

This morning we're going to talk about excuses. Do you ever make excuses? Sure you do! We all do! Anytime we are trying to cover for ourselves, we are always ready with a good excuse. In fact, I dare say that there isn't a day that goes by that we don't all make an excuse about something. Excuses have become a way of life. If you don't believe it...just follow politics for a few days...and listen to all the excuses for why this happens or that happens. Or talk to a school teacher to learn of all the excuses they are given. Or how about a coach, or a highway patrolman, or a parent, and yes... even a pastor. Without question, we all make excuses and certainly hear excuses A LOT!

Today, we're going to watch how Jesus handled the excuses of three (3) people as they offered excuses to Him as to why they couldn't answer His call on their lives. Jesus was heading out across the Sea of Galilee and loading up in a boat...and the question was...WHO WAS GOING TO GET IN THE BOAT WITH HIM?

The title of today's message is: "Jesus' Power to Call Us." And I guess if I were to have a subtitle to the message it would be, "And The Excuses We Make When He Does."

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 8, and make your way to verse 18. As you do so, I'll remind you where we are and what's happening. Jesus has just finished delivering His blueprint for ministry as He preached His "Sermon on the Mount," on a hillside outside of the Galilean city of Capernaum. He comes off the mountain, tired and worn out...but, He continues to minister to multitudes of people who came to Him in need of healing of all kinds of sickness and diseases. Jesus healed them all. You will remember...He started with a leper...



He touched him and then He healed a paralyzed, servant boy and then Peter's mother-in-law and Matthew tells us that (in essence) He healed everyone in Capernaum who was sick. Matthew recorded: "He healed all who were sick." And folks, AGAIN...these were instantaneous healings that were immediate and total. There was no delay...No rehab, no therapy and no co-pays... They were 100% totally and completely healed!! And because of this...the crowds were growing by the hundreds...and ultimately the thousands... And now Jesus is getting ready to board a boat and shove off. Look at verse 18 of Matthew 8.

Matthew 8:18-22

18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. **19** And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." **20** And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." **21** Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." **22** And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

Now church, as we begin this morning, let me tell you something...Jesus was dead tired...because He had been preaching, teaching and healing almost non-stop...and He was worn out. How do we know? Next week we're going to see that He was so tired that He falls asleep in the bottom of a small wooden fishing boat in the MIDDLE OF A STORM.

And let me say this...Jesus knows what it's like to have long hard days and to be stressed and pressured and pushed. He knows what it's like to have demands placed on Him that are unreasonable and unrelenting. Remember, the writer of Hebrews tells us that He is our great high priest and sympathizes with us in all our weaknesses. You see, even Jesus...the Son of God...in His humanity knew He needed a break and the only way He was going to be able to catch His breath was to get in a small boat for a little while.

What's the lesson? Simple. We can't burn the candle at both ends and expect not to get burned. Even Jesus rested. And so must we. Believe me...I'm the chief of sinners here...but, I'm getting ready to heed the warning. I've not had a Sunday off since the second Sunday in December. But, next Sunday, I'm not going to be here...I'm going to rest. Maybe you need to rest in your life. Maybe it's time to take your foot off the gas. Jesus knew He needed to rest and so He got into a boat. Look at verse 18 again.

Matthew 8:18

18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.

Jesus saw the crowds and He's wiped out and He's going to make a short journey across the Sea of Galilee and He literally gives orders (like a military commander) to His disciples that they are going to the other side. Now let me show you where they were headed.



They were headed from Capernaum (11 o'clock on the Sea of Galilee), to the east side 3 o'clock to Gergesa or what is known as the area of the Gadarenes, aka as part of the Golan Heights. **I can show this to you.** Here I am standing of the shores at Capernaum and behind me are the Golan Heights or Gergesa or the Gadarenes.



You might notice that fishing boat behind me as well. They still fish in boats very similar to the ones that were used in the first century. Here's a model of the type of boat they used...



You'll see these fishing boats weren't very large and Jesus had to be absolutely worn out to fall sound asleep in the bottom of one of these things in the middle of a storm! **Interestingly, Mark's Gospel tells us in Mark 4:36** that "other boats were with him," as people scrambled to follow Him. So, in essence you have what is known as a little flotilla preparing to go across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee from west to east. This journey would only be about 7 miles in the boat, but it will give Jesus some time to rest.

Now I want you to imagine with me and try to see in your mind's eye all the people surrounding Jesus at the shoreline and pressing in on Him as He's trying to get into the boat and get moving... Here's an artist's depiction of that...



So now as Jesus is preparing to shove off a man comes running up...a man called a "Scribe." Matthew describes it this way in verse 19...

Matthew 8:19

19 And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Now you might ask, "What is exactly is a Scribe?" Well, a Jewish Scribe is an expert in handling the written documents of the Old Testament. Here's an artist's depiction of one.



These Jewish men were well educated and considered scholars and often taught, interpreted and offered regulations about the Law of Moses. The truth is, they most always aligned themselves with the Pharisees in that they hated Jesus. They thought He was a blasphemer because He claimed to be the Son of God and they were also jealous because of the crowds of people who followed Him. Yet, here comes one of these Scribes and he says with great conviction and resolute confidence: "Hey Jesus, I'll follow you anywhere!" Wherever you go...count me in!!

Wow! Sounds good doesn't it! That's pretty cool...after all, it's mostly fishermen and poor people who are following Jesus around at this point. A SCRIBE...??? ...sounds good...a Scribe with a bunch of fisherman...he'd probably come in handy because, after all....he knows the Scripture so well and on top of that He's made a fantastic profession, right?

Matthew 8:19b

19 "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

I mean...What more could you ask, right? He's respectful in that he calls Him: "Teacher," and he's resolute and confident enough to publicly make this profession to follow Jesus. I mean this is "spot on, right?" So, Jesus says, "Hop on in...right?" Wrong!

Matthew 8:20

20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Folks, what kind of response is that by Jesus? Huh!!! Foxes and holes, birds and nests? What's up with that?

Church family...listen...it's very simple. Jesus (by this strange response) is on to this guy. He knows what's in his heart. Jesus knows this guy is about to make a rash decision without really counting the cost.

Now think with me. What had this Scribe seen? He's likely a Scribe who worked in the synagogue at Capernaum, So, he's most likely seen the miracles of Jesus in Matthew chapter 4 and he's likely heard the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 and now he's likely witnessed the healing of the man with leprosy and the paralyzed boy. And he sees the crowds!! Oh man...the crowds!!! And the Scribe had to be thinking: "Man...this deal is a whole lot better gig than I've got going... copying down Scriptures all day on parchments. This guy Jesus...man oh man...He's popular and famous and man...the crowds...they're flocking to Him... Yeah...I want in on this deal!"

Church, let me be blunt and put this scene in the vernacular of our day: The Scribe sees Jesus as a rock star and he wants a piece of the action." **Do you know people who are like this?** They seem to jump on the bandwagon of Jesus. They make a public profession of faith in Jesus, and then seem all excited and then they drift away. Why? They weren't sincere. It was all emotion.

I had a cousin like that. He came to the altar one Sunday and prayed to receive Jesus and was on cloud 9 and less than two weeks later, he was back drinking and partying and to this day if you ask him if he's a Christian...he'll say, "Yeah...I did that when I was a teenager at MPBC...yeah...I'm saved."

Now, what Jesus revealed about this man in His response says otherwise. See it again...

Matthew 8:20

20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Do you know what Jesus was saying? He was saying, **"Look...you might think this a good**

looking deal right now...but, you got to understand....I own nothing...I have nothing...I don't even have a place to lay my head. I don't own a house...I don't own any sheep...any donkeys...nothing. The foxes have holes and the birds have nests...they've all got more than I've got. So, don't be looking to come get in on this deal and think it's going to be comfortable...because it's not!"

Listen church...Jesus left the glory of heaven and all the riches of His kingdom to come to this earth and He had nothing. In fact, Luke tells us in Luke chapter 8 verse 3, that if it hadn't been for some women...He likely couldn't have even funded His ministry.

2 Corinthians 8:9

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Listen, Jesus is not preaching a prosperity Gospel to those people and His word...the Bible is very clear...if you chose to follow Jesus...you better be ready to take up your cross and suffer. This isn't a vacation...this is a journey that Paul described as a race...and as a battle...and we are Christ's athletes and soldiers. Don't you think that following Jesus is just some sort of get of Hell card you play when you arrive at the pearly gates... Jesus is asking...are you willing to get in the boat and suffer with me?

You see church family, my fear is that so many people have compartmentalized Jesus in their lives. They only want Him for the benefits...like this Scribe. They've compartmentalized Jesus and stuck Him somewhere in a corner in their lives. They've watched Him shove off and they never got into the boat with Him. Is that you?

Do you just want the benefits of following Jesus or are you willing to suffer? You say, "How can you tell?" Well, it's pretty simple. **How do you act around your friends?** In other words, if you have Christian friends and non-Christian friends, do you act the same around them both? Do you agree with your Christian friends at church about the controversial issues of the day and nod your head as they quote Scripture and then flip, flop with friends who aren't grounded in the Word and wilt when it comes to standing for truth? Are you in the boat with Jesus?

Might I say a word to our young people? Please hear my heart young person who claims to be a follower of Jesus: do you post stuff on Facebook that your parents will like, and then turn around and post "the real you" on Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and KIK to impress your friends. If you do...you're not in the boat. You may say you are...but you're not...you're on the shore. You talk a good talk...but you're acting like the Scribe.

By the way mom and dad...parents...if your kids have some form of social media that you don't, why? You need to be where they are. Think about it... You wouldn't let your 12-year old...go ride around till midnight in a car with a bunch of 16-18 year olds that you don't know...by themselves... But oh my goodness...with your child's smartphone...they are being influenced in ways you might not even dream about. **Please be their parent and don't be afraid.** Make sure you have their passwords and if they balk and say you don't trust me...you tell them...it's not them that you don't trust...it's everybody else. You see that's true trust and true love! Some things you don't have to explain to your child...because you're the parent...and they should respect you for that role in their life. And if they don't...then maybe they're standing on the shore and not in the boat with Jesus.

Well, what happened to the Scribe? Well, truth is...you don't hear about him again and so it seems he just disappeared in the white space between verse 20 and 21. With one sentence...Jesus exposed him and it seems he just disappears in the crowd. Look at verse 21.

Matthew 8:21

21 Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

Seems like an honorable request to me. In fact, the individual is listed as a "disciple," (which simply means follower)...so it seems the man has his father's funeral to attend to. But, again...Jesus' response reveals otherwise. In fact I want you to see the more full response in Luke's Gospel, where we're given an extra phrase. **Turn to Luke chapter 9. We are going to see something from Luke's perspective that we don't from Matthew's.**

Luke 9:60

60 And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Does that seem cold to you? It might unless you know the culture. In that Middle Eastern culture, even to this day, that phrase: "I must bury my father or mother" is a colloquialism used by people even if their parents aren't dead. It simply means that they need to stick around for when they do. It's another way of saying... "I'm waiting for my inheritance." Jesus knew that and it seems almost cold...but, He said, "Let the dead bury the dead," meaning... You need to put me first. You need to follow me now. The boat is pulling out...it's now or never. Jesus said...

Luke 14:26

26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

In other words...our love for Jesus must be so strong and so prioritized that the love we have for our family looks like hate compared to our love and priority for Jesus.

By the way, I told you there is a phrase in Luke's account that Matthew's doesn't have. Did you catch it?

Luke 9:60b

60 But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

What's the priority? Proclaiming Jesus and the Kingdom of God! Oswald Chambers says:

"Your priorities must be Jesus first, Jesus second, and Jesus third, until your life is continually face to face with Jesus and no one else is taken into account whatsoever. Your prayer will then be: 'In all the world there is no one but You, dear Jesus; there is no one but You.'" Oswald Chambers

Is Jesus your priority? Are you telling Jesus that you'll serve Him wholeheartedly but not now...LATER. Maybe you're saying: I'll serve Him when I graduate or some say...when the kids grow up or you get the house paid off? What excuse are you offering today?

Let me ask you a question that weighs on my heart: When I'm gone next Sunday, (like I

mentioned to you earlier) will you still come to church? You say, "Who's preaching?" And I'd say, "I'm not going to tell you because it shouldn't matter if Jesus is your priority, now should it?" **Listen...are you in the boat or not?**

Two men...two excuses...You're in Luke 9. Luke records a third man who comes to Jesus...that Matthew doesn't record. Look at it.

Luke 9:61-62

61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." **62** Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke says, "Yet another..." It's almost like watching the excuses given to a teacher on a Monday morning as to why her students don't have their homework done. One after another...excuse...excuse...excuse. Surely, Jesus' call on our lives is more powerful than any excuse we can muster, if we are truly His bondservant... Yet, here's another excuse.

In short...the guy says... "Hold the boat Jesus...let me go have one last party with my family and say bye and then I'll be back. Hold the BOAT!!!"

But, Jesus saw through that excuse just as He did the other two and He said, "No...I'm not waiting...because you are looking back and you're trying to move forward in hesitation just like a man who tries to plow a straight row looking over his shoulder." That's nothing but a mess!

A farmer will never plow a straight row looking back over his shoulder... You have to be like this farmer and look straight ahead.



This third man was like Lot's wife...she couldn't let it go. She couldn't let Sodom go in her heart and she was destroyed by looking back.

Hey...church...the boat's pulling out...are you on it? What excuse will you offer Jesus for not getting on? You see this third man was likely a young man who was tied down to his family. And he couldn't serve Jesus because of it.

Listen to me...this a strong word for the families today. Some of you as mom's and dad's...you say that Jesus is first in your home. Yet, you can't even control what your kids wear. You can't even stand for the truth of modesty under your own roof and you are plowing a crooked row.

America is a wreck because the church in America is a wreck. We're supposed to be the salt and the light and we're plowing crooked rows...looking back at the world. We've got parents who are scared of their kids. Scared to discipline. Scared to take the time to teach them. And so we turn the other way and plow crooked rows and condone sin and disrespect and we've got adult children living in sin and we do nothing. We get with friends at work or even family and we wilt when it comes to Biblical truth about the controversial issues of the day and we say:

“Hold the boat Jesus!!!!” but Jesus says, “No!”

Luke 9:62

62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Listen carefully, we’re almost done... If Jesus in bodily form were to walk into this room and begin picking out His most faithful, dedicated, committed followers, would He pick you? No I’m not talking about legalism here. Because that’s what some of you are thinking. Every time you hear a preacher talk about commitment and loyalty and dedication to the Lord Jesus...you bristle and you say, “Legalism!” No! I’m not talking about how many chapters of the Bible you read each week or how many times you come to church each month. I’m asking you, “Would Jesus pick you to ride His boat?” Are you honoring His name among your friends? On social media? In your homes? John records some frightening words in John 2:24.

John 2:24

24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

I close with this story:

One day an owner of a large estate came to one of his servants and he said, "You have a joy and a happiness that I wish I had." He said, "What is it?" The servant said, "Sir, it's Jesus Christ." The wealthy owner said, "I want the Christ that you have." The servant said to his master, "Then go put on your white suit and come down and work in the mud and you'll meet Him."

The owner said, "Oh no...oh no...I'd never do that...my white suit...work in the mud... No, I wouldn't do that." A year later the rich owner came back to the servant and the owner was in deeper problems and troubles and he said, "I want to have what you have." The servant said, "What I have is Jesus Christ. Put on your white suit and come down and work with us in the mud and you'll meet Him." The owner said, "I can't do that and I won't do that," and he walked away.

Some months later in absolute desperation the wealthy owner came to back to the servant for the third time and he said, "I've got to have what you have." And the servant said, "Sir, you know how...you know what to do...you got to go and put on your white suit and come down here and work with us in the mud and you'll meet Him."

The owner pondered for a moment and then said with great excitement: "I'll do it," as he turned to go his house to put on his white suit. Just then, the servant shouted, "Sir, you don't have to." The owner turned and said: "What do you mean I don't have to?" The servant said, "You just had to be willing, that's all."

You see, willingness is the issue... Are you willing?

What excuses are you making today? None of them are worthy of being offered as you look into the face of the One who gave His life for you? Isn't it time that you choose to be 100% committed to Him?

The boat's pulling out... Jesus is calling. Oh... please...please get on the boat! And I want you to know that I'm in the boat and I'll do whatever He asks me to do...even in a white suit!