

## Adam Smith: Weighing Allegiances

Matthew 8 verses 18 through 22. Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side, speaking of the lake. And a scribe came up and said to him, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.

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. Another of the disciples said to him, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

Let's pray together. Lord, we believe that your word is alive and active, sharper than any two edged sword. We believe that you have spoken and that by your spirit, you desire to speak to us today.

And so God, I pray that you would illuminate your word to our minds and hearts, not only to understand it, Lord, but where we need to be convicted, would you convict us? Lord, not in fear or in shame, but in, Lord, courage and hope to save, to heal, to redeem, to cleanse, to set free. Holy Spirit, only you can do in us, only you can do in our hearts, what we truly need to be done, Lord, to soften hard hearts, to transform us from the inside out, that we would see Christ and desire him in his beauty, in his love, in his grace and in his mercy. And so Holy Spirit reveal Christ to us today.

Do in us what you desire for your glory, for the advancement of your kingdom in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Go ahead and have a seat. Over the past several years, my family and I have gotten into buying and selling cars, trying to find a good deal, do necessary work on the cars and try to flip them for a profit. And it's been a lot of fun and we've learned a ton as well.

One of the things that we have learned is that when buying a car, it's really easy to allow emotion to take over and the excitement to cloud judgment and cause us to spend more money on the car than we should have. It's something that little known fact, I used to be a car salesman when I was like 19 and 20. Something I used to take advantage of, the emotion and the excitement clouding judgment.

And now it's something I need to be mindful of. And so now whenever we go and look at a car, whether it's at an auction or a private sale on Facebook marketplace or something like that, we always try to go in with a limit in mind. A limit not only of what we're willing to spend on the car, but a limit based on what we know and anticipate we're going to have to spend later.

What it's going to cost us once we have it. Because the real question is never just how much does the car cost? The real question is, what is it going to cost me once it belongs to me? How much work is it going to take? How much time is it going to take? How much sacrifice? How

many busted knuckles from trying to crank on the engine? What is it going to cost me in order to turn a profit? And this is a tough lesson to learn. A few weeks ago, my oldest son and I went to go look at a 1991 Corvette.

And for me, I was just like, I was antsy. I was super excited. This is like one of my dream cars as a kid.

And the pictures online looked amazing. There was low miles, the seller was motivated, and everything seemed right. And then we got there and the seller was an incredible photographer.

Because this thing was in shambles. We were test driving and the engine starts shaking. And the check engine light or one of the alarm lights came on.

And we're still talking about it. We're standing outside the guy's house and we're looking at it. Still like the emotion and the excitement.

And at the end of the situation, standing in the driveway, because it was a car for Asher and he had saved his money, it's a decision that he had to make. And to his credit, he made the wise call and he walked away. It was going to cost too much at the end of the day.

It was going to cost more than he wanted to spend. The price was too high. And honestly, unfortunately, this is how many people approach Jesus.

And what is wise with cars is foolishness with Jesus. See, when we approach Jesus the way we approach a secondhand vehicle, we're not relating to him as Lord, but rather treating him as a lifestyle accessory. And that can happen because we get excited about things like forgiveness.

We get excited about having a new purpose in life, a new hope, even being embraced by a new community. And it can be exciting to think about what following Jesus will mean for us. But then Jesus starts to talk about things like surrender and allegiance and denying yourself and laying down control.

He starts talking about placing him above every other loyalty in life. And suddenly we begin asking, what is following Jesus going to cost me? And in our text today, two men come to Jesus expressing a desire to follow him. And in both interactions, Jesus confronts the conditions that they are placing on their commitment.

One man is willing to follow Jesus as long as it doesn't cost him security. The other is willing to follow Jesus as long as it doesn't threaten a deeper familial allegiance. And underneath both conversations is the same issue, the same question that we all need to ask ourselves today, which is who ultimately has the right to define my life? That's the tension in the text and that's the tension in the room and in our own hearts as well.

Because every human life is organized around some ultimate allegiance. Something sits at the

center of our lives. Something defines us.

Something or perhaps many things govern the decisions that we make, the fears that we have, our hopes for the future, governs our identity, who we are and who we want people to believe that we are. And following Jesus becomes difficult when he begins threatening those ruling allegiances. And that's what these two encounters reveal.

These men aren't simply struggling with obedience. They are weighing their allegiances and that is what Jesus does in our lives as well. Jesus exposes our rival allegiances.

And the first one that he exposes in the text is our allegiance to self. So the first man approaches Jesus with enthusiasm. Matthew tells us he's a scribe.

He's not just some random dude from the crowd. He is educated. He's respected.

A scribe is one of the experts on Torah, on God's law. He's influential in the community. And he comes to Jesus with enthusiasm.

He says, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. And at first glance, that sounds incredibly devoted. He sounds all in.

He's like, teacher, wherever you go, I go. No questions asked. I am by your side.

I am following you. But Matthew gives us a very important, quiet little clue. See, the scribe calls Jesus teacher, not Lord.

He calls him teacher. And throughout Matthew's gospel, true disciples consistently refer to Jesus as Lord, while those outside of genuine surrender lean toward the title teacher. And so I think Matthew wants us to feel the tension here because this man is certainly impressed by Jesus.

He's interested in Jesus. There's something about Jesus that is drawing him to his presence, but he is not yet surrendered to Jesus. And this is how many people approach Christ today.

They're comfortable admiring Jesus or learning from Jesus or being inspired by Jesus or adding Jesus to an already carefully curated life. As long as Jesus fits into the life that we have planned for ourselves, as long as Jesus fits that, as long as Jesus is headed the same direction that I have set for myself, then I'm eager to follow. But Jesus doesn't, Jesus refuses to be an accessory, like a piece of religious jewelry that we can put on and take off at a moment's notice.

Jesus comes as King and every human heart eventually reaches the moment where admiration must either become allegiance or rejection. And so Jesus exposes the condition under this man's enthusiasm. He says, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

In other words, Jesus is saying, you'll follow me anywhere, but what if there is nowhere to follow?

What if there is no place for you to land? What if there is no security? What if where I'm going is someplace uncomfortable and uncertain? Will you still follow? That's a question for us. Will you? Will you still follow Jesus if he's going someplace different than you had desired? So Jesus knows this man hasn't counted the cost. And so what begins to surface is the man's deepest allegiance, self-preservation, security, control, comfort.

Maybe that's what is being impressed upon you, the awareness, rather the avoidance of discomfort. So we want Jesus to improve our lives. We want Jesus to bless our plans and to strengthen our portfolios and to protect our goals, but we resist the moment that following him threatens our comfort, our control, our image and reputation, the preferred future that we have set for ourselves.

Because we naturally live by the assumption that my life belongs to me. And so I get to make the calls. I get to choose my adventure.

I get to be the decision maker. I get to be the Lord of my life. But listen, if I remain the sovereign ruler of my own life, then by definition, Jesus is not my Lord.

And regardless of what I say about Jesus, my heart exalts my own desires for my life over Christ. And so the scribe is eager to follow Jesus until Jesus threatens the life that the scribe has built for himself. And so here's something that we all need to take seriously.

Is Jesus allowed to redirect your life? Does he have authority over your time? Does he have authority over our money? Does he have authority over our family and over our future? Is Jesus allowed to ask anything of you? Don't answer too quickly, okay? Lest we risk not taking him seriously. And perhaps to illustrate the seriousness of this, Matthew introduces another would-be disciple. The first man had appeared with enthusiasm and got rebuffed.

And now a second man approaches with hesitation. Unlike the scribe, this man calls Jesus Lord right away. There's a greater recognition of his authority, but he says, Lord, let me first go and bury my father.

And we don't know if the man's father had passed away and he needed to fulfill his obligations as a son. We don't know if maybe he's still alive, but as a son, he's got an obligation to remain close. And so was unable to leave his father's side or to leave his home at this time.

Either way, what the man desires, what he's asking for is desirable. It's not like we can't scoff or mock him or look down on him for what he wants to do. It's honorable.

Family loyalty in the Jewish culture was sacred. And so the guy's not asking for permission to rebel. He's not saying like, Jesus, I will follow you, but you gotta let me keep this vice.

No, he's asking for something good. He's asking for permission to take care of his family. But

ultimately, what he's asking for is permission to delay surrender because of a competing loyalty in his life.

He's saying, I want to follow, but not yet. I want to give you my life, but you need to give me more time. And so this man reveals the second rival allegiance, not allegiance to self, but allegiance to others.

His identity is tethered to his family and expectations and social obligations. That's the same for us too. It's not just the things that we desire for ourselves or our internal motivations, our comfort, our security, our wealth, luxury, whatever it may be that rules us.

Sometimes it's the opinions of others that rule us. What they think that we should be like, the pursuits that they think would be good for us, the kind of people that they want us to be. See, some are ruled internally and others are ruled externally.

Some people worship autonomy while others worship approval. Either way, both people are enslaved because the issue is not merely what do we do with our lives? The issue is who ultimately do we serve? And so Jesus responds. He says, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

Now, I'll be honest with you. This is one of those times when we read the Bible and we come across Jesus' words and the social, like the way the world talks about Jesus, about how he's always loving all the time. And that's true, he is.

But our world defines love as only saying nice things to us all the time. This is one of those times when the Bible flies in the face of culture because what Jesus says is harsh. Leave the dead to bury their own dead.

He's talking about the man's dad and the rest of his family. He's saying those people who are outside of faith in me, they are spiritually dead. Let them handle it.

I'm calling you to life though, so follow me. And it's harsh. And it would have sounded harsh to the original audience too.

But the point is not that Jesus hates families. The point is that Jesus is claiming supreme authority over every other loyalty. And so let's let the text, let's let what's happening here press on us personally, because we have our own conditions for discipleship.

We want to negotiate the terms of our own surrender. Yeah, Jesus, okay, I will give you this, but... You need to be able to guarantee this, like we're entering a contract with Jesus. I'll follow Jesus as long as this thing in my life gets to stay, as long as my comfort remains protected, as long as my relationships remain untouched, as long as my plans, my sovereignty over my life and my future remain in my control.

And the problem is not that any of the things that we want are bad, but Jesus refuses conditional allegiance. And honestly, I think this might be the single greatest hurdle for many people in our culture to experience the beauty of Jesus. I think this is the single greatest obstacle.

See, we live among a people profoundly open to spirituality and yet allergic to surrender. We live among a people who are willing to lift their hands in praise, but refuse to bow the knee in true worship. Our culture loves inspiration, but without authority.

People in our world pursue transcendence, but will never repent. We want a kingdom, the kingdom of God, but not the God on the throne. There's so many people in our world, in our communities, in our families, in our neighborhoods, who are comfortable with Jesus as teacher, but not as Lord, not as ultimate authority, not as king.

Because we live in a world that has taught us from the time that we were in the cradle until now, that our lives belong to us. And so every surrender feels like loss. And we fear that if Jesus truly became the Lord of our lives, that we will somehow become less than our true selves.

That we will be less fulfilled, that we'll be less alive. Maybe that's you today. Maybe you've never trusted Jesus with your whole life, with your whole self.

Maybe you've trusted him with some things, just enough so that you can have confidence in the forgiveness of your sins, but you've not trusted him with your future. You've not trusted him with your marriage. You've not trusted him with your reputation, your identity, your family.

Maybe you've not trusted him with your health. And so every threat, real or perceived, creates crippling anxiety because you want Jesus, but you're afraid that he's going to put his finger on that thing. You're afraid he's going to call you to give him that thing.

And you're afraid that if Jesus truly becomes Lord, he's going to take more than he gives. That surrender to him will somehow diminish you rather than set you free. That's what the text is confronting.

That's what the spirit is confronting in us today because Jesus doesn't soften a call. He doesn't lower the stakes. So I'm going to be honest with you.

Following Jesus will cost you absolutely everything. Absolutely everything. Throughout the gospels, Jesus intensifies the demand.

He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Not admire me. Not tweet at me.

Not appreciate me. Occasionally agree with me, so long as it doesn't make you uncomfortable. Not add me to your already existing priorities.

He says, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. And in the first century, nobody heard the word cross and thought Jewry. The cross was an instrument of torture.

An instrument of death. Jesus is saying, if you're going to follow me, your life no longer belongs to you. Lay it down.

And if it hasn't already begun, this is where the conflict intensifies. Because we don't mind Jesus being important. We struggle with Jesus being absolute.

We're comfortable with Jesus giving giving Jesus influence, but we resist giving him ownership. So many of us have given Jesus a voice into our lives as a teacher, but we struggle to give him authority over our lives as Lord. I think many people today approach Jesus the way a company hires a new CEO.

The company already has a vision. They already have a direction. They already have products.

They already have a brand identity. And the CEO's job is to help the company become a better version of what that company already wants to be. And so many people approach Jesus in that same way.

We already have a vision for our lives. We already have goals. We already have priorities.

We already have careers. We already have, you know, a vision for our lives, a definition of fulfillment. And we want Jesus to help us to succeed at becoming the person that we've already planned to be.

But then Jesus begins to redirect our lives into places that we never intended to go. And suddenly we panic. And again, it's like that company.

Imagine what shareholders would do if General Motors decided to scrap making cars and make cookies. Everyone would abandon ship. Discipleship feels wonderful as long as Jesus is helping us to achieve our vision.

But discipleship becomes terrifying when Jesus begins to replace that vision with his own. And this is why following Jesus is costly. Because he's not asking to be part of your life.

He's asking you to make him Lord over it. He's not asking to be one allegiance among many. He is asking to be the defining allegiance over all others.

Listen, many of us, if you're hearing Jesus, following Jesus is going to cost us everything. And if you're hearing, give everything to Jesus. If that's all that you hear today, if all you leave with is, okay, I need to give everything to Jesus, that would be true and good.

But Christianity would be crushing. There's no good news in that. But the good news is that Jesus

didn't just ask for our allegiance.

He proved himself to be the only one worthy of our unrivaled allegiance. Because the good news will never be what you give up for Christ. It's about what Christ has given up for us.

And so when my son and I go look at cars, we're always asking the question, is it worth the cost? Is it worth the cost? And we inspect the damage and we count the repairs and we calculate the sacrifice. And if the cost outweighs the value, we walk away. But here's the terrifying truth.

When it comes to Jesus, we're not the only ones counting the cost. God has surveyed your life. He has surveyed this world.

He has surveyed humanity and he's not impressed. He found us totaled. He found you broken by sin, damaged by rebellion.

He found you unable to repair yourself. He found us in our most natural condition apart from him, dead in our trespasses and sins. And yet the Father didn't come and kick tires and walk away.

He counted the cost and he willingly paid that price for you in full. He gave his son so that through faith, you would not perish, but have everlasting life. And it wasn't just the Father who counted the cost and sent his son.

Jesus himself counted the cost as well. He saw every lash. He saw every nail.

He saw every humiliation. He saw every drop of wrath required to rescue you. Counted the cost fully and said, it's worth it.

They're worth it. Humanity is worth it. You are worth it.

Jesus counted the cost and paid it in full. And so it's only in light of Jesus' unconditional surrender that giving our allegiance to Jesus makes any sense at all. Otherwise, it just feels like a hostile takeover.

But check it out. Discipleship is a takeover, but it is not hostile. It is generous and it is loving and it is compassionate and it is good because the King who is worthy of our surrender is the same King who surrendered himself for us first.

The one who is calling you to give your life to him has already given his life for you. This is not domination. This is deliverance.

This is salvation. This is rescue. And so every other master in this world that you could possibly give your life to, that you could give your time to, that you could give your money to, that you could give your devotion and your love to, every other master in this world that you could serve will continue to require from you until there is nothing left.

But only Jesus will give himself to you until you're alive, until you're free. Church, we're not merely a people who counted the cost and decided that Jesus was worth following. We are people for whom Jesus counted the cost and decided that we were worth redeeming.

And so the question is no longer, is Jesus worth the cost? The cross has already answered that question. The real question is now, will you continue to cling to your rival allegiances or will you finally surrender absolute allegiance to the one who has given everything for you? And here's what's fascinating. Matthew never tells us what these two men decide to do.

Their stories are unfinished. One comes with enthusiasm and Jesus kind of challenges him. One comes hesitant and Jesus calls to follow him with urgency, but we never find out how they end.

See, Matthew's doing something brilliant. He's inviting us to stand in their shoes. The text, rather than just becoming a story that we read, becomes a mirror that we look into.

It's like a choose your own adventure book where the story suddenly turns to the reader and says, what do you want to do next? What do you want to do now? What are you going to do with Jesus? Because ultimately it doesn't matter today what these two men decided to do. What matters is what you decide to do right now. Because all of us are weighing our allegiances.

We're all caught in conflict between our loyalties. Something is sitting on the throne of your life. Something possesses your deepest loyalty.

For some of us, it's control. It's predictable outcomes. For some, it's approval.

Maybe a family or friends or people in your career that you look up to or inspired by. For some, it's comfort or success, achievement, relationships. For many people in our world, maybe many people in this room, it's just autonomy.

The right to define our own law, to define our own morality, to live our own truth, regardless of what other people say, to just be the final word. And Jesus stands before every one of us with the same command, the same conflict, the same fears, and he gives us the same command. Follow me.

Follow me. Whatever you've been following before, whatever you've been living for before, whatever has got you to this place, whether good or bad from this day forward, you follow me. And so today, as we come to a time of worship and response, come to the cross.

Lay down your allegiances. Stop trying to negotiate the conditions of your surrender. That's not how it works.

As we come to the bread and the cup, we have communion available in the front and in the back. The body of Christ broken for you. The blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of your sins.

Reflect on what Christ has given for you and renew your commitment to give him everything. And here is the promise. This is the promise that Jesus makes to you.

He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Listen church, let's take Jesus at his word. Okay, let's take his promise seriously because when we give our lives to him, when we give ourselves to him, though he may call us into obscurity, yet we are always secure in him. And though he calls us to leave behind our old lives, in him alone will you find your true life.

Father, I ask now that as we worship, Holy Spirit, you would continue to stir in our hearts what you've already begun. Lord, where you are convicting us of rival allegiances and false loyalties, God, we pray in whatever way is meaningful for us today, maybe it's coming down to the carpets and confessing that we've allowed other things, other even good things, to war against you for our hearts. As we come to the carpets, we just leave those things here symbolically before you and walk away free from their tyranny.

Maybe it's confessing to a friend, maybe it's coming up to the prayer ministry and asking for prayer. But Holy Spirit, whatever it is that we need to do to leave this place free of the things that are holding us back from freedom, I pray that you would give us the courage and the boldness to do just that. God, for those who are on the fence, I pray that as the body of Christ, as we worship together, Holy Spirit, you would manifest Christ in this place, that you would magnify Christ in our hearts, that we would see how beautiful you truly are, how good you truly are.

And like the man who found the treasure hidden in the field, went and sold everything with joy and came and bought the field and possessed the treasure, Lord, with joy, we would lay down our lives, we would sacrifice with joy our allegiance to even good things, to embrace the salvation that you have purchased for us with joy. Holy Spirit, come and exalt Christ in this place, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.