

5. Give the evidence that the person was really healed.
6. State the time when the second series of events, included in this text, began to occur.
7. Explain the reason for the Capernaum citizens' waiting until just that moment to bring the sick to Jesus.
8. State the precise location where the sick were brought for healing.
9. Contrast the manner by which Jesus healed the sick with the manner in which He cast out demons, as seen in this text and its parallels.
10. What was the unusual cry of the demons as Jesus cast them out? By comparison with normal human comprehension of the ministry and Person of Jesus seen in the Jews of that period, what does that cry indicate about the demons?
11. Explain why Jesus would not permit the demons to speak "because they knew He was the Christ." Both Mark and Luke offer this quotation as the reason Jesus silenced the demons. Show how this reason is the proper explanation of Jesus' action.
12. What kind of connection does Matthew indicate between Jesus' activities and the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah?
13. How does Matthew mean the word "fulfil" in this connection indicated in the previous question?

Section 15

JESUS CALLS TO DISCIPLESHIP

(Possible parallel: Luke 9:57-62)

TEXT: 8:18-22

18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.
19. And there came a scribe, and said unto him, Teacher, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.
20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.
21. And another of the disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.
22. But Jesus saith unto him, Follow me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On other occasions when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him He had compassion for them and helped them. Why does He on this occasion try to get away from them? Compare verse 18 with its parallels in Mark 4:35, 36 and Luke 8:22.
- b. Why do you think Jesus tested this scribe who offers to be a disciple? Did not Jesus say that any who came to Him He would not ever cast out?
- c. What did Jesus mean by "the Son of man hath no place to lay his head"? First, what did He mean by it as regards Himself and, then, how was the scribe to understand and apply it? Did He really mean to indicate that one who follows Him should not expect to have a roof over his head? Explain.
- d. Should we try to obey Jesus' order: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead"? How should it apply to us?
- e. When or under what circumstances is someone "turning back" and, thus, "not fit for the kingdom"? (See Paraphrase and Harmony)
- f. Have you ever wondered what kind of impact these blunt replies, Jesus made to these potential disciples, upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? Certainly, they must have been listening as Jesus said this. How do you think they felt about what He said to each inquiring follower? How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the Apostles?
- g. How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the potential disciple of Jesus? What if it were your religious respectability, your dying father, your dear ones at home, you had to leave for Jesus sake?
- h. What do Jesus' words envision as a future for His self-seeking, glory-grabbing disciples who, clear down to the end of Jesus' ministry, struggled for prestige and priority in Jesus' Messianic Kingdom? (Study Mt. 18:1-5; Lk. 9:46-48; 22:24-27)
- i. Is "was the father of the would-be disciple already dead?" a necessary question to answer before being able to interpret Jesus' command to "leave the dead to bury their dead"?
- j. What is the one clear difference between Jesus and the Church that shows up immediately when someone comes to become a follower of Jesus? How does this difference between us and our Lord affect how we deal with would-be disciples?
- k. Do you think it is possible for us to issue the same challenges of sincerity and commitment that Jesus gave to these men in our

text? If so, how should this be done, in view of our fallibility of judgment, our ignorance of motives, etc.?

- l. What is wrong with a man who finds Jesus' requirements heartless and shocking?
- m. How is it possible for us to become "unfit for the Kingdom of God"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him that day, after He had finished preaching the Great Sermon in Parables (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), when evening had come He boarded a boat with His disciples. He then gave orders for the departure to the other side of the lake of Galilee.

But before they got under way, a man of letters, a scribe, came up to Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have their lairs; birds in the sky their roosts but the Son of man has nowhere to call His own."

To another man, Jesus called, "Follow me."

But this disciple said, "Lord, first give me leave to go bury my father."

"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead," was Jesus' answer, "but as for you, you go and preach God's kingdom."

Another volunteered, "I will follow you, Sir; but permit me first to say good-bye to those at home."

But Jesus told him, "No man who regrets his decision, after beginning the life he had chosen, has the right understanding of God's rule."

CONNECTION BETWEEN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE AND LUKE'S

There might be no connection whatever. Life is just unpredictable enough to make possible the repetition of two totally unconnected series of events so very much alike that anyone not immediately familiar with the connections and relationships, names and places, would almost swear that the two events, as narrated by completely competent eye-witnesses, are but two accounts of the same facts. But the two eye-witnesses, were it possible to recall them from the dead to testify, could verify the difference between the two similar incidents.

The problem before us is the practically verbal similarity between these two accounts, so verbally exact in the Greek text (with but

minor variations) that these authors are accused of copying a third unknown author, of having made personal variations according to their personal style and taste, and of having completely forgotten the original circumstances under which these events actually transpired. Here are some of the facts of the difficulty:

Matthew located this account early in Jesus' ministry quite some time before the feeding of the five thousand. (Mt. 14)

Luke locates this incident later in Jesus' ministry after Peter's confession, the Transfiguration and Sermon on Real Humility (Lk. 9)

Matthew says the first potential disciple was a "scribe", a fact that might be suggestive were the man's motives known. Some attribute to him selfish ambition in relation to Jesus' rising political popularity. But Jesus' answer does not necessitate this.

Luke omits this detail.

Matthew omits this disciple.

Luke adds the challenge Jesus placed before a third potential disciple (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Matthew omits the whole ministry performed by the seventy in Perea.

Luke seems to connect Jesus' response to the first potential disciple with His rejection of a Samaritan village; however this connection is tenuous. Luke points out that the second contact was actually commanded to follow Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom; Luke next mentions the mission of the 70. Does he intend any connection by it?

Plummer (*Luke*, 265) is probably correct in reminding us that, although Luke also lists these three stories together, he too may be editing, bringing them together, not because they all occurred the same day, but may be grouped together because they are similar in content.

Whatever is decided about the contrasting connections between Matthew and Luke, it is very clear that Matthew, as he arranges his own material, is giving some of the finest cases in point to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. Each of these would-be disciples

must decide whether he really wants to be "pure in heart" or not (5:8), whether he is trying to "serve two masters" or not (6:24), whether he is seeking earthly treasure and fulfilling merely secondary duties or whether his first interest is the spiritual joy of God's kingdom regardless of the personal expense, suffering, privations or death for Jesus' sake. (6:25-34; 5:10, 11). The *logical* sequence of Matthew's chapters leads to this observation.

However, if Mark's sequence is the *chronologically* correct one, then, chronologically, this section follows the great sermon in parables. Accordingly, if the scribe approached Jesus at the conclusion of that message, it may be that *that* sermon influenced him instead of anything Matthew includes immediately in this context. (Mk. 4:1-34 recorded by Matthew 13; Compare Mt. 8:18, 19, 23-27 with Mk. 4:33-41)

WHAT IS THIS TEXT DOING HERE?

Would that more preachers of the Gospel ordered their material after the orderly style of this former publican, Matthew-Levi of Alphaeus! As pointed out earlier (Introduction to Chapter Eight), Matthew arranges the miracle stories in groups of three with a line or two recording the response of people to Jesus. This time, however, he puts two responses into the same text and masterfully throws OUR conscience into a crisis. Observe how he brings the two would-be disciples into their own crisis of faith: each must decide what he *really* thinks of Jesus. There may be other clear reasons why neither Matthew nor Luke record the final choices that each disciple finally made. But it seems as if by a deft use of silence these Gospel writers have thus brought into trial our motives for following Jesus. As would a persuasive preacher driving for decision, so Matthew too is not merely telling enjoyable miracle-stories with a happy ending; rather, he is leading the reader psychologically to DECIDE about Jesus. And, to be true to his task, Matthew must insist that we decide about Jesus in a manner that so deeply affects our lives that our whole reason for existence be altered. Many would follow Jesus, but on conditions! If they can remain king of their lives, they will follow Jesus to the end of the earth. But the basic principle behind these compact crises of conscience is this: the Kingdom of God is the rule of God that requires all there is to a man, not all of God that man's rule can require. (See Notes on 5:8; 6:19-34) May we paraphrase Matthew's purpose, if we have correctly inferred it, like this: "Friend, you have seen pictured the Son of God identifying Himself as the rightful

authority to speak for God to you. You have seen His credentials through these miracles just recorded: He cleansed a leper, restored life and power to the centurion's servant, rebuked the fever that had attacked Peter's mother-in-law, and healed all of Capernaum's sick. On the strength of this evidence, are you willing to turn your life over to His direction? Decide! But remember: your reasons for following Him must be pure, unmixed. Your commitment must neither be shallow and hasty nor reluctant and procrastinating. But you **MUST decide!**"

NOTES

8:18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him.

This, Matthew says, is the explanation for Jesus' departure. But why would Jesus deliberately try to get away from popularity at any time in His ministry? Mark (4:35) definitely links this sentence with the conclusion to Jesus' great sermon in parables, and consequently finds its explanation in that situation. (See Notes on Mt. 13) Matthew's connection does not draw as much attention to the popular ministry of Jesus that had already developed, requiring that He keep a tight rein on the mistaken excitement of the crowds who would go to war at the indiscreet mention of the word: "Messiah."

The day is over (Mk. 4:35) and Jesus is worn out after a hard day of preaching, arguments and miracles (cf. Mk. 3:19b-35; Lk. 8:23), this being an entirely different day than that on which Peter's wife's mother and many others were healed at sunset. (cf. Mk. 1:21-34) Hence, Matthew omits the mention of the time as being sundown, lest this different day be confused with that. At the conclusion of that day Jesus had remained in Capernaum overnight and next morning the crowds were ready to mob Him again almost before He hardly had begun to pray in private. This time He intends completely to escape the multitudes entirely.

He gave commandment to depart unto the other side of the Sea of Galilee by boat. (Lk. 8:22; Mt. 8:23) Peter's former fishing boat may well be the one intended, since Zebedee's boat may still be in service as a commercial fishing boat. (See Mk. 1:20) Since Jesus has just finished a day of ministry probably at Capernaum (Mk. 3:19b), His command means to sail east across to the less populous eastern shore for some privacy and rest. The following section concerning the Gadarene demoniacs also confirms His intent.

To some, this deliberate "escape" ordered by Jesus may be surprising, for we would have expected Jesus to continue day in day out mercifully ministering to multitudes of needy people. But Jesus, we

often forget, was every bit a Man who really tired, really hungered, really needed time to get away from the pressures of constant public attention to be alone with His disciples. (See Notes on 4:1-11 and special study on Jesus' Temptations, Vol. I) Not only must Jesus have privacy to teach His disciples and privacy to seek the Father's face, but He must also cool the ignorant zeal of the multitudes. He often used this "tactic of unavailability" to hold them where He could thus control them and keep His own schedule with as few interruptions as possible. (cf. Mk. 1:36-38; Lk. 4:42, 43; 5:15, 16; Jn. 5:13; Mk. 3:9; Mt. 14:22, 23; Jn. 6:15; Mk. 7:24; Mt. 15:39; 16:4; Mk. 9:30) Jesus did not forsake the multitudes because He did not love, but precisely because He DID love them. He knew that their salvation depended upon their understanding His revelation of Himself, but they insisted upon His healing all their sick. This very insistent clamor drowned Jesus' self-revelation to them. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that if Jesus kept healing their bodies, feeding their stomachs with miraculous bread and fish, raised their dead, if He kept serving their material needs, they would miss that very truth which would save their souls! Their attention must not be centered upon the earthly reign of a worldly messiah who can pamper everyone's appetite and keep all men healthy, wealthy and worldly wise but ignorant of the Rule of God! At all costs, Jesus must concentrate their attention upon His real mission to earth.

THE LURE OF THE LEGITIMATE

A. THE LONGING FOR LODGING AND LEISURE (8:19, 20)

8:19 **And there came a scribe.** As at the conclusion of a lecture some of the students crowd around the instructor to ply Him with questions or pursue a question further, so this scribe seeing that Jesus had dismissed the crowds and was immediately preparing to embark for some unknown destination, elbowed his way through the group bustling around him in all directions till he found himself at water's edge where the Lord was just hurrying the last of the Apostles into the boat for the lake crossing.

The scribes, as a class in Jesus' time, had grown from careful students of Mosaic legislation among the priestly class into an honored upper-class occupation of professional lawyers, zealous defenders and teachers of the Law beyond the bounds of the priestly group of earlier days. As experts in OT Law and exposition, application and instruction to the people, they were classed as professional rabbis with nobility.

(See *ISBE*, 2704 and Bible dictionary articles on their origin and position in the nation.)

Heîs grammateûs ("one scribe") is said to be emphatic, practically stating that this is the only scribe that ever followed Jesus, a fact which is undoubted insofar as the record shows. Perhaps so, but *heîs*, "one" is also equivalent to the indefinite article, "a scribe" (Arndt-Gingrich, 230). Or, regarded as equivalent to the indefinite pronoun *tis*, there being no definite articles, *heîs* is the real subject of the participle and *grammateûs* is a noun in apposition with *heîs*: "Now there came a certain man to Him, a scribe, . . ."

These texts indicate Jesus' relations with the scribes: Mt. 22:35; 23:1-36; 15:1-20 (See Notes); Lk. 5:17; 10:25-29; 11:45-52; 14:3; Ac. 5:34) This scribe may already have been a disciple, since the next man Matthew mentions is "another disciple." He is possibly a secret disciple, like Nicodemus, now coming out into open confession of his willingness to follow Jesus. (Note Jn. 12:41-43) But, considering the almost universal condemnation of the scribes as a class by Jesus, and their monolithic rejection of His message and ministry, we may well ask what caused this particular man to flaunt tradition, throw away his friends and brave the censorship of his former colleagues?

1. It may be that this scribe's own inadequate or selfish motives were not yet clear to himself. So Jesus drives straight to his heart's motivations, causing him to examine his real purpose for following.
2. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 79) argues that this scribe seems to have desired to go along with Jesus as a guest, but Jesus gently declines his company since he has no shelter and can not entertain His friends. But does it seem likely that a scribe would be so frivolous as to identify himself with this uncertain, popular movement led by one who so persistently contradicted "the assured results of modern rabbinical thinking," without thus cutting himself off from all that he held dear among the other rabbis as a class?
3. We may be seeing here the sheer impact of Jesus upon the life of this Jewish doctor. This man, thoroughly educated in the method of the rabbis, must have seen in this itinerate rabbi from Nazareth an Authority and excellence that went far above and beyond that of all scribes that he knew about. (cf. Mt. 7:28, 29; Mk. 1:22) Jesus' miracles had identified

Him to THIS scribe at least, as a Teacher come from God (cf. Jn. 3:1, 2) and His message had the ring of true authority in it. This Jewish rabbi, wealthy in the memory of hundreds of OT Scripture texts, heard in the voice of Jesus exactly that kind of doctrine that might be expected from a spiritual Messiah predicted by the prophets. Had he gone this far?

If we reason backwards from Jesus' answer, we shall be better able to see the man as Jesus saw him.

4. Was this scribe unconsciously but clearly compromised by his station in life and preconceptions about the messianic kingdom? And this, even though he be completely sincere, insofar as he is aware of his motives? Perhaps, as Foster suggests, he expected a great earthly messianic kingdom, is now thoroughly convinced that Jesus can bring it about, and now comes forward to assure himself a glorious position and honor when that kingdom becomes reality. And yet, in his own mind, this is the right move to make, consonant with his own understanding.

Teacher I will follow thee withersoever thou goest.

His approach is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that he was himself an accepted teacher among the Jews. **Teacher** speaks of function but, as a word addressing Jesus, does not necessarily mean it was spoken in sarcasm or loaded flattery, as at other times. (See Mt. 22:16, 23, 36) Here is the honest confession of one rabbi who was literally overwhelmed by the supernatural wisdom of this REAL Rabbi to whom he now enthusiastically offers himself as willing follower.

I will follow thee withersoever thou goest. Rereading this sentence, we see in it the perfect expression of that unconditional commitment Jesus really sought from every disciple. And no man can come to Christ until he is ready to make this declaration. And yet, Jesus sees something in this particular disciple that is hidden from many:

1. The danger of momentary enthusiasm. (Mt. 13:20, 21) How would this confession sound when the going got rough, as Jesus tangled more and more bitterly with the scribes?
2. The danger of rash over-confidence: "Without knowing precisely where you plan to go, Jesus, I am prepared to travel that last mile with you!" (Cf. Mt. 26:31-35; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37)

3. The danger of deep ignorance of the issues involved. This man will probably be shocked to learn the real future of Jesus and His disciples. (cf. Mt. 16:21-28; 17:22, 23; Lk. 9:45)

How would we have reacted to this man's generous offer of his life and influence to our movement, were we Jesus? The man is one of the finest prospects for church membership we have seen in a long time; he has influence, position, learning and, best of all, a willingness to cast in his lot with us in the service of God. The measure of difference however, between our response to him and Jesus' response indicates how little we really understand our mission to bring men to Christ.

8:20 **Jesus saith unto him.** Tired as He was and anxious to get away from people for awhile for various reasons, still Jesus did not treat this excited scribe as a troublesome nuisance interfering with His plans. The Lord may have well known that this scribe had wrestled with his conscience and emotions before, to decide whether to link himself with Jesus at all. Now he rushes up to Jesus at the conclusion of a trying day for Him, right at the very moment after He made the psychological break with the crowd. Having dismissed them, He is busy hurrying the disciples into the boat for immediate departure, when before Him stands a man whose spiritual crisis had reached its zenith, whose eternal salvation was at stake. Besides, this generous enthusiast has bared his heart and life to Jesus. Undoubtedly, Jesus cannot but be moved by this offer. On the other hand, He could not compromise His honesty even to gain this disciple.

The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests: even the simplest animals of God's creation are provided with more or less permanent homes, **but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** This mercifully homely response shows Jesus baring a secret of His heart to His would-be disciple that He did not talk about with others. However unworthy his real motives might have been, Jesus does not scold him or crush his zeal. Still, in view of so sweeping a proposal, Jesus must challenge the scribe to consider the cost of discipleship. He will have no unrealistic disciples who have never heard what it is they must confront in His service. Jesus did this over and over:

1. To this scribe: "Do you really want to follow me? Listen, it will cost you more than you dream! My service will not be comfortable to say the least, but come along if you think you can take it."

2. To the rich young ruler: (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22, esp. v. 18) "Do you really mean 'Good Teacher'? Only God is good: do you really mean to call me 'God'? Are you then willing to sell all and follow me as God?"
3. To Nicodemus (Jn. 3) "Do you really think I am a teacher come from God? Good, then why argue with me about the possibility of new birth, as if I were but a rabbi on your level? I am not *discussing* this with you, Nicodemus; I am *telling* you!" (Jn. 3:9-12)
4. James and John (Mt. 20:22)
5. An enthusiastic woman (Lk. 11:27, 28)
6. Peter (Lk. 22:31-34)

Why did Jesus cool men's enthusiasm? In order to deepen their understanding.

1. They must count the cost of discipleship; (Lk. 14:25-33)
2. They must learn to live with the fact of Jesus' Lordship; (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)
3. Then, having made them fully aware of the sacrifices involved, He would call forth the heroic in them that would drive them to offer seemingly impossible sacrifices for Him.

Jesus HAS to offer blood, sweat and tears to get these excited people to grasp even the smallest conception of where Jesus is going, i.e. to suffering and death. He fully knows how shocking to this scribe would be a full revelation of His future opposition by the scribe's own colleagues, suffering the misunderstanding of His own disciples and horrible mockery of justice and criminal crucifixion that would be His. Rather than destroy this scribe's glimmer of real faith by baring these horrifying facts, Jesus considered it enough to say: **the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** But what does this mean?

1. Literally, this was not true, because, undoubtedly, Jesus and the Twelve rested somewhere ever night. Further, He would be welcome in hundreds of homes across the country on any night He chose to visit. (cf. the oriental hospitality of Lk. 24:29) Again, He seems to have had a fixed dwelling at Capernaum to which He returned from His evangelistic trips. (cf. Mk. 2:1) Add also the fact that at different times and in different ways, Galilean women contributed to the financial expense of His life and ministry (Lk. 8:1-3). His group also had a treasury with enough money in it to help others and tempting enough to steal from (Jn. 12:4-6; 13:29).

Admittedly, there may have been several occasions when Jesus and His closest followers were probably too many guests in homes every night, and so must have camped out. This leads us to ask: exactly what was Jesus' emphasis and intention for saying this then?

2. Figuratively: Jesus deliberately exaggerated His case for emphasis to impress the scribe with the nagging uncertainty and constantly moving character of Jesus' service. The scribe, accustomed to the comforts of a fine home, needs to realize that, if he would follow Jesus, these must be sacrificed at once. Jesus is saying: "Because of the demands of my unsettled, wandering ministry, I have no time for regular home life."

In this text Jesus is confessing to a poverty equal to the poorest of His day and yet claims allegiance like the most autocratic oriental despot over the tenderest, dearest sentiments of man! Only a Jesus can unite these extremes, for His relative poverty was self-chosen, that none of us may ever despair of His comprehending our sorrows, even though Jesus now reigns at the right hand of the Father that none may presume to believe His Lordship can be lightly dismissed. Every tie that binds us and hinders our service to Him must be crucified! Jesus would have us all see the sinful lure in legitimate things, things that are right, good and often necessary. So He contrasts in this vivid way the sheer uncertainty of His earthly existence with the normal human desire for roots and security.

The Son of man is a title that Jesus used to indicate Himself more than any other that He might have chosen. But where did He find this title and why did He use it, as opposed to better-known expressions of Messiahship? Attention is called to James Stalker's article "Son of Man" (*ISBE*, 2828) which summarizes the answers to these questions:

1. Jesus used this title in full consciousness of His Messiahship, even as Daniel had used it (cfr. Dan. 7:13, 14 with Mt. 24:30; 26:64. See also Rev. 1:7; 14:14. Note Keil, *Daniel*, p. 269-275 on Dan. 7:13, 14)

Keil: "He thereby lays claim at once to . . . a divine pre-existence, as well as to affirm true humanity of His person, and seeks to represent Himself, according to John's expression, as the Logos becoming flesh."

This is most startlingly clear from the form of the oath by which the high priest bound Jesus to commit Himself to say

"if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. 26:63). Not only did Jesus respond in the affirmative, but added the promise that pointed directly to Dan. 7:13: "You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

2. But Jesus did not merely use this title of Messiahship as an overt revelation of His true character, since this title apparently was not commonly used among the Jews for "the Christ," even though they had some understanding thereof. (See Jn. 12:34)

That the Jews did understand the words "the son of man" to be messianic is proved by the nature of their question for clarification of Jesus' cryptic declaration that "the Son of man must be" crucified: "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (Jn. 12:33, 34; see notes of Hendriksen, *John*, Vol. II, p. 203ff)

In this true messianic title lay half-concealed, half-revealed His identity, and as a term, would not expose His ministry, so readily as would other terms, to the excesses of nationalistic messianism, giving Him time, thus, to develop in the minds of His closest followers the true character of the suffering Christ. Since "son of man" was also a title with which both Ezekiel and Daniel are addressed in their prophetic office, Jesus' application of the term to Himself, without clear and obvious christological intent or explanation, might suggest no more to the uninformed listeners than that Jesus was speaking of Himself as belonging to the same prophetic line. Or else, since "son of man" related the bearer of this title most intimately to the human race (cf. Ps. 8:4), the uninformed hearer could well be held at a distance by its use. However, as indicated before, Jesus' intention was ever to indicate His Messiahship almost as eloquently as if He had said, "I am the Christ." Yet He does this without unnecessarily exciting the wrongheaded political ambitions of national messianism.

3. A third suggestion why Jesus should make use of this title rather than so many others by which to characterize Himself, is His identification with the human race. While His title

"Son of God" emphasizes His unique and unshared relationship with the Father, this title, even though messianic and specifically originating in a context that unquestionably establishes His divinity, still speaks of the human form in which His ministry to man took place (See on 9:6; Cfr. Heb. 2:5-18 as commentary on Psa. 8:4-6; Jn. 5:26; Mt. 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8)

But which of these views indicates best what Jesus was saying to this excited scribe? Any one of the choices is fair enough, although the irony involved in thinking that the Messiah of God is so reduced as man as to have no place to call home, is as heart-breaking as it is tremendous!

Before we feel too much pity for Jesus who had no comfortable, permanent home or earth, we must ask ourselves who is really to be pitied: Him who knew how to detach Himself from home so as to be free to prepare Himself and men for God's eternity, or us who are so attached to the loved and known, to home and family that we cannot respond to Jesus' call to service as we ought? So in the long run, Jesus' answer is less cruel because He will not let this scribe be disappointed after rushing in where he did not understand what he would have to suffer. Still Jesus does not refuse the man. He is now left to decide whether he too is free from earthly attachments to follow the Master, in such unhesitating, whole-souled service as he had at first offered. He must decide whether he will cast in his lot with this homeless Rabbi whose Words alone led men home.

B. THE LATENT LAWLESSNESS OF LEAVING THE LORD TO THE LAST
(8:21, 22)

8:21 **Another of the disciples said to him.** This phrase seems to clarify two points: one, that the scribe before him was actually a hidden disciple who was coming out into open commitment to Jesus, and, second, that this follower is already numbered among the openly committed disciples of Jesus. This gives point to Luke's account of this man's call: To another he said, "Follow me." (Lk. 9:59) For what special purpose did Jesus wish this known disciple to enter His special compassionship? This is precisely the same wording used by Jesus to call Matthew to apostleship (Mt. 9:9), the fishermen-Apostles (Mt. 4:19) and Philip (Jn. 1:43). Did Jesus want this man to enter some special service like that of the Apostles? Was he to become one of the evangelists who would later evangelize Perea? (See Lk. 10:1-23) If so, it is not surprising that

Jesus would need considerable manpower to stir up popular interest in His message among the many cities of Perea and Judea where He had not previously labored with the intensity with which He had practically mobilized all Galilee behind Him. Maybe this invitation was but a general mission to which Jesus called this man, as He had so done with others. (See Mt. 10:38; 16:24; 19:21)

Here is the tragedy of the unseized opportunity: **Lord, let me first go and bury my father.** This man's excuse is reasonably valid within itself, so reasonable in fact that any further argument about his refusal seemed to be eliminated. Not only is his reason normally quite justifiable, but beautiful and honorable, if anyone else but Jesus were calling him.

What was the actual condition of the father?

- a. Perfectly well? Then this declaration of the son may be interpreted as an oriental expression of dependence upon the father until the son becomes his own master at his father's death. Nothing is clearer than this fitting exhibition of oriental filial duty. If this is the case, perhaps the young man is bargaining for time.
- b. Sick unto death? Then this plea is to be interpreted as requesting perhaps months of delay before taking up Jesus service.
- c. Actually dead? This again is oriental filial duty to give proper respect to his departed ancestor.

Some might feel that it would make some great difference were we to choose one of these interpretations as against another. But the fault of the request is still present in all three possibilities: "Let me put anything else first, before serving You." Further, Jesus' refusal is applicable to all three situations. This is proof that the actual death of the father makes no difference: following Jesus is our duty higher than duty to family alive or dead!

Why should the young man wish to remain with his old father, instead of following Jesus immediately?

- a. His father was probably an unbeliever in Jesus: a believing father who understands Jesus' ministry would have insisted that the son serve Jesus. Apparently the young man did not wish to be rejected by his family who would misunderstand his higher calling to serve Christ. They would be too blind to understand what he was doing. Probably, he had every intention of entering Christ's service later

when he became master of his own destiny at the death of his father.

- b. The young man himself did not recognize that his reluctant or hesitating request contained a deadly principle, which, if admitted, would prohibit any further effectiveness as a disciple, if not his very discipleship itself: "any other duty may be put first."

8:22 But Jesus said to him, **"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."** Jesus refused his request in the most imperative language. (cf. Jn. 21:19-22) Jesus knew the human heart's desire to procrastinate, to put the hard duties off until later. In the strongest terms, Jesus urges His disciple: "My friend, it is now or never: be mine!"

By the time the man's father's funeral was over Jesus would be gone on more important evangelistic activity and this disciple will have missed his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be the personal colaborer of Jesus of Nazareth! Worse yet, the man, having not taken this one great opportunity might be convinced by his own complacency or by unbelieving relatives not to return to help the Master.

Leave the dead to bury their own dead. This interesting figure used by Jesus has but one point but many applications. Without mentioning the emotionally touchy word "your dead father," Jesus makes the highest demand upon this young man: "let those who are spiritually insensitive to the high call of the kingdom of God take care of those things that might be called the highest duties of human life." There are people enough who have not caught your vision of God's service: let them attend to those affairs which, in comparison with my service, are clearly secondary.

Jesus does not intend for us to neglect normal human responsibilities. (See Notes on 15:1-20; cf. I Tim. 5:8; Eph. 4:28; 6:1-4) Jesus Himself went to the funeral of Lazarus, but He did not require that Mary and Martha leave the tomb to began an evangelistic journey with Him. Of course, it might be objected that, in all the connections Jesus had with the dead, He intended to raise them. But this is not true, for He did not raise John the Baptist. Raising some of the dead people in scattered parts of Palestine was the least often repeated of His miracles, if the few instances we have is any indication.

Note that Jesus does not mention great sins that cause our hearts to be polluted with hatred, malice, jealousy, dishonesty, selfishness, falsity, murder and the like. Rather He raises the standard: He regards only total commitment to Him as righteousness. Any other reason-

able, useful, justifiable, good duty that is used to keep a man from following Jesus is SIN! (Mt. 10:34-38; 16:24-26; Lk. 14:26-33) Jesus does not intend nor does He insist on our denial of some things. Rather, He insists on our total commitment to Him that will sacrifice anything to be free to do His bidding. (See Notes on 5:29, 30) No man, having heard the direct call of Christ to any work and is sure that Jesus means him (and not merely infers that he is meant on the basis of reasoning based upon Jesus' words), has a right to make reservations or limitations on his service. Jesus wants the whole man. Too often we are none of us all of one piece. More than one man dwells within us, often in uncomfortable association with his fellows. We are "walking civil wars." Thus, anyone who commits himself to follow Jesus and delays, temporizes or reminisces about the desirability of the life or relationships he is leaving behind, is not fit for the kingdom. His heart is still tied to the world. (cf. Lk. 17:32) No family tie or social relationship may have any competitive compulsion over a disciple of the Lord. (Mt. 10:36, 37) And yet, tragically, some do go home to discuss their conversion with unbelieving relatives and never return. Jesus demonstrated what He meant by this principle. (Mt. 12:46-50; Jn. 2:4) Did He love Mary and His brothers any less than when He walked out of Nazareth never to return "home" again? That higher ministry, for which He left them behind in Nazareth and refused to let their fleshly relationship hold Him or influence His ministry (cf. Mk. 3:21), revealed a higher, deeper love for them than all the remaining at home and serving them there could have ever shown. Paul too understood Jesus' meaning. (Phil. 3:5-10)

Lk. 9:60 **But as for you . . .** Jesus recognizes in this man a true disciple in spite of his hesitations: "You are not a dead man you are sensitive to the needs of Israel, you have heard the call of God. The ministry to which I have called you is so important and this discipleship so holy that you have as much reason as any high priest to leave the burial of your family to others in order to do your duty to me!" (See Lev. 21:11; Nu. 6:6, 7) The ministry to which I have called you is no less than the proclamation of the kingdom of God!" Foster (*Middle*, 101) points out that, once a man is dead, there is little more that can be done for him, while there are living souls in eternal danger for whom much can be done by urgent preaching. He sees Jesus' words as implying a contrast between the relative unimportance of funerals when compared with the urgency of saving the living.

Why did Jesus give different people different answers? Because they were different people. His admonition depended upon the situation, the circumstances and the person's hearts:

1. To one He says, "Follow me" (Mt. 8:22; Lk. 9:59; Jn. 1:43 etc.)
2. To another He says, "Return home to friends and declare how much God has done for you." (Lk. 8:39)
3. To cleansed lepers: "Go show yourselves to the priests and offer the gifts . . ." (Mt. 8:4; Lk. 17:11-19)
4. To an enthusiastic scribe: "Consider the hardships." (Mt. 8:20)
5. To a rich young ruler: "Sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and come, follow me." (Mt. 19:21)
6. To a compromiser: "I accept no lukewarm service." (Rev. 3:16; Lk. 9:62)

This hard saying of Jesus is perfectly in harmony with the hard terms of discipleship He set before the multitudes. Plummer rightly gives us pause with the question (*Matthew*, 130): "Who is this One who with such quiet assurance makes such claims upon men?" Unless we are willing to answer this question and unflinchingly surrender even the most justifiable, and most useful occupations that hinder obedience to Jesus, we cannot properly call ourselves His disciples!

C. THE LIABILITY AND LOSS OF A LAST, LINGERING LOOK AT THE LOVED AND A LAMENTATION OF WHAT IS LEFT (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Even if the two accounts of Matthew and Luke are not the same, let us study Luke's third man as additional commentary on Jesus' attitude toward shallow commitment. Here is a disciple facing the danger of unfinished commitment. Hear his dallying temporizing: **"I will follow you, Lord, but let me first . . .** It does not really matter what words follow for he has already pronounced those two words that may NEVER be used in the same sentence when addressed to Jesus: "But Lord . . ." If Jesus is LORD, then there can be no but's, if's, and's or maybe's.

Permit me first to say farewell to those at my home.

In contrast to the man just before him, who might have been requesting much time, this disciple assures Jesus of his willingness to take up His service, with the very small request, the very small proviso, that he be permitted to take leave of his loved ones. What could be more reasonable? Is this not a proper respect for those whose society has been our familiar environment and for whom we have

been pleasurable companions? Yet, Jesus sees in this man's plea a mind, a heart that is still on the past, the loved, the dear. He must enjoy them once more before giving them up permanently. He had a "Lot's wife mentality." (cf. Lk. 17:32) Jesus' service was not yet for him his highest joy, nor was Jesus yet dearer than the home folks. We can best understand Jesus' attitude toward this man's weakness by studying contrasting illustrations of men who grasped this truth:

1. Compare Elisha's call to the prophetic ministry (I Kg. 19:19-21)
2. See Paul's attitude toward the relative value of ALL ELSE (Phil. 3:8f.)
3. Contrast Matthew's attitude when he gave a farewell feast. Rather than enjoy the company of his former associates a little longer before making the final break, he apparently intended the occasion to be used to introduce his old cronies to the new Lord of his life. It was obvious to Jesus and to Matthew's friends that he had already, permanently and unequivocally broken his emotional ties with the publican life from which Jesus had called him. (See on Mt. 9:9-13)

" Lk. 9:62 **Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.** This dreadful warning of Jesus—"None who begin my service and look back are FIT!"—must cause us to sense the lofty, imperative character of Christ's call. We must learn to live with the FACT of His Lordship.

Put his hand to the plow, taken as an expression, probably has nothing at all to do with plowing, as if in the act of looking back, the plowman should be thought to fail to plow a straight furrow. Jesus is not discussing plowing at all, but ENTERING INTO DISCIPLESHIP. If Jesus' words in the first part of this conditional clause are considered metaphorical as well as those in the conclusion, why should the intervening words be taken literally? What are we to suppose the plowman to be looking at? It is just better not to regard this admonition as a "parable of the plowman," and, instead, take His words simply in a metaphorical sense. The point Jesus is making, i.e. undivided loyalty and concentrated, committed attention to the tasks of the Kingdom, can be understood from His words without first reducing them to a parable. This is but a proverbial expression meaning: "anyone who begins the task."

And looks back. If you take your allegiance to the Christ as a settled matter, do not die a thousand deaths struggling to decide whether you will do what He wills or not. (Cf. Phil. 3:13; Jn. 6:66, 67; Heb. 10:32-39) The reason Lot's wife was destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah is that her look back revealed that her heart, her life, her love lay with the cities that God had determined to destroy. Her act of looking back unveiled an unwillingness to forsake all for God's sake, not even if her life depended upon it.

This passage is no reference at all to those who, having become Christians, engage in "secular" work for their living, for so-called "secular" work may enable one to publish the gospel much more effectively from a standpoint of financial independence. At the same time, such "secular" work can give power to one's preaching, not only by personal example on the job, but also as proof that "we seek not yours, but you!" (Cf. 2 Co. 12:14)

WHO ARE THESE MEN?

There have been commentators that have sought to identify these men willing to follow Jesus under certain conditions. (See Plummer, *Luke*, 266, for illustrations.) The most notable suggestions are usually Apostles, who, out of deference for their later office, remain anonymous, according to the view of those who search for the identity of these totally unknown men. It is certainly useless to waste time trying to learn what the Bible did not say.

But it is of profound importance to remember that the lives of the apprentice Apostles was not all light and beauty. They struggled with real prejudices. (Cf. Mt. 16:21-23) They wrestled their misinformed consciences while Jesus' requirements and views continued to batter their own cherished notions. Foster (*Middle*, 98) provokes imaginative thought by asking: what kind of impact did Jesus' blunt challenges to these would-be disciples make upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? They would yet, even until Jesus' last hours, debate their own relative merits for high positions in Jesus' Kingdom. (Cf. Mk. 9:33-37; Lk. 22:24-27) How must the Apostles have understood these hard-line answers Jesus gave these other men? They could not remain unaffected by the shocking treatment Jesus gave the others. (Cf. Mt. 15:12) His words could not but affect their later judgment regarding the relative value of social position, wealth and family.

As for these would-be disciples, we know nothing about what decision they made when their conscience was thrown into crisis.

But we do know and thank God for what the Apostles decided. This is our own conscience faced with the burning question of Jesus' Lordship. How shall we respond?

Jesus is endeavoring to impress, sift and confirm His disciples. He had already arrested their attention by so vividly describing the nature and conditions of His service, that they might be clearly aware of what they would face if they follow Him. These words sift and eliminate some who are too unwilling, or too fearful to undertake His service. These words inspire and confirm the determination of those who, though also frightened, desire service under Jesus above all else. His words stir the hero in their hearts and call him forth.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. State the problems involved in trying to harmonize Matthew's account and the circumstances to which it was related, with that of Luke in the circumstances in which this latter tells us this same basic story.
2. Do you conclude that these are two accounts of the same event or two separate events? Upon what basis do you decide this?
3. If you have not already done so, in answer to the previous questions, state the different circumstances which precede Matthew's account, and then those which Luke states as immediately preceding this event. These must be known, since our understanding of the author's intent for including them will certainly affect how they are to be interpreted. Where was Jesus going just as the scene begins, according to Matthew? According to Luke?
4. According to Matthew, who was the first disciple to approach Jesus requesting permission to accompany Him in His ministry and travels? What is so significant about this man's offer? Describe his social position which makes his offer so unusual.
5. State and interpret Jesus' answer. Was Jesus' answer strictly true? Did Jesus have a home, whenever He was "at home", to return to?
6. Is it known whether the father was dead, for whom one invited disciple desired to delay his service?
7. Who are the "dead" who must be left to "bury their own dead"? Explain Jesus' use of the word "dead" in each case.
8. What does Luke report as Jesus' antithesis of His command to leave the dead to bury their own dead? That is, what does Jesus state as being the direct opposite, in this case, to ministering to one's dying or dead relatives?
9. Did Jesus regard the disciple, whom He ordered to leave the dead

- to bury their own dead, as being "dead" too? How do you know?
10. What is meant by the expression: "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God"? What is this "kingdom of God" that Jesus wanted proclaimed by that disciple? How does that concept differ (if it does) from the kingdom of God realized in the Church today?
 11. What additional situation does Luke record in connection with these challenges Jesus gave others to count the cost of their discipleship to Him?
 12. Was the third man committed to Jesus? If not, why not? If so, in what way?
 13. What did Jesus think was wrong with saying farewell to those at home?
 14. What is meant by Luke's expression: "put one's hand to the plow"?
 15. In Jesus' warning, what does He mean by the expression: "look back"?
 16. Does Jesus mean these expressions literally or figuratively?
 17. In what way is one, who begins service in the Kingdom of God, accepts the responsibility to follow Jesus and then tempts himself to reconsider his decision by evaluating all he is giving up for this service, so particularly unfit for the kingdom of God? What does Jesus mean by the expression: "not fit for the kingdom"?
 18. Is Jesus using the expression "kingdom of God" in this admonition exactly with the same force or meaning as earlier when He charged the other disciple to "go and proclaim the kingdom of God"?
 19. Explain the absolute necessity for Jesus' challenging of the sincerity and commitment of these enthusiastic followers. Show the contrast between the open-arms reception we feel constrained to give any contact who manifests an interest in Christ, and the blunt, almost stand-offish approach actually used by Jesus Himself here.
 20. List other cases where Jesus cooled the enthusiasm of a would-be follower, in order to deepen his understanding and strengthen his commitment.

Section 16

JESUS STILLS A TEMPEST

(Parallels: Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)