

[Matthew 8:18-22](#)

Loving Jesus More Than Self: The Cost of Discipleship

Introduction

If you or I were asked “Why follow Jesus? Why is He worth loving more than self?” What would we say? Some of us might answer “Because that’s what a Christian is supposed to do.” Or “I owe it to Him”. Others might respond “Because He’s worth it”. Yes, the Lord Jesus is worth loving more than self. He is worth the cost of discipleship. But why is that true? Jesus Himself warned about counting the cost of following Him ([Luke 14:25-33](#)).

In fact, based on the text from [Matthew 8:18-22](#), Jesus is saying the cost of following Him and loving Him more than self means that:

- It will be a difficult path to follow Him along life's way.
- Nothing is more important than loving Him more than anything or anyone, including self.

[Matthew 8:20](#)

²⁰ And Jesus said to him, “**Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.**”

[Matt 8:20](#) (ESV)

Even animals had a place to go home and rest, but Jesus didn't. In essence, Jesus was saying He was homeless. In fact, in Jesus’ time of ministry, to follow Him meant giving up one’s job, leaving home/family behind, as well as being hated and persecuted by those who found Him offensive. Following Jesus today versus then really hasn’t changed.

Just ask Christians in Asia, Africa or the Middle East what it’s like to follow Jesus. If following Jesus means giving up our job, leaving home/family and being hated and persecuted for His Name’s sake, would you or I be okay with that? Is Jesus really worth all that?

[Matthew 8:21-22](#)

²¹ Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ²² And Jesus said to him, “**Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.**”

[Matt 8:21-22](#) (ESV)

Jesus emphasized that nothing takes precedence over following Him. It is even more important than burying one's deceased father. Burial of dead strangers was regarded as a highly meritorious work of piety in Judaism; how much more the burial of one's own

father! Attendance to the duty of burying one's parents was implied in the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother."

Discipleship is costly. Following Jesus is going to be difficult, but nothing is more important. If we're really serious about loving Jesus more than self and following Him, no matter what the cost, here are four (4) truths that point to honoring Christ Himself as worthy of following Him out of delight and not of duty.

- **Supremacy of Him**
- **Trust in Him**
- **Obedience to Him**
- **Contentment in Him**

We have to be keenly aware that these truths are nourished and grow by the work of the Holy Spirit. So, here's a caution; these four truths are not a list with some "to do's" in it. These truths point us to the value of who Jesus is; He truly is worthy of following and loving more than self.

By the way, discipleship in the context of our Scripture from [Matthew 8:18-22](#) is defined as the willingness to follow Jesus, whatever the cost, even at the expense of one's self. If we're really willing to pay the cost of discipleship in following Jesus, let's take a look at each of the four (4) truths beginning with the supremacy of Him.

1. Supremacy of Him

According to Scripture, the supremacy of Jesus means that He is:

- Above all things
- Before all things
- Created all things
- Head of the church

[Colossians 1:15-18a](#)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church.

[Col 1:15-18a](#) (ESV)

Supremacy is defined as being superior to all others in power, authority and status. That's who Jesus is. He is God. Scripture says that **all** things were created by Him, through Him and for Him. That includes you and me. In addition, it says that Jesus has Lordship over all of creation and the church. In other words, His supremacy is over everything.

Example: Take marriage for example. In God's supremacy over all things, He designed marriage between one man and one woman. A Christ-centered marriage is one where

husband and wife have an adoration and a devotion for one another. The bride and her husband hold fast to one another in good times and bad times. They delight in each other. There is great worth in their relationship.

Do we see Jesus like that? Does His supremacy cause us to see His worthiness? Is there a love, adoration and union with Him as a bride has for her husband? In fact, does Jesus' supremacy enthrall us to the point where we see Him as described in the parables of Matthew 13 - the treasure hidden in a field or the pearl of great value? Out of joy, the man who finds the treasure goes and sells all that he has to own the field and gain his prized treasure. Out of joy, the man who finds the pearl sells all that he has to possess it ([Matthew 13:44-46](#)).

If we don't see Him as the Treasure or the Pearl of great value, then the truths about the value of who Christ is for us and why He is worth following will just be information. And that's where the Holy Spirit makes all the difference, as He transforms hearts. Once we see Christ as supreme over all things, including our lives, our trust in Him will grow.

2. Trust in Him

Trusting in Jesus means trusting by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In fact, happy is the man who does so.

[Jeremiah 17:7](#)

⁷ *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.*

[Jer 17:7](#) (ESV)

Example: I'm a first-time grandpa. I'm looking forward to the day when I can take our grandson to a park. And when we cross the street, I'll be holding his hand tightly. In fact, I wouldn't let go no matter what. His safety is completely dependent upon my grip on him. That's a picture of the kind of trust we should have in Jesus. Would we trust the Holy Spirit if He called us to go and make disciples, even in a place where sharing the love of Christ is difficult and/or dangerous? Would we go simply knowing we can depend upon God to hold our hand tightly with His strong grip, even though we might be scared to death?

Trust is defined as reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety of a person or thing. God's Word is referring to Himself as our trust and our strength. Without trust in Jesus, we have no hope. Trusting in Christ alone through faith alone is not only for salvation, but for growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

In Pastor Dan's recent sermon series in the book of John, we've heard the stories of people encountering Jesus. The marriage feast at Cana ([John 2](#)), the religious leader Nicodemus ([John 3](#)), the Samaritan woman at the well and the man with a son near death ([John 4](#)). In fact, throughout the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, some trusted Him, some didn't. Some even wanted to kill Him.

So, I ask the question; why would someone put their trust in Jesus? Some might say "It's a free pass for getting out of hell". Others may answer "It's what I get from Him. After all, He provided plenty of food, good wine and amazing healing according to the Bible."

Yet, the books of John and Matthew, and in fact the entire Bible, point us to something much greater. Scripture bids us "Come and see; Come and believe." As the Samaritan woman at the well said "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." And I might add "and still loves me." Jesus' love is matchless, boundless and everlasting. He is the zenith, or highest point, of grace and truth. In the book of Psalms, God says "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him". ([Psalm 34:8](#))

With that said, I ask the question: "Why would someone **not** put their trust in Jesus?" Is it because hobbies, jobs, friends or family are more worthy than Him? Is it because there's difficulty believing the fact that God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for the sake of those, who by God's grace, would put their trust in Him by faith alone? That's the message of the cross, the gospel. It's the good news that God chooses people, in spite of themselves, who were dead in their sins and makes them alive together with Christ.

Have you put your trust in the Lord Jesus? If you haven't, you can do that now. Come and see. Come and believe. One of the great promises of God is that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved ([Acts 2:21](#)). And if you're like me, having trusted Christ for many years, perhaps we need a refreshing in the value of who He is for us and our identity in Him. Come and see. Come and believe. Isn't He worthy of trusting in because of who He is? And as trust grows in Christ, obedience flows out of that trust.

3. Obedience to Him

Obedience means giving way to God's way. Are you and I willing to do that? In fact, what does obedience look like in the life of a person who trusts God?

[Micah 6:8](#)

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

[Micah 6:8](#) (ESV)

The Lord requires us to:

- Do justice i.e. do what's right
- Love kindness i.e. love mercy
- Walk humbly with your God

What do these indicate about God's character? He is just, merciful and faithful. It is a call for the truly forgiven men and women to demonstrate the reality of their faith by living it out. Such living would be accompanied with acts and deeds of mercy, justice and giving of oneself for the orphan, the widow and the poor. In fact, obedience to Christ is a way of life when our joy is wrapped up in Him. Joy in Jesus comes first, then obedience follows.

Example: Jesus chose the first of the twelve disciples, which were James, John, Simon (Peter) and Andrew.

[Mark 1:16-20](#)

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

[Mark 1:16-20](#) (ESV)

Why would James, John, Peter and Andrew drop everything and immediately follow Jesus? Jesus certainly wasn't promising fame and fortune. Seems radical doesn't it to give up their job and follow Him. Could it be that Jesus' love for them was so evident that they loved and trusted Him? Could it be their obedience flowed out of the joy and trust they had in Him? The disciples may have asked themselves “Isn't He worthy of obedience, even if it means giving up everything to follow Him?”

Obedience doesn't originate out of a sense of duty that says "We're supposed to share the love of Christ; we owe it to Him". No, obedience flows from a heart that has joy in the One whose love excels over all others. So, if I'm willing to share the love of Christ with my neighbors, friends or family, it's because I get to, not because I have to.

Example: Some of the best examples of obedience found in Scripture are Jesus Himself being obedient to His Heavenly Father. He did the will of the Father according to everything the Father appointed, even at the expense of Himself.

[Philippians 2:8](#)

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [Phil 2:8](#) (ESV)

[Romans 5:19](#)

¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. [Romans 5:19](#) (ESV)

Obedience isn't done for reasons such as feeling good about one's self or a performance-driven-finding-favor-with God mentality. It's about honoring God first and foremost. As we grow in trust and obedience to Jesus, we love, live and learn that Christ is our contentment.

4. Contentment in Him

Contentment in Jesus will cost something. Whether it is inconvenience, self-sacrifice or suffering, there will be a cost to being content in Him. Take the apostle Paul. He had

contentment in Jesus. If there ever were someone who could have been discontent, it would have been Paul. But here's what he says in [2 Corinthians 12:10](#).

¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. [2 Cor 12:10](#) (ESV)

Are you and I content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities? Would you have signed up to go along with Paul on his missionary journeys? The answer lies in whether or not there's contentment in God's grace. Here's Paul again [2 Corinthians 12:9](#).

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. [2 Cor 12:9](#) (ESV)

Note that this is after Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove a thorn in the flesh. This brings up the fact that if there's contentment in Christ, then satisfaction, joy, desire and value will be in Him as in nothing else or no one else. Scripture says this about contentment in [1 Timothy 6:6-8](#).

⁶ Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [1 Tim 6:6-8](#) (ESV)

When we find our contentment in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are able to be content in all things at all times. Whether the day has plenty or famine, good or bad, sickness or health; our contentment can be found in Jesus because He is the greatest value in our lives. Our contentment isn't in a feeling, a slogan or knowledge; it's in a Person; that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of this message, I asked the questions "Why follow Jesus? Why is He worth loving more than self?" The answer is not because "That's what Christians are supposed to do" or "I owe it to Him." Rather, the answer is as one brother in the Lord said "It's because we find our real, deep, lasting life only by exchanging our self-centered, worldly, pleasuring-seeking, shallow and fleeting life for the life He gives! It's a delightful sacrifice! A no-brainer, if we see the value of who God is for us."

And here are the four (4) truths in review that point to honoring Christ Himself as worthy of following Him out of delight and not of duty.

- **Supremacy of Him**
- **Trust in Him**
- **Obedience to Him**
- **Contentment in Him**

I'd like to conclude by sharing a quote and a story. First, the quote by Jim Elliot, missionary and martyr to the Waodani (Wah-o-dah-nee) tribe in Ecuador in 1956. "**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**" In other words, a person isn't a fool to give up the transient things of this life for the eternal value found in Jesus.

Now the story, which is about a man named Jay Leasum. Jay's wife, Helen, is a member of the church here at La Crescent. By the way, I'd like to thank Helen for allowing the use of this powerful story that testifies to Jesus' worthiness. Jay was diagnosed with mesothelioma, an aggressive type of cancer, which typically targets the lungs. He and Helen decided not to have chemotherapy done, which Helen says was an easy decision. Jay died in August 2008, only two months after the cancer diagnosis.

In spite of the physical and emotional pain associated with cancer, Jay and Helen wanted the **supremacy** of Jesus proclaimed to family members who needed salvation, even at Jay's funeral. They found their only hope was **trusting** Jesus in the abundant life He gives. They saw the power of being **obedient** to His Word. Now, as then, they rest securely in Jesus as their **contentment**. Jay and Helen were no fools; they are both very much alive in Christ at this very moment; Jesus is their greatest gain.

How about you and me? Is the Lord Jesus the prized Treasure? Is He the Pearl of great value? If He is, loving Him more than self and following Him will be difficult, but nothing could be more important. Yes, Jesus truly is worthy. Amen.