like this? Or, was I showing wisdom and therefore maturity and experience?

You do this all the time. You are driving toward an intersection and the light turns yellow. What do you do? It depends on a host of circumstances, but in the moment, you have to make a decision. Are you going through or are you going to stop? What’s it worth? Or, you know that eating a certain food that you love is going to have consequences. What’s it worth? You are making a value judgment. In the moment you have to decide if the long term pleasure weighs more than the short term discipline or if the short term pleasure weighs more than the long term pain. What’s it worth?

This is the point that Jesus is beginning to talk about. He has addressed this in a general sense before when he said that you cannot serve two masters (6.24) and that you need to seek the Kingdom of God above all else. But here, Jesus is unpacking that. This is what it means to seek first the kingdom of God. It means that you follow Christ above all else.

This event in the life of Christ allows us to see how serious Jesus is about the terms of discipleship. In the next chapter he is going to call Matthew to follow him, right then! There are some things you do not need to pray about. Are you going to follow Jesus or not? It’s yes or no. There is no maybe. Yes, you need to count the cost. Yes you need to know what it involves. But then, fish or cut bait. Jesus makes no apologies for this.

I. **Following Christ is unconventional.** (not what you might expect) (18-22)

A. **Jesus generally discourages large crowds.**

Do you what Christ is doing here? The command to go to the other side of the lake served as a challenge to see who in the crowd was actually willing to follow Christ. Christ would do this from time to time in order to reveal who was really following him and who was simply caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment. At this point there was a large crowd that heard him speak. They saw some miracles and they were excited. But, excitement is a poor substitute for genuine commitment.

But let's think a bit deeper about this. Movements tend to be evaluated based on their size and/or based on the quality of the followers, right? We tend to say things such as, "Wow, that place was packed. Standing room only! Sold-out! Those things, we think, validate the movement or the event. Jesus, on the other hand, is not impressed with large crowds and tends to whittle them down, like he is doing here. But why? Why do we think that large crowds validate a person and Jesus is not impressed?

We think that way, because we are needy, insecure people who long for validation. We are broken, power-less people who long for influence and authority. We do not have inherent authority, so if we can get a crowd and if we can impress that crowd, then we can get vested, temporary authority from that crowd. And this is what gets so many people in trouble, particularly people who are leaders. We long for validation and authority. We think that people will give us that. So, in order to gain a crowd or keep a crowd, we will tell them what they want to hear so that they will give us what we long for. It is no different than some delightful girl dating a jerk. You see it all the time. Why are you hanging out with this jerk? "Cause he tells me I'm pretty." Of course he tells you that you are pretty because he wants to get into your pants. She is willing to compromise her convictions because she thinks he is giving her what she longs for. When leaders crave power, they will cut corners. It goes the other way as well. There are organizations that think that they have to have a particular leader. This leader is so popular, so gifted, so well known that the leader validates the organization. So, what happens if the leader disqualifies himself? Sometimes the board will not do what it should do, because "we need him." Our neediness is the occasion for compromise.

The reason why the leadership of Jesus is so unconventional is because he is not needy. He does not need you or me, or large crowds. He does not need validation since he is the Son of God and he certainly does not need authority since he is God, the Son. Instead of looking at this large crowd and trying to figure out how we can maximize the momentum of this moment into a magnetic, motivating movement, Jesus says, let's get into a boat and get out of here. Are you crazy? No, most of these people are not serious about really following me. DO you see it now? That is what is happening in v.18! "Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him (in response to the crowd) he gave orders to go over to the other side (of the lake!)." Jesus is whittling the crowd down. This is when the scribe steps up.

B. **Jesus is not impressed with status and title or enthusiasm.** (19-20)

On the face of it this guy sounds like a potential member of the dream-team doesn't he? A scribe! Here is a legal expert in the Old Testament. Look at this profession. He calls him teacher (not Lord, but teacher implies instructor and one he can learn from, which is significant for a scribe to say, don't you think?) And wouldn't a "scribe" give a little bit of credibility to this movement? Wouldn't a guy like him have some connections that could provide some protection from the powerful forces that might otherwise threaten a movement like this? There are plenty of reasons why Jesus could use a guy like this. But, Jesus does not need large crowds, nor does he need prominent people. Here is the beautiful truth, and it is really beautiful. Jesus does not need us. Jesus is not needy. However, Jesus loves us and wants us. If Jesus was needy, then we would be tempted to think that he loves us because of what we can do for him. So, if you have money, then Jesus would be tempted to love you because he needs your money. If you are talented, Jesus would be tempted to love you because he needs your talents. If you know people, then Jesus would be tempted to love you because he needs your connections. If you are educated, then Jesus might be tempted to love you because he needs your brains. We just assume that this is how things are, don't we? The problem is, we are no longer wanted or needed when we lose our money, or someone comes along with more talents or better connections or more brains. That is not the case with Jesus. He loves you, not because he needs to, but because he chooses to. Period! But, if you are going to follow him, you are going to follow him on his terms.

So, here comes this scribe and he is ready to jump on board, literally. "I'm in!" "I'll go where ever you go. Let's go!" But Jesus says, not so fast. The fact that he is a scribe is not a qualification to follow. He needs to know something and this too is unconventional.

C. Jesus warns people about the difficulties of following him.

When you follow Jesus, he makes certain that the "small print at the bottom" is in bold at the top of the page. There are no surprises here, and that is how we need to inform people about the cost of discipleship when someone wants to become a follower of Christ. Here is the reality of following me, Jesus says: I don't even have a regular place to sleep at night, ok? In other words, if you think that following me is going to get you on the inside track to fame and glory, forget it. Following me is going to get you a cross. Still interested?

D. Jesus gives the "bad news" up front.

Back when Obamacare was being debated in the House of Representatives people were questioning about what was actually in the Health Care Act. Nancy Pelosi famously said that we have to pass the bill in order to find out what is in it. In other words, you have to buy the car so that you can find out what car you actually bought. Now, these many months later, the bad news just keeps leaking out.

When you are selling a house, you have to disclose the legitimate problems with the house. Otherwise, you will be held accountable for the cost of repairing those problems.

We have these laws because people have a tendency to hide the bad news. This is another reason why Jesus is so unconventional. Here is the deal. I do not have a place that I call home. I cannot promise you something that even foxes and birds have. Do you understand that? Are you still willing to follow me? I.e. Am I worth not having a bed to sleep in at night? Do you want to follow me because you think I will give you your best life now and make your life comfortable? If you do, then you will be disappointed. I am not promising you comfort. Do you still want to follow me?

Jo Jin Hye recently testified before the United Nations “Commission of Inquiry” regarding the atrocities being committed by the North Korean government against their own people. Jo knows firsthand. As a child in North Korea who knew only starvation, she escaped to China where she was exposed to the gospel. After being deported back to North Korea she was imprisoned in one of N. Korea’s prison camps. One of the crimes that she was charged with was interacting with Christians. Jo said that in N. Korea, “just by professing your faith, you can be killed. ... You’re putting your life at risk by becoming a Christian.” When Christ was talking with this scribe, no one’s life was yet at stake for following Christ. But soon, it would be. And that is the cost that you need to know up front before you commit. In fact, if you read ahead you will know that Jesus is telling them to get into a boat, knowing that he is taking them into a storm.

E. The Son of Man does not have his own home.

Conclusion: You need to count the cost before you profess your commitment. But, in order to count the cost, you need to know the cost. That means that when we tell people about Christ that we need to explain the cost before we declare that someone is converted. The fear is that if we tell people the truth about following Christ that they may not stick around. But, if we don’t, then they may think they are following Christ when in reality they are attempting to use Jesus instead of following him. What are you seeking in following Christ? What is it that you really want?

II. Following Christ demands a willingness to sacrifice. (19-20)

What is the American dream? Is it not a family, a car, and a house? Do you see what Jesus is saying here? Following Jesus is not how you get the American dream. In fact, he did not even have a house. Jesus is not saying that if you want to follow him, that you cannot have a house, or a car, or a family. He is saying that you cannot hold anything in your heart and life higher than Jesus. There may come a time when in order to keep your job you are told that you have to deny the teachings of the Scriptures. What will you do? What you do then, will be determined by what you signed up for. If you signed up to follow Jesus for convenience and comfort, then when it is no longer convenient and comfortable to follow Jesus, you will drop him to the curb and look for something else.

The fault lies at the feet of pulpits. We have tried to preach a gospel without repentance involving a Jesus who demands no commitment, by a church that is willing to accommodate itself to whatever people want to believe. It does not matter how slick the

media splash it's not the gospel. He demands my life, my soul, my all. He is, after all, the King of glory!

Do you understand this? You do not follow Christ on your terms. He is Lord; we are servants. He is Creator; we are creation. He sets the mark; we keep the pace. We follow; he leads. You do not make him a part of your life; he takes over your life. He will have all of you or none of you. He is not a means to the end; he is our entire life. He does not play games or mince words. If you are going to follow him, then you must be willing to lay down your life for Him. He is worth it.

But, here is a major difference between following Christ and following many religions. We do not sacrifice for Christ in order to earn his favor, or to prove our worth. We do not sacrifice for Christ because we fear the consequences if we don't. No, he is the one who has sacrificed everything for us. He is the one who died for us. He is the one who paid the penalty for our sin. We do not follow out of fear. We follow out of love. We follow as a response, but know this: our following of Christ is not a cheap click of a computer mouse that I like this, or simply wearing a Jesus button. Following Christ is the complete yielding of my life, my future, my goals, my ambitions, my abilities, my money, my values, my beliefs, my priorities and my plans to Christ. In fact, following Christ has priority even over your family.

III. **Following Christ has priority over your family.** (21-22)

Yes, Jesus said this. This does not mean that he does not love your family as is obvious from the text last week. It does not mean that he does not want you to love your family. The truth is, he wants you to love your family more than you can imagine. However, he wants you to love him more. Do you know why? Your family is not God and cannot save you. Neither are you God and you cannot save your family. The only way you can love your family like they need to be loved is for you to love God even more. If you love them without loving God more, they will most likely never see their need of God. Your family will die without hope if they do not have Christ, no matter how many things you do for them. That is why the greatest thing you can do for your family is to love God more than you love them.

The first guy was a scribe who had not really considered the cost, so Jesus spelled it out for him. This guy, on the other hand was not as eager as the scribe, but instead was reluctant. The scribe was too impulsive and would not last. This guy is too hesitant and won't commit. It's like, "I really want to, but...I just have a couple of things that I have to take care of." And Jesus is saying that the boat is leaving the shore. You are either in the boat or not. There is no middle ground.

It is possible that this guy's father had not yet died and that he was the oldest son who was expected to care for his dad in his declining years. If that were the case, then he would be saying, "I really want to get into the boat, but I have this responsibility to care for my dad and I can't go with you right now. But, as soon as I can I will. Right after my

dad dies, I can do it. And Jesus says, no. I am more important than your dad. Do you know why Jesus said that? Because He is!

In 1904 William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school. As heir to the Borden family fortune, he was already wealthy. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave 16-year-old Borden a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Bill Borden wrote home about his "desire to be a missionary." One friend expressed disbelief that Bill was "throwing himself away as a missionary." In response, Borden wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves." As a freshman on the campus of Yale University in 1905 his classmates noticed something unusual about him. One of them wrote: "He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it. We who were his classmates learned to lean on him and find in him a strength that was solid as a rock, just because of this settled purpose and consecration." Surveying the Yale faculty and much of the student body, Borden lamented what he saw as the end result of an empty, humanistic philosophy: moral weakness and sin-ruined lives. During his first semester at Yale, Borden started something that would transform campus life. One of his friends described how it began: "It was well on in the first term when Bill and I began to pray together in the morning before breakfast. I cannot say positively whose suggestion it was, but I feel sure it must have originated with Bill. We had been meeting only a short time when a third student joined us and soon after a fourth. Borden's small morning prayer group gave birth to a movement that soon spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, one thousand of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups. Borden's missionary call narrowed to the Muslim Kansu people in China. Once he fixed his eyes on that goal, Borden never wavered. He also challenged his classmates to consider missionary service. One of them said of him: "He certainly was one of the strongest characters I have ever known, and he put backbone into the rest of us at college. There was real iron in him, and I always felt he was of the stuff martyrs were made of, and heroic missionaries of more modern times." Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down some high-paying job offers. In his Bible, he wrote two more words: "No retreats." William Borden went on to do graduate work at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey. When he finished his studies at Princeton, he sailed for China. Because he was hoping to work with Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead. Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," he had written: "No regrets."