

Is Jesus Worth Following

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[0 : 00] This evening's reading can be found on page 973 of the Church Bibles. 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. Jesus replied, Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Another disciple said to him, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus told him, follow me and let the dead bury their own dead. Then he got into a boat and his disciples followed him.

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him saying, Lord, save us.

We're going to drown. He replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid? Then he got up and he rebuked the winds and the waves and it was completely calm.

[1 : 03] The men were amazed and asked, what kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him. When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon possessed men coming from the tombs met him.

They were so violent that no one could pass that way. What do you want with us, son of God? They shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? Some distance from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding.

The demons begged Jesus, if you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs. He said to them, go. So they came out and went into the pigs and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.

Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus.

And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave the region. Well, thanks, Andrew.

[2 : 12] And good evening. Let me add my welcome to Jamie's. My name is Simon, and I'm a training minister here at St. Silas. If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be great, as we focus on this passage in Matthew.

Let's pray for our time together in God's Word this evening. Father God, thank you that you are the one who speaks through your Word, by your Spirit, about your Son. We pray that what we learn this evening would glorify your name and strengthen us to live for you.

Amen. Is it really worth it? Is it really worth it? It's a question we ask often in life, evaluating whether something we want is really worth the cost that we would pay for it.

On a very low end of this scale, Lurpak Butter made the news earlier this year for having one of the most inflated prices of any product in a supermarket.

At one point, a normal tub of Lurpak Butter could have cost you £7.25. Is your buttery toast in the morning worth £7.25? I know from talking to people this week, the answer is absolutely yes.

[3 : 17] We seem to be a very high-quality butter church. But maybe for some people, it's time to go own brand. But the question of is it really worth it is sometimes way more significant.

Is the degree I'm getting really worth it with all the time and energy I put into labs and the library? Is it really worth coming along to a midweek Bible study if it means having to miss sports and a pub trip with some friends?

Is that new job really worth the time and effort it would take to apply and the strain that it would put on my family? We're always weighing up whether something really is worth the effort, whether it's worth the cost that we would pay for it.

And so as we come to this passage in Matthew tonight, we're provoked with a big question. Is following Jesus really worth it? What does it cost to follow him?

And is he worth that cost? Well, so let's dive right in and start with the question of this cost in verses 18 to 22. Our first point, what is the cost of following Jesus?

[4 : 23] We pick up the story in Matthew with Jesus having taught the crowds on the mountain, just as God did in Israel's history through Moses. He's then come down from the mountain into the world where we've seen him restore outcast lepers, welcome Gentile foreigners, and heal crowds full of people.

Here is the promised king come to heal the world and bring about his kingdom. In verse 17, Matthew quoted the prophet Isaiah, showing us that Jesus is also the suffering servant that God would send to save his people from sin.

As we see Jesus' actions and miracles, it's backing up the words that he was giving to the people on the mountain. It's showing us what his kingdom would really be like and what he will be like as king over it.

And if it's that good, we might just think, well, of course we'd follow Jesus. If he's bringing about a kingdom that changes the world, gives us hope, a kingdom that is free from disease and death and suffering, why wouldn't we want to follow him?

Well, I think the first little section that we look at tonight, we look at two people who give us reasons to question that. In verse 18, we see Jesus boarding a boat to get away from the crowds that he's been followed by since he came down the mountain.

[5 : 46] And one of Israel's teachers, part of the religious establishment, comes to Jesus and in verse 19 says, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. And we might think, well, surely, model disciple.

He's keen, he's ready, he wants to go. Surely that's good news. But Jesus' answer to him implies that he hasn't understood what following Jesus would actually cost him.

Look at Jesus' response in verse 20. Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. The title Jesus uses for himself there, the Son of Man, references back to a prophecy in the book of Daniel, a book from Israel's history, where one called the Son of Man would be the one who would come and receive power and glory from God in order to reign over the world.

That's a title that Jesus picks up consciously for himself multiple times in the Gospels, showing that he is that promised king that Israel had been waiting for. Yet, do you notice the disparity in that? This is the Son of Man, this is the promised king, and he has nowhere that he can call home, nowhere to lay his head. He rules over all creation, even the animals have places to rest, but the Son of Man does not.

[7 : 10] Jesus has come about to bring the kingdom of God in full over which he rules, but it isn't here in full yet. And in his life and ministry, find that Jesus doesn't stop moving.

He finds no place to call home on this earth. So the question is, is following Jesus as straightforward as this religious teacher thinks? Well, we get a second man in verse 21.

He says, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. He asked Jesus' permission to go and bury his own father before he follows. Now, I think it's unlikely that this man would even have been here if the funeral was happening right this second.

It's possible this request to wait to follow Jesus is for when his father has grown older and died and he doesn't have that responsibility anymore. To follow Jesus when it seems more convenient.

And although we don't know the specifics here, Jesus replies with one of the strongest and honestly most shocking replies that we find anywhere in the Gospels. Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.

[8 : 20] Notice it's a command from Jesus, follow me. He's come to the right person, but he hasn't understood the urgency of following Jesus. Jesus' words there, let the dead bury their own dead, that's saying, let those who are spiritually dead go and bury the physically dead.

His clear verdict on those who won't follow is that they are already dead without him spiritually. And their concerns are not those of his kingdom, even the most important family concerns.

Following Jesus isn't something a person can put off even for the most pressing of reasons. And I think that pronouncement, we've got to understand, is as shocking for the crowd then as it is for us now.

Jesus says that to follow him means that you have to put everything else to one side and make him your priority. That nothing else is a priority above the kingdom for someone who would call

themselves a follower of Jesus.

Now, it's worth saying that as we see through Jesus' teaching through the Gospels, Jesus respects and loves the family. He upholds God's law about the family. But here he shows that even the most important aspects of family life and relationships are secondary to his call on our lives.

[9 : 41] You can't just come when it's convenient. You can't just put off following Jesus until it suits you. You can't just follow Jesus when it's easy. Whatever the cost, you must follow him.

So how do you find yourself responding to that call from Jesus? Do you think it's harsh or fair? It is hard to come to terms with the cost of following Jesus because nothing in this world demands so much of us.

Because in fact, following Jesus would cost you everything. If you follow Jesus, you follow the one who is not at home in this world and you become a foreigner even in the place that you live.

following Jesus means to follow the one who demands to be the first priority of your whole life, of every day, of every moment, with no other priority allowed to supersede him.

Following Jesus will change everything. So, is following Jesus worth it? if the cost is that high, am I going to follow them?

[10 : 58] Well, look with me as Matthew continues his gospel after these statements to two episodes that give us an insight into answering that question as we see Jesus is a king who calms storms and banishes evil.

So, that's our second point. Jesus is the king who calms storms. It's been a long day and Jesus and the disciples have been with the crowds the whole time.

Jesus has been teaching and healing and if you look back to verse 16, it's now night time. As they get on the boat leaving the crowds behind to sail across Galilee, a furious storm whips up and in verse 23 we see it is greatly dangerous.

The storms do often come in the region of Galilee. Apparently this happens due to the altitude and the shape of the area and the weather patterns but then 2,000 years ago there is no coast guard, no lifeboats.

Actually, what this means is that everyone on this boat is on the verge of death and in human terms this storm could easily be the end of everyone. Yet, in contrast to this chaos and darkness, Jesus is asleep.

[12 : 09] The disciples awake him panicking, Lord, save us, we're going to drown and notice the order of events in Jesus' response in verse 26. The words that he says come before the miracle.

Whilst the storm is raging, Jesus says, you of little faith, why are you so afraid? And then he rebukes the storm and with a word, the winds and the waves are still.

One second impending death, the next, a quiet evening boat ride. And the difference is one word from Jesus. And so we hear from the disciples, what kind of man is this?

Even the winds and the waves obey him. They're absolutely amazed. The answer to that question is just staring them in the face. Whose words can turn dark chaos into quiet waters?

Whose words rule over the seas and over the deep? The words of no one else but God alone. What kind of man is this?

[13 : 18] Well, on one level, he's Jesus, the tired man from a day full of ministry, sleeping on a ship. But as we see in his words, Jesus is the creator God, the king of the whole universe.

So when we hear the words, you of little faith, Jesus isn't talking so much about an amount of faith in some way as elsewhere that he says that faith as small as a mustard seed can move a mountain. But what's little is the understanding these disciples have. as their fear shows, they don't have enough faith to believe, they have enough faith to believe that Jesus can help but not enough to allay their fears.

They haven't truly understood yet who they follow. Far more than just a miracle worker, here is God himself. Had they understood that they were on the boat with the one who created the seas, they may not have feared so much.

The deficiency in their faith is the source of their fear because they aren't seeing Jesus for who he truly is. So what do we need when our fears arise, when we start to worry about the things in the world and some of those costs from before?

[14 : 37] Well, the theologian Don Carson says this of this passage, faith needs not to know so much what Jesus will do or what promises he has made in a certain situation but who he is.

Our deepest need as people and the most essential part of following Jesus is knowing him for who he really is. That Jesus is God.

That he is the creator king of the universe. He is the one who came down to save us. On the verge of death in a storm, Jesus brings life and peace and it gives us a glimpse again of that future kingdom where the world will be put right and even nature will submit peacefully to its king.

Believing in him will in fact cost us our fear as we choose to put our faith in him. We live in a world so plagued by the wrath of nature that it's on the news every week.

Every single time we have prayers on a weekly service, almost always there is some big disaster that has happened somewhere because of a flood or an earthquake or a tornado or something.

[15:48] Friends, we can't even keep the rain out of this building most of the time. But one day in Jesus' kingdom every storm will cease as the whole of nature submits to the one who made it peacefully and joyfully because Jesus is the king that calms storms.

As we move on to the final part of our passage today, we see the disciples and Jesus have safely alighted their boat onto the other side of the lake.

And you can imagine maybe that the disciples are a little shaken. They're on the verge of death and now they're wondering who is this that we are traveling with? Yet here, far from the crowds in the Gentile territory, they are now in a Gentile territory.

They're about to see even more of who Jesus is and that's our third and final point this evening.

Jesus is the king who banishes evil. As Jesus and the disciples get off the boat to enter this Gentile area, they're immediately met by two demon-possessed men.

We're told that these men are so violent that nobody's been able to pass near them and also that they came up from the tombs, the place of the dead. These men have been dehumanized by these evil forces and they come at Jesus shouting, what do you want with us, son of God?

[17:10] Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? In comparison to the disciples who haven't understood who Jesus is fully, isn't this fascinating?

The demons know exactly who they are addressing. They are entirely sure of who Jesus is. Here is the son of God himself. And from their words, we get two other important pieces of information.

First, that they are expecting torture and secondly, that they are expecting it at an appointed time.

They don't want to worship Jesus. They aren't going to submit to him as Lord, but these demons know that they are under his power.

There is a day coming when they will be judged and rejected and cast into hell forever. And they know that that day is set in stone and that Jesus knows when it's coming.

One day, the kingdom of God will come in full with Jesus as king. And on that day, evil will be banished completely. These demons then beg Jesus to be cast out into a nearby herd of pigs and Jesus, again with a word, cast them out.

[18:24] This gives us an insight a little bit when the pigs then run into the lake all to their deaths. It gives us an insight into just how powerful these demonic forces really were.

What true evil really looks like. Now we often ask the question at this point, well why did Jesus do this in the way that cost so much? Why all of these pigs? And the passage simply doesn't tell us.

But it demonstrates the true danger of these demons but also the true majesty and miracle of Jesus' power. power. But the response from the town?

Well the pig farmers run off to tell everyone and return with the whole town pleading for Jesus to just leave them alone. We don't get any sense of gladness for seeing these two men freed and restored just fear and rejection.

Jesus may be the king who banishes evil yet his kingship is rejected by the world. The cost for these people is simply too high. In the words of a commentator these people show that they preferred pigs to persons swine to saviour.

[19:35] And that isn't to downplay the real cost here. According to Mark's account of the same event there was probably as many as 2,000 pigs there is a huge cost here. On one level this shows us just how valuable human life is to Jesus.

He's not content to leave these men as they are. but ultimately it forces us to ask that question again as the disciples did who is this man?

Who is Jesus? Well he is the king who banishes evil the one whose kingdom will be free of spiritual darkness entirely and forever.

He's the one who set a day for judgment when all evil will be gotten rid of and his kingdom is a place of peace and righteousness forever. The world we all long for free of evil reigned over by Christ in peace and justice is coming.

But then what about the demon's question why has Jesus come now before the appointed time? Ultimately Jesus has come so that before that day of judgment when all evil is wiped out people would have an opportunity to follow him to turn from their sin to turn from God's wrath and turn to Christ to look to his eventual death on the cross and see their sin punished there instead of receiving judgment themselves.

[21 : 04] Here is the glorious king who comes to die as the suffering servant for his people. Wonderfully Jesus is that king that comes to banish evil.

And the question I want to ask is well what do we make of all of this? How does looking at those two pictures of what Jesus can do help us with the question of the cost of following him?

And to answer that I think we simply have to look at who Jesus is. If he really is the king who will one day bring total peace to creation having banished all evil forever. If he is the one who battles back against death in all its forms to bring eternal life to those who believe.

If he is a king for whom the ultimate moment of his kingship is found in his death on the cross bearing the cost of our sin and our rebellion and rejection dying in our place then he is a king whose salvation of us cost him everything.

We're so worried about followers being what is the cost for us as followers of following Jesus yet we look at Jesus and see one who gave up all he had in heaven to come to earth and ultimately to die on the cross for us it cost Jesus everything to save us and through that he brings us eternal life in his kingdom forever.

[22 : 35] The cost of following Jesus is completely outweighed by just looking at Jesus himself. though following him would make you a foreigner in your own world it makes you a citizen of his kingdom forever.

Though he demands to be the central priority of your whole life in every moment in every decision he has bought you with his precious blood and welcomes you into his kingdom. Though it costs you everything you have getting Jesus as your king is worth it because only in him can we find eternal life.

And when we understand this we see that the greater cost actually comes in rejecting him and losing out on life forever a cost that none of us can bear.

And yet that is the cost of rejecting him. Let me say if you're here and you're not yet a Christian weighing up the cost of following Jesus are you going to put your life behind him and put your faith in him?

Well let me say that Jesus calls you to follow him now not just when it's convenient. And if that feels like it would take a huge step of faith then just look to the king whose rule is so wonderful who will bring about that perfect world forever the king in whom we find forgiveness of sin and eternal life the servant king who comes for you.

[23 : 59] But maybe you've been a Christian a while and sometimes you wonder why doesn't that question ever go away? Is it still worth it? Is it still worth it because it still cost me something?

It's not just that it cost me something to choose to follow Jesus the first time it cost me every day and every moment to keep following him. Am I going to keep following Jesus when it's hard?

Will it will I still follow Jesus when my lifestyle differs so much from the people around me that I begin to see that I can't have all the things that my friends have because actually my priority is to give to the church and to his work?

Am I going to continue to follow Jesus when being honest about my Christian faith means I lose the respect of my colleagues and sometimes even my job? Will I continue to follow Jesus when I've been single for a long time and actually a relationship with someone who's not a Christian and doesn't love Jesus becomes an option?

Am I going to keep paying that cost? Is following Jesus worth it? And in all those moments what we have to do is not focus on the cost but on the king.

[25 : 19] Remember who your savior is. The one who gave all he had for you. Remember the price he paid for you on the cross and the new life that you already have in him.

Remember that hope of that glorious future kingdom that we will be in forever where all the pain and death and suffering is gone. That future hope is what makes sense of the cost today because if

I have Christ I have everything I need forever and it really is worth following him.
Is it worth following Jesus friends? Absolutely. In every way and it never won't be. Don't look to the cost. Look to the king. Let's pray. Father God thank you that you sent the Lord Jesus for us. That through his death and resurrection we may be welcomed into your kingdom. Our sins forgiven and our conscience cleansed. Thank you that through him through the cost that he paid you have bought us for your kingdom forever.
So we praise you for sending the Lord Jesus. Jesus we thank you so much that you came for us and Holy Spirit we ask that you would help us to know him more and more each day as we learn to follow him daily counting the cost but looking to Christ.
[26 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.