

Three Things that Keep People from Christ

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Well, we've been studying the book of Titus but we have some very special things planned over the next few weeks, and so I didn't want to launch into the next section of Titus for a while. And I was reflecting, as I often do, on the Christmas season, I spend a lot of time doing radio talk shows by telephone and talking to people about Christmas and what it means. Sometimes even unbelieving people who called in and wanted to talk about it. And, of course, I watch the world as you do go by and nominally, superficially celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, understanding this is the Son of God in human flesh who died and rose again and all of that gospel data that they know. And I watch the world with that sort of shallow apprehension of fact and truth, look at Christ, celebrate this particular time of year and then go right back to the way they've always lived, if in fact they ever changed anything even during Christmas.

They have some kind of interest in Christ, some kind of fascination about Christ, maybe some appreciation of Him. But it never ever causes a change in their life. They ultimately reject Him. And I began to sort of pose the question in my own mind, "How can people do that? Why do people reject Christ?"

I mean, if someone came along and said, "Look, I want to forgive all your sins and remove them as far as the east is from the west so that they'll never be remembered again and you'll be eternally free from guilt, shame and any punishment." That sounds like a fairly good offer. You can't imagine a rational person saying, "I'm not interested."

If someone comes along and says, "Look, there's a real possibility that you're going to spend forever in a burning pit where you're going to live forever in torment and torture and you're going to cry out in pain forever and I want to deliver you from that place. And I want to take you to a place called heaven where everything is bliss and everything is joy and rejoicing and happiness and fulfillment and satisfaction." Now you would assume that any rational person would respond by saying, "That sounds like a pretty good offer. I think I'll take that."

Somebody came along and said, "I want to tell you about life. Life can be frightening, life can be terrorizing, life can be uncertain, life can be debilitating, life can be painful, life can be sad, life can be unfulfilling. I want to change all that. I want to fill your life with joy. I want to fill your life with

abundance. I want to fill your life with peace. I want you to be able to live life in this world to the maximum level. I want to make possible for you the fulfillment of every relationship and every experience." Sounds like a pretty good offer, doesn't it?

And those are precisely the things that Jesus Christ offers. And they are precisely the things that people refuse. Why? Because they don't understand them? No. There's a major hindrance here and it is at the heart of understanding a gospel call, or a gospel presentation. We're being told today that if we...if we were more effective in marketing the gospel, more people would be buying it. If we were more clever in presenting it, more people would respond to it. If our presentations were more entertaining, or more dramatic, or more attractive, if we could just throw in some added stuff like signs and wonders and health and wealth and a little worldly fun, we could get people to buy Christ much more easily.

Is that really so? Is it a matter of marketing strategy? What is it that keeps people from responding to Christ? What causes people to ignore the truth and reject Him? Even understanding what that truth offers?

Well, I think the Lord Jesus gave us deep insight into that question and gave us the answer in some illustrations found in Matthew 8 and Luke 9. Let's look at Matthew 8 and then in a moment I'll read you from Luke chapter 9.

Matthew chapter 8 verse 18, "Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him He gave orders to depart to the other side. A certain scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' 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.' And another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me and allow the dead to bury their own dead.'"

Then over in Luke chapter 9 we find the parallel passage. Verse 57, "As they were going along the road someone said to Him, 'I'll follow You wherever You go.' 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.' And He said to another, 'Follow Me.' And he said, 'Permit me first to go and bury my father.' And He said to him, 'Allow the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'"

Rather strange responses on the part of Jesus, are they not? Generally by our measurement. Because what you have here is basically three people who are interested in following Christ. They even go so far as to say, "I'll follow You wherever You go. I want to be a part of this. I want to join the group." After all the incomparable, matchless, lovely, gracious Lord Jesus Christ had put on a

demonstration of power and wisdom, the likes of which nobody had ever seen, His words and His works, the very demeanor by which He carried Himself, His affections, everything about Him was attractive.

The people of His time saw many things that verified that He was a supernatural person, that He was, in fact, God who had come to save. For example, His authority was apparent. The people were astonished at His teaching for He taught them as one having authority, it says in Matthew 7:28 and 29. His words were absolutely unique. In John 7:46 they commented, "Never a man spoke like this man." Nobody had ever talked like He talks. His works were undeniably from God. The blind man...the blind man said, you remember, in John 9, "It is a marvelous thing that you don't know where He is from, and yet He has opened my eyes. If this man were not from God, He couldn't do this." His authority and His words and His works were supernatural.

His wisdom was superhuman. From time to time they were so astounded at His wisdom that all they could do was walk away, themselves amazed that anyone could be so wise. In fact, it says in Matthew 22:22, sort of summing it all up, "When they heard these words, they marvelled." They marveled, and that was in response to what He said about, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," but many times He confounded them with His wisdom.

His purity was undeniable. In John 8:46 He said, "Which of you convicts Me of sin? Who has a sin against Me? Who can identify any iniquity in My life?" And no one could. His truthfulness was unquestionable. And He said, "If I say the truth, why do you not believe Me? If what I say is true and you can verify it and you know it's true, it accords with what you know to be truth and what you know the Old Testament has taught, if what I'm saying is true, then why don't you believe it?"

His power fascinated them. Luke 8:25 they said, "What manner of man is this, He commands even the winds and water and they obey Him. What kind of person are we dealing with? With what kind of power?" His provision astounded them. He fed the multitudes, creating food for them and then said to them, "You seek Me because you did eat the loaves and were filled," John 6:26. They saw, they experienced, they ate the very things He created.

His healing took away their sickness. Even here in Matthew 8 He's just accomplished healing miracles and even made a comment about His healing power in verses 16 and 17, the prior texts to the one I read. When the multitudes, for example, in Matthew 9, saw Him heal the paralytic, they marvelled and glorified God who had given such power to man.

He was astounding and everything about Him was astounding. His love overwhelmed them. In John 11:36 they said, "Behold, how He loved him," commenting on His love for Lazarus. His dominance of demons shocked them. They had never seen anybody who could control demons totally. When He

cast out the demons in the next chapter, Matthew 9, the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never so seen in Israel." No one has ever been able to do this. His judgment was awesome. He came to the fig tree that time in Matthew 21, He cursed it, it died on the spot and they marveled. They were astounded. They were amazed. Even His composure, His unruffled character, His absolute confidence was beyond human. Here He was silent before Pilate, showing no fear, giving no defense, answering not a word so that the governor marveled greatly, it says in Matthew 27:14. His teaching was something like they had never heard. In fact, they said of Him, "How does He know anything because He hasn't been to school?" John 7. Even as a boy in Luke 2:47, they were utterly astonished at His ability to talk in the temple there and talk about theology. His independence made them shudder. The Pharisees marveled that He didn't first wash before dinner. What does that mean? Well, He defiled their ceremonies. He acted completely independent of the system.

His tender condescension shocked them. They marveled at Him because He talked with a woman at the well who was a Samaritan, He was a Jew. They marveled at Him because He hung around tax collectors, Publicans, and sinners and prostitutes. Everything about Him was astonishing. Everything about Him was marvelous. Everything about Him was supernatural. There was never any question, that's why Mark 6:6 says, "He marveled at their unbelief." Equally amazing was the fact that they could see this all and reject. He said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." "He that believes in Me shall never die." He said He had come to take away sin, the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for the world. And yet He came unto His own, His own received Him not and He Himself said, "You will not come to Me that you might have life. You choose death, I give you life. You choose hell, I give you heaven. You choose sin, I give you forgiveness."

And finally at the end they just screamed, "We will not have this man to reign over us. Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him." And you ask the question...why? How can such an offer be spurned on such a broad level? Why does the world continue to reject? Why are there only a few who come to Christ?

Well the answer in general is found in John chapter 3...and the obvious answer. John 3, "This is the judgment, the judgment on the world, that the light has come into the world...that is Christ who is the light...and men loved the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil." Simply stated, they love sin...they love sin. And the real issue is, they don't want to give up sin...that's the bottom line. They don't want to give up sin. They want to hold on to it. They would rather have their way than receive what Christ offers. It's unimaginable, isn't it?

Now, it's the same today. People reject the Lord Jesus Christ, they pay Him some tacit attention around Christmas and maybe a little thought or two at Easter time. But generally they reject Him, even when they know the gospel and when they fully understand the gospel they reject Him. They know what He offers. They know what He came to provide and they reject it. Some of you sitting in this church have been coming here for months, maybe even years...we hear testimonies to that effect

in baptisms frequently...and you still haven't responded to Christ. It is inexplicable from the rational viewpoint that you would reject Christ when you know what you know about what He offers, but the reason you do is because you cling to your sin. You love it. You hold it. It's more important to you than anything else.

You say, "How does all this fit into Matthew chapter 8?" Well I think Jesus does a very, very good thing for us, He helps us to understand this sinful attitude by putting it into three general categories into which it falls. What He shows us here is how sin manifests itself in three common ways that cause people to reject Christ...very simple illustrations of the general categories of human sin which cause people to reject Christ.

The first one is personal comfort, or personal lifestyle might be a better way to say it, personal lifestyle. The second one is personal riches, personal possessions. And the third one is personal relations...personal relations. And they're illustrated here. People's sins fall into the categories of personal pleasure, personal lifestyle, what I want to do with my life, personal possessions, riches, materialism, things I want and relationships. And those are the things that hold people. They chose their own personal lifestyle, their own personal riches, their own personal relationships over Christ. And here you have that illustrated.

And interestingly enough in this particular text and in the Luke text, in each case these people appeared to be prospects for salvation. They wanted...in fact they were already disciples, in a sense, as we shall note. In fact, they are even called disciples in verse 21. So they had already started to follow Christ. So we're not talking about the worst of men, from the human view, we're probably talking about the best, those who were morally self-conscious, who wanted to do right things and good things and noble things and were religious people. But even they illustrate the truth of the categories into which sin falls that keeps people from Christ.

Furthermore, they would all have wanted to follow Christ if they could have had Christ and the other stuff they were holding on to. And there are many today who would suggest that they had every right to have both. They were attracted by the signs and wonders, if you will, they were attracted by the incredible things that surrounded Jesus Christ, the amazing personality that He was. Their emotions were fired. Their feelings were touched. And they really wanted to follow and under the terms of most evangelistic strategies today would have been labeled as Christians. But Jesus didn't accept any of them.

What sin keeps men from Christ? First of all, the sins that fit into the category of personal lifestyle. Look at verse 18, in Matthew 8. "When Jesus saw a crowd around Him He gave orders to depart to the other side." That's just a little note to let you know that the heat was on. Back in chapter 8 verse 1 He already had a multitude following Him, and then He does some healings and this just excites the crowd just at a fever pitch. It's at the point now where He could be thrust into some situation that

wouldn't be the will of God. They could begin to try to force the issue with Him, and He knows it's time to leave. And so, in effect, in verse 18 He says, "Guys, we've got to get out of here. This thing is reaching a point of no return, we've got to move." So He gave orders to depart to the other side. It's a little process to get there, but they needed to start moving away from this massive crowd that had been attracted by these healings.

And so He does give them that order, but before they can leave and this is a break, and there are people there that know it. He's got around Him some followers. It's not yet chapter 10 where He really identifies the Twelve. He's got these followers around Him and they're there because they're fascinated by Him. And as He says "we're leaving," and there's already certainly a recognizable inner core there, and they're going to go with Him, some others that are a little bit further out in the circle of would-be followers, they start to say, "Wait a minute, we've got to talk to You before You go." And the first one says, "Teacher, I'll follow You wherever You go. I'll go wherever You go."

Now it was evening, Mark 4:35 tells us that. The Lord was tired, even sleepy, down in verse 25 He goes to sleep in a boat during a storm, so you know how sleepy He was. He needed some relief from the pressing crowds, some time to pray, some time to sleep, some time to get away from the misguided enthusiasm of the crowd that could reach too high of a fever pitch. So the order was given, "Go to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee." But just before they could get that in motion, three men appear.

And the first one is a scribe, look at verse 19, he's a certain scribe. Ah, this is great. You see, scribes were themselves the teachers of the law. They were qualified by the Jewish authorities, they were highly educated and loyal to the system. They were the interpreters of the law. They were the religious lawyers of their day. They were generally hostile to Jesus. They had already manifested their hostility earlier in the book of Matthew, we saw some of it back in chapter 5 verse 20. You see it all the way through the life of Jesus, the scribes and the Pharisees always taking positions against Christ because Jesus Christ threatened their system. So here is one of them, a teacher of the law, an expert in the law, knew the Old Testament, was fascinated by Jesus Christ. Surely Jesus was the most powerful individual he had ever seen. We know that in ancient times and certainly in Jewish history, they tended to follow great lights, rabbis who were great lights at any era of time, great teachers, and was certainly the greatest teacher this scribe had ever heard. And even though Jesus stood for the destruction of all that was narrow, legalistic, and unbiblical that the scribes and Pharisees stood for, He was still irresistible to this man. His personality and His power he couldn't resist. And here Jesus has an opportunity to pluck off a scribe, that would be a real trophy.

And he's a very respectful scribe because he says in verse 19, "Teacher," that's the word "rabbi," "master," didaskalos. He recognizes this miracle worker from Nazareth as a very gifted rabbi and teacher. And he says, "I am willing to follow You wherever You go. I want to go with You. I want to be in on this miracle power. I want to be in on this profundity that comes out of Your lips."

But Jesus had seen this before. This isn't new. He had seen people attracted to Him for the wrong reasons. In John chapter 2 the record tells us in verse 23 when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover at the feast, many believed in His name, beholding the signs which He was doing. They too saw the wonders and the signs and the miracles and they were enamored of that and emotionally excited about it. "But Jesus on His part was not entrusting Himself to them for He knew all men and because He didn't need anyone to bear witness concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." He knew what was in them wasn't legitimate. To put it simply, He had no faith in their faith. It was superficial, it was shallow. It was an attraction based upon the phenomena of what they saw, the supernatural. There were always those who wanted to follow the miracles. There were always those who wanted to cash in on a moment's popularity. There were always those who emotionally became excited about this individual. He knew that...Jesus did...that human nature hungers for sensation, it hungers for the supernatural, the amazing. He knew it was fickle. He knew it was unstable. He knew it was self-centered.

So here's the scribe, he sees the crowds, the multitudes, the excitement. He hear the teaching, this is profound, this is powerful. I want to follow this man, I want to go wherever He goes. He was ready. He was eager. And his offer was very complete, "I'll go wherever You go." Boy, I'll tell you what, if that were today in our contemporary kind of evangelism, he would become a statistic, a convert. Lenski(?), the Lutheran commentator writes, "He sees the soldiers on parade in fine uniforms and the glittering arms and is eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps, unmarked." He doesn't understand the cost. He never really understood the basic principle of discipleship, self-denial, self-sacrifice, suffering, service. And Jesus knew that. All he could see was the sensation and sensation will always attract a certain level of follower.

So Jesus hits him with the real issue. Listen to this response. You would have thought maybe Jesus would have said, "Oh that's a wonderful offer, I accept. Come along." He didn't. 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."

What kind of an answer is that? You would have thought He would have said, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," or something like that. Or, "The Lord is going to make you healthy, wealthy and wise." "You follow Me and I promise you paths of clover." No. He says, "You need to know one thing, I'm homeless. You follow Me, you're homeless. You willing to do that?"

He calls Himself the Son of Man, the first of eighty times in the gospels, and that's His term of humiliation, His favorite term for Himself, fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of Daniel 7:13, the title of His humiliation. He was humbled, Paul tells us in Philippians 2, and here is His humiliation...the foxes have holes. There were foxes in that land, lots of them and they had their burrows and they went into them at night. And birds have nests, places where they go. But the Son of Man in His

humiliation doesn't have any place to lay His head. He had to sleep in a boat in a storm. Wild animals, birds are better off in terms of creature comforts than I am.

What's He saying? Well what He's really saying is, there's a price to follow Me. It isn't just a matter of lining up and signing up to follow the sensation. There's a price. The life that I live and the walk that I walk is a walk of suffering. You have to choose the spiritual over the fleshly, the eternal over the temporal, the heavenly treasure over the earthly comfort. What I'm asking from you, He said, is a new lifestyle. You have to become what Paul called the off-scouring of the world, the filth of the world, rejected. You see, Jesus didn't want followers who were swept away by emotion, who were carried by the ebb and tide of their feelings. He wanted people who followed Him who understood fully what was involved, a total change in lifestyle, self-denial, self-sacrifice.

You see, what this young scribe wanted was to add some excitement to his life. Jesus wanted him to change his life. He might have been a potential Judas, there might have been two of them if Jesus had let him in, cause he was following for the same reasons, apparently, that Judas did. He was looking for personal gain, personal glory, personal sensation, satisfaction. But he wasn't about to change his life style. And when he heard that Jesus was homeless, that was the end of the discussion, he doesn't say anything. He drops off the page of Scripture for good. He's like stony ground, the seed went in, in Matthew 13:20 and 21, and a little plant started up but there was rock bed underneath the roots and they couldn't get to the water and the sun came out and there was no water and it burned and it died. There was an emotional exuberance about this Jesus but not to the point where it could endure anything. And Jesus says you're going to have to endure...self-denial, self-sacrifice.

Listen, that category of sin is very common. People don't come to Christ because they don't want to change their life style. They are not willing to make sacrifices in their life style. They don't want to change their behavior. They don't want to change the things that they do. They don't want to say no to their pleasures. They don't want to say no to their creature comforts. They don't want to change their lifestyle and the Lord demands that you be willing to do that. And that was this man's problem.

Look at the second man. In verse 21, another of the disciples, so he was a follower like the other. Disciple used in a very sense, simply means a follower or a learner. He said to Him, "Lord," and he's chiming in with the first guy saying, you know, in effect, "I'm going to go wherever You go too but first, permit me to go and bury my father."

You say, "Well that sounds like a reasonable request, I mean, after all, a body lying around could smell bad pretty fast. And doesn't the Old Testament say that when somebody died they were to be buried immediately? Yes...yes. It was a noble thing to do. Back in Genesis 50 verse 5, "My father made me swear saying, 'Behold, I'm about to die in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Cana and there ye shall bury me.' Now therefore please let me go and bury my father, then I'll return."

Joseph talking to Pharaoh. I've got to bury my father, that's a noble thing to do, that's part of biblical history. You've got to do that. The Jews didn't embalm and even Lazarus in four days "stinketh," it says in John's gospel. So they got that body in the grave as fast as they could. Remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? He was taken off the cross, taken immediately to the tomb and buried, there wasn't any waiting time. And it was very customary that this be done and here's a man who seems to be asking a very reasonable thing. According to Jewish custom and tradition, burial took place immediately after death and in Israel giving an honorable burial to the dead person was considered a duty and a kindness and it was the highest level of service and normally the responsibility of the oldest son as his final act of devotion to his father. You will see that all through Genesis, Genesis 25, 35, 49 and 50. And that was just normal behavior.

So he says, "I know You're leaving the area, I know You're going away, and I want to follow You wherever You go, but I need to bury my father." Well the Twelve were ready to go and there were some others who obviously like this man are hanging around the fringes. In verse 23 Jesus entered a boat and left and there were other boats that went with Him so there were some other disciples following along. But this man isn't quite ready. He's attracted but he's not quite ready. He has to bury his father. What does that mean?

Interesting statement really. It doesn't mean that the father is dead. Let me give you an illustration. One writer tells about an incident related by a Syrian missionary. And just to show you that this is a Middle-Eastern custom, this missionary was friendly with an intelligent and rich young Turk. He advised him to make a tour of Europe at the close of his education so his education would be complete and his mind would be broadened. The Turk answered, "I must first of all bury my father." The missionary expressed his sympathy and sorrow that the young man's father had died, but the young Turk explained that his father is still very much alive and that what he meant was that he must fulfill all his duties to his parents and to his relatives before he could leave them to go on this suggested tour, that in fact he couldn't leave home until after his father's death which might not happen for many years.

That's what he meant. When he said I must bury my father, he said I have to wait around till my father dies. Why? Because it's my duty to my father and I will receive the inheritance. You think I'm about to walk away from that? I'm going to follow you but not till my father dies. I'm going to hang around to get my part of the money, the loot. That's what he's really saying. He's saying...Yeah, I'm interested in You and You fascinate me, and I really do want to follow You, but, man, I can't forfeit my fortune." And that was what was on his heart.

And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, follow Me and allow the dead to bury their own dead." You let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. You let the system take care of itself. You let the world take care of itself. He's not saying you're forbidden to go to a funeral or to bury your father. He's just saying those are trivial matters when compared to matters of the Kingdom. Those things don't

matter. That's why He said, as it's recorded in Luke chapter 9, the text we read, He said to the man, "You go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God." In other words, get on with the spiritual enterprise. You let the world's passing fortunes take care of themselves. you just follow Me and preach the Kingdom.

But the man's priorities were fouled up. He wasn't about to follow Christ until he had gotten his money. Secular matters, Jesus said, belong to secular people. If you're going to be a spiritual man, you've got to be about spiritual matters. Well it proved to be that the man was not a spiritual man because he wanted to stick with the secular issues. He's like the rich young ruler, remember Matthew 19, came to Jesus...how do I get eternal life? And Jesus said to him, "Take what you have and sell it, and give the money to the poor." And he went away, he left.

That was it, he split, he wanted eternal life but not that bad. There are a lot of people like that. They...they look at Christ, they attracted to Christ, they're enamored about Christ, they see some things in Christ that attract them, that fascinate them, that astonish them even and they understand that He's offering the forgiveness of sins and they understand that He's offering heaven, and they understand that He's offering abundant life, but they are in love with another god and that god is money and possessions and all the stuff that goes with that. They're attracted, astounded, amazed, even overwhelmed by Jesus, but to walk away from the loot and the money...no way, the price is too high.

So, you see, here again you have a very, very clear illustration of a category of sins which keep people from Christ. The love of money, the love of possessions...John said, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father isn't in Him." They're mutually exclusive, you can't serve God and...what?...money. That keeps people from Christ. They want to hold on to their possessions and their money and they live for that. It isn't that you can't have possessions, it's that you think of them differently. They live for that, to achieve and attain and garner and store up like the rich fool who had all the barns and loaded up all the stuff...and then his soul was required of him. It's what Jesus had in mind when He said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." But that's what people do. On the one hand people reject Christ because they don't want to change their lifestyle. ON the other hand they reject Christ because they live for money and possessions.

And here's some well-meaning guys. And Jesus doesn't say, "Come on in and we'll straighten you out later, just believe on Me and we'll fix the rest as we move down the path." He says, "Either you understand that you're going to be living a wholly different lifestyle and that you're going to be turning away from the things which you possess to do what I ask you to do, or you can't come into My Kingdom." Very strong. There's no pragmatism in this kind of evangelism.

And then the third would-be disciple appears over in Luke 9 and we have to turn over there to see this one. In Luke chapter 9 and his problem was personal relations. He illustrates a whole category of

people who don't come to Christ because it will cost them relationally. He said, "I'll follow You...verse 61...I'll follow You, Lord," it's good that he uses the word "Lord," I mean, it's very honorable and respectful. "But first permit me to say goodbye to those at home."

You say, "What's wrong with that? I mean, there's no harm in a goodbye." Well the implication here is it's far more than just some simple reasonable goodbye. What Jesus saw in the heart of this man was a malingering apron string. He wanted to go home and ask his mother if it was okay, or his father, or check with the patriarch, whoever it might have been, his grandfather. Family stood in the way, relationships. The family in this case, or whoever was there in his home is emblematic of people who don't come to Christ because other people threaten them. "I don't want to come to Christ, it will cost me a relationship with this person or that person, or these people."

Many people are kept from Jesus for fear of being put out of the family, fear of being alienated from their friends, emotionally ostracized. They're embarrassed to be identified with Christ. They'll be laughed at and mocked and they're not about to do that. They have a certain reputation among unbelievers. They want to maintain that reputation. They want their friends and they're not willing to make the sacrifice.

There are young people who won't come to Christ because they don't want to go against their parents. I talked to a young man who wouldn't acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord even though he knew all of the truth because his father had died an anti-Protestant Catholic and he said, "The day I acknowledge that Protestant evangelical theology is correct, I will also have to say my father is in hell and I can't bring myself to say that." That kind of pressure, they don't want to sever a relationship between a living and a dead person.

Matthew chapter 10 verse 34, Jesus said, "Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth, I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. And he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me." I mean, it's going to cost you relationships. There are some people who aren't willing to make that sacrifice.

Jesus said to him, "No one...verse 62...after putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." Very simple agrarian word picture. When you take hold of a plow you better look forward if you're going to plow straight forward, right? You can't be looking back all the time or you're going to be all over the place. And Jesus says, if you're going to be a legitimate disciple, you put your furrow in the ground and you go forward and you don't worry about relationships. There are people who don't want to come to Christ because they'll lose a lover, they're bound into a sexually immoral relationship, they'll lose a family, they'll lose friends. Jesus said you can't have a divided heart, you can't plow a furrow forward looking backwards. That's unacceptable. Half a heart is no heart at all.

Here's a guy who needed to go home for some fond farewells. He didn't understand the seriousness of eternal matters. He had a trivial purpose betrayed that his family was more important to him than Christ. Now he's not referring particularly to his wife and children, but going back and getting the permission of those who were in authority over him, or those who were the patriarchs in his family. He says you're not fit for My Kingdom if that's your concern.

People reject Christ no matter how magnanimous and wonderful the offer is because of sin. That sin seems to find itself in these three categories. Here are people who otherwise would have come to Christ. All Jesus had to say them was, "Look, don't worry at all about your personal lifestyle, just take Me as Savior and we'll work on your lifestyle somewhere down the road. Don't worry about this personal concern about riches and material things, who knows, Jesus may make you very wealthy. And don't even give a thought about how these other folks feel about it, you just commit your life to the Lord and you go back and you just share with them and do your best to keep that relationship all it should be. You don't have to make any radical kind of commitment."

So here are a people who might fit very well today in the no-cost disciple kind of evangelism, the signs and wonders kind of evangelism, the health, wealth, prosperity kind of evangelism. They might just be classic, classic examples for those kinds of people, converts to those kinds of movements. But as far as Jesus is concerned, they're not adequate.

Personal lifestyle, preferences, personal riches and money, personal relationships keep people from the full commitment to Christ, in which you say, "I will give up my lifestyle, I will give up all that I possess if that's what You ask, I will give up every relationship if it is needed, that is how important Christ Jesus is to me." And until you're willing to say that, Jesus said you're not worthy to be My disciple.

It doesn't mean that He'll ask you to give up everything. I didn't have to give up my family when I became a Christian, they're Christians. The Lord has not made me poverty stricken. In His goodness as I seek the Kingdom, He has blessed. The Lord has changed my lifestyle to some degree as He does everyone's who becomes a Christian. But He hasn't asked me to become a monk. But the willingness was there because the level of desperation about sin and repentance and desire for what Christ offers was so overwhelming that the true repenting person comes with a Beatitude attitude, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, as Jesus said in Matthew 5.

William McDonald wrote, "We are not told how these disciples responded, but there's a strong implication that they left Christ to make a comfortable place for themselves in the world." And I love, "And to spend their lives hugging the subordinate." To spend their lives hugging the subordinate.

It's sad. Through the centuries people have seen the same things in Christ that these people saw because they have Bibles, they can read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They can marvel at His authority, His words, His works, His wisdom, His purity, His truthfulness, His power, His provision. They can marvel at His healing, at His love, at His dominance, His judgment, His composure, His teaching, His independence, His compassion, His condescension. They can marvel at all of that but myriads of people who marvel at that walk away just like these three. And Bishop Ryle once wrote, "The saddest road to hell is the one that runs under the pulpit past the Bible and through the midst of warnings and invitations."

What does this say to us? Well, we can't evangelize in a Burger King manner theology, have it your way. It doesn't work that way. Sometimes I fear that the gospel we preach plays into the hands of these very errors. Jesus wants you rich. Jesus wants you happy. Jesus wants you giving up nothing. It's man-centered rather than Christ-centered. Our gospel can't be altered to promise people the very things that Jesus says they have to be willing to give up. But so often it is.

I guess the sum of it would be...would be Matthew 10:38, just to close. The sum of it would be these words, "He who doesn't take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

If you're not willing to take up your cross, put your life on the line, the life you found, whatever its material benefits, whatever its lifestyle might be, whatever its relationships, if you're not willing to lose it, you'll never find the true life. Strong words, aren't they, from Jesus? But true. We have to know that there are compelling things in the heart of sinful men that keep them from the glorious and gracious invitation of Christ. It's unimaginable to those of us who have come to Christ because we...we have better relationships, greater riches and a more wonderful lifestyle. But the world clings to its own stuff and that's why, in spite of the offer, they reject Christ. May it not be so in your life. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we pray that if there are any here this morning who have rejected You because of the love of sin, their own personal pleasures and desires and lifestyle, their own longing for riches and worldly things and relationships, be there good or bad ones, honorable or dishonorable, and those are holding them back from coming to Christ, Lord, may that hold be broken and may they come to know Christ and be true followers who say...I'm willing to take up my cross and follow You, whatever it costs, whatever You ask, I'll follow. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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