

### **Focus Text**

“Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. 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.”

**(Matthew 8:18–22, ESV)**

### **1. Surrendering Comforts**

“Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. 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.” (Matthew 8:18–20, ESV)

Jesus is being mobbed, possibly because of the volume and quality of the healing miracles He was doing. So, Jesus instructs that it's time to move to the other side of the Galilee—a scribe approaches, desiring to follow. Scribes were often a part of the religious elite, a group that seemed to disdain Jesus' ministry, and this request seemed outside of the norm. However, the “tell” in the text is the title teacher, which was a lower term that did not describe Jesus' rightful position as a Rabbi. Jesus then uses the title “Son of Man,” which has a dual meaning. In Daniel and Enoch, “Son of Man” represented a divine being coming from the clouds with glory. It was used as a symbol of power and clout, but “Son of Man” was also a basic and almost insulting phrase, “human.” Jesus is painting a picture here for the scribe. Jesus will be both the divine one coming on the clouds in glory, but also a homeless human who wanders from place to place. Jesus is asking this scribe a challenging question: “Would you give up your status and be homeless, like I am?” Remember the scribe's quote, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus is asking a challenging question, in saying I am the divine one in Daniel who came from the clouds and I have a divine status that is higher than everyone in this crowd, yet I choose to follow God from place to place without a permanent home of my own. We have seen Jesus forgo all of the material luxuries of His day and be a wandering Rabbi, healing and preaching about God's Kingdom. Jesus is asking the scribe, “Will you really follow me? Wherever I go?”

To be a Christ follower means you aren't the one in the lead. Our mission statement is one of surrender and service, not one of leadership. This is the great challenge in following Jesus. Jesus welcomes anyone who wishes to follow Him, but the first requirement is to acknowledge that you are His servant, not His master. Can we admit we're not in charge? Jesus is the King of Kings. He is the divine One! We are called to be in the back of the line. However, being one of Jesus' servants in the Kingdom of God is eternally better than being a Queen or King of a finite trash heap.

“So far in Matthew scribes, like Pharisees, have been objects only of denunciation. So one expects this scribe to illustrate inadequate discipleship, and Matthew includes nothing to discourage this expectation.<sup>26</sup> The man addresses Jesus as “teacher” (didaskale), a title given to Christ in Matthew only by those who do not fully believe in him (cf. 12:38; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36). The title is accurate but not adequate. The scribe professes absolute allegiance, but Jesus realizes that the man doesn’t know what such a commitment would actually involve. He describes his itinerant ministry as even more austere than the lives of birds and foxes. Of course, Jesus had a home in Capernaum even if it was a borrowed one, but he was often not there to use it. At a deeper level Jesus’ disciples must recognize that no location on earth affords a true home. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and life on earth is lived as “strangers [sojourners, exiles] in the world” (1 Pet 1:1).”<sup>1</sup>

“Ironically, the son of man, who has been given glory and honor as well as dominion over the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, does not have the shelter they possess. If other NT applications of Ps 8:4–8 to Jesus’ future power indicate traditional usage (below, C.6.b), the present text may imply an ironic contrast between present lowliness and future glory”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Prioritizing Christ

“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.”” **(Matthew 8:21–22, ESV)**

To add to the urgent and costly nature of following Jesus, Matthew includes another story that is found in Luke 9. For both Matthew and Luke, these encounters set the scene for the priority and urgency of following Jesus. One thought is that this man has heard the call of Christ and should press forward with the Kingdom of God, leaving those who have rejected the call of Christ to deal with the consequences of their rejection. Another point in this story could be Jesus’ encouragement to leave the past behind because once you have entered into the Kingdom, you need not concern yourself with the troubles of the past. This parable points toward the allegiance Jesus expects from His people to follow Him and not to wait behind.

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<sup>1</sup> 26 Contra J. Kiilunen, “Der nachfolgewillige Schriftgelehrte: Matthäus 8.19–20 im Verständnis des Evangelisten,” NTS 37 (1991): 268–79.

Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Nickelsburg, George W. E. 1992. “Son of Man.” In The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, edited by David Noel Freedman, 6:143. New York: Doubleday.

When we pair the two stories together, it creates a picture. Jesus is on the move, proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God, which takes priority not only for Jesus but also for His disciples. When I was a child, I remember my father saying, “When grandpa works, everyone works!” My dad was letting me know that when Grandpa Hiltibran was out in the garden, I should be getting my hands dirty, or when Grandpa was working on something in the garage, I should be holding the flashlight. If King Jesus is on the move and doesn’t have time to enjoy creature comforts, then His followers should not be lounging around staring at the sky.

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “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.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57–62, ESV)

“The questioner had received the call, and that was the more urgent duty. In this case, the burial of the dead parent would come under the rule that sometimes the call to follow Christ might necessitate the abandonment of human relations; cf. 19:29. But it is possible that “let the dead bury their dead” was a proverbial saying, meaning, ‘Cut yourself adrift from the past when matters of present interest call for your whole attention.’”<sup>3</sup>

## Application

### Where’s your urgency?

Jesus makes it clear that if you want to be His Committed Follower, that will be an urgent priority in your life. Disciples are not just church goers who leave behind the things of Jesus at the door on Sunday afternoon but spend time daily in prayer, study, service, mentoring, and sharing.

“Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. –C. T. Studd”

This week, what is one way you can increase your priority and urgency in your relationship with Jesus?

Some suggestions:

- Have a family Bible Study
- Take your family or life group to serve the needy.
- Challenge Yourself to pray with someone this week.
- Call up a Christian friend and have a conversation about where God is growing you.

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<sup>3</sup> Allen, Willoughby C. 1907. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew. International Critical Commentary. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons.