

What Kind of Man is This? Lord of Our Life, Part 1: This is NOT a Job
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

Are you happy with your job? There are lots of people who would say, “no”. Maybe it’s time for a career move? If you’re thinking about it, there is lots of help on the Internet. Here are some suggestions from a job placement company called “Indeed.com”. They posted an article called, “13 Things to Consider When Looking for a Job”. We won’t hit on all 13 points, but here are a few:



1. Company history: Is the company stable? You don’t want to work for a company that’s here today and gone tomorrow. According to Indeed.com, stability needs to be your first concern.
3. Job location: What kind of commute are you looking at? You don’t want to spend too much time traveling.
4. Working hours: Nobody wants to work too long, right? Later in the list is “work-life balance”. Hey, I mean we all have a personal life. You don’t want your work life eating away at your private goals.
5. Salary(!): Here’s a quote from the article: “Your compensation package should be able to meet your basic needs and help you plan for the future.” Nobody wants to work for free. I mean, money is what it’s all about. You want to plan for your future, we’re told. You want a good home. You want to enjoy the good things in life. You want comfort.
9. Opportunities for growth: Another quote: “Can you move into a senior position or help moving toward larger career goals?” You want to move up, up, up. It’s OK to start small, but someday, you want to be somebody. You want to be important!
10. Recognition: Are you acknowledged for your work? Are you going to work hard, and find that someone else got all the credit?

So, what kinds of things are you looking for in an ideal job?

- Stability.
- Salary: The ability to live in a good home.
- Enough money to enjoy the good things of life. You want to be comfortable.
- A sense of importance and recognition.

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe." Recently we started this sub-series: "What Kind of Man is This?" We've learned some important things about Jesus. These things make him worthy to be: ***The Lord of our Lives.***

Over the next few sessions, we're going to look at some examples of people who were offered the opportunity to be followers of Jesus - They were offered the chance to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. Some of them responded well. Others didn't.

In this article, we're going to meet someone who approached Jesus about the possibility of a new job. Let's read about him.

When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:18-20)

Today, we're going to learn something important about the Christian life: ***Following Jesus is not a job.***

Let's find out why.

I. What is this passage saying?

First, let's take these statements apart so we can better understand them.

When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. (Matthew 8:18)

Jesus has just seen some of big successes. He spoke on the mountainside to large crowds. Even though he said some controversial and challenging things, large crowds began to follow him. Since that time, Jesus has shown amazing power to heal people. This has surely caused the crowds to grow.

Today, this would be viewed as the foundations of success. That's because one of the measures of success today the size of the crowds that follow you. Today, you want to be a rock star. But apparently, this was not the case for Jesus. Jesus seemed to feel that something had to be done to control the growth of the crowds. This meant he had to go away for a while.

Where to go? Apparently, it had to be someplace where it would be hard for crowds to follow. Perhaps he wanted to concentrate on a small group for the time being? He chose a place on the other side of the sea of Galilee - Actually, the opposite side. Capernaum, where Jesus stayed with Peter, is on the northwest shore. Jesus chose a place called Gadara. Gadara is on the southeast shore of the sea of Galilee. We're told that Jesus gave orders to go there.

While everyone is getting ready to go, something interesting happens.

Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." (Matthew 8:19)

Here is a man who appears to be very dedicated to following Jesus. The size of crowds, as we said, is one measure of success - Another is dedication. This man declares deep allegiance to Jesus.

What's more, he is called a "teacher of the law." Some translations say he's a scribe. Scribes were people who had the responsibility of hand-copying the Scriptures. In order to make proper copies, the Scribes had to be well-trained in what the Scriptures taught. So, they were often teachers as well.

In the days of Jesus, any teacher of the law was part of the ruling class. So, this would normally be considered a great win - A great success. Not only is Jesus acquiring a dedicated follower, but this dedicated follower is someone of importance. Previously, Jesus was getting people like fishermen - Low, common workers. That's very nice, but many would say it isn't the pathway to power. This man is different -he's got some power.

So, Jesus should be very excited about this, right? He should put his arm around this man's shoulder and call out, "Hey everybody! Look!. One of the scribes is here. He wants to follow me wherever I go. Isn't that great?"

Is that what Jesus does? Let's see:

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (8:20)

Well, that's odd. Instead of being excited, Jesus meets this man with a statement about foxes and dens and birds and nests and not having a place to lay your head. What's going on? Let's try to dig deeper.

II. The "Teacher of the Law"

Who was this man who came to Jesus? As we said, he was part of the ruling class. There were things that went along with the position of teacher in those days - privileges. Once you

achieved the status of teacher, you became an employee of a synagogue or a center of religious education. That means, you had a job. It was a steady job. Steady job meant you had a regular salary. Regular salary meant you had a nice place to live. You had good clothing. And not just clothing that looked nice. You had comfortable clothing that kept you warm on cold nights.

Along with all that came respect. People looked up to teachers. If you were a teacher, and you walked down the street, you got a warm smile and a nod from people who passed by. You got invited into homes. And once there, you were treated as an honored guest. We know that because that's what Jesus said about these people. Matthew records it later in his book:

...they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others. (Matthew 23:6-7)

So, being a scribe, a teacher of the law, was a great job. You had all the things people look for in a good job today:

- Steady, stable work.
- A good salary.
- And Respect.

Having said that, religious leaders having a salary isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, the Bible teaches it. Here's what the Apostle Paul said about religious leaders receiving a salary:

13 Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (I Corinthians 9:13-14)

The question is not whether it's right for Christian workers to receive a salary. It's a question of the heart.

We're told in the Scriptures that God knows the heart.

Death and Destruction lie open before the Lord—
how much more do human hearts!
(Proverbs 15:11)

Remember, one of the themes of Matthew's book is that Jesus is presenting credentials that he is the great King. In a few weeks, we'll run into a story where Matthew tells us something about Jesus:

Jesus knew their thoughts... (Matthew 12:25)

God knows the thoughts of people. Jesus knew the thoughts of people. That's a little something to file away about what kind of man this is.

But back to our story. We have a teacher of the law. Teachers of the law have a good life with job stability, good money, and respect. Here's an important question: Were these things influencing this teacher more than he realized? Jesus is capable of knowing his thoughts, and I'm sure that influenced his response to this man. Let's look at it again.

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

III. The three entities in the story

There are three entities here.

Foxes

We keep running into animals in Matthew's book. Every time we run into one, we learn something important: People who have to live with these animals in the wild often view them differently than people who only read about them in story books. In story books, foxes are often clever animals. In the zoo, they're cute animals. Things change if you're a farmer. If you're a farmer, foxes are sneaky, vicious thieves who eat your chickens. You're heard the phrase, "Letting the fox guard the hen house." That's the idea.

How did Jesus use the word "fox"? He used it to describe King Herod.

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." 32 He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'" (Luke 13:31-32)

Herod was a worthless, sneaky fake. So, Jesus uses the word "fox" for him.

How about the other animal?

Birds

How about birds? Once again, we tend to think of birds as being cute. We have bird feeders in our back yards. We have bird watching societies. But once again, in the days of Jesus, birds were not so popular. If you didn't properly cover your food, they would come along and eat it.

In a little while, we'll see Jesus use them in his parables.

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up." (Matthew 13:3-4)

At its least, this is an annoying picture. The farmer works hard planting for the coming year, and those pesky birds come along and eat some of his grain. But, it gets worse. Later, Jesus pulls his close followers to the side and explains the parable.

18 Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. (Matthew 13:18-19)

So here, birds are a symbol of the Devil himself!

I've read commentators who say, "Jesus uses the symbol of common animals here." Well, these are not just any animals. "Foxes" equal sneaky thieves. "Birds" equal the Devil himself. Jesus knew the thoughts of this man. What did it mean that Jesus used symbols of evil to describe those thoughts?

These animals, as worthless as they are, have homes. They have at least some level of rest and comfort.

But then Jesus introduces the third entity: The Son of Man.

The Son of Man

The title, "Son of man" was used by Jesus to describe himself. He didn't invent this phrase. It comes from the book of Daniel. When Daniel lived in Babylon, he received several visions. In one, beasts rose up to rule the earth. Each beast represented a different king in a different age. But then, all the beast are defeated, and one individual takes over. Let's read about it:

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

In other words, the Son of Man is the great King. One day he will be given ruler over all things forever. Jesus says he is the son of man.

The title “Son of Man” is a title of humility. Here’s another place that Jesus used the title:

...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28)

The title, “Son of Man” indicates someone with a servant’s heart. The Son of Man is the great king. But when the Son of Man first comes to the earth, he will not be like earthly kings. Those kings, like Herod, are found in palaces. The great king will be a teacher. But he will not be like the teachers of that day. He will not have a steady salary and a comfortable place to live and constant respect.

The Son of Man will have no place to lay his head. And that was true of Jesus. When Jesus grew up as a carpenter’s son, he may have had a home. But he left that home when he started his public ministry. We see no record of him ever owning anything other than the clothes he wore. He sometimes accepted invitations to stay in homes, such as we recently saw with Peter. Other than that, he had no permanent place to stay. Not a house. Not even a tent. He slept out in the open.

So one day, a man came to him. A Teacher of the law. A man with a job, a salary, a nice place to live, and respect. This man declared deep allegiance to Jesus. Jesus replies by simply saying this:

Following Jesus is not a job.

There is no guarantee of security, or comfort, or any of the things people normally look for in a job search. There is only one guarantee: True followers of Jesus will live with him forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. That’s it. And Ladies and Gentlemen, that’s plenty!

IV. What does this mean for us today?

Now that we understand the main point here, we need to ask a question: What does this mean for us today?

First, we need to look at an unusual group. Normally, when we share a sermon on Sundays, we don’t focus on this group. Today, we will. The group is: Christian leaders. For our purposes, pastors, like me. Hold on a minute while I grab a mirror. Phil – this is for you! And it’s for any other professional Christian leaders listening. It’s also for anyone who might consider becoming a Christian worker one day. There are applications for all of us, so if you’re not in the groups I just mentioned, please don’t tune out.

All people in this group, Christian leaders, need to be reminded: ***The Christian ministry is not a job.*** Some who join the work of the Gospel receive a salary of some kind. Others do not.

I have served in both kinds of situations. At some points in my ministry, I have worked in traditional settings where a church or other organization paid a salary. At other times, I supported my ministry by working at something else. I've worked at everything from factory worker to janitor to software engineer.

Over the centuries since the time of Christ, countless individuals have served in the Christian ministry. Many did so faithfully, even though they lacked all the things you would look for in a job. The Church has been blessed by those people.

Tragically, the Church of Jesus Christ has also suffered under a different kind of person. These people viewed the ministry as only a job. Let me give an example:

Slavery

Tragically, some people in early America fell to the temptation to participate in the horror of Slavery. The Bible clearly teaches that kidnapping people and selling them as slaves is sin. In the Law of Moses, doing so brought the death penalty. So, in the Bible, this is very clear.

Now, imagine that you're a pastor serving in the southern states, where slavery was practiced. It's the 1850s. Someone hands you a book or a pamphlet describing the horrors of slavery. Your heart is touched, and your soul is grieved. So, you decide to preach a sermon on that topic the following Sunday.

The next day, you run into an elder of your church. You tell him what you're planning on doing. He says, "Oh, no – you'd better not do that!" You ask, "Why not?" He proceeds to tell you that there is a family in the church who owns a big plantation. The whole thing is run with slaves. This family gives a lot of money to the church. Some folks in the church would agree that slavery should end, but others support it - A lot of those work for the plantation.

If you give that sermon, you'll split the church.

What does the pastor do? Here's what he'll do if he's a pastor who needs a job. From that point forward, he won't talk about slavery. That may be why it took us so long to beat slavery in America - Because we had a few too many pastors who needed a job.

What should a Christian Leader do? There are many passages of Scripture that describe this. Let's focus on one. Here, the Lord speaks to the prophet Ezekiel:

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, 3 when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet

and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.' (Ezekiel 33:1-6)

Ancient cities had a wall. At the corner of the wall was a tower. A Faithful guard would be commissioned to stand in the tower and warn if they saw any kind of threat. Ezekiel was told that he was a kind of watchman. He was to warn when he saw judgement coming.

Jesus was a kind of watchman. He announced the Kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who listened was invited to follow him. Anyone who didn't listen faced impending doom. Christian leaders from that time on accept this as part of their role. They are to announce the kingdom. They are also to warn if they see their congregations falling into sin.

Many Christian ministers in the days of American slavery accepted their calling and denounced slavery. Sadly, many did not. That resulted in the American Civil War. Thousands died during that conflict. Whole cities were burned to the ground. Perhaps it could have been averted, were it not for a number of Christian leaders who looked to the comfort of their salaries and valued that comfort over their responsibilities.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

We've been asking the question, "What Kind of Man Is This?" We've seen that Jesus is worthy to be the Lord of our lives. Today, we met someone who had a chance to make Jesus the Lord of his life.

But Jesus saw something in this man: He had a good job as a teacher. Jesus had to tell him that becoming a follower was not a job. The name of this man is not mentioned. He is never heard from again. Many take that as meaning he gave up when he found out what it would cost him to follow Jesus.

For the Church of Jesus Christ, that was a good thing. It's a good thing because, as we learned, the church has been terribly hurt by people who thought that following Jesus was a job. When they were threatened with loss of their job, they reneged on their responsibilities.

Before we close, we have to ask, "Is this only for church leaders?" Is there something here for others who want to follow Jesus? Not all are called into "Professional Christian Ministry." There's plenty of room for butchers and bakers and candlestick makers.

First, let's ask: Many Christian leaders faithfully accept their call to be a watchman. They warn when they see sin and impending judgement. When they do so, do we listen?

For others, could it be that for many, the Christian life is a kind of a job? We clock-in to church on Sunday morning. We clock-out after an hour or so. Then, during the week we do whatever we wish. Around us are people who are hurting. Some of them are in danger. Are we announcing the Kingdom of Heaven? Are we telling people about the rewards of following Jesus, as well as the penalties of disobedience?

Friends, following Jesus is not a job. But oddly, for those who follow Jesus, the rewards are greater than any earthly job. You may not see security now, but there is eternal security in the Kingdom. You may not see comfort now, but you will experience eternal joy on the day that Jesus calls you home.

Friends, follow Jesus. Not because it's a job. But because Jesus is worthy to be the Lord of our lives.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
