



Matthew 8:18–22

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” 20 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” 21 Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 22 But

Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Reflection

“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

That is a remarkable line, isn't it? Jesus means to evoke a reaction. How does it affect you? ‘Let the dead bury their own dead.’ What does Jesus mean?

Let me ask another question to get under Jesus' comment. Can you come to Jesus with conditions? And an even better question to ask is a specific one. What actual conditions would you like put in place before you come to Jesus? Or even more important, what conditions do you place?

To answer that, each one of us needs to take the time to reflect on our hearts. Some options:

- I'll come to Jesus, on the condition that he gives me proof of his resurrected existence.
- I'll come to Jesus, on the condition that I avoid suffering, or senseless pain.
- I'll come to Jesus, on the condition that my sexual life is mine to choose.
- I'll come to Jesus, on the condition that I live in a nice place, near a good beach now. And in a nice place near a good school in 10 years.
- Or that I can keep my money or my hol-

idays.

- Or that God will give me someone to marry and children. And grandchildren.
- Or that following Jesus doesn't interrupt my study, my social life, or my desires.

All these things are temptations we all face. So can you come with your conditions? It may be good to pause the App right now and ponder this very question. And pray about it.

We read in the passage "Jesus gave orders to go to the other side of the lake." (And wait until you hear what happened on the boat – but that's tomorrow's talk). Presumably before they get on the boat, a man comes to him, and he appears to

come without conditions:

‘As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’

Here’s a volunteer! A willing one. But Jesus wants to manage the man’s expectations, and make things very very clear: If you come with me, it may mean living out of a suitcase. On our way to Jerusalem. To die.

‘Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”’

‘I have no house; no settled lifestyle; no hardwood floors throughout; no water views; no bed; no pillow to lay my head

down on. In fact, feral foxes and birds are more settled than I am. Do you really want to join?’

There is a good side: No mortgage! But then Jesus priorities are not his retirement. The bad side is that Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is near, which is a volatile thing to say then (or indeed at any time), and especially in that part of the world. Death is on the line.

We don't know what happened to that man. Did he follow? Would you? The next guy is warm, reasonable and caring. He's a good son.

‘Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’

This man is either grieving now, ready to bury his father in the next few days, or he is taking care of his father who is in his declining years, and won't join Jesus until he is released from that responsibility. Either way – Jesus is brutal –

‘But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’

There's no getting around that. It's astounding. It's outrageous. It's seems so insensitive. I like to imagine the man's reaction: ‘Let the dead do what? Come on; win me over to your cause! Woo me! Pitch it to me! We all know that the dead can't bury their own. They don't have functioning hands.’

In Luke's account of this encounter, Jesus

has already set his face towards Jerusalem to die, and he says in Luke 9:60:

‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’

In Luke, one more person comes to him, with a condition, Luke 9:61:

‘Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. 62 Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’

So can you come to Jesus with conditions? From here – the answer is: No. Not ever. Jesus simply says: ‘Join me. Follow me.’

The thing is this: you can't come to Jesus on your terms. We want to so badly to be able to, but we can't. We want to be in the driver's seat, but we can't be. So how do you make sense of it?

The answer, interestingly, I think, is summed up in the first of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other god's before me.”

In our passage, Jesus called himself the Son of Man for the first time in Matthew's Gospel, and it he will use the phrase to describe himself all the way through Mat-

thew. Look out for it. The Son of Man is a quote from Daniel 7, and is the name given for the promised glorious God-like figure who, at the end of time, will judge the world, end all evil, put the world to rights, and be worshiped by all creation. Jesus said, 'That's me.'

So when Jesus says: 'Follow me', people just got up and followed. They didn't 'check him out' first, they didn't ask for references or resumes, they didn't get him to prove his credentials. They didn't 'test him', like some did and do. They followed him, just like an Israelite was urged to 'Follow the Lord' and 'Serve him only'.

So no idols. Nothing first. Nothing before him. No conditions. Just following. They say when one's house is burning down,

people take out only the most important things: sometimes it's just one important thing. What is the one thing that's important in your life?

There used to be a show called: 'Put Your Life on the Lawn'. The idea was simple: you emptied your whole house onto your front lawn, and only put back what was actually worth putting back.

What if you were to unpack your whole heart on the lawn, what do you want to put back? Jesus says: 'put me in your heart. Follow me. You shall have no other gods before me.'

Think & Pray

Take some time to hand to God your

dreams and fears. He knows what you need. Pray about the cost. There will be a cost. Take the time to consider the cost now. Ask yourself what needs to go. Do a bold spiritual inventory of your heart.

Can you come to Jesus with conditions?

Hear John Newton – in the 18th Century famous hymn, who gave up much for Christ:

Were the whole realm of nature mine?
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!