

Matthew 8:18-22

Intro/Starter

What do we mean by the statement, 'Jesus is King'?

We most probably mean that Jesus is the promised and long-awaited Messiah (Hebrew) / Christ (Greek) / King (English). We may mean something equivalent to "Lord". Without wanting to engage in debates around the Republic, in a country that does not make much of the fact that we remain, to a degree at least, under royal rule, one of our challenges in communicating the Gospel is how to accurately and helpfully express Jesus' identity to others. What does the other person hear when we say, 'Jesus is King'? Do we need to think of other descriptions? Can you think of other terms that may work better?

The price of following Jesus

Read Matthew 8:18-20.

What announcement does this teacher of the law make?

He says to Jesus, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" (v. 19).

What do you think of his statement?

On the one hand it is impressive and admirable – who of us have thought/said such a thing? On the other hand, the teacher of the law's designation of Jesus as "Teacher" (cf "Lord", v. 21) may raise questions. We may also wonder whether he is in fact overstating his commitment.

If a person said something similar to us we might express surprise, encouragement, or a desire to immediately involve the person in some form of ministry. Perhaps, like Jesus, we may want to probe further behind the words spoken to ascertain what is truly behind them.

How does Jesus respond?

Jesus says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (v. 20).

What does Jesus' response tell us about Jesus?

Although Jesus is King, from the cradle to the grave the incarnation involved consistent self-denial, sacrifice and suffering for Jesus.

What does Jesus' response tell us about the price of following him?

Following Jesus will involve self-denial, sacrifice and suffering. Given this, Jesus wants this man to press the pause button, so to speak, and consider what is actually involved in following him.

Did you count the cost when you first decided to follow Jesus? In what ways have you counted the cost since first following Jesus?

Allow group members to share as they are able to remember and feel comfortable to do so.

The priorities of following Jesus

Read Matthew 8:21-22.

What does this would-be follower say to Jesus?

He says, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (v. 21).

What do you think of his statement?

At one level it would appear to be a reasonable enough request. The man would seem to be seeking to honour his father. However, at another level, as soon as something or someone is placed "first" it may call into question the validity of one's allegiance to Jesus as King/Lord/Number 1.

How does Jesus respond?

Jesus says, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (v. 22).

What does Jesus' response tell us about Jesus?

As the King, Jesus possesses such authority and rule that he is able to demand allegiance that trumps even the closest of human relationships. Given this, Jesus wants this man also to press the pause button, so to speak, and consider what is actually involved in following him.

What does Jesus' response tell us about the priorities of following him?

Following Jesus is clearly not a casual exercise nor one that consists of merely occasional involvement. As Leon Morris stated, 'Is it comfort, custom, convention or is it Christ?' It is not a both/and but an either/or. In the end, there can ultimately only be one person/thing that occupies first place.

When you first decided to follow Jesus, did that decision involve a conflict of priorities in terms of family? In what ways have you been challenged in terms of priorities since following Jesus?

Allow group members to share as they are able to remember and feel comfortable to do so.

Summary/Close

Read John 6:60-69.

Given that the price is high and the priorities hard, why would someone decide to follow Jesus?

After some similarly hard teaching, Peter's words here in John's Gospel ring true for all those who truly desire to follow Jesus. In the end we have nowhere else to go because he has the words of eternal life (v. 68). There is something in Jesus' identity (who he is) and his work (what he has done) that means that it is both his right to rule our life and also our joy to live for him.