

# The Son of Man Has No Place to Lay His Head

## Matthew 8:19-22 and Luke 9:57-62

**DIG:** Where were Jesus and His apostles traveling? Why? How does the Lord respond to the excuses offered by these potential followers? What do His responses teach us about discipleship? In your own words, what does each of Christ's sayings mean? What's His point?

**REFLECT:** How did you first become aware of the cost of following the Meshiach? Where do you feel that tension now? If He were to say to you: **Follow Me today**, and you used one of your favorite excuses for putting things off, what would happen?

After crossing over the Jordan River into Perea Jesus was walking along the road and met several "casual disciples" on His way up to Jerusalem. Yeshua knew human nature is fickle, unstable and self-centered. Many people are attracted to Him by excitement, glamor, or the hope of personal benefit. They are quick to jump on the bandwagon when things are going well, but as soon as the cause becomes unpopular or demands sacrifice they break their ankles jumping off. At first they look as if they are alive for **Messiah** and often give glowing testimonies, but when their association with Him begins to cost more than they bargained for they lose interest and are never seen again in the local church or messianic synagogue. As the Bible commentator R. C. H. Lenski observes, such a person "sees the soldiers in the parade, the fine uniforms, and the glittering arms and is eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, and the graves, perhaps unmarked."<sup>921</sup>

Jesus had said that His **yoke** was **easy** and His **burden** was **light** (see **Ee - Come to Me, All Who are Weary, and Burdened and I Will Give You Rest**); however, this did not imply that **Christ** made **light** demands on those who would be His disciples. His **yoke** was **easy** because **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24)**. Here, we have a picture of how rigorous the demands of **Messiah** are for those who would follow Him.

We have already seen three levels of discipleship. First, we must deny ourselves; secondly, we must take up our **cross**; and thirdly, we must follow **the Good Shepherd**. All three are elaborated on here. It is important to remember that **the apostles** were also **disciples**, but all **disciples** were not **apostles**.

**First, you must count the costs before becoming a disciple.** A Torah-teacher came to Him and said: **Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go (Matthew 8:19; Luke 9:57).** Unlike most of the Torah-teachers, this one, on the surface, seemed at least for the moment to approve of the Lord. Torah-teachers who were also disciples are mentioned as well in **Matthew 13:52, 23:34.** But these were notable exceptions to every other reference to the lawyers of Yeshua's day. However, even being held in such high esteem, Christ was calling His followers to some costly sacrifices that many people were not prepared to make.

No doubt that Torah-teacher felt he was paying a high price in volunteering to follow Messiah and going through the process of discipleship after already being a scribe would be a humbling and time-consuming experience. Jesus, however, warns His prospective disciple that even such a sacrifice will prove inadequate when He said: **If anyone would come after Me, they must first deny themselves (Lk 9:23a).**<sup>922</sup> There is no denial here; he was too hasty. The Master replied: **Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58).** The first use of the phrase **Son of Man** in Matthew gives unusual weight to the literal meaning of the Aramaic phrase, *a human being*. The Lord knew the zeal of the pharisaic Judaism to quiet His voice. The emphasis here is less about the loss of a soft place to sleep, and more about His ultimate rejection in Tziyon.

**Secondly, once you are committed, do not delay.** To another potential recruit, Christ said: **Follow me.** But the man replied: **Lord, first let me go and bury my father (Mattityahu 8:21; Luke 9:59).** This could have several meanings. First, it was probable that his father was not dead yet. Jesus has been criticized here for being too harsh. But the point is the father is not even dead yet! **The rabbis teach that the first-born son (this man seems like the first born) was to stay with the father until he died. After he died, the son was to stay for one year and say the special kaddish prayer for him, and only then was the son free to go wherever he wanted.**

Next, during the Second Temple period that Jesus ministered in, **there were two burials for a traditional Jew. The first burial was immediately after death, at which time the body was properly prepared and then placed in a burial niche in a cave or tomb. The second burial would take place after the one-year mourning period, in which the bones of the deceased were then placed in a special burial box known as an ossuary.** There is a parallel custom in Judaism today. The immediate family of the departed loved one is called to a period of mourning for one year. At the end of that time, the headstone of the grave is unveiled to symbolize the end of the mourning period.<sup>923</sup> **But whatever excuse he had, Yeshua told him: Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60). He was too slow. He violated the second principle of discipleship, and take up their cross daily (Luke 9:23b).**

Since these customs were not **Torah** requirements, those **men** would have been placing custom over **His** personal call to follow **Messiah** immediately. This saying, **let the dead bury their own dead**, contains a word play on "**dead**." **The Lord's** response actually means: **Let** those who are *spiritually* **dead bury** those who are *physically* **dead**. In this pun the spiritually **dead** are those who do not follow **Jesus** (**Luke 15:24, 32; John 5:24-25; Romans 6:13; Ephesians 2:1 and 5:14**). This shows that those who are alive in **Christ** should make **His Kingdom** their highest priority.

**Thirdly, there must be a division of loyalty.** Still another said: **I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family** (**Luke 9:61**). This man's request was similar to that of **Elisha** in **First Kings 19:19-21**. Yet although **Elijah** granted the young man's request, **Yeshua** did not. **God's Kingdom** has come, and the summons to follow **the Good Shepherd** takes precedence over everything else. The old family relationships are part of what one must leave behind to follow **Him** (**Luke 5:11, 28**).<sup>924</sup> **Jesus replied: No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God** (**Luke 9:62**). The members of this man's family were keeping him from making a full commitment. This man was not making a proper choice between his **family** and **Messiah**. **His spiritual priorities were out of order**. If your **family** is making you choose between them and **Christ**, break all ties that would hold you back.

**The Savior** challenges the excuses of those whose commitment is weak. To the excuses of those who reject **Him** altogether (**Luke 14:18-20**), **He** responded with anger and withdrew **His** offer. In reality, either kind of excuse seems foolish, like the excuses people embrace today, "I can't believe in **Yeshua** because I'm Jewish" - but all the early believers were Jewish, as well as many since. "I'll have to give up too much" - yet far less than what is to be gained. "I'll lose my friends" - but **Messiah Himself** said: **Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - along with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life** (**Mark 10:29-30**). To all the excuses people come up with, the Bible has answers . . . but there is no guarantee people will accept them.<sup>925</sup>