

## [Matthew 8:18-22](#)

### **Loving Jesus More Than Self: The Cost of Discipleship**

Imagine having been one of the people that was an eyewitness to Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing. Energized by the excitement of it all, we may have said something like the scribe, "I'll follow you wherever you go." Or perhaps we'd tack on a condition like the disciple who said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." By the way, in the Jewish culture, attending to the duty of burying one's parents was highly important; it was held to be implied in the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother."

Based on the text from [Matthew 8:18-22](#), Jesus is saying there's a cost in being His disciple. Following Him involves walking a narrow and difficult path. Loving Him more than self is hard. The Lord pointed out that even animals had a place to go home and rest, but He 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 the gospel offensive. Following Jesus today versus then really hasn't changed.

Just ask Christians in North Korea, Africa or China 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 worth it?

Discipleship is costly. Following Jesus is going to be difficult and nothing is more important. So, who is God calling us to be as His church? What will discipleship look like in your life and my life? Are we really serious about loving Jesus more than self and following Him, no matter what the cost? Because Jesus really is worth following, here are four (4) truths that exalt His name in the life of every follower:

- **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 in the life of the believer during his/her sanctification, which is a process over time where we become more like Jesus. I want to caution us, though, that these four truths are not a list of "things to do".

By the way, discipleship in the context of our Scripture from [Matthew 8:18-22](#) is the willingness to follow Jesus, whatever the cost, even at the expense of one's self. Discipleship requires faithful work and service in proclaiming the good news, the gospel. Discipleship will be characterized by renouncing (giving up) one's own life. It will involve humility, poverty, suffering and most importantly, faith in Jesus. Even when we fall short in all of these, He is faithful to uphold those who belong to Him because of His steadfast love, amazing grace and unending mercy.

If we're really willing to pay the cost of discipleship in following Jesus, let's take a look at each of the four truths that bring exalting worth to His name.

### **1. Supremacy of Him**

Supremacy of Jesus means that He is above all things, before all things, created all things and is the Head of the church. Here's [Colossians 1:15-18](#).

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*  
[Col 1:15-18](#) (ESV)

Note it 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. He is the firstborn from the dead, which alludes to His priority to creation and sovereignty over all of creation.

Jesus being firstborn of the dead also refers to Him being the origin and life of the church. He broke death's hold in a glorified body by virtue of His resurrection. The Greek word for firstborn is *protokos*, which means first, special status, supremacy and honor.

When it comes to supremacy, Jesus is in a class by Himself. There are no competitors. He is distinctively exclusive. Scripture says Jesus is the Great I Am, the Lord of lords and King of kings, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the world, the Living Water, and the Way, the Truth and the Life. There is no one or nothing in heaven or on earth that is greater than Him. Once we embrace the truth that Christ is supreme over all things, including our lives, the trust we have in Him grows by the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **2. Trust in Him**

Trusting in Jesus means placing our confidence in God's grace alone, that through faith alone, we are justified in Christ alone. Authentic trust is exemplified as a childlike faith, which means totally depending upon the integrity of God as Abba Father, Daddy.

Our grandson, who is currently two years old, will be visiting in a couple weeks. Grampa, yours truly, plans to take him to the swimming pool. Why do you think he'd jump into the water into my outstretched arms? Because he trusts me to catch him. That's a picture of the kind of trust we should have in the Lord Jesus.

Who or what have you placed your trust? If it's not in Christ, you're dead by drowning in the deep waters of sin; if it's in Christ, you're alive and buoyed up and into the everlasting arms of the Living Water, Jesus Himself. Trust Him! He gave His everything for our nothing. That's the gospel, the good news message of the cross. But here's more

good news. God in Christ not only saves us from sin, but He is trustworthy to work for us, with us, through us, and in spite of us.

For example, God has given the elders at La Crescent Evangelical Free Church (LEFC) a vision to plant churches in the local area. The purpose is to share the love of Christ and see the lost saved. God is saying, “Trust me. Jump into the water of church planting by faith, not fear. I’ll catch you.” Do we trust God when He calls us to plant churches? Would we do it with a childlike faith, simply knowing we can depend upon God, even though we don’t know much about church planting? Trusting in the Lord means holding fast to the assurance that He is our only hope and confidence. Here’s [Jeremiah 17:7](#).

*Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.*  
[Jer 17:7](#) (ESV)

The essence of trusting God is recognition of His greatness and our neediness. To have confidence in His character is to acknowledge that He is more reliable than anyone or anything. In fact, we would lean upon Him even when it invites our own destruction.

In the Old Testament book of Esther, Esther, a Jew, queen of the Persian Empire under king Ahasuerus, learned of a plot by a wicked fellow named Haman to annihilate the Jews throughout the empire. Mordecai, a Jew and Esther’s cousin, had raised her after the death of her parents. He requested Esther approach the king and plead with him on behalf of the Jewish people.

Anyone who approached the king in his inner court without being called would be put to death, unless the king held out the golden scepter in his hand. Trusting in God and through Mordecai’s exhortation, Esther decided to approach the king, whether she died or not. Here’s her reply to Mordecai as recorded in [Esther 4:16](#).

*“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”*  
[Esth 4:16](#) (ESV)

God is not once mentioned in the Old Testament book of Esther. Yet, it is evident that God’s plans and purposes unfolded according to His providence and sovereignty. Esther trusted God to take care of His people, including her. Because God was her Trust, she was ready to die. As our trust continues growing in Christ, our 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? Here’s [Micah 6:8](#).

*<sup>8</sup> 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 truly forgiven men and women in Christ 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.

For example, the first of the twelve disciples were fishermen. They were James, John, Simon (Peter) and Andrew. When Jesus called them to follow Him, Scripture states that they "immediately left their nets and followed Him." ([Mark 1:16-20](#)) 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 Jesus? Could it be that Jesus' love for them was so evident that their obedience flowed out of the joy and trust they had in Him?

Obedience doesn't originate out of an attitude that says, "Well, this is what I'm supposed to do, so I'll do it." No, obedience flows from a heart that has joy in the One who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. If we're followers of Christ and not willing to share the gospel with neighbors, friends or family, then our heart says "I don't really care". As a result, our obedience to God suffers.

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. Take a look at the following verses.

[Philippians 2:8](#)

<sup>8</sup> *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](#)

<sup>19</sup> *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**

The apostle Paul 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](#).

*<sup>10</sup> 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 me content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities? Would you or I have signed up to go along with Paul on his missionary journeys? The answer lies in whether or not we are content in God's grace. Here's Paul again [2 Corinthians 12:9](#).

*<sup>9</sup> 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 we're content in Christ, then we'll find in Him our satisfaction, joy, desire and value as in nothing else or no one else. Where do you and I find our greatest contentment? Is it in our hobbies, jobs, friends or family? And if we don't find Jesus as our greatest contentment, why is that? In fact, Pastor Dan's sermon last week titled “Contentment Found Only in Christ” emphasized this theme, as found in the following verses in [1 Timothy 6:6-8](#).

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

Concerning contentment, one of my brothers in Christ at LEFC said it well: “The less we have, the more content we are in Christ.” Even in a troublesome situation, less is more with regards to contentment in the Lord Jesus.

Scripture gives the account of Paul and Silas, who were in jail praying and singing hymns to God ([Acts 16:22-25](#)). How could anyone find joy in praising God in a prison cell unless their contentment is in Christ? 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 of great worth. Contentment isn't in a warm, fuzzy feeling, a coffee cup slogan, or a wealth of theological knowledge. Contentment is found only in a Person; His name is Jesus.

## **5. Conclusion**

At the beginning of this message, God's Word is explicit about the truth that following Jesus is difficult. Nothing is more important than loving Him more than self ([Matthew 8:18-22](#)). In each individual's life the effects of the call to discipleship manifests itself differently. But the heart of the call is the same for all of us when, in essence, Jesus says: love me more than self and follow me. Here's [Matthew 16:24](#).

*<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Matt 16:24 (ESV)*

Reviewing the four points of the cost of discipleship in loving Jesus more than self, in a different order, reveals an acrostic. An acrostic is a form of writing where the first letter in a line spells out a word. Here it is: **C**ontentment – **O**bedience – **S**upremacy – **T**rust.

Yes, there’s a cost to having contentment in Jesus. It means loving ourselves less and loving Him more. There’s a cost to being obedient to Jesus. Obedience means giving up our way for God’s way. There’s a cost to knowing Jesus’ supremacy. It means persevering through trials, knowing He is sovereign over all things. There’s a cost in trusting Jesus. Trust means totally depending upon Him and not ourselves.

Here’s a final thought: All of the following have their costs: Planting churches, serving the church in love, volunteering as a missionary, or parenting with a biblical worldview. We may ask ourselves, “Is it really worth it?” But the question should be, “Is Jesus really worth it”? If the answer is “yes”, loving Jesus more than self and following Him isn’t going to be easy. But nothing could be more important. Jesus truly is worth it. Amen.