

Matthew 8:18-22 - No Higher Priority

1. Introduction

Bonhoeffer – the Cost of Discipleship

Read from pp. 3-4.

Against cheap grace – costly grace

Wrote 1937 in Germany

Hitler had come to power in 1933

Most Christians applauded his inspirational leadership

Bonhoeffer was a leader of the “confessing Christians”

Bonhoeffer’s stand was to lead to his death

1943 arrested for involvement in a plot against Hitler’s life

1945 hanged just a few weeks before the end of the war.

Today cheap grace is everywhere

Christianity portrayed as simply the most satisfying lifestyle

It is more satisfying – but it is not just an attractive commodity

Christians choose the church they will go to according to how much they can get from it – not where they can best serve

Christian involvement in politics – often sounds distressingly like we are campaigning for narrow self-interest – rather than the common good.

Popular to say that the gospel is about “God’s unconditional love”

In certain ways true – we cannot earn our salvation by our good works

But I don’t think Jesus would have recognised “unconditional love”

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; (Matthew 10:37)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24)

As Bonhoeffer wrote in “The Cost of Discipleship”

“When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die”

In Matthew 8-9 Matthew has collected together stories to establish Jesus’ authority

Stories actually come from various parts of his ministry

Three sets of three miracles – saw the first one last week.

Authority to touch a leper – and the leper becomes clean

Authority to heal a centurion’s child simply with a word

Authority to forgive sins – as Isaiah 53 predicted.

Now we have a couple of responses to his authority.

First of all note how he responds to the throng of followers – Mat 8:18

What sort of a leader of a movement is that?

2. A Word to the Over-Enthusiastic – vv19-20

A “teacher of the law” approaches – v19

A clue that this man may not yet have grasped who Jesus really is –
“teacher”

But he is not lacking in enthusiasm “I will follow you wherever you
go”

Jesus response

No congratulation

No encouragement

No assurances

It costs everything – v20

What it doesn’t mean: It doesn’t necessarily mean becoming homeless

I am not sinning simply by being a homeowner

Jesus had a home, and conventional job until the age of 30 – not
sinning.

It does mean that everything must be submitted to Christ

We must be prepared to give up everything.

Give up security – fox hole

Give up comfort – nest

Predictability of life – at the end of the day fox knows – he will return
to his lair.

Fundamentally opposed to the profound underlying principles of our
culture

No-one is pursuing a larger vision

“We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot at, hung, jailed, lynched, tarred and feathered, slandered, ridiculed, and fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us gets killed or imprisoned; we live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the Party every penny we make above what is necessary to keep us alive.... We communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life.”

A letter from an American student breaking off his engagement.

Examples

Friend of ours who had an offer of marriage – but she knew it wasn’t
right. She is still single today.

Friend of mine – California, vet. Devoted his life to developing
countries.

Countless stories

Jobs not taken – because could not fulfil their Christian calling

Jobs accepted despite cost – because sensed this is what God wanted them to do.

Costly decision to give birth to a disabled child rather than termination

Innumerable more trivial decisions – decisions made by older members of this church when I came – not for their comfort but for Christ.

- In the end we are not losers
 - Four families in this church, us included – housed magnificently – but took decisions simply to trust Christ.
 - My California friend hates being displayed as someone who accepted loss for the sake of Christ – “I have only gained” he says.
 - Sometimes the gain is simply what God does in our hearts
- Not just for the superheroes
 - Tendency to have two levels of commitment
 - Priest and laity
 - Perfecti in the Cathars
 - Jesus’ words

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 - Here not a unique call to “teachers of the law” but to anyone who would follow.
 - His call to you – don’t be casual about Jesus.
- Not just about initial response
 - Christian discipleship not like the cynic’s view of marriage
 - “a short spasm of enthusiasm followed by a long period of regret”
 - It is actually “a long obedience in the same direction”
 - The young man who was a leader in CU – now nothing
 - The phenomenon of progressive compromise
 - Our culture erodes Christian vitality
 - Up and down the country – enormously difficult to find lay leaders in their thirties and forties.
- Lack of people who will devote themselves to full time gospel ministry
 - Somewhat distorted here because of the nature of Oxford
 - Lack of pastors in this country
 - Average age of pastor/vicar – over 50
 - Need a whole new generation who will devote themselves full time to gospel
 - Need a whole new generation who will commit to lay leadership
- You profess to be a Christian: DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE LET YOURSELF IN FOR?

3. A Word to the Cautious – vv21-22

Not quite clear what “let me bury my father” means

Could be that his father has died – i.e. “let me perform my funeral duties

More likely it means “let me wait until my father has died”

Jesus reply: Following him takes precedence over all else

“let the dead bury their own dead”

?let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead?

An idiom “leave all other duties”

He will accept no delays

- What are you waiting for?
Bonhoeffer Letters and Papers from Prison.
".. who stands fast? Only the man ... who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and exclusive allegiance to God - the responsible man, who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God. Where are these responsible people?"
- What you waiting for in starting to follow Christ?
- Christian what are you waiting for – following Jesus is all about the next step – will you take it?