

# Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

## 8:16-27

by J.C. Ryle

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### Transcript

In the first part of these verses we see a striking example of our Lord's wisdom in dealing with those who professed a willingness to be his disciples. The passage throws so much light on a subject frequently misunderstood in these days, that it deserves more than ordinary attention. A certain scribe offers to follow our Lord whithersoever he goes. It was a remarkable offer when we consider the class to which the man belonged, and the time at which it was made. But the offer receives a remarkable answer. It is not directly accepted nor yet flatly rejected. Our Lord only makes the solemn reply, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay his head." Another follower of our Lord next comes forward, and asks to be allowed to bury his father before going any further in the path of a disciple. The request seems, at first sight, a natural and lawful one. But it draws from our Lord's lips a reply no less solemn than that already referred to: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." There is something deeply impressive in both these sayings. They ought to be well weighed by all professing Christians. They teach us plainly that people who show a desire to come forward and profess themselves true disciples of Christ should be warned plainly to count the cost before they begin. Are they prepared to endure hardship? Are they ready to carry the cross? If not, they are not yet fit to begin. They teach us plainly that there are times when a Christian must literally give up all for Christ's sake, and when even such duties as attending to a parent's funeral must be left to be performed by others. Such duties some will always be ready to attend to; and at no time can they be put in comparison with the greater duty of preaching the Gospel, and doing Christ's work in the world. It would be well for the churches of Christ if these sayings of our Lord were more remembered than they are. It may be feared that the lesson they contain is too often overlooked by the ministers of the Gospel, and that thousands are admitted to full communion who are never warned to count the cost. Nothing, in fact, has done more harm to Christianity than the practice of filling the ranks of Christ's army with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession, and to talk fluently of his "experience." It has been painfully forgotten that numbers alone do not make strength, and that there may be a great quantity of mere outward religion, while there is very little real grace. Let us remember this. Let us keep back nothing from young professors and inquirers after Christ: let us not enlist them on false pretences. Let us tell them plainly that there is a crown of glory at the end, but let us tell them no less plainly that there is a daily cross in the way. In the latter part of these verses we learn that true saving faith is often mingled with much weakness and infirmity. It is a humbling lesson, but a very wholesome one. We are told of Lord and his disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat. A storm arises and the boat is in danger of being filled with water by the waves that beat over it. Meanwhile our Lord is asleep. The frightened disciples awake him, and cry to him

for help. He hears their cry and stills the waters with a word so that there is a great calm. At the same time he gently reproveth the anxiety of his disciples: "Why are ye fearful O ye of little faith?" What a vivid and instructive picture we have here of the hearts of thousands of believers! How many have faith and love enough to forsake all for Christ's sake, and to follow him whithersoever he goes, and yet are full of fears in the hour of trial! How many have grace enough to turn to Jesus in every trouble, crying, "Lord save us," and yet not grace enough to lie still and believe in the darkest hour that all is well! Let the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," always form part of our daily petitions. We never perhaps know the weakness of our faith until we are placed in the furnace of trial and anxiety. Blessed and happy is that person who finds by experience that his faith can stand the fire, and that he can say with Job, "I know that though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). We have great reason to thank God that Jesus, our great High Priest, is very compassionate and tender-hearted. He knows our frame: he considers our infirmities. He does not cast off his people because of defects. He pities even on those whom he reproveth. The prayer even of "little faith" is heard and gets an answer.

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