

## Matthew 4.18-22 'Followers of the King' Transcript

**Date:** 24/11/2024

**Preaching:** Rhys Lamont

**Series:** Matthew's Gospel

**Sermon Title:** Followers of the King

--

***The following is an AI generated audio transcript and may contain errors. Please do not republish or quote any part of this sermon without the authors permission.***

--

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran theologian known for his active resistance to the Nazi regime during World War II. He was executed by hanging in the Flossenburg concentration camp in 1945. Bonhoeffer's most famous and perhaps influential work is a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*, which contains a chapter entitled "Costly Grace." In this chapter, he essentially creates a comparison between two categories: costly grace and cheap grace.

Cheap grace, he says, is the deadly enemy of our church. It is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate. We want to avoid, believers, cheap grace.

On the other hand, the grace we must, as followers of Christ, desire is that grace which is costly. Costly grace is that true and transformative grace of God. Bonhoeffer said this of costly grace: "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in a field. For the sake of it, a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy, which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ, at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again. The gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow. And it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life. And it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

This morning's passage illustrates the outworking of Bonhoeffer's costly grace. Matthew 4:18-22 is all about the formal calling of Jesus' inner four disciples, the first of those whom we know as the 12 apostles. Here we learn that the Christian faith is all about following Jesus. To be a Christian is to be first saved by him, but then led by him, to learn from him, to surrender to him, and to see him as the focus and end of all that we do in life. Following Jesus as he calls each of us is not cheap grace, but it is costly grace. Following Jesus leaves every disciple of

his changed forever, and we carry his yoke upon us. We know that he is worthy of it for all he has done.

Let's move into the biblical text and do a brief summary of what's here before we move into some application of the passage. Jesus, as we established last time, has made his permanent home in Galilee of the Gentiles. His ministry is now focusing in the north rather than initially how he was based or spending a lot of time in the south. He has moved to Galilee of the Gentiles, Capernaum, and he is teaching and preaching concerning the gospel of the kingdom of God. He is declaring the arrival and inauguration of God's kingly rule and reign spoken of and expected down through redemptive history.

The text opens with Christ beside the Sea of Galilee. It might be helpful for you to know that this is not a sea as we understand it; this is actually a freshwater lake. In the Hebrew conception, the word translated "sea" would simply mean a large body of water. The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake and has many other names as well. But that aside, this is the setting of Jesus' first call of four disciples.

Perhaps we shouldn't let the irony be lost on us, for the Sea of Galilee is actually the primary source of water for the people who live in Israel. It's their primary source of drinking water. But it is Christ, who ministered so often by the Sea of Galilee and on the Sea of Galilee even, who is the one who could truly satisfy man's spiritual thirst. Our Lord said, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14).

This is where Jesus calls Peter and his brother Andrew, and then James and his brother John, to become his disciples. Now, this idea of somebody having disciples might seem a little strange for us, but in older times in parts of the ancient world, it was common for a teacher or a rabbi to have followers who would learn and train under their teaching and instruction. One example would be Socrates, who lived a long time before Jesus. He had students and disciples, and they too followed suit, the best of them anyway.

So Jesus had not only a general audience but also an inner circle, those whom he would closely mentor. In fact, the apostles would go on to become the link between Christ and his church. They would become the 12 pillars, as it were, of the church following Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Jesus will spend a considerable amount of time with them, specifically explaining his teaching in parables and so on in depth in person.

There is nothing unusual about what Jesus is doing here in this passage calling disciples. The only difference might be that typically, as I understand it, a teacher would have people who wanted to be their disciple come to them and request and almost have to prove their worth to become a disciple of this teacher. With Jesus, it's the other way around; he calls his 12.

A further important detail you need to know is that this is not the first time Jesus had met the disciples he calls here. While the way of the narrative as we've just read it may seem to imply that Jesus is just walking along by the Sea of Galilee and out of the blue, he just spots these

men and calls them to be his disciples, that's not at all what happens. By reading the other gospels, particularly John chapter one, we learn that Jesus has actually already met and encountered these whom he calls as his disciples. They know who he is. They've heard Jesus teaching and preaching already. What we have here is a formal calling of the disciples.

There is a real sense that this happens with all who come to know Christ, isn't there? There's always a shift that must happen between hearing about Christ, reading about Christ, learning about Christ, and actually following and committing oneself fully to Christ. This is what we find with these disciples. This is what the Christian faith is all about.

For the rest of this message, I want to work through five different applications that arise out of this text that teach us concerning what it means to be followers of the King.

The disciple is a student of Jesus. This is the first thing that we learn. To be a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ is to be a student of Jesus Christ. This is what the word disciple means at its very fundamental level: to be a learner. The call to follow Jesus is not simply a call to acknowledge that Jesus exists. It's not simply a call to acknowledge that Jesus is important. Rather, Jesus is calling these men to learn from him through following him. This is the most basic concept implicit in discipleship.

I fear that the church in general has forgotten this fact of the faith. For you see, it is learning, however slow, however limited, whatever your abilities may be, it is learning which must be at the heart of what it means for us to be Christians. If we wish to be engineers, we must learn how to think, calculate, and solve problems as engineers. If we wish to be farmers, sheep or dairy, we must learn all about livestock management and pasture types. You folks here that are farmers know far more than I will ever know about such things. But you had to learn, you had to grow, you had to develop in those things to be an effective farmer.

Human life revolves around learning, and this is no less true for the Christian life. We must dedicate ourselves to learning from Christ, allowing his words to transform us, shaping us into his likeness in word, thought, and deed. So are we learning then, believers? That's the challenge. Or are we languishing? The call of Christ to "follow me," as he says to his disciples, is at the root of all true faith—a desire to be a student of Christ.

In Matthew 11, Jesus said this: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." We learn from Christ through God's word. The word is the fountain, the headwaters, the source of our spiritual growth. Learning from Christ, enabled by the Holy Spirit, we must be taught just as we must be teaching. This is why, as part of Jesus' later commission to his disciples, you remember in the Great Commission, Matthew 28, Jesus said, "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

The Christian must always be one, including myself and people who teach, must always be taught as well. We are being taught, and we are teaching, and we're in this constant process in order that we would be disciples of Christ. It is cheap grace, coming back to Bonhoeffer,

that makes nothing of discipleship as fundamentally a learning and growing in Christ through his word.

A well-organized church and a healthy church will always provide avenues for followers of Jesus to learn from Christ. We have a number here at this church; we have the men's ministry, which is set up for this purpose. We have the women's Bible study, we have a midweek study. All these different programs are actually avenues purposed by the church, used by God for God's people to grow in the knowledge of Christ and in the word of God.

So we should always make use of those. It is cheap grace that ignores Bible reading, however much or however little it might be. Cheap grace minimizes the emphasis of sitting under sound biblical teaching. Cheap grace decides not to glean and learn from the Lord. For to follow Jesus, you see, is to learn and to tell.

The disciple obeys Jesus' word. This is the second thing we learn, and we see this in the passage with this pair of brothers, don't we? Take special note again of verses 20 and 22. It says, "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." "Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."

The disciple obeys Jesus at his word. It's not as though these disciples did so irrationally or without thought. As I told you, they already knew who Jesus was. They'd been introduced to him. John records, as another says, "Some of the 12, at least Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel had been with Jesus during his earlier ministry." You can see John 1:35-40, for example.

So it wasn't irrational. This wasn't just something out of the blue. It was calculated, but they followed. To follow Jesus is not blind or dumb faith, you see. It can and should be informed. Jesus himself said in Luke 14:31, "What king when he sets out to meet another king in battle will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with 10,000 men to encounter the one coming against him with 20,000?"

Faith must be calculated. Am I really prepared to obey the word of the Lord? What I'm trying to say is that Christ has the keys to the disciples' mind and heart. Your thoughts are his to govern. Your decisions and the way to live will be that which honors the fact that we are slaves of Christ as we are his friends. We are his to rule, his to govern. And so the Lord calls, and immediately we obey.

Faith in Jesus surrenders. Faith in Jesus does not hold back from him. It presents all. It gives what he asks. The disciple heeds and obeys the words of Jesus. We receive his word humbly, trusting, and desiring urgently to obey. To obey Jesus' word simply means self-denial, to act in all things in respect to Christ.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." These are not abstract or distant truths at all. They affect

every moment of our days. As we deal with our finances, we are to be reminded that the ultimate treasure we are commanded to seek is a treasure in heaven, that which is incorruptible and lasts forever.

As we consider a new job or career change, we ask, "What will this do to my Lord's command to nurture my family, my children in the ways of the Lord? What will this do to my participation in the life of the church as we are commanded?" In dealing with conflict with unbelievers, do we remember that we are to, when necessary, turn the other cheek, to not trade blows, but show grace and show love as that is shown to us in Christ?

You see, it's very practical to obey the word of Christ. And how we entertain ourselves, have we remembered that time is fleeting and we are not to waste it? Have we remembered that God calls us to fix our mind on things above and not of this world, that we are not to revel in or be entertained by that which is in the world and is detestable to God?

To be a follower of Christ is to obey his word, and that will change everything for us.

There is a cost factor to following Jesus. We notice again in verses 20 and 22 that it's not simply that they became followers and obeyed Jesus' word. We actually notice that they left something as well. When Jesus finds them, they were busy and occupied and doing something. They were living their lives. When they left to follow Jesus, there was a call and a cost factor to that call. They left their occupation, their nets. In the case of James and John, it says they left their boat and their father, meaning they probably left the family business and followed him.

This text is not asking you to abandon your current life to follow Christ. That's not at all the application. But it is asking you to hold up your life to God, to present it before him. For some, this is a call to pursue only the ministry, someone in the role of a pastor or a full-time ministry, missionary. They really do often leave a career and pursue the ministry. But for most, the vast majority, it is simply to be prepared to follow the cost, to count the cost, to follow Jesus where it leads.

If you need to leave your nets, then you will leave your nets. You will do it. If you need to offer financial support to God's work, locally and abroad, you'll do it. No matter the cost, even to the point of death. For the disciple, no cost could be too high. We have to give serious thought as to what it is we clutch in our hand when Christ calls us to follow him, what we are justifying in our hearts to withhold from God.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 10:37: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." What Jesus is saying there is he's taking that which we value the most, which is generally our family, those closest to us, that we would actually say we would truly die for that person. And Jesus says, "I have to be of even more value to you than that which you value the most."

We have to be willing to count the cost of that call. Following Jesus entails placing everything else beneath him. Jesus is more important than your family. He's more important than your wealth. He's more important than your time. He's more important than even your life. So you must leave and follow whatever you must and hold it up before him.

Being a follower of Jesus has a great cost involved, but what we give up for God's kingdom is the best return on investment. Its return is far beyond the best stock choices, the best ROI in property, the best cash flow business. The best investment is to live humbly and obediently before God by his word, considering nothing which we give up—whatever time, whatever money, whatever aspirations—that we might serve the Lord. We must consider that of infinite worth.

Listen to what the Lord said in Mark 10:29-30: "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters, mothers and children of farms along with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first."

You see, Christ says that the sacrifice is worth it. He says all that you invest for the sake of the kingdom will be returned a hundredfold. We're talking this life, don't worry about it. A smart investor or a savvy businessman, the golden number is 10%, isn't it? If you can invest a dollar and every year return 10% on that dollar, it's going to compound, and every seven years it'll double and so on. That's considered the golden number.

Christ says you invest in the kingdom, and he uses this. It's, of course, hyperbole, a hundredfold. There's no amount of investment, no cost too high. The payback is a hundredfold because it can't be stolen. It can't be taken. It is that which moth and rust cannot touch—treasures in heaven. Count the cost, Christ says. Leave what you must.

R.C. Sproul once said, "Theologians refer to the foundation of the church as built atop the blood of the martyrs." Of the four who are mentioned in this text, these men, three were killed for their allegiance to Jesus. Simon Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross after saying that he could not preach the cross without welcoming the opportunity to be put to death on one. You see, there's a cost factor to following Christ. We have to be willing to pay.

To follow Jesus is to trust Jesus. The follower of Jesus must be willing to trust God. When these men in the passage were called by Christ and they followed him, there would have been a tremendous level of uncertainty, wasn't there? They were leaving stable jobs that were able to feed them and help them support whatever family they had. And Christ calls them to follow him. There's tremendous uncertainty that would have gone with that.

For many Christians, you see, following Jesus may lead to a continual sense of shortage without earthly security. We just have to trust that it'll work out in God's plans, and it's a good

place to be. So we have to simply trust in Jesus for our security, as the disciples would have. This is not to say we're not to be wise. It's not to say we don't do anything. We don't plan for nothing. That's not to say that at all. It's that we do all of those things in a way which honors the reality that, as Proverbs 16:33 puts it, "The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord."

God's sovereignty and God's providence is over all, and we can trust him that he knows our lives. The scriptures say that he has good works prepared for us in advance. He's got your life in his hand, and you can trust him. So when he calls you to follow, you can follow, knowing that he'll provide the way.

It means we remember that not by strength will man prevail with God. God's ways keep us trusting. Like the Puritan who so beautifully said, we read God's providence in our lives like we do the Hebrew language backwards. It's only when you look over your shoulder you can really sometimes see just how dependable and trustworthy God really is.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 18:3: "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." What does that mean? Well, children have to trust, don't they? Children are completely dependent upon adults for their wellbeing. And Jesus says it's to be this way for us too as followers of Christ.

So are you willing to follow Christ and trust him for the outcome? He is the light of the world after all, as we looked at last time. May our anxiety then lead our minds to heaven where Christ intercedes for us, and we cry to him, "Father, in you I trust." May in our stress and in our business, we step back and say, "Lord, you take charge. Though I can't see the end of this road, I'll walk in it in your strength and with your help." This is another call of discipleship.

Jesus recommissions all his followers. He gives us a new purpose, you see. We see this for these fishermen. Christ calls from their nets, from their family businesses. He calls them and sends them into the world with the gospel of the kingdom. Look at Matthew 4:19: "And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

These fishermen would now become fishers of men, commissioned to preach to see the power of God come upon the world with power as God pours his spirit into the world that Jew and Gentile, all who believe in his name, would be given the right to be children of God. You see, God makes his people his ambassadors in the world. We who left to ourselves are haters of God who do not live by his ways, who reject the gospel, but he has made us coheirs with Christ, and he sends us wherever we are—the community of Woodlands and Invercargill, wherever we live, whoever we interact with. He sends us with the light of his glory because we hold in these earthen vessels, to use the language of scripture, the wonder of the beauty of the gospel.

It's God's light, and we have it. We ought to remember that our careers, our jobs, all these things are really just a side hustle. People talk about side hustles nowadays. I have one or two side hustles as well, but people talk about side hustles. But really, our careers and our jobs, all of these things in a way are a side hustle to our primary purpose which God has left us here for, isn't it? To be disciples and witnesses of Jesus Christ.

That's why the church remains in the world—to be witnesses of his, to carry his message and his name. God promised what we see outworking in the call here in Matthew 4. God promised this in times past. There's an interesting passage in Jeremiah 16:16: "Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen, declares the Lord. They will fish for them, and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt for them from every mountain and every hill and from the cleft of the rocks."

In other words, God was going to do a work wherein his people were going to be sought with the word. That was the promise of what Jeremiah was speaking of as God gave him his word. And so now, at the dawn of the gospel of the kingdom, as the call goes out to men and women, we find that the first disciples are called fishers of men.

God's going to use them to bring the gospel to others. So the call goes out: repent and believe in the gospel. God saves, and then he recommissions those whom he saves to go out into the highways and the byways to bring the gospel to all that God may bring the increase. We must persevere in this through disappointment even and rejection, remembering that Jesus himself said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

So might we take heart and follow the Lord wherever he would with his light.

In summary, our headings have been these: First of all, we considered that the disciple is to be a student of Jesus. Most fundamentally, we are to be those who learn from Christ. We are to remember that the disciple obeys Jesus' word. Immediately it says they left their nets, they left their father, and they followed him. There is a cost factor to following Jesus as well, and it will cost you, but we should be willing to pay whatever price the Lord asks of us.

We also looked at that to follow Jesus is to trust Jesus. These disciples would have been in tremendous uncertainty about what it would bring for them, but in the end, it was all worth it. We must trust him. Finally, we saw that Jesus recommissions all of his followers, and he makes us fishers of men.

I pray we would be encouraged to find ourselves as these disciples also.

Let's pray.