

# The Claims of Christ Are Paramount

by John Murray

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*The claims of Christ are paramount and must be prioritized above all else, including natural filial devotion and other duties or obligations.*

**Duration:** 36:55

**Scripture:** Matthew 8:18-20, Matthew 8:22, Matthew 10:7, Matthew 16:17

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on two sayings of Jesus that are closely related to each other. The first saying is about the birds of the air having nests, but the Son of Man not having a place to lay his head. The second saying is about letting the dead carry their own dead, but going and preaching the Kingdom of God. The speaker emphasizes the urgency and importance of discipleship and following Jesus, even if it means sacrificing worldly comforts and attachments. The sermon highlights the power and love that Jesus demonstrated through his ministry and urges listeners to prioritize their commitment to Jesus over worldly concerns.

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## Transcript

The Gospel according to Matthew, the 8th chapter, beginning at verse 18. The 8th chapter of Matthew at verse 18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

And a certain scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee. And Jesus said unto him, The foxes have gone from the bags of the air of Nazareth, but the Son of Man hath not gone. And another of his disciples said unto him, Jesus said unto him that our Lord ever tried to enlist disciples.

We don't have to tell. And we might say that Jesus might quite properly have concealed the cost of discipleship, even though he would not necessarily deceive. But it is also true that our Lord did not conceal or suppress the cost of discipleship.

And nothing shows that more clearly than that word of Christ with which we are so familiar. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross. Now in these words that we find in all the way in which that demand was applied, they are the two cases of the scribe who said, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And of the other disciple who said, suffer me to go home. And now in reference first of all to the scribe, it would be easy to, that he was really playing an act of sincerity of his resolve. When he said, in fact there is everything to indicate that there was determination to follow out that which he had said.

That there was real sincere intent. This man was a scribe. And it was most unusual for a scribe to offer to the Lord this.

And therefore this scribe had really been in such a way indeed that he was resolved to become his disciple. His discipleship. The reply of Jesus is all the more remarkable.

Because we might think that when Jesus said, that when the scribe said, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. The fact that this was so exceptional and the appearance of our Lord instantaneous acceptance. We might even think that our Lord would have given him warm congratulations.

Such for example as on another occasion he gave to Peter, blessed for flesh and blood. And we might have expected on this occasion that Jesus would have said something to that repellent in its effect. Birds of the air do nest.

But the Son of Man hath not. And it is the kind of reply that would be cut. Enthusiasm.

Which came from the resolve of this scribe. Now it is admittedly difficult to discover the real character of this scribe. Or the real purpose of his resolution.

We cannot be absolute. But of this we can be certain. That there was something in the situation.

Or there was something perhaps in the character of the scribe himself. That demanded this reminder on the part of our Lord. Of that we can be certain because our Lord never spoke aimlessly or purposelessly.

There was a real occasion. For our Lord to say on that particular occasion. Foxes of old and birds of the air do nest.

But the Son of Man hath not. And the reminder is simply this. That discipleship does not carry with it any of the blandishments or any of the emoluments or any of the comforts which should belong to worthy prestige.

Discipleship carries with it, Lord, the reminder. Indeed it carries with it the promise. Of tribulation.

Of torture. Of plagues of Christ's sake. Of persecution at the hands of Christ's enemies.

And even sometimes the scribe needed to be reminded of it. That was why Jesus replied on this particular occasion in these terms. And we need to be reminded of it also.

If we perchance are animated by an enthusiasm, which is based upon a shadow of the commitments involved in discipleship, then to that extent our enthusiasm is flawed. And it is flawed that we... Not simply before the scourge of temptation, but before the very... And we need to be reminded. We need in fact to be promised.

Not simply in Hades, but it promises the reproach of Christ and reproach such as is exemplified in this particular statement of our Lord. Ox is a foal. Birds at the head of men.

The Son of Man has not wings. It is enough for the disciple to be at his master, and the parent at his Lord. And if we are not willing to take the cost of discipleship, if we are not willing to be at the outskirting of all things, for Christ's sake, then we are not His disciples.

Christ cannot know of idols. And it must be that wholehearted commitment to Him. We must be in captivity to His obedience.

If we are to be His, where His testimony leads us, then we must go. Where I am, there shall also mine serve. Now the other disciple who is spoken of in this particular text.

In the case of the scribe, we have what we may call a philosopher of the Lord. It's a promise of instant and constant following. Whereas in the case of the other disciple who said, let me first go and tell my father, you have a certain reserve.

And you might think that if Jesus needed to caution the scribe because there was perhaps too exuberant enthusiasm based on too shallow a conception of what discipleship involved, and if in the case of the scribe there was superficial and too exuberant enthusiasm, then the error expressed by the other disciple would be just the very thing that Jesus would commend. We might well say there is something commendable about this man because he wants to be sober, he wants to reflect, he wants a little rest so that he can thoroughly raise the demands of discipleship. And a little reflection that asks for the cooling off of superficial enthusiasm might be the very thing that would be in order.

In contrast with a certain superficial and exuberant enthusiasm exemplified in the case of the scribe. But that is not Jesus' withdrawal. We find in this case also that Jesus' answer is just as severe as that which he offered to the scribe.

And we might think it to be very gross, very harsh, very unnatural. Follow me! And we are told in the current of Catechism that the dead is very delicate or go down and preach the kingdom of the dead, but go down and preach the kingdom of God. Now in this case, just as in the other case, we must not be too hasty in our judgment of this particular man.

When he said let me first go and then my father. We do not have a warrant to suppose that he was offering this as an excuse, as an alibi, whereby he might get away entirely from the claims of Jesus. Some people, I suppose, would be ready to place that interpretation upon this request on the part of the other disciple.

But there's no good word for supposing that he was hypocritical, that he was insincere. And neither may we suppose that this disciple wanted to go home and stay for a long time with his father until finally his father would die. I suppose some would be ready to place upon his request that interpretation, let me go home and stay with my father until my father is deceased and then I'll come back.

It might be illiard, and therefore he is pleading that he might go home and look after his father and then after that he would be Jesus' disciple. All which we are justified in telling from the request of this disciple is this, that he wanted only a brief interval in which to perform the last rites of respect and honour to his father, who probably had already died or was on the very verge of death. A brief rest.

And that is all we may properly assume that he desired simply a period, might only be a matter of a few hours, it might be only at the most a matter of a few days, to do what under normal circumstances would have been a perfectly natural and beautiful act of filling of the bowl. And under normal circumstances who

would consider it by any means an unreasonable request that a person would be given a brief respite to go and bury his father. And it is just because we need not suppose and must not suppose any hypocrisy or insincerity on the part of this other disciple that Jesus, if we try, is all about coming following and let the dead bury their own dead as it is in religion.

Let the dead bury their own dead. When you might say that is harsh, that is harsh, that is harshness, that is even unnatural. Why not grant that particular brief respite to perform that act, that action of filial devotion? And that is why it is all the most likely when we consider that what Jesus most probably meant when he said let the dead bury their dead is that they are physically dead, burying the physically dead.

People sometimes interpret this to mean let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. And there is no warrant for that interpretation in the text. There is something far more abundant, there is something far more finite in Jesus' reply.

If we interpret it as I believe it should be interpreted, let the physically dead bury the dead. And you can see yourself that that is an impossible, you never see a funeral of dead person. You always see a funeral of a dead person carried by living.

Let the dead bury their dead. And that just means let them go and perish. Implying that the dead would better go and perish than that this man on that particular occasion should go home and bury his father.

And you say how unfilial. How to eliminate his Jesus' reply. Let the dead bury their dead.

And it is just these considerations which point out the severity of Jesus' reply to this particular man. And the more you have to find the tension between the demands of what is apparently filial devotion on the one hand and the discipleship of Jesus on the other I say the more you have to find that tension between the apparent filial duty on the one hand and the discipleship of Jesus on the other the more you press upon us that their death which was undoubtedly Jesus' intention on this particular occasion even the script changes to the declaiming of Christ all of us are that's the lesson the claims of Christ are paramount there is no other claim however powerful however much supported by the apparent demands of even natural filial devotion that can take the place of the demands of Christ for the Lordship of Christ is never suspended and it is never displaced by the apparent demands which come to us from other quarters or from other sources there is no circumstance under which any other apparent duty can take precedence to the all that claims of Christ for Christ's Lordship is never suspended and we may not think that even so natural a duty as the burial of the Father can take precedence to the demands of discipleship now we must not suppose that Jesus was here inculcating that fidelity to Him we are of the duty of filial devotion whatever kind of filial devotion of family devotion it may be in another case our Lord has praised the Jews particularly the Pharisees for their tradition by which they have made wise the fifth commandment He said to them that they had made wise the word of God by their own commandment for what God has said is honor thy father and thy mother but He said that if these Pharisees said that it is called and that is whatsoever is given it is given to God and He suffered and will do no more for His father or for His mother thus making God the commandment of God by their own tradition Jesus was not teaching filial disaffection and He was not inculcating anything contrary to the demands of natural filial affection but there are occasions when the claims of Christ require us to forego that warning of what Christ appears to be duty to our family and Jesus pointed out that demand so clearly He that loves all mothers more than Him is not worthy of it and that is the great lesson that is inculcated in this particular instance it might appear to have been the duty of this particular disciple to go home and bury his father but in this particular situation it was

not so and I think we can we may well suppose that this man's father was on the verge of death but had actually died and the time required for this particular duty wouldn't have been perhaps more than a few hours or at the most a few days that is the most reasonable assumption that we can place upon the situation as it is delineated for us and why did Jesus forbid him?

I don't think it is very clear Jesus was just about to pass over to the other side of the lake we read in this verse verse 18 Jesus saw great multitudes about Him He gave commandments to depart unto the other side unto the other side of the lake and it is for that reason that Jesus made this commandment upon this disciple on this particular occasion now what for? if this disciple had gone home to bury his father he would have missed the boat and he wouldn't have been with Jesus on that particular voyage and what would he have missed? he would have missed two of the greatest demonstrations of Jesus' power and grace and glory when he stilled the wind and the sea and when he healed the demoniacs on the other side of the lake in the country of the Galilee and we know from the parable of

Calvary that this disciple was not only a disciple but that he was charged by Jesus to go and preach the kingdom of God for him that the dead buried there must go out and preach the kingdom of God and if the disciple had gone on this particular occasion he would not have witnessed these single demonstrations of Jesus' divine and messianic power and glory and he would have been deprived of that all important part of his equipment that was necessary for him as one don't you see there was an urgency in this particular situation because Jesus was now on a great mission to give that demonstration of his almighty power and also of his messianic authority in fulfillment of his order he died by the kingdom of God at Calvary then did the kingdom of God come nigh unto you and Jesus was about to

give one single demonstration of his great messianic power of authority in the country of these demons and if this disciple had not gone this way he would have missed the boat he would have missed the boat indeed that's the lesson of this particular of this particular instance and in right manner with us it is just that way that we are to be wise from this incident it is the holiness that we be sensitive to the demands of Christ when we allow anything to interfere with our instinct and constant obedience to him then we miss the boat and we miss the boat of opportunity we miss the boat of privilege and we miss the boat of blessing that's and I would bring home to myself by the blessing of the Holy Spirit that great lesson that the claims of Jesus Christ are eternal they are never suspended

they may never be displaced and we must always recognize the Lord at the cross when we perform the duties of filial devotion it is because we recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ requires us to fulfill these duties of filial devotion and when filial devotion or at least apparent filial devotion interferes with our obedience to Christ then we must remember that we can never surrender the claims of Christ to come for any other consideration Christ is God you know people will sometimes say and it's a very common argument by which to justify illicit conduct that is unlawful conduct conduct perhaps that is shady in respect of its truthfulness or that is shady in respect of its honesty or that is in blatant violation of the commandments of God they will plead the necessity of such conduct

because it is the necessity of their dimension our for example in connection with this with the charitable service how I met and you have met perhaps also with the Irish well I don't like to work I've done necessary labour on the Sabbath day or the Lord's day but it is just a necessity of my living and I cannot allow my wife and my family to suffer and consequently I have to work I don't like it I know it's wrong but it's just a necessity of my living and that is justice that it is a necessity of life or of confession God never under any circumstances whatsoever makes it necessary for us to give away His commandments He

sometimes makes it necessary for us to lose our lives to lose our livelihood but what we call our livelihood is sometimes necessary didn't Jesus say if any man would come

after me let him deny himself putting up his cross and taking up the cross is just the same thing as saying being prepared to lay down our lives our lives for Christ and that's a great lesson that is portrayed on this particular instance in the life of our Lord let them live let them live but go now and preach the kingdom of God now these two sayings of Jesus or these two replies in these two instances stand in very close relationship to foxes and dogs and birds of the air and nests but the Son of Man has not gone on to lay His head follow me let the dead bury their dead but go now and preach the kingdom of God and the great lesson is this that we must have the cross of discipleship it is with cross and foundation that Christ promises to His disciples it was with cross and foundation that

was the cross of His discipleship who by the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despised in the day and He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty of God that was the way that Jesus Himself went and although He cannot emulate Him in His Messianic performance or His Messianic undertaking we nevertheless must emulate Him in following Him even to the very shore of death even to all the tribulations and the obstructions and the desires of this world if that a person can obediently to His Master now these things are not good in themselves we ought not to seek we ought not to seek tribulation for its own sake that is nothing but self-righteousness let us never seek tribulation for its own sake there's nothing sanctifying in tribulation there's nothing sanctifying in itself in

suffering there's nothing in itself sanctifying in poverty so let us not fall into the great error that is so patient in lay branches of the Christian Church of the Prophetic Christian Church whereby certain tribulations and certain tortures self-tortures and certain reproaches are regarded as sanctifying in themselves they are not but we must remember that it is tribulation it is reproach only for Christ's sake not for any person that resides in tribulation for reproach for trouble, for suffering for poverty, for sickness for even death there's nothing sanctifying in death itself it is almighty for Christ's sake that is the great lesson it is for Christ's sake and it is just because it is man's therefore as the demands inherently now be placed require that we give to Him at all times the

pre-emptive and as we are bound to Him we He we we shall give immediately the demands of Christ's honor and may I plead as I would plead first of all with myself so would I plead with you that you from the youngest of you to the eldest will bear in your mind the power of grace the scholarship of Christ in every detail and substance of Christ it was for that for that reason that Christ died and rose again that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living and it is the reward that Christ promises to His disciples that if they suffer for His sake they will also be glorified together with Him it was that joy that the joy of that Lord that sustained our Lord Himself to ultimate standard to ultimate criteria that we shall have in Christ first of all to the approval of our Lord Himself

and count all things but God for the excellency of His knowledge not reckoning with those things that are behind us but reaching forth unto those things which are before us we press forth to the mountain for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus Christ

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