

What Keeps Men from Christ?

Scripture: Matthew 8:16–22

Code: 2259

INTRODUCTION

A. The Rejection of Christ

What makes Christ refuse would-be followers? In some ways it is utterly incredible that people continually reject the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is beyond understanding that people reject Christ as the incomparable, gracious Son of God, the Savior of the world who died for them, and still despise Him as much today as He was when He first came.

As you study the Gospel of Matthew, it becomes very apparent that unbelieving people stubbornly refuse to accept all that Christ has done, for His credentials are obvious. The proof of His existence as God in human flesh is beyond contradiction: His words, works, death, and resurrection all speak unmistakably of the reality that Jesus is the Christ of God, the Savior of the world. In spite of that, Scripture records that people rejected the evidence and refused to acknowledge Christ as Lord. John 1:11 says, "He came unto His own, and His own received him not." Jesus said in John 5:40, "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life." Shortly before His crucifixion, people cried out, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14). Those statements go against the affirmations that people made when they were confronted with His miracles.

B. The Responses to Christ

The world is like a judge in a court who has heard an open-and- shut case and made an opposite verdict from the facts. For example, the the people had witnessed the evidence of His...

1. Authority

The words of Jesus were absolutely unique. Matthew 7:28-29 says, "...the people were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as one having authority...."

2. Works

The works of Jesus were undeniably divine. John 7:46 says, "Never man spoke like this man." The blind man in John 9 said this to his inquisitors: "Why here is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from where He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes.... If this man were not of God, He could do nothing" (vv. 30, 33).

3. Wisdom

The wisdom of Jesus was superhuman. In Matthew 22, the Herodians (a political party that supported the rule of Rome) confronted Him with a coin and asked, "...Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (v. 17b). And Jesus said, "Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God, the things that are God's. When they heard these words, they marveled..." (vv. 21b-22a).

4. Purity

His purity was undeniable. He challenged the Pharisees in John 8, saying, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?..." (v. 46a). The point is, they couldn't.

5. Truthfulness

His truthfulness was beyond question. In John 8:46 He asked, "...if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"

6. Power

His power fascinated people. In Luke 8:25 the disciples said, "What manner of man is this! For He commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey Him."

7. Provision

He miraculously provided food for a multitude. In John 6:26, when they showed up again the next day, Jesus told them, "...Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."

8. Healing

He healed the sicknesses of many. Matthew 9:8 says, "But when the multitudes saw [the healing of the paralytic], they marveled, and glorified God, who had given such power unto men."

9. Love

His love was amazing. Those who stood at the grave of Lazarus said, "Behold how He loved him!" when they saw Jesus weep (Jn 11:36).

10. Dominion over Demons

When Jesus cast the demon out in Matthew 9:33, "the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel."

11. Judgment

His judgment was awesome. Jesus cursed a fig tree and it withered in Matthew 21:19. "And when the disciples saw it, they marveled..." (v. 20a).

12. Composure

His composure was beyond that of others. He was silent before Pilate, who had power over His life. He showed no fear and gave no defense as Matthew 27:14 indicates: "He answered him never a word, insomuch that the governor marveled greatly."

13. Teaching

His teaching was so far beyond any teacher that anyone had ever known that John 7:15 records that "the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" And as a boy of twelve, the teachers in the Temple "were amazed at His understanding and answers" (Lk. 2:47).

14. Independence

His independence from their legal system made the Jewish leaders shudder. Luke 11:38 records that when Jesus accepted an invitation to eat with a Pharisee, His host "marveled that He had not first washed before dinner." He defied their meaningless ceremonies.

15. Tender Condescension

His tender condescension shocked many. Jesus humbly conversed with a Samaritan harlot. John 4:27 says, "And upon this came His disciples, and marveled that He talked with the woman...."

People clearly saw that everything about Jesus was astounding and humanly inexplicable. Is it any wonder, then, that in Mark 6:6, Jesus "marveled because of their unbelief...."? How could people be exposed to such a vast number of convincing credentials, and yet walk away? For some there is an overt, willful love of sin. John 3:19 says, "...men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." People don't want to come to the light of righteousness because they love the darkness of sin, and the light will expose their sin. That is why they deny the evidence and even run the other way. Some people are attracted to Jesus' charisma and power. They are the thrill seekers who want to get in on the action but don't want to make a commitment. The church has plenty of them. They may claim to be born again and to be following Jesus, but they're just as lost as the ones who turn and run from the light. In chapter eight we are going to meet three such thrill seekers.

C. The Revelation of Christ

1. A Compassionate Preview (v. 16)

"When the evening was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with demons; and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick"

As soon as the Sabbath had come to a close, people came to Jesus with the sick and the demon possessed, and He healed all of them. It was always that way. One didn't have to search very long to find a miracle, for Jesus performed thousands of them. Whether the diseases were spiritual, as in the case of demon possession, or physical, Jesus healed them all. Jesus healed those who came to Him regardless of their faith or circumstances. In so doing, He was giving evidence of His Messiahship and deity. His acts of healing were part of His ongoing ministry: Matthew 12:15 says, "...and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all." Matthew 14:14 says, "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick." He virtually banished disease from Palestine.

If someone marched through the countryside healing people, he probably would attract a crowd. Even phony healers today can draw crowds. And people who go away from there as sick as they were when they showed up, often insist on trying to find another healer. So when a true healer appeared, naturally the crowd became larger and larger.

Now why did Jesus heal so many people? If we said it was because of His compassion, we would be right. He had compassion on people, despising disease and death because He knew they were the result of sin reigning in the world. Furthermore, Jesus healed the people because He was giving them a preview of His Kingdom. Do you know what will happen when Christ sets up His eternal Kingdom? There will be no more death, sorrow, pain, or sickness (Rev. 21:4).

But there is another reason why Jesus healed: His healings provided...

2. A Consummation of Prophecy (v. 17)

"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah, the prophet, saying, He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses."

The Old Testament had predicted many things about the Messiah of God, the Savior of the world, who, as the Lamb of God, would take away sin. Jesus showed Himself to be the very fulfillment of those prophecies. Among the many prophecies, was Isaiah 53:4-5 states that the Messiah would bear our griefs and sorrows and bring healing. In His earthly ministry, Jesus wonderfully dealt with disease and sickness, giving the people a taste of how His Kingdom would be free from all sickness, death, and sin.

a. Spiritual Healing

Matthew 8:17, which says, "...He Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses," is taken from Isaiah 53, an important chapter in the Bible that predicted the substitutionary death of Christ. Important to our present understanding are verses 4-6: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." This great prophecy tells us that Jesus died for our sins. When it says, "...with His stripes we are healed," it is not referring specifically to physical healing, but to the spiritual healing of the disease of sin. However, when sin is healed, sickness is indirectly healed as well, because sickness is a result of sin.

Some people ask, "Isn't there physical healing in the atonement?" The answer is yes, there is, but it isn't for now--it's for later. When Jesus died on the cross, did He take away our sin? Yes. Do you as a Christian still have trouble with sin? Yes. Jesus dealt with our sin but the fulfillment of that is yet future in the fullest sense. When He died on the cross did He destroy the enemy death? Yes. Do Christians die? Yes. The fulfillment of that is yet future. When He died on the cross, did He deal with disease? Yes. Do we still get sick? Yes. That also is to be completed in the future. Yes, there's healing in the atonement just as there's deliverance from death and a full restoration of the believer before God in the atonement--but still we wait for that day. People who say that Christians should never be sick because there's healing in the atonement, are forced to logically conclude that a Christian should never sin or die. It is no more correct to teach that Christians should be free from illness sick any more than to say that a Christian should be free from sin or death.

Christ died primarily for our sins, not our sicknesses: The gospel is good news about forgiveness not health (Ac. 26:18); Christ was made sin, not disease (2 Cor. 5:21); and Christ took away our sin not

our sickness (Jn. 1:29). We should never interpret Isaiah 53 any differently than to say that it primarily means that Jesus came and died to heal us from sin. First Peter 2:24 reinforces the fact that the cross was designed primarily to heal sin: "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed." Peter is talking about a spiritual healing from sin. But Matthew adds the physical dimension: He opens up to us the fact that Isaiah 53:4 extends from the sin problem to sickness. Yes, there's healing and wholeness in the atonement, but only as it comes to us in the fullness of salvation, when our bodies are glorified in His eternal Kingdom. Someday He will take away all our sicknesses away, but the healing that took place during His earthly ministry was only a foretaste of that which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

b. Sympathetic Feeling

1) Of the Pain of Sickness

Jesus also bore our sicknesses in that He sympathetically felt pain. Being omniscient, Christ knew what was in the heart of man; He could read the mind. In John 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus and without even asking the question he had in his head, Jesus was able to give him an answer. He often did that because He knew what was in a man (Jn. 2:24-25). Therefore, because He is omniscient, knowing everything you've ever felt, thought, or experienced, He can fully understand every pain you feel. That is why Hebrews 4:15 says that He is a sympathetic High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." I believe He has borne our sicknesses in that He sympathetically feels the pain we feel. When Jesus saw the crowds, "He was moved with compassion" (Mt. 9:36). The word "compassion" literally means "to suffer with." Jesus didn't contract our diseases, but He fully felt our pain.

2) Of the Power of Sin

When Christ bore our infirmities, He suffered from their root, the power of sin. For example, as He stood at the grave of Lazarus, who had been dead for many days, the Bible says He "groaned in His spirit" (Jn. 11:33). The passage also says that He wept. What was He groaning and weeping about? It wasn't just because Lazarus was dead for He was about to call him out of the grave. He was groaning and weeping because whenever He saw sickness, He anticipated the bitter reality of Calvary. He knew that the evil of sin caused all the pain and sorrow. Living His life in the shadow of the cross, He never saw sickness without feeling the pain of sin.

I think most supremely of all, Jesus bore our sicknesses in that when He went to the cross, He dealt with sin in such a devastating way that He guaranteed that disease would ultimately be destroyed. His healings were simply a preview of that marvelous day.

Although there were many Pharisees who hated Jesus because they loved their sin, loving darkness rather than light, there were others who were attracted to the magnetism of His personality. The latter group were the thrill seekers. In each case something kept them from genuine conversion. In the first case, it was...

I. PERSONAL COMFORT (vv. 18-20)

A. The Change of Scene (v. 18)

"Now, when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side."

Jesus and His disciples had been on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Since the crowd around them was becoming so massive and the Lord was physically exhausted, they entered a boat

to depart to the opposite shore. This afforded the Lord some necessary time for prayer, meditation, and respite from the pressures of the crowds. Such pressures, not necessarily part of God's plan, motivated Jesus to leave for ministry in a new place.

As He left, the issue of commitment faced certain people. By that time, many people were following Him. In fact, Mark tells us that several other boats followed behind Him like a little flotilla. So some people were at the very crux of decision: "Do I get in the boat and go, or do I stay?" Treating this event out of chronological order, Matthew presents his readers with two individuals who must make similar decisions. In a parallel passage, Luke introduces us to a third person.

B. The Choice of a Scribe (v. 19)

"And a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee wherever Thou goest."

The first man appeared to be interested in following Jesus, but he never did follow or come to true salvation, because he wanted personal comfort more than he wanted Christ.

1. His Office

This man was a scribe, an authority in the law having the official sanction of the Jewish authorities to teach. They were highly educated and were loyal to the system. Generally siding with the Pharisees, the scribes joined in their opposition to Christ. For those reasons, it was unusual for a scribe to want to follow Jesus.

2. His Offer

The scribe approached Jesus, saying, "Master [Gk. didaskalos = 'teacher, rabbi'], I will follow Thee wherever Thou goest." What a tremendous statement of dedication! Apparently, he was making a permanent commitment. I am sure the scribe thought that Jesus was the greatest teacher he had ever heard, and when he saw Christ's miracles, he concluded that they were from God. He was attracted to the unique and impressive person and power of Christ.

If that man showed up at a church today, most people would immediately sign him up. But Jesus wasn't so eager. He tested the scribe's true level of commitment:

C. The Challenge of the Savior (v. 20)

"And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

1. Discerning the Dedication

That is a proverbial saying that simply means Jesus would not regularly experience the basic comforts of life that wild animals had. When John 7:53 and 8:1 say "And every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives," the implication seems to be that He didn't have His own house. Often He would spend the night at the Mount of Olives in prayer with the Father. In Luke 8:2-3, there is a listing of some of the dear ladies who were hospitable to Him. Although, the

gospels tell us that Jesus occasionally stayed in a house in Bethany, He had few personal possessions. He had no guarantee of comfort to offer this scribe. Being able to read his mind, Jesus forced him to face the unpleasant reality of discomfort. Although the scribe was probably thinking, "Jesus, my life is full and rich; I'm already satisfied. I just want to add You to my lifestyle," Jesus refused to take advantage of such moments of popularity.

In John 2, after Jesus had done many miracles in Jerusalem, "...many believed in His name.... But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man" (vv. 23-25). Do you know what that means? It means He had no faith in their faith, because He knew it was only superficial thrill seeking. In fact, He classified such people in the parable of the sower as seed that immediately springs up, but is soon scorched by the sun because it has no root. There are people who want to jump on the Christian bandwagon, but as soon as the persecution starts and following Christ is not comfortable anymore, they want out.

The scribe was captivated by Jesus. But Christ knew that human nature is fickle and self-centered. He knew that it hungers for sensations: the crowd, the miracles, and the excitement. The commentator Lenski described the scribe's fascination with Jesus in this way: "He sees the soldiers on parade, he sees the fine uniforms, he sees the glittering arms, and is eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked" (The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel [Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1961]). His shallow eagerness is like a seed on stony ground that grows quickly but dies under the heat of persecution. Evidently, that man never understood the basic elements of discipleship: self-denial and suffering. After Jesus told the scribe what he could expect, you will notice that the next verse doesn't say anything about him. Do you know why? He probably wasn't around. He left in the white space between verses 20 and 21. The Lord put him under the spotlights and he left.

Jesus is so unlike us. We sugarcoat the message so everybody can get in as easily as possible. But Jesus told it like it was and in so doing kept a lot of insincere people from following unless they had a genuine commitment.

2. Paying the Price

Jesus affirmed that He was "the Son of man," a Messianic title that first appears in Daniel 7:13 and is used in the gospels eighty-eight times. The term, "Son of God" speaks of Jesus' deity, whereas "Son of man" emphasizes His humiliation. He is saying, "In My humble estate I don't even have the basic comforts of life that foxes and birds have. And if you're going to follow Me, you need to be willing to give them up." In fact, the New Testament makes it clear that persecution would accompany those who follow Christ and live righteously:

a. Matthew 10

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.... But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings.... But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.... And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake.... But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another...." (vv. 16a, 17-18a, 19, 22a, 23a).

b. John 15-16

"...The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute

you..." (15:20b); "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.... In the world ye shall have tribulation..." (16:1-2; 33b).

c. 2 Timothy 3

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (v. 12).

d. Matthew 5

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake" (v. 11).

e. Hebrews 11

Many heroes of the faith "(of whom the world was not worthy)" were tortured and killed (v. 38).

There is a price to pay for being a Christian, but the scribe wasn't willing to pay it; he just wanted to add excitement to his life. He was a potential Judas and nobody needs more of that type. So Jesus' explanation of the way things really are drove him away. If a young man expresses a desire for a scholarship, a school might ask him, "Are you prepared to scorn the delights of the world and to study diligently to attain your goal?" When an explorer wants to gather a team to explore some uncharted portion of the earth, many may want to join him for the adventure until he tells them about the snow and ice, the searing heat, the swamps, and the wild animals. When a young person wants to be a great athlete, the good trainer asks him, "Are you willing to make the sacrifice that it takes to be great?" We do Jesus a grave disservice if we lead people to believe that the Christian way is an easy way. It is not. There is no thrill like following Christ, and there's no glory like the end of a life of obedience to Him, but Jesus never said it would be easy--He always said you had to take up your cross. People who want personal comfort plus Christ merely want to add Jesus to their previously established pattern of life. He refuses such people as His disciples.

There is a second person in Matthew 8 who didn't obtain entrance into the Kingdom. That was because he preferred...

II. PERSONAL RICHES (vv. 21-22)

A. The Request of a Son (v. 21)

"And another of His disciples [followers] said unto Him, Lord, permit me first to go, and bury my father."

1. His Words

That sounds like a reasonable request, doesn't it? The son couldn't just forget about his father if he were dead; he would have to bury him quickly because Jewish people didn't embalm. Furthermore, Jewish custom taught that one needed to mourn for your father and mother for thirty days after they died. Genesis tells us that the last responsibility of a son in his final act of devotion to his parents was to make sure he cared for their burial (25:9; 35:29; 49:28-33; 50:13-14). So maybe he was talking about needing a month to mourn and take care of family business. He knew the Lord was on the move in His ministry and so he said, "I can't come now, but I'll try to catch up with You later after I bury my father." But there's a lot more here than meets the eye.

2. His Wait

The son's request was a colloquial phrase that appears in the Middle East even in contemporary times. A missionary in the Middle East was talking with a rich young Turk, advising him to go on a tour of Europe upon completing his education. When the Turk replied that he must first bury his father, the missionary expressed his sympathy that the young man's father had died. But the Turk explained that rather than being dead, his father was very much alive. He merely meant that he had to stay at home to fulfill his responsibility to his parents until his father died, before he could go on the suggested tour.

The implication of the phrase "to bury one's father" can mean that a person would prefer to wait until his father passes away so that he can receive his inheritance. That seems to be what the son in Matthew 8 had in mind. In his indecision about whether to follow or not, maybe he was thinking, "When I get my inheritance, think of how I can be used in the movement." The distraction of money took the courage and commitment out of his discipleship.

B. The Response of the Savior (v. 22)

"But Jesus said unto him, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead."

1. Explained

At first, that sharp statement seems to be almost nonsensical: how can dead people bury other dead people? The solution must be that the first kind of dead people refer to those who are spiritually dead. To this proverbial statement Luke adds in the parallel passage, "...but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (9:60). In other words, Jesus is saying, "Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead--let the secular world take care of its own issues--you have been called to the Kingdom of God. You are functioning on the wrong level. Let the system take care of itself." Jesus was not saying that Christians are forbidden to go to funerals, or that Christians are not supposed to make sure their father or mother get buried. He simply pointed out that the world's passing affairs regarding death and inheritance are part of a dead system.

The young man's priorities were fouled up. He had stressed secular matters above spiritual ones. As a result, he left somewhere between verses 22 and 23. Personal possessions were important to him; he had waited a long time for his inheritance and he wasn't going to leave now. He was attracted to Jesus by the thrill of the cause, but exhibited no commitment. He wanted his money more than he wanted the Messiah. He reminds me of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:

2. Exemplified

a. The Request

"And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16).

b. The Response

"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." (v. 21).

No one gets saved by selling all his possessions and giving the money to the poor, but if money stands in the way of a man's relationship to God, he will have to get past it if he's going to be saved. Money distracts many people. It can prevent them from being committed to Christ and therefore entering His Kingdom. Although the rich young ruler claimed he had kept all the law, Jesus knew that

there was yet an obstacle that stood between him and his faith: money.

c. The Regret

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (v. 22)

He was sorry he couldn't get in the Kingdom without holding onto his money. How foolish! But many people are like that. How sad it is that personal comfort and personal riches keep people from coming to Christ. They may be initially attracted to Him, but when they discover the price of commitment, they walk away--lost forever.

There was a third would-be disciple that came that day. Although Matthew doesn't tell us about him, Luke does. His obstacle to following Christ was his...

III. PERSONAL RELATIONS

Luke 9 says "And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, who are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (vv. 61-62).

A. The Pull of Parents

Jesus cited a popular proverb of His day that was attributed to the Greek poet Hesiod from 800 B.C.: You can't plough a straight furrow when looking backward. That illustrates the need for a full commitment to one's goals. Jesus knew that the young man was more attached to his parents than he would be to Him. It wasn't his wife and kids he wanted to bid farewell to; it was his mommy and daddy. He was still dependent upon the influence of his parents. Jesus knew that intimidating emotional pleas and threats of being ostracized would keep that man from following Him as a disciple.

There are a lot of people like that. They would come to Christ but they're afraid of what their family might say or do. Not wanting to be alienated, they stay in a false religious system or they keep from following Christ out of fear. Such people are trying to plough a furrow while looking backwards.

B. The Parallel About Priorities

Matthew 10:34-37 says, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me." If devotion to one's parents holds a person back from full commitment to Christ, then he is not fit to enter the Kingdom of God. That is not talking about entering Christian service; it is talking about salvation: You can't get saved with priorities that demand more devotion than Christ. Jesus offered nothing to the young man who refused to commit his whole heart to Him. There is no such thing as halfhearted discipleship.

Personal relations, personal riches, and personal comfort all stand in the way of following Christ. Even though Jesus said in John 6:37 that "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out," He will

not accept those who have no intention of making a true commitment. Such insincerity usually becomes evident when the demands become too great. That was the case later in the chapter when Jesus said, "...Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you" (v. 53). What did He mean by that? You either take all, or you get nothing. After Jesus had made other challenging statements, many would-be disciples lost interest in following Him: "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (v. 66). They weren't willing to make a full commitment, so He turned them down. Therefore, the verse needs to be qualified for our understanding: The one who comes to Jesus, He will not reject if he comes with a Beatitude attitude—begging in his spirit, mourning over his sin, meek before God, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, crying for mercy, and willing to be persecuted, hated and reviled for His sake.

Focusing on the Facts

1. In spite of the fact that the words, works, death, and resurrection of Jesus identify Him as the Christ of God, how did many people respond to Him?
2. What seemed to be the overall response to the different elements of Christ's life listed on pages 1-3?
3. How is it possible that people could be exposed to such a vast number of convincing credentials, and yet respond the way that most did?
4. Give two reasons why Jesus healed people.
5. How is the healing in Isaiah 53 primarily to be understood?
6. In what sense is there physical healing in the atonement? Why is it inconsistent to teach that Christians should never be sick because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross?
7. As our sympathetic high priest, what can Jesus feel on our behalf (Heb. 4:15)?
8. Knowing that He could raise Lazarus, why might Jesus have groaned "in His spirit"?
9. When Jesus went to the cross and dealt with sin in such a devastating way, what was guaranteed with regard to sickness and disease?
10. Why might Jesus have wanted to depart from the multitudes to the other side of the Sea of Galilee?
11. What did the scribe apparently want more than following Jesus?
12. Why was it unusual for a scribe to want to follow Jesus?

13. According to Jesus' proverbial statement, who or what had more creature comforts than He did?
14. Why didn't Jesus put His confidence in the faith of those who seemed eager to follow Him (Jn. 2:23-25)?
15. With regard to the parable of the sower, what type of soil condition could the scribe be compared to?
16. How can we assume the scribe responded to Jesus? Why?
17. Beside the humiliation of having no comfort, what does the New Testament say will also accompany those who would follow Jesus in living righteously?
18. Although the son's request to bury his father sounded reasonable, what could have been his true intention, taken in the context of Jesus' response?
19. Explain the meaning of Jesus' response to the son "...let the dead bury their dead...but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Mt. 8:22; Lk. 9:60). In what way were the young man's priorities out of order?
20. How can money prevent a person from being saved?
21. When is a person not fit for the Kingdom of God, according to Luke 9:61-62? Why?

Pondering the Principles

1. If you have you been miraculously healed by Jesus, or you know a close friend or relative who has, take a moment and renew your thankfulness to God. On the other hand, if you know someone who is suffering right now, pray that God would give grace in the midst of it and healing if He so desires it. Next, read and meditate upon Hebrews 4:14-16, praising God for Jesus, our great high priest, who can sympathetically identify with us and provide "grace to help in time of need" (v. 16b); and also Revelation 21:1-7, praising God that someday physical suffering, sorrow, and death will be vanquished.
2. Modern society emphasizes leisure time, and there are probably many people who have no desire to work hard. However, there are many who are "workaholics" because of our society's fast pace. Even in Christian circles, there are those who would "burn themselves out for the Lord." It is great to be sacrificially committed to Christ, but not by failing to provide financial and spiritual support for your family (Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:8), or at the expense of one's health (Ac. 14:5-6; 1 Tim. 5:23). Notice the example of Jesus, who, in the midst of the exhausting work of His ministry, would take time for spiritual, physical, and emotional refreshment (Mt. 8:18; Mk. 6:31-32; Lk. 6:12; Jn. 18:1-2). As dedicated as you may be to your work and ministry, plan now to allow time for necessary rest and refreshment. If you are part of a family, discuss together some places to go and some things to do that can not only provide mutual enjoyment, but also a revitalized outlook on your daily

responsibilities.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5. Evaluate yourself honestly. Are you similar in any respects to the scribe who loved comfort, the son who wanted to wait for his inheritance, or the young man who was still tied to his former relationships? Do you sense that you are only following Jesus at a distance, or are you actually postponing a full commitment to Him as you focus your attention on some lesser priority? If you were to sit down with Jesus in a conversation and talk about the direction your discipleship is heading, what do you think He would say? Meditate upon Philippians 3:7-14. Commit the changes you need to make into God's care. To help ensure your commitment, get involved in a small group that can hold you accountable for your goals.

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