

**What Kind of Man Is This? Lord of Our Lives, Part 2: Burying a Father**  
**From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”**  
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**Introduction**

**SLIDE**

Imagine the scene: A mother is working in the kitchen. She’s got a toddler and a four-year-old. She’s juggling all kinds of responsibilities: She’s working on food, she’s keeping track of messages, she’s interacting with the children - all kinds of things. She has another child, a teenager, who’s sitting on the sofa in the living room.



After managing numerous interruptions, with a lot of hard work, this mom has completed a hot, nutrition dinner. She begins to set the table. While she is corralling the two youngest children to the table, she calls out, “Dinner’s ready.”

The teenager in the living room yells back, “I’m busy!”

What do you think Mom is thinking at that moment? How is she feeling? There’s an interesting phrase in the English language: “Take for granted.” Here’s a definition from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary:

Definition of “Take for granted”

1: to assume (something) as true, real, unquestionable, or to be expected

Example:

We took our invitation to the party for granted. = We took it for granted that we'd be invited to the party. [=we assumed we'd be invited and did not think about the possibility that we wouldn't be]

So, to “take for granted” means you just assume something. There’s a hint here that maybe you shouldn’t just assume certain things.

The folks at Merriam -Webster also provide a secondary definition:

2: to value (something or someone) too lightly : to fail to properly notice or appreciate (someone or something that should be valued)

Look at that: To “value someone too lightly.” “To fail to properly notice or appreciate someone that should be valued”

So again, we have our mom. She’s worked really hard to have a great dinner prepared. Her teenage child announces that they’re “too busy” to come to the table. Too busy might be “watching TV”. Too busy might be “playing a video game.” Too busy might be “talking on the phone with a friend.” It that’s what “too busy” means, then I think we can say with some assurance that “taken for granted” is at least part of what Mom is feeling.

We’re in our Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.” We’re working our way through the book of Matthew, where Matthew tells his friends about Jesus. We recently started a sub-series called, “What Kind of Man is this”. In our last session, we said that Jesus is worthy to be “Lord of our Lives.” In that session, we met a man who had the opportunity to make Jesus the Lord of his life. Sadly, the man fell short.

Today, we’re going to meet another such man. We’re going to learn that he was someone who took Jesus for granted. Let’s read about it:

21 Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 22 But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:21-22)

At first glance, this looks odd. A man makes what would look like a reasonable request: He wants to take some time off to bury his father. Jesus gives him an answer that seems pretty, well, cold-hearted. Maybe even a little cruel. Is Jesus cold-hearted and cruel?

As we’ve been doing in our last several sessions, let’s start by seeing what’s going on here.  
- Let’s try to understand this passage.

## **I. What is this passage saying?**

### **A. The man**

Let’s start by trying to understand who this man is. Matthew refers to this man as a “disciple”. So, this is someone who has shown some level of dedication to Jesus and to his teaching. He’s been around for a while. We don’t know how long, but long enough to be considered something more than a casual observer.

Here, we don’t know much about him, but we learn a little more if we look over to the book of Luke. Luke tells the same story with just one more detail:

59 He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59-60)

This adds a little detail to the story: Jesus calls to this man. He gives this man an invitation, if not a command. He says, "Follow me".

Today, we tend to think of "follow" as meaning, "obey teachings". So, "follower of Jesus" means we try to learn what he wants and obey it. Jesus isn't physically around, so we don't need to physically get up and move ourselves. We can be a disciple without going anywhere. In those days, Jesus was physically on the earth. So, "follow me" certainly meant "learn about me and obey me". But it also meant "Physically pick yourself up and go wherever I go."

There were plenty of people at the time who would hear that Jesus was in town. They would leave what they were doing and go to see him. Then, when he left, they went home. If they were farmers, they went back to the farm. Whatever else they might have as an occupation, they went back to it.

On rare occasions, Jesus would look at someone and say, "Follow me". That meant, "Leave whatever you do for a living – leave your home, and don't plan on returning any time soon."

There was an implication here: Jesus is saying to this man, "There is something special about you. I want give you special attention." Jesus was offering this man a kind of promotion. There were many who were disciples of Jesus, but there was a very select group called "Apostles." There were only twelve. Was Jesus giving this man an invitation that would eventually result in him becoming one of those apostles? We're not sure, the question is intriguing.

From all this we learn that this man was a disciple. He had begun the process of learning who Jesus was and had a level of commitment. But he reserved the right to leave whenever he wanted to. Jesus is inviting him to a deeper level of commitment that would surely have greater rewards than a mere disciple. But this would require leaving behind his profession and his home.

How does the man respond?

The man replies, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21)

Jesus has just invited this man to a special experience. The man responds with a reason why he can't come at that moment: He wants to bury his father. At first reading, this seems straight forward. As it turns out though, there are actually three things that the man might be saying.

Let's look at each one.

### **Possibility #1: His father has recently died.**

This would certainly be sad. In Jewish culture, when loved one died, you had to do some things: This culture did not practice embalming. So, the body needed to be buried within a few days of death. Children were then required to mourn for 30 days. Being present at the burial and showing proper respect were important family responsibilities and were considered part of the faith. They were thought to be part of obeying the Ten Commandments. Commandment number five states, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12)

### **Possibility #2: His father was on his death bed.**

Maybe his father was very ill and was only given a short time to live. A good son would be driven to be at his father's side. He would want to be there to help his father.

This brings us back to the response that Jesus gives to this man's request: But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (8:22) Again, that appears cold. If this man's father has just died, Jesus appears to be saying, "Forget your grieving family". If the father is alive, but on his death bed, Jesus appears to be saying, "Forget your father's pain - Let someone else take care of him".

Honoring your parents by being there when they died was thought to be part of honoring the Ten Commandments. Would Jesus require people to do things that caused them to break the Ten Commandments? Failing to honor your parents when they died would be considered irresponsible by your family and your culture. Would Jesus require his followers to do things that would make them look like horrible people in their culture?

Let's leave those questions hanging for just a few minutes while we look at possibility number three.

### **Possibility #3: The man wants to fulfill family responsibilities until his father dies.**

There is a saying in the Middle East that looks just like what this man said to Jesus. Let's say that you have an idea for a new business. It's going to be a real money maker, but it's also a risk - It's going to be a fulltime commitment. You have a friend that you know could help you out, so you invite him to join you.

But let's say that his family has a business, and he's part of it. He might respond this way: "I'm sorry. I have a place in our family business. I can't leave until I bury my father." In this case, the father hasn't died - he may have years to live.

There are multiple reasons for this answer: Others in the family business rely on this man. Leaving means others will have to work harder to handle the workload. So, if the man leaves, other family members will look down on him.

But there's an even bigger reason. Family businesses are often owned by the father. When the father dies, the business is handed to one of the children. Or, the assets of the business are broken up as inheritance. Here's the thing: ***If someone in the family pulls out before that time, they will be cut out of the family inheritance.***

As I've read commentaries on this passage, the concept of "burying your father" goes all the way back to the time of Jesus and before. So, it's possible that this man is saying, "Lord, if I leave the family business now, I will be cut out of the inheritance. So, let me go home until my father dies. I'll come back after that. Then, I'll have the comfort, security, and steady income of my inheritance."

If the man's father had died or was on his death bed, the man would be away for a limited amount of time not much longer than a month. If, on the other hand, he was holding on until his father died, he could be away for years.

### **The best choice**

Which of these three possibilities is the best choice? Let's think about it. How about option number one? The father has died. In this case, this man's family is supposed to be observing a 30-day mourning period. Recall, this man is considered a disciple. That means he's been around for a while, away from home. If his father has recently died, why is the man anyplace other than with his family? Choice number two says the man's father is on his death bed. If his father is on his death bed, why is this man anyplace other than at his father's side?

For these reasons, the commentators that I've read lean towards option number three. The man wants to go home to fulfill his place in the family business until his father passes away. That means this man was about to do something that would take him away from Jesus for what could be a long, long time. His reasons for doing this was his desire for the comfort and security of a big inheritance.

You may recall from our last session that this was the problem for the teacher who declared that he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus had to warn him that becoming a follower was not a job. There was no promise of comfort or security involved. It may be very important that Matthew chose to put these two men right next to each other in his book.

### **The Explanation**

So, what is the likely explanation for this man's request? Why did this man ask for permission to bury his father? Answer: He was taking Jesus for granted. He assumed that Jesus would be around for a long time.

Following Jesus, to this man, was something like attending college. Most colleges have been around for a long time. They'll continue to be around for a long time into the future. If you can go to college today, great. If you can't, go next year. If waiting a year means you can make a lot of money in the meantime then, hey, make your money. In fact, if you can make more money without college then forget college! Go and make your money.

Also, remember our second definition of "Take for granted.": To value something lightly. This man also took for granted what Jesus was offering. Jesus was offering this man something very special: a place in his inner circle.

But, there was even more.

For the last several sessions we've been asking, "What Kind of Man Is This?" Let me give you a preview of our next session: We'll find that Jesus is Lord of Nature. Let's read about it:

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:23-27)

And this is where we're getting our series title. What kind of man is this? In this case, he is Lord of nature.

Why did this man ask for permission to bury his father? *He was taking Jesus for granted.* He thought Jesus was a normal, human man. A good one – a smart one. But still, a normal, human. But Jesus wasn't a normal, human man. He was God visiting the face of the earth.

Jesus was a little over 30 when this man met him. Most normal humans of this age are around for a while. But Jesus wasn't going to be around for a long time. He was going to be walking on the earth presenting himself in public ministry for only a few years - We think about three. Not ten years, not five years. Three years. During that time, he would show people amazing miracles. But few of them would compare to the time he calmed the storm.

Now, let's say that the first or second explanations were true. Maybe this man was about to follow Jesus when a relative came running up and said, "Come home right away! Your father just died."

This man was offered the opportunity to follow Jesus. Jesus wanted him to physically pick up and move wherever he went. Jesus was about to get on a boat. He was about to display one of the greatest miracles of his earthly ministry. He was about to calm the storm. Whatever reason this man had for saying no. Whether it was a good reason or less than good, **he was not on that boat**. He was not there when Jesus displayed one of the greatest acts of power ever shown to mortal men.

Why did this man ask for permission to bury his father? He was taking Jesus for granted.

Here's perhaps the hardest part. Why did he do that? Why did he take Jesus for granted? We find out when we look at the rebuke that Jesus gave him.

But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."  
(Matthew 8:22)

In the Bible, Death is discussed on several levels. Of course, there is the end of our physical lives. In that case, when they die, most people are buried. They're buried, hopefully, by their families and friends. But the Bible also talks about life and death on the spiritual level:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

So, many people are spiritually dead. They follow the ways of the world. They follow a being called, "...the ruler of the kingdom of the air...". He's known better as the Devil or Satan.

Paul goes on to say that all people start out in this state:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. (Ephesians 2:3)

In another place, Paul tells his friends that when people follow the Devil, they have a problem:

4 The god (small 'g') of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (II Corinthians 2:4)

When people are spiritually dead, they're blind. They don't see the glory of Christ. So, they live their lives obsessed with things on this earth. They live for security and comfort. They live for their bank accounts and retirement packages. And as I always say, bank accounts aren't wrong in and of themselves, but sometimes being obsessed with them is a symptom of spiritual blindness.

Jesus warns this disciple that he's acting like those who are spiritually dead. He says, "let the spiritually dead, those who are obsessed with businesses and inheritances and safety and security, let them take care of their own." He then says, "follow me, and I will give you something much more." And in this particular case, this particular man, Jesus was offering something more than he even offers to most of us: Displays of unimaginable power!

But this man didn't understand. He took Jesus for granted.

## **II. What does this mean for us?**

So, now we understand what happened. We now ask: What does this mean for us? Our response to this is wrapped up in one question: Do **we** take Jesus for granted?

People take Jesus for granted in lots of ways. How? Let's look at a few.

### **A. Many people are spiritually dead.**

Many people are spiritually dead. I know they don't feel like they're dead, but here's the problem: Because they're spiritually dead, they see no value in Jesus. Ask yourself? Do you see no (or little) value in Jesus?

To our friends who are guests on Sunday morning: Do you only come because a relative or friend drags you? Do you find yourself thinking, "Well, religion is nice, but I have better things to do"? If you're spiritually dead, you will never see the value of Jesus. And that's a shame, because Jesus offers us more than we can imagine.

Jesus once said to a famous teacher of his day, "You must be born again." (John 3:7) All the studying in the world won't help you if you are spiritually dead and spiritually blind.

After describing the problems of spiritual death, Paul gave a solution:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

God wants to give you new life through Jesus Christ. When you receive it, you'll begin to see all the wonders of who Jesus is. Would you talk to us? We'll show you how to receive the new life that God offers. There will be some important info at the end of this article.

So, some people take Jesus for granted because they're spiritually dead, and they need new life.

## **B. Dying Faith**

Others have a faith that is dying. At one time in their lives, they could understand everything we're talking about. But somewhere along the line, something went wrong. When we get to chapter 13 of Matthew's book, we'll run into some stories that Jesus told that describe different kinds of faith. In one, a farmer went out to spread seed. Jesus said that some of the seed began to grow but it got choked out by thorns and weeds. Here's how Jesus describes what happened there:

22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

At one time in their lives, these people heard the word. At first, it was great. But then, they're overtaken by what Jesus calls, "The deceitfulness of wealth." We'll talk more about that when we get to that story. For now, we'll just say that life gets busy. If we let ourselves get too busy, we begin to take Jesus for granted, and he gets pushed out.

As a practical matter, this gets expressed most by church attendance. When people take Jesus for granted, they take church for granted. "That church will be there next week." And, that's true. Most churches last for a long time. If you skip a week, the church will still be there. This attitude is sad, because sometimes Jesus has something special for us - And sometimes, it only happens once.

Over the years, I've spoken in a lot of places. It's not at all unusual to hear someone say the following: "Pastor, that message was written for me! I'm so glad I came." I've heard people say that they were going through some really hard times, and the message provided something that helped them to deal with their burdens.

I've even heard people say that it wasn't the message that helped them. It was a song. It was a few words from a person who stopped to listen to their problems.

But, what if the person had skipped church that week? What if they overslept? Late night comedians, friends, and movies on Saturday night can make it hard to get out of bed Sunday morning. Or, what if that person decided to take some overtime at work? In any of these cases, whatever God wanted to offer them during church was lost - Maybe lost forever.

Let's pull this all together.

## Conclusion

What kind of man is Jesus? He's worthy to be the Lord of our lives. Today we met another man who was offered the opportunity to make Jesus the Lord of his life. The man's name is not given. We never hear from him again. Many take that to mean he left. In doing so, he missed an incredible opportunity. In the next session, we'll look at the miracle of Jesus calming the storm. I've heard people say, "Oh, what I would have given to be on that boat to see that miracle!" Well, this man had a chance, and he turned it down.

He turned it down because he took Jesus for granted. He thought Jesus would be around for a long time. He thought he had all the time in the world to follow Jesus. Two years later, Jesus was crucified for the sins of mankind. He was buried and rose again. Hundreds of people saw a that miracle, a miracle even greater than the calming of the sea - But this man was not one of them.

Friends, don't take Jesus for granted. Make him the Lord of your life. Make him Lord now - Right now. Let that be reflected in things like your attendance at church and your commitment to service.

Do it because Jesus is worthy to be the Lord of your life.

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**Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:**

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

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

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)