"Not for Wimps or the Worldly" 09/23/2018
Matthew 8:18-22 GCC

Introduction
Jesus' parable of the soils demonstrates that there would be some who would start to follow Jesus who would not be able to finish. They would fall away. They might even come with great enthusiasm, but they would never produce fruit. Such are not true followers. Jesus did not want those who professed to follow him to be deceived. So he gave warnings. Another such warning appears here in Matthew 8:18-22.

[Read Text; Pray]

Thus far in Matthew Jesus has taken the initiative to call men to follow him. He approaches two pairs of brothers who were fishermen, Peter and Andrew and James and John. He calls them to follow him and the main message he gives them is that if they follow him he will make them to be fishers of men. They were not pursuing Jesus; they were busy with their nets. It was Jesus who pursed them. He called them and immediately they left everything to follow.

That was before Jesus became so celebrated. Here in chapter 8 all that has changed. Jesus is the talk of Galilee. He cannot go anywhere without attracting a multitude. A crowd is always with him. The public is falling all over itself to get to be around Jesus, to see his healing power and to hear his authority as he teaches. So Peter and Andrew and James and John came and started following Jesus when it was not so popular. But now that Jesus is popular, people are coming out of the woodwork saying they want to follow Jesus as well. They want to get on the band wagon. They are attracted by the attractiveness of what it appears to mean to follow Jesus. Two of them step forward here, and it is instructive to us how he deals with them. Jesus addresses them in a very surprising way. Rather than jumping up and down and welcoming them into the company of believers, Jesus pushes back. He basically says, "not-so-fast, my friend." He has a point to make to each one, and these points tell us about Jesus and about his terms for followers and would-be followers. These points have implications for

how we preach the gospel. Let's look at each of these three men–a scribe, a son, and the Sovereign.

I. The Scribe with Swagger

A. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd . . . again, and he had given orders to go over to the other side. Perhaps he needed some rest. Perhaps he wanted to go elsewhere to minister to others in the region. At any rate he was going. No doubt many with boats were going to. And up walks this guy who says, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Perhaps he is wanting to get in the boat with Jesus or in one of the other boats that were going and wanted some assurance of Jesus' recognition before the departure for the other side.

B. One thing we need to notice is that this man is a scribe. You might liken a scribe in Jesus' day to a seminary professor of today. Scribes were professional students of the biblical and Jewish law, who devoted themselves to preserving, transcribing, and teaching it. Many were Pharisees. Together those two groups were zealous for the traditions as well as the scriptures. And these were the ones who wanted to be recognized as the authoritative teachers of the Jews. They had little if any respect for those who were not educated in their schools. They held in contempt any who would question the traditions of the elders such as Jesus did. So it is striking that a scribe approaches Jesus and calls him "Teacher." It indicates that this man has seen and heard in Jesus something that has caused him to rethink his very identity. In a flash of the moment, he appears ready to give all that up.

C. But one characteristic of the scribes and Pharisees remains evident in this man–pride. It comes out in the grandiose declaration he makes to Jesus on the sea shore. "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." The one time I can think of hearing something like this come out of the mouths of the twelve disciples is when Peter emphatically said to Jesus, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you" (Mark 14:31) and the rest of the disciples all said the same. We all know how that went. He denied him three times and the disciples denied Jesus by scattering away from him when his hour was dark.

The declaration of the scribe oozes with bravado. He speaks with swagger. He exudes self-confidence and boldness, and it seems he is saying these words to impress Jesus. And would Jesus not be impressed? I mean here years later as Matthew composes this gospel, he still remembers that it was not just any common man who made this declaration but a scribe. Here was a guy whose presence with the other disciples could have added some "street cred" to Jesus and the burgeoning movement. This is one of those guys you would really want on your team. Then you could become even more popular than you are right now.

C. Therefore, it is arresting when Jesus answers him the way he does. "Glad to have you aboard!"? No. "Yes we are looking for men like you."? Not hardly. Rather, Jesus basically says, "Man, you do not have any idea what you are signing up for. And now is the time to count the cost."

The reality is this. "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Animals have it better than me. Foxes have holes to call home. Birds of the air have nests in which to sleep at night. Following me is not about worldly glamor or ease. It may look enticing right now, but following me is tough. It is lonely. It is a life of being unwelcome in the world, a life of not having a home. Following me is not for wimps. It is costly. It is not for people who have great confidence in themselves or in their grandiose commitments. There won't always be happy crowds and enthusiastic welcomes. And the whole point is not to get too settled in this world. I am just a sojourner here, I am just camping out while doing what the Father sent me to do. And if you follow me, it will be the same for you.

D. It is easy to make strong and grandiose commitments when the heat is not on. But they are tested when reality sets in. As a child I dreamed of being a football player. Having been born in Texas, I was a fan of the Cowboys at the time. And I wanted to grow up and play quarterback for Dallas, believing nothing could keep me from it. When I came home from school in those days I made a beeline for my football and out to the front yard I went, dreaming of how it would be. By seventh grade, I was on the cusp of starting my dream fulfillment. I could finally go out for football! I was going to do whatever it took. But things turned out not as I ahd dreamed. After the second day of practice, I had had all I could take.

Football was a whole lot more fun in the front yard when I wasn't getting tackled by guys that were three times my size, and didn't have a coach yelling at me. That was it. I quit. All those dreams were gone. I had not realized what the cost was going to be.

Neither did this scribe. Jesus alerted him to the fact that the narrow road that leads to life is a hard way. Those who truly follow Jesus will have to walk by that way because there is no other. It is the way of self-denial not self-indulgence. It is the way of sacrifice not worldly gain. It is the way of being despised and rejected not welcomed and celebrated. It is the way of tribulation and persecution. Not so fast, Mr. Scribe. Do not judge what it means to follow me by what you see right now. It will cost you. You won't just be disowned by the other scribes and the Pharisees, you will be disowned by the world itself. But that's what you must be ready for if you would follow me wherever I go. The message in brief, following Jesus is not for wimps.

II. The Son with a Situation

A. Here is another guy who really wants some praise from Jesus. He too wants to follow Jesus, and he wants Jesus to know it, but he has a situation. His father is still living and he is expected, as other middle eastern sons were, to stay with Dad and work with Dad until Dad dies and he gets his inheritance. Once the situation resolves, hey, he is up for following.

This saying, "Let me first go and bury my father," makes it sound to us like the father has already died and this guy will be along just as soon as the funeral is over. Not so. For one thing, you would not think his father had just died because Jesus, the healer, has been around. If this guy was following Jesus, and he was because he is loosely called a disciple, then surely he would have sought Jesus to heal his father as he had Peter's mother-in-law. Furthermore, it was the custom of the day for sons to stay and work with their fathers until the father died. At that time sons would gain their inheritance. That was referred to as "burying one's father."

So this guy's situation is not unlike the situation of James and John who were in the fishing business with Zebedee their father. But when Jesus

called them, they immediately left their nets and followed. This guy wants in on the deferral program. He is in the world. He wants his inheritance. Following Jesus is something he would like to do, but it is not his top priority. In other words, for this son, following Jesus is something he would like to add to what he has.

B. Look at Jesus' reply. "Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead." Far from forbidding this son or any other son to go to his father's funeral, Jesus is rather saying that when you follow him you cannot be driven by worldly things like inheritances. That is the way of the world. That is the way of those who are spiritually dead. Those who are dead to Christ will be consumed with worldly things. If you are going to follow Jesus, you've got to put those things away. When you follow Jesus, you are leaving the world. The world is ruled by the prince of the power of the air, and the concerns of the world are the here and now. If you follow Christ, you must leave the world behind. You can't love anything the way you love him. It is the same as the first commandment: you shall have no other gods besides me. Coming to follow Jesus is not adding him to everything else you have in your life; it is replacing everything else with him. John MacArthur writes, "It's not that any amount of self-denial or sacrifice can earn salvation, but anything that is held more dearly than Christ is a barrier to Christ and will stand between the unsaved person and salvation." "Coming to Jesus is coming on his terms and not our own." And the terms of following Jesus is that it must be total and unreserved. Traditional wedding vows promise that "forsaking all others," a husband or wife will cling to and only to his/her spouse. That is what Jesus requires in a follower.

C. John echoes this sentiment in his first epistle in that familiar admonition: "Do not love the world or the things in the world; it anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world–the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life–is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires . . ." (1 John 2:15-17) Following Jesus is not for the wimpy. And it is not for the worldly either.

III. The Sovereign without Shelter

Now we have already noted what Jesus said to the scribe, but it bears us looking at it again. This time we pay particular attention to what it says about Jesus himself. It is in verse 20. In response to the would-be disciple, Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

A. We have already noted that Jesus was pointing out to the scribe that he did not have a place in this world. He was unwelcome. He was a sojourner. It is a hard and difficult path. And anybody who follows him has to follow him down the hard path. But there is more in what Jesus is saying here. He is actually shedding light on the magnificence of his incarnation. John writes, "and the word became flesh, and we beheld his glory, glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." In this short statement, Jesus is helping us behold his glory. And here it is.

B. It starts with the animals–foxes and birds. Jesus could have said, "most of you have homes, but I don't." That would not have been as strong. When Jesus points to animals, he is pointing out not simply that he has sacrificed what other people often take for granted but that he has sacrificed what even animals take for granted. And in the case of the birds he is speaking of an animal whose significance people almost completely overlook. Jesus had spoken of birds in his sermon on the mount. His point was to say that if God takes care of these who are so seemingly insignificant, then how sure you can be that he will take care of you. Now, in this morning's context, Jesus speaks of birds in order to show how common a creaturely comfort is having one's own place. It is something so common, so fundamental, so basic that even birds of the air have nests. They have a home. They have a dwelling. But Jesus does not. He has no such creaturely comforts that even is experienced by the lowest of the animals.

C. And yet, there is one more aspect to what he says that we must not overlook. It is how Jesus refers to himself. It is significant because this is the first time in the gospel according to Matthew that we find Jesus referring to himself with the title, "Son of Man." And this is incredibly significant. It is easy to say that "Son of Man" is a title that reflects the humanity of Jesus. And yet, this background to this title is the prophet

Daniel. Daniel had a vision of the conquering Messiah who emerges into heaven to receive his reward. It is a picture of the ascending Christ who having died and risen from the dead now is ascended before the throne of God. Let me read it to you:

Daniel 7:13-14–and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a SON OF MAN, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

When Jesus designates himself with this title, he is actually declaring his everlasting dominion and sovereignty. He is that guy from Daniel 7. He in fact is declaring his deity. It is interesting that when Jesus asserts his lordship over the Sabbath, he refers to himself as the Son of Man. And when he asserts his authority to forgive sins, he calls himself the Son of Man. You see how this understanding affects Jesus' statement? "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." On earth even the lowest of land animals and birds of the air have a place to lay their head, but not so for the very one who created them. Not so for the one who has come to redeem and to rule from heaven.

It brings fresh into our thoughts and understanding of Jesus this thing that Paul said of him in 2 Corinthians 8:9. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Paul also pointed out to the Philippians that "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Scarcely will someone forfeit his life for a good person, but God demonstrates his love in that while we were yet sinner, CHRIST DIED for

us. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. At his birth he was placed in a feeding trough and that is emblematic of his life. When the disciples went to their homes Jesus went to the garden. Though owner of it all, he selflessly lived as though he owned nothing and he died as an outcast and pauper. He was even placed in a tomb that did not belong to him.

He came to the earth he created, yet this earth had no room for him, and on it he had no home, no dwelling place. But why did he do it? Why did he stoop so low. And why did he sacrifice himself so much? Get this, it was so that he could gather together his people, his disciples, his true followers . . . and take us . . . HOME. Remember the words he spoke to his disciples, "In my Father's house are MANY ROOMS. If it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also."

It was necessary that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, come and be outcast, come and be hated and rejected, come and be crucified, come and be homeless, so that his true followers could have an eternal home with him. Marvel at the willingness of the king to do this for you. Stand amazed at a what an astounding truth this is. It says something about the depth of human sin, and it says something about what is the holiness of God. It says something about the compassion of Christ. Each are profound. It also tells us how worthy he is to be followed the way he prescribes. Jesus was not a wimp. Jesus was not of this world. And following Jesus isn't for wimps or for the worldly either. It is for those who forsake all and trust in him.

Conclusion

This morning's passage tells about the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells how he was willing to sacrifice incredibly in order to save sinners, to call unto himself followers. It also tells us the nature of the call to "Follow him." We should take with us this morning warnings about how we share the gospel. We must not misrepresent the gospel or sugar-coat the gospel so as to hide from people the demands Christ makes of those who would follow him.

People are eager for a bargain. It is true with respect to goods and services. And it is true with respect to the gospel. The two guys in our passage this morning were in search of a bargain. The scribe was eager for an easy way. The son wanted Jesus along with his slice of the world. He was unwilling to pay any more than that.

But the fact is that the gospel never goes on sale. It has one price. Jesus paid it all. But nevertheless, receiving the gift that is eternal life will cost you no less than everything. You must cut with the crowd, cut with the expectation of comfort, cut with being loved by the world and possessing the things of this world. These are the terms. There is no other way. If you would come to follow Christ, you must die to self. You must come to follow not merely when it is convenient, not only when it is easy, not just when it is agreeable to you. It is a hard road, but it is the road to glory. It is the road at the end of which you are gloriously home with Christ and with the Father . . . forever.