

June 5, 2016

## NO PLACE TO LAY HIS HEAD

Matthew 8:18-22

Jesus says to a new convert, a Scribe no less, who feels so devoted to Jesus that he is willing to follow Him wherever He would go, *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* (8:20) It would be a lonely thing to love the country and the people of the land, but still not really belong to it. If you align yourself to Jesus, who doesn't belong to this world, you will not belong to this world either. You will feel as though you have *"no place to lay your head."* No place will be a haven of rest for you. You will know that you are always on your way somewhere greater...much greater...better.

Even though *"great crowds"* had attached themselves to Jesus, He knew He didn't really belong to them. Still many were truly inspired by the extraordinarily gracious ways of Jesus. Jesus had many who followed Him simply because they were impressed with Him. Not bad, but, not true faith either. This man learns that it is a risky thing to be a disciple in those days, because when you live so simply as to depend on the graciousness of others for food and shelter, you might discover the hard way that you could end up with *"no place to lay your head."*

Jesus called all His hearers to follow Him. And yet, it seems that some were just not truly ready. One man claimed that he had to go and bury his father. But...That he was not at home with his father and family, but rather on the road with Jesus, indicates either that his father was not near death, nor even dead yet, or, if he was, this man really didn't care that much for his family. Certainly, he would be with them if his father had just died, and he would never delay getting to his home by joining a crowd attracted to a traveling preacher. And no one would refuse a person the dignity of performing the final rituals for a loved one's loss. Jesus tells him, *"Let the dead bury their own dead."*

It is hard to know exactly what is meant by His saying this, but one possible interpretation is that this refers to those who are dead in their sins, or, those who are morally dead, or, emotionally uninspired, wrapped up in other issues, and are not quite ready to be true followers. In this parallel story in Luke, one man wanted to say farewell to his family. There is nothing really wrong with that. But that is when Jesus talks about not looking back. Elijah waited for Elisha to bid farewell after he called him to follow. (See 1 Kings 19:19-21) But if you want to plow a straight furrow, you don't look back, it won't help. It helps to look back at the end of the row to see if it was straight, but you don't go forward, most of the time, by looking backward. It might be relevant, at times, to consider the past, but only as a point of reference for the future. *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62)

The point being made in this story lies in the fact that these "believers" are discouraged from following Jesus... as a disciple. Neither of them, apparently, was capable of the passionate loyalty to the Kingdom of God that Jesus required/expected. Neither of them was ready to take up their cross daily, willing to make sacrifices, and deny themselves. There may be some degrees of devotion to the Kingdom of God, but it seems only in how it will be something *for* them, not something for them to *work for*. It is not a club to join, but a lifestyle to live. Consider how the church sometimes seems like a club. You get to join it. There may be privileges and a few requirements, but.... To be fit for the Kingdom of God we

need to forget our own personal needs and comforts. We need to give absolute priority to our purpose in following. And we need to face forward and concentrate our attention on what it is really all about.

It can be good to look back at all that has been accomplished and give thanks, or, celebrate. But in order to be fit for the Kingdom, of God, we should, as Paul did, “*forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead...Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 3:13-14) There is a proverb that, in the King James Version says, “***Where there is no vision, the people perish.***” (29:18) This gives added meaning to letting the dead bury the dead. For those who are perishing for lack of vision – the spiritually dead – there is little other purpose in their lives than burying the dead.

There can be nothing worse than getting caught in the trap of living in the past. Think about Norma Desmond in the movie *Sunset Boulevard*. By living in the past we can very easily lose sight of all that we should be working to accomplish. We are not fit for the Kingdom of God when we have no vision of it. For Jesus, He did not know where He was going to sleep that night. It might even be a stable behind a crowded inn for all He knew...again. But, He still went forward.

The Kingdom of God is a present reality that will be completely fulfilled in a future not yet known. Our eyes should be fixed on that glorious future while our hearts are living today as if it had already come. It is this attitude that will make us fit for the Kingdom, and, ready to follow its King!