

November 17, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Authority of Jesus Christ - Over Disciples

Matthew 8:18-22

1. Jesus doesn't need crowds (verse 18).
2. Jesus doesn't need verbal commitments (verse 19).
3. Jesus communicates the cost of discipleship (verse 20).
4. Jesus doesn't want delays (verse 21).
5. Jesus wants followers (verse 22).

Matthew 8:18-22

18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side. (19) And a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." (20) And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air [have] nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (21) And another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." (22) But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

If you recall (and I will continue to remind you if you don't), we are in a section of Matthew's gospel that is presenting the authority of Jesus Christ. In the past several weeks, we have seen His authority over disease (8:1-17). In the next few weeks, we will look at His authority over nature (8:23-27), demons (8:28-34) and sin (9:1-8).

Today, we come to this passage which is different than these other sections. There aren't any miracles in this passage. Rather, Jesus encounters two would-be followers. In each of these cases, Jesus challenges them in some aspect of what it means to follow Him. Most commentators do not seek to connect this section with the sections surrounding it. I was pleased this week to pick up James Montgomery Boice's commentary on this passage. Concerning verses 18-22, he writes, "Since these stories [of two disciples coming to Jesus] come in the middle of a section documenting the authority of Jesus over sickness, we might ask why Matthew has included them here, especially since Mark leaves these conversations out entirely and Luke, although he includes similar material, inserts it at a much later point in Christ's ministry, about six months before the crucifixion (Luke 9:57-62). The obvious answer is that Matthew wants to show that the same Jesus, who has authority over sickness, nature, and demons, also has authority over the lives of his disciples. Jesus, not us, determines what following him will involve. Therefore if you are going to follow Jesus, it must be on his terms rather than your own" (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, The King and His Kingdom, p. 130). Dr. Boice nails it exactly. Jesus continues in this section to demonstrate His authority.

The slogan to Burger King may well be, "Have it your way." But when it comes to following Jesus, we will "Have it His way." This morning, we will look at the authority of Jesus Christ over disciples.

1. Jesus doesn't need crowds (verse 18).

Imagine this scenario. Rock Valley Bible Church begins an incredible season of numerical growth. We begin having hundreds of new people coming each week to our services. So that within a month, we are up to 1,000 people who are attending our services each Sunday morning. We have so many people that this cafeteria cannot contain them all. We have moved our church meetings into the gymnasium. Even that isn't enough. We need two services to contain all of the people who are coming! Furthermore, imagine with me (and I know that I will stretch you here), that all these people are coming because of the greatness of the preacher in this church. People have begun to tell other people of this great man, who is expounding the Scriptures to them. Finally, they are able to understand the Scriptures! They love this man.

I know that if I were this pastor, upon whom God had poured our His blessing to create tremendous crowds coming to hear the Bible taught, I would do everything that I could to continue to foster the spiritual growth in the people that God was bringing into our assembly! But look what Jesus did, "Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side" (verse 18). When Jesus saw that many, many people were coming to see Him, He left town.

Matthew tells us that "He gave orders to depart to the other side" of the Sea of Galilee. Next week, we will see that Jesus will use this boat trip as a teaching opportunity, as He calms the storm (in verses 23-27). We find in verse 28, that Jesus and His disciples come "to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee] into the country of the Gadarenes." Jesus departed from Capernaum, in the north-western edge of the sea. The country of the Gadarenes were along the south-eastern edge of the sea. He went straight across the sea, which amounts to about ten miles. On a calm day, this trip might take an hour or two.

Picture this! The popularity of Jesus' ministry was overwhelming! There were many, many people flocking to see Him. So, what does He do? He leaves town to go two hours away. This is comparable to God prospering the ministry greatly here in Rockford. And I say, "I'm out of here. I'm going to Milwaukee!" From our perspective, this isn't a very good plan. When God is prospering a ministry, we think it best to stay and continue to cultivate what God has established. But Jesus doesn't say in Capernaum. Do you know why? Jesus doesn't need disciples. Jesus doesn't need a crowd of people to elevate Him to prominence in the Jewish circles as a great religious leader! Jesus doesn't need people to propagate His ministry!

Most commentators would say that Jesus was simply tired and He wanted to get away, because He wanted to get some rest. I believe that there is truth to that. Certainly, Jesus was exhausted, how else could He have fallen asleep in the midst of such a great storm. Yet, I believe that there is more to it than Jesus' fatigue. Matthew gives us no indication that Jesus wanted to leave because He was tired (neither do Mark or Luke in their accounts). Matthew says, "**When Jesus saw a crowd** around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side." I believe that Jesus wanted to leave the crowds! Jesus didn't need the crowds.

This isn't a unique circumstance in Jesus' ministry. There are many instances in the ministry of Jesus when crowds were pressing all around Him and He left them. For instance, ...

In Mark's gospel, we find Jesus in the same context in which we find ourselves in Matthew. Jesus had just healed Peter's mother in law. We are told that "the whole city had gathered at the door" (Mark 1:33). Jesus had just healed "many who were ill with various diseases" (Mark 1:34). Yet, we are told, "in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. And Simon and his companion hunted for Him; and they found Him, and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.' And He said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the town nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for'" (Mark 1:35-38). Jesus was the revival preacher. The whole town was at His door responding to Jesus. Peter was concerned that Jesus was neglecting these crowds, who had come to see Him. When Peter told him what was happening, Jesus says, "Let us go somewhere else" (verse 38). This doesn't make sense to us, yet, it did to Jesus, because Jesus didn't need the crowds.

In John's gospel, we find Jesus' ministry flourishing. He had just fed five thousand men (and more women and children according to Matt. 14:21). "When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:14-15). Jesus didn't need the crowds to help Him become King! We are also told in John 5:13, that Jesus "had slipped away" after healing a lame man, so that this man didn't even know that it was Jesus who had healed him. (I doubt any faith healers today would do this.)

In Luke's gospel, we read, "But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:15-16). When multitudes were around Jesus, He often left the situation.

The picture we get of Jesus' ministry on earth is that great multitudes were aroused to follow Him. Yet, Jesus purposefully made Himself elusive, so that people wouldn't know where he was. He never sought to build His empire by mobilizing lots of people, who would give Him credibility or raise Him to prominence. Rather, the picture that we get is of Jesus stirring up great interest in Himself, and then disappearing from the people. Perhaps Jesus would be spotted in the next town and someone would come and say, "Hey, Jesus is in Bethsaida, let's go!" When these people would get to the town, Jesus may have left for another. Perhaps then, you would hear some great story of some blind men being able to see. They think that Jesus did it, but they weren't quite sure. Perhaps they would go to see Him, but He would be gone.

This is illustrated in the story of Jesus' brothers mocking Him and saying "Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world" (John 7:3-4). John adds, "For not even His brothers were believing in Him" (John 7:5). Jesus, then sent His brothers up to the feast by themselves (John 7:8). "But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as it were, in secret. The Jews therefore were seeking Him at the feast, and were saying, 'Where is He?'" (John 7:10,11). This is a picture of Jesus' ministry. He didn't need the crowds.

Jesus had the authority to stir the crowds. But, He purposefully never used the crowds to accomplish His ends. He wasn't dependent upon them to help Him in any way. When Jesus walked upon the earth, He "didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:35). He was powerful alone. He had the authority in Himself. He didn't need the crowds.

Here is a lesson that we can learn: **Our church ought never to be driven by the crowds.** Too many churches are doing this. Too many churches are driven by numbers. Too many churches are driven by what the people want, rather than what Jesus wants. Jesus wants genuine disciples to be following Him. He doesn't need large numbers of people. I don't think that Jesus will be particularly impressed with Rock Valley Bible Church if we get to the point where 1,000 people are attending our services.

Recently, in Men's Equippers, several of us men looked at Paul's methodology for ministry in 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5. There, we saw that ...

1. Paul's message of the gospel was not particularly attractive to many in the world (to the Jews it was a stumbling block and to the Greeks, it was foolishness). When you are driven by the crowds, you will change your message to make it more palatable.

2. The people at the church in Corinth were not particularly attractive to many in the world (there weren't many mighty, noble, wise, or strong, rather they were the foolish, the weak, and the despised). When you are driven by the crowds, you will seek the well-respected in the society to make your message legitimate.

3. Paul's method in proclaiming the gospel was a simple proclamation of the truth, without superiority of speech or superiority of wisdom (that the faith of those who believe would rest on the power of God, and not on the wisdom of men). Paul could have come with great appearing wisdom, for He was one of the greatest intellects of his day. But he didn't. When you are driven by the crowds, you will use every method imaginable to attract the people and hopefully, they will like Jesus, when you finally get around to telling them about Him.

These are the sorts of things that happen when you allow your church to be run by the crowds that fill the seats.

When Jesus "saw a crowd around Him," and subsequently left, I believe that this is an example of His authority. Jesus wasn't dependent upon other people following Him.

2. Jesus doesn't need verbal commitments (verse 19).

Verse 19 says, "A certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher I will follow You wherever You go.'" We see someone like this and are immediately encouraged by the potential of such an individual. First of all, he is a scribe. A scribe is an expert in the Law. This man was trained in the teachings of the Old Testament. He was part of the Jewish religious establishment. This man would help to give legitimacy to Jesus' ministry. It is always encouraging when a Jewish Rabbi comes to see that Jesus is the Messiah and converts. This man appears to be that such of an individual with his comments. Second, he is willing. He had come to understanding something about Jesus. He was quick to express his eagerness. He was willing to go with Jesus wherever He was going. In his willingness, he ranks right up there with the apostle, Peter.

Yet, Jesus probably knew more about this man than this man knew about himself. Jesus replied, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (verse 20). I believe that Jesus saw right through the façade of this man's bold commitment to follow Jesus. This is why Jesus challenges him with this statement about foxes and birds. Jesus was saying, "Oh, so you are interested in following Me? Huh? Well, let me tell you a little bit about what that entails. You see the foxes over there? They live in holes and find their comforts and safety there. You see the birds flying about? They can go back to their nests and find protection there. But let me tell you about Me. I call myself, 'the Son of Man,' which you, being a scribe, ought to recognize as a clear Messianic title from your studies in the Old Testament (Daniel 7:13,14). Yet, thought I am the Messiah, I don't have the privilege that the foxes and the birds have. I have no place that I can call my own. My mission and my ministry will always be on the move. We will travel from place to place. You can forget safety, protection, ease and comfort. If you come after me, your life will be just like mine. So, do you still want to follow Me?"

We don't know how this scribe responded. Matthew gives us no clues about His identity. Perhaps the fact that he remained anonymous might give us some clue that he probably wasn't one of Jesus' 12 disciples. However, we do know that Jesus challenged this scribe with the commitment it would require to follow Him. He did this right up front, before he ever allowed him to follow Him "wherever He would go."

I believe that the point is this: **When we follow Jesus, we follow Jesus on His terms, not on our own!** This is because Jesus has the authority to demand from us whatever He wants.

Think about a police officer. When a man walks up to you with a badge on his uniform and a gun in his pocket, and says, "Sir, come over here, I want to ask you a few questions." Your heart skips a beat or two, and then starts to beat strongly and you say, "Yes sir!" And you make haste to follow everything that he says. Why? Because the police officer has the authority. You don't demand of the police officer that he can talk to you right where you are right now. Think about a judge. In the courtroom, it is the judge who is the final authority. I don't care what the prosecuting attorney tries to do. I don't care what the defending attorney tries to do. Apart from the say of the judge, they are powerless.

I think that it is similar here. When we follow Jesus, we follow Jesus on His terms, not on our own! For this scribe, it meant a life of difficulty. I believe that Jesus identified this particular challenge to this scribe because of his own issues in His life. When the rich young ruler came up to Jesus, Jesus knew that the ruler's life was dominated by his financial comfort. Jesus told him, "Go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). Jesus challenged this man's verbal profession with a willingness to encounter difficulty. For that is what this man would face if He physically followed Jesus around throughout His earthly ministry.

We must realize that **verbal professions aren't guarantees**. How many in our day are plagued with the notion that they pray a simple prayer or make some type of verbal commitment or sign some kind of commitment card, that such an act guarantees for them a place in the kingdom of heaven. You never know, perhaps, those who prayed the prayer or signed the card were seeking to sign up on their own terms, rather than upon the terms of the One whom they committed to follow!

I received an illustration of this during the week. Have you ever switched phone companies? I don't think that we ever had at home. However, for some reason, I chose to do it with the phone line at Rock Valley Bible Church. I did this a few months ago. I thought that it was a pretty good deal. I even showed the bills to Lance, who keeps track of the finances here at the church. He said that this new company was cheaper. Well, this week, I received a call from my old phone company, who said, "We want you back!" They offered to cut my rates in half of what I was getting previously! It sounded pretty good to me. So, I switched back. As many questions as I tried to ask beforehand, I didn't quite get them all. I didn't fully understand the commitment I was making. Apparently, my rates from my first switch were for tying together both my local and long distance together. I was told that I needed to call my former company, who told me that my great long distance rates no longer applied, because my local service was no longer with them. Furthermore, their rates were outstandingly high. So, I had to get a new long distance phone service when I switched back. I wanted to switch back on my own terms, rather than on their terms.

Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus will describe the kingdom as seed thrown upon four types of soil (Matthew 13). In two of the soils, the seed will sprout up. And yet, there will be something which will inhibit the seed from growing: affliction or persecution or worries of the world or the deceitfulness of riches. In one of the soils, the seed takes root and brings forth great fruit. I believe that the seed flounders because those who made the initial commitment to follow Christ never dealt with this question of what it would cost them. And when the affliction or persecution or difficulties in the world arise, the say, "Wow! I didn't think that it meant this! I'm out of here." Their initial verbal commitment was no guarantee of anything.

Don't get me wrong, I don't believe that any follower of Jesus Christ will fully understand the full implication of the authority of Jesus upon

their lives. But, when you come to the point of desperation, when you realize your need for God more than anything, and say, "God, my life is yours. I have no hope, but to cling to Christ and grasp the salvation that only He can give," your verbal profession saves you. Does not the scripture say, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10). The thief on the cross could only say, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). The thief was saved and enjoyed Paradise with Jesus that very day (Luke 23:42).

For those people who have completely abandoned their own life, when difficulties come because of following Christ, they willingly endure, because their life is no longer their own! Yet, when people come to Jesus on their own terms, they will fall away when difficulties come, because they didn't take the difficulties that would await them into consideration. Such terms weren't in their contract when they "signed up" to follow Christ.

In my observations over the years, I know of more people who have made a verbal profession of faith, which have demonstrated themselves to be bad soil, than those who have made a profession of faith, who have persevered. Just because someone makes an outstanding vocal commitment to follow Christ doesn't mean that they will be authentic in their profession. When I hear of someone making a verbal commitment, I am encouraged (and you should be as well). I pray for them that their life will demonstrate that they have completely abandoned their life.

3. Jesus communicates the cost of discipleship (verse 20).

When this scribe told Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go," Jesus made sure that he knew what this meant. It meant "having nowhere to lay your head" (verse 20). When someone comes to you today and says, "I want to follow Jesus," you should take the time and explain to them exactly what this means.

Sure, tell them of the joys and the pleasures and the blessings of following Jesus. Make Jesus sound attractive to them. Quote scripture to them, such as ...

- Psalm 16:11, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever."
- Ps. 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart."
- Ps. 84:10, "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside, I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness."
- Ps. 84:11, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly."
- Ps. 84:12, "O LORD of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!"
- Matt. 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
- Matt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Be like Christian, who told Pliable of the glories that awaits those who believe in Christ. Perhaps you remember the story when Obstinate had left their company and Christian was telling Pliable what great things awaited them at the end of their journey.

CHRISTIAN: There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom forever (Isa. 45:17; John 10:27-29).

PLIABLE: Well said. And what else?

CHRISTIAN: There are crowns of glory to be given us, and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of Heaven! (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 3:4; Matt. 13:43).

PLIABLE: This is very pleasant. And what else?

CHRISTIAN: There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow; for He that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 7:17, 17; 21:4).

PLIABLE: And what company shall we have there?

CHRISTIAN: There we shall be with seraphims, and Cherubims, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them.

There, also, you shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that Place; none of them are hurtful, but loving and holy, everyone walking in the sight of God, and standing in His presence with acceptance forever; in a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns; there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps; there we shall see men, that by the world were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love that they bare to the Lord of the Place; all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment (Isa. 6:2; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 7:17; 4:4; 14:1-5; John 12:25; 2 Cor. 5:2-5).

PLIABLE: The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart; but are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers thereof?

Yet, when you speak to a would-be follower of Jesus, don't end with the blessings. Tell them of the difficulties that await them if they want to share in it. I am sure that the scribe who came to Jesus saw all of the good things that were going on with Jesus. He saw the blessings. He saw the healings. He heard the teachings. He said, "I want to be a part of this." This is why Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Be straightforward and honest of the cost of following Christ. Tell such people that ...

- The world will think that you are foolish to follow a crucified savior (1 Cor. 1:18).
- Many will hate you. (If the world hated Jesus, the world will hate a follower of Jesus - John 15:18-21).

- You will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12).
- Your family may ostracize you (Matt. 10:36, "A man's enemies will be the members of his household").
- You may suffer financially.

When Paul went back to the church he had started, he sought to encourage the believers to continue in the faith saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Peter wrote to the persecuted church to tell them that they were "aliens and strangers" in this world. When you repent from your sins and follow Christ, the world will think you are so strange that you have come from another planet. You will look like E. T. to them.

So, be balanced in your evangelism. Tell those who are interested in following Jesus of the blessings to following Jesus. Tell them of the difficulties as well. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12). Tell them, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). Balance your thoughts, like Paul did, "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

This summer, while on vacation, Yvonne and I went on a hike through a large forest. The path that we followed wound back and forth and it traversed up a hill of several hundred feet. When we arrived at the crest of this hill, we were met with a beautiful lake, surrounded by trees, embedded into the mountain. As we continued on past the lake, we met several guys who were hiking back the other way. We asked them what lay ahead. They said, "Oh, it is a beautiful scenery point, where you can see the ocean and the trees and the mountains. It is gorgeous. But, the hike is pretty strenuous, however, especially at the end, where there is a rugged cliff. But the view makes all of the trouble worth it all!" What a picture of salvation this is! Oh, there are some difficulties along the path. But when you get to the end, it will be glorious! We will be with Jesus forever! Let's not hide either from would-be disciples of Christ.

4. Jesus doesn't want delays (verse 21).

Look at verse 21, Matthew writes, "And another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.'" We find here "another of the disciples" coming up to Jesus. This simply acknowledges that the first guy (in verse 19) was described as being a disciple of Jesus, that is, this scribe was learning from Jesus. We find another guy here, who was learning from Jesus as well.

When this second man thought about following Jesus, he wanted to bury his father as first priority, before following Jesus. We would think that this is a pretty reasonable request. Funerals are typical events in which employers will gladly allow their employees to take time off from their duties. Even NBA players are allowed to leave their teams and miss a game during the playoffs to attend a funeral of a close family member (as Tim Duncan of the San Antonio Spurs did last Spring). Yet, for some reason, Jesus didn't accept this request.

Jesus said (in verse 22), "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead." This statement has confused many and has caused many to speculate on what exactly Jesus meant. Most commentators give two options for what Jesus meant here.

1. Some say that this man's father was very sick and soon to die. This man wanted to demonstrate his honor to his father by performing one last duty for him, that was burial. In the Jewish world, the act of burial was an act of piety and respect.
2. Others say that this man's father is very much alive and well. This man was wanting to wait until he died to get his inheritance. Thus, this man's request to delay his following of Jesus was simply an excuse.

The problem with both of these views is that Jesus says that the father is dead! He said, "allow the dead to bury their own dead." He doesn't say that he is sick or old. He says that he is dead! I believe that the key to understanding this phrase is wrapped up in the burial practices of the ancient Jews around the time of Christ.

When you think of burying someone, your picture is probably of caskets and digging six feet down in the ground. But that's not how they buried people in the time of Jesus. You remember how they buried Jesus? After he died upon the cross, Joseph from Arimathea, "took [the body] down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain" (Luke 23:53). When he left the tomb, there was a big rolling stone, which looked like a wheel that was rolled over the entrance to this tomb (which was essentially a cave). On the Sunday following His death, the women brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus, so that when it decayed, it wouldn't smell so bad. You can't anoint a body that is six feet underground! But this is how they buried people in Jesus' day: they put them in caves, and let their bodies naturally decay.

But that isn't all. There was another step in the burial practices of the Jews. About a year later, the body would have decayed to the point where there would be only bones left. These bones would then be placed in a box, called an ossuary (which means "bone container" in Latin). The ossuary was usually 20-30 inches long (long enough for the longest bone in the body to fit in it -- our femur), 10-15 inches wide (wide enough for the thickest bone in our body to fit in it -- our skull), 10-15 inches deep (deep enough to contain all of the bones of our body into it). (Click [here](#) to see a picture of a typical ossuary). Then, this box would be buried some place. It could either remain in another location in the burial cave or it could be buried someplace else.

In recent weeks, a great archaeological discovery has been made. One of these ossuaries have been discovered in the private collection of an antiquities collector in Israel. This ossuary has an inscription upon it written in Hebrew, which reads, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." One of the world's leading epigraphers (who specialize in inscriptions), named André Lemaire, was permitted to study and

photograph the ossuary. His findings are given in the November/December 2002 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review (pp. 24-33). (Click [here](#) to see a picture of it). He concluded that both the ossuary and the inscription date back to the 1st century A. D. Furthermore, he believes that it is probably the ossuary where the bones of Jesus' brother were placed after his body decayed, after he suffered martyrdom for the faith in 62 A. D. This is tremendously encouraging for us as it continues to mount proof for the historicity of the Bible can be trusted completely.

Just Friday (2 days ago), this ossuary was put on public display for the first time every at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, where it will remain until December 29th, when it will surely be headed back to Israel. I doubt they will let it out of the country again, because of its great historical significance. (So, if you ever want to see it, perhaps you might want to take a trip to Toronto in this next month).

Preaching this text could not have come in a more timely fashion. Last week, when my mother in law was here, we looked at the miracle of healing Peter's mother-in-law from the fever. This week, we learn about ossuaries, just as the world has been told of them. All I can say is, "Beware of the weather next week, when we see Jesus calm the storm!"

I believe that this man's father was already dead. He was already buried and his body was decaying. Yet, the body wasn't fully decayed. There were probably some months to go before the father would be finally buried. He was requesting to delay His following of Jesus until a known date in the future when he would be able to lay the bones of his father to rest. Jesus said, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead" (verse 22). Jesus means, "allow the [spiritually] dead to bury their own [physically] dead."

With Jesus and His kingdom, He doesn't take rain checks. Nor does He take reservations. You can't plan on following Jesus tomorrow. Why? Tomorrow never comes! Throughout Scripture, there is this emphasis upon following the Lord, "Today." As Paul wrote, "Now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation'" (2 Cor. 6:2). Jesus called this man to follow Him NOW! Not tomorrow, not next week, not next month. NOW! Delayed repentance is not repentance. Delayed repentance means that you have willfully chosen not to repent right now!

Verse 21 teaches us that Jesus doesn't tolerate delays. If you are delaying in following Jesus, know that His plan is that you follow Him now. If you are delaying repentance in one area of your life for some reason, know that you are only hurting yourself. Jesus wants all of you. Jesus wants all of you, right now!

5. Jesus wants followers (verse 22).

I get this from the first two words of verse 22. Jesus says, "Follow me." This is what He told His first disciples (in Matt. 4:19), "Follow Me!" This is what He told Matthew (in Matt. 9:9), "Follow Me!" This is what He has told everyone since. You want to be a follower of Jesus Christ? You need to follow Him, regardless of the cost! You need to forsake your life and follow Him. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

Notice in every instance here, Jesus made following Him harder, not easier. Remember when you were a child and played "Follow the Leader"? Suppose that you were trying to follow the leader, but the leader kept placing objects in your way, making it much more difficult to follow. This is exactly what Jesus was doing when He encountered these people. When the crowds were coming around Him, Jesus left. When the man committed to following Him, Jesus made this commitment harder to keep. When a man had a seemingly legitimate excuse, Jesus wouldn't accept it. Jesus could do this, because He had the authority to demand such obedience.

Jesus is looking for those who will drop everything they have and give their full allegiance to the Lamb! "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). These two men illustrate two of the many difficulties which we will face in following Jesus: (1) Hardship (no where to lay His head); and (2) Desertion (leaving the family behind).

The good news of the gospel is that when you indeed have forsaken all, Jesus will grant you the grace needed to overcome these troubles. The one who follows Jesus will find that His "yoke is easy," and His "burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). The one who follows Jesus will find God's commandments not to be burdensome (1 John 5:3). This is illustrated nicely in Matt. 10:19-20, when Jesus told His disciples whom He had sent out that they will face great difficulty. Yet, He promised great sustaining grace, "But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but [it is] the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."

I could give you countless passages that teach the same thing (for instance, Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 5:7, 10; Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:7-11; Heb. 13:9; 2 Tim. 2:1). When Jesus said, "Follow Me," we ought not to think that we are supposed to do it on our own strength. We are to drop everything that is ours and rely upon the strength of Jesus Christ to accomplish it for us! This is the glorious news of the gospel!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 17, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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