

Sermons on Matthew

Following Jesus

Matthew 8:18-22

With Study Questions

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Following Jesus

Matthew 8:18-22

And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ⁻¹⁹⁻ Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.”

⁻²⁰⁻ 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.”

⁻²¹⁻ Then another of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

⁻²²⁻ But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:18-22) -

Preface

In these chapters of Matthew the power, identity, and authority of Christ is made manifest through His performing of miracles. These acts were no doubt spectacular, drawing great multitudes, and winsome, evoking a desire in many to follow Jesus. In verses eighteen through twenty-two, we read of two would-be followers of Jesus and His responses to them.

In a culture where we'll do whatever it takes to get people to go to church, I find it quite remarkable how dissuasive Jesus seems to be when people willingly desire to follow Him.

I. Would-be Followers

A Scribe

Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” ⁻²⁰⁻ 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.” (Matthew 8:19, 20)

Here we observe exactly what any preacher would desire - a willing disciple. And what's even more impressive... a scribe. *Scribe* and *lawyer* are similar titles (Matthew 22:35, Mark 12:28). Scribes were Jewish and generally belonged to the sect of Pharisees. As the name suggests, they were writers of the law, often supplementing the law of God with their own traditions (Matthew 23). They were for the most part hostile to Christ and His followers (Acts 4:5; 6:12). What a boon it would be to the advancement of the kingdom to have a scribe on board!

But apparently Jesus was not very tactical. Didn't Jesus realize what a key figure this man would be? He could be the gospel's voice in the Jewish community! One para-church organization I was affiliated with, in their evangelistic efforts, was fond of saying, "No person is more important but some are more strategic." "If the student body president were converted it would surely be more instrumental in the advancement of the kingdom than if the supposed less significant student were converted." Jesus would have none of this nonsense.

Jesus seemed to have one concern with this would-be, seemingly over-anxious follower: 'Has he counted the cost?' Scribes were accustomed to a quiet and easy life. They enjoyed prestige and comfort. Perhaps this scribe thought following Jesus would elevate him on the financial or socio-political ladder. Those who seek to follow Jesus must be confronted against ulterior motives. **"_If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and __follow Me." (Matthew 16:24)**

So far from Jesus doing everything possible to keep people in church, He seemed more interested in keeping the wrong people out.

The Good Son

__Then another of His disciples said to Him, "_Lord, __let me first go and bury my father." ⁻²²⁻ But Jesus said to him, "_Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:21)

We learn in Luke that this man was called by Jesus to follow Him. His response to Jesus appears quite legitimate; he desires to bury his father. One needn't explain the possibilities that this man's father might not yet be dead—the term *bury* could mean to stay with

my elderly father until he dies—which could be years. Nor is it necessary to labor the point that in this culture there was often a long, drawn out, formalized mourning period which may or may not have been accompanied by genuine grief.

The point appears quite obvious; the zenith of human relationships and responsibilities ought to pale in comparison to one's commitment to Christ. It is not mere chance that the Holy Spirit would choose a scenario that would cause most of us to recoil. Jesus' words amount to "Let the spiritual dead bury the physically dead."

This is not, by the way, to be thought of as an across the board requirement, any more than selling all you have is a universal law for genuine repentance (Matthew 19:21). Christianity does not mean neglecting your parents. In fact we ought to honor our parents. It does mean, however, that when confronted with a choice between the will of Christ and the greatest possessions of this world, we are to acknowledge one, and only one, Master.

In these two accounts we learn that Jesus tells those who wish to follow Him to count the cost (Luke 14:28). And we learn that our love for Christ should make our love for those dearest to us appear as hatred by contrast (Luke 14:26).

No Groveling

Jesus was not groveling for followers. The gospel should not be presented in an apologetic¹ fashion. Jesus didn't make sure His preaching venues had a Starbucks, a continental breakfast, and a bubble-machine for the kids—'Become a Christian and win a free toaster oven!' Jesus, no doubt recoils at the fawning nature of today's low-price Christianity.

Jesus was unapologetic about the authority and claim He commands in the lives of people. And His words are not to be thought of as megalomaniacal rantings. Any parent understands the claim they have on the lives of their children, and they are, and should be, unapologetic when they put forth authoritative stipulations. After all, nobody loves your kids like you.

II. The Son of Man

¹ Not meaning here apologetics as a reasoned defense for the faith, but as in a diffident manner.

Inconspicuously weaved into this story is the first account of Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man. Why is it significant? In a certain sense, the term can simply mean that he is a human being. But to a student of the Old Testament, this term would bring up quite a significant image.

***_I was watching in the night visions, And behold,
_One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of
heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they
brought Him near before Him.¹⁴ Then to Him was
given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all
_peoples, nations, and languages should serve
Him. His dominion is _an everlasting
dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His
kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel
7:13, 14)***

Here we see a record of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Notice the similarity between this language and the language of Paul speaking of the resurrection,

***...when _He raised Him from the dead and _seated
Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,⁻²¹⁻ _far
above all _principality _and _power and _might and
dominion, and every name that is named, not only in
this age but also in that which is to come.⁻²²⁻ And _He
put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head
over all *things* to the church,⁻²³⁻ _which is His body,
_the fullness of Him _who fills all in all. (Ephesians
1:20a-23)***

I find it vexing how today's dispensationalist understands the vision in Daniel to be the Second Coming of Christ, rather than the ascension of Christ. This seems to be a clear case of bringing your presuppositions to the text. But it also robs us of the contrast Jesus seems to wish to make in the current text.

How can someone who doesn't have a pillow on which to lay His head so confidently demand uncompromised allegiance of His

followers? The answer is easy. In Christ's humiliation He has no pillow for His head, but in His exaltation He will be granted a kingdom and authority that extends to all of creation—not only in this age, but in the age to come.

In light of this, the demands Jesus imposes on His followers begin to lose any sense of burden or sacrifice. It would be like me asking to borrow your pen to write you a billion dollar check. "You want to *borrow* my pen!? You can *have* my pen!"

Surely man is to count the cost prior to following Jesus; but this does not mean that he does not consider the value of what is purchased—today I have no pillow, but tomorrow I will have all of heaven and earth. We've been praying for Jack Owens who has invested scores of years ministering and preaching the gospel at the Beacon Light Mission. I recently received the news that he will soon receive his reward. At some level Jack has understood the sacrifice, the cost. He will soon fully understand the reward.

So my friends, what will you purchase? Will you invest your heart and soul in the weak and shifting sands of a fallen world? Or will you heed the words of Christ:

I counsel you __to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and __white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Revelation 3:18)

Questions for Study

1. Who were the scribes (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why was Jesus dissuasive with the scribe (pages 3)?

3. Are some people more strategic than others when it comes to evangelism (page 3)?
4. Was Jesus teaching the son who wished to bury his father to be dishonoring (page 4)?
5. What do you suppose to be the point of Jesus telling him to let the dead bury their own dead (page 4)?
6. Do you notice any difference between the way Jesus speaks to follower and what we see in today's church (page 4)?
7. Discuss the term "Son of Man" (page 5).
8. How does the term fit into the context of what Jesus is teaching (pages 5, 6)?