

Matthew 8:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Analysis

The command 'let the dead bury their dead' uses 'dead' in two senses: the spiritually dead (unbelievers) can care for the physically dead, but the disciple must prioritize spiritual life and kingdom work. This doesn't advocate irresponsibility but establishes hierarchy—Christ's call takes absolute priority over even legitimate earthly obligations. The call to 'follow me' is present, urgent, demanding immediate response without delay for earthly concerns, however pressing they may seem.

Historical Context

This harsh-sounding statement shocked hearers in a culture that valued family honor and proper burial rites. Yet Jesus consistently taught that kingdom priorities supersede earthly loyalties (Luke 14:26). The disciple's calling was to proclaim life to the spiritually dead, not attend to burial of the physically dead.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does this passage teach about the absolute priority and urgency of following Christ's call?
2. How do you distinguish between faithfulness to legitimate responsibilities and using them as excuses to delay whole-hearted discipleship?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	Ἰησοῦς	εἶπεν	αὐτῷ	Ἀκολουθεῖ	μοι	καὶ	ἄφες
G3588	But	Jesus	said	unto him	Follow	me	and	let
	G1161	G2424	G2036	G846	G190	G3427	G2532	G863
τοὺς	νεκροὺς	θάψαι	τοὺς	ἐαυτῶν	νεκροὺς			
G3588	dead	bury	G3588	their	dead			
	G3498	G2290		G1438	G3498			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 15:32 (Parallel theme): It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Colossians 2:13 (Parallel theme): And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Ephesians 5:14 (Parallel theme): Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Ephesians 2:1 (Parallel theme): And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Ephesians 2:5 (Parallel theme): Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

John 1:43 (References Jesus): The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

1 Timothy 5:6 (Parallel theme): But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org