

More Excuses

And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59-60)

There are several examples of people making excuses for not following Jesus. The rich young ruler's excuse was his possessions, another had to see the field he just bought, and another had to see his new bride. Here is a man who had to bury his father. On the surface it seems that Jesus does not care about a man taking care of his family, but let's look a bit closer at the culture of Second Temple Judaism in the first century.

Jesus, like Jews in the first century, had a high view of burial. They felt like taking care of the body was the last act of respect for a loved one. Jesus even commended a woman for preparing his body with perfume for His burial (Mt 26:6-13). He also knew the importance of taking care of one's parents over religious rite (Mark 7:11). So what does Allow the dead to bury their own dead mean?

In the first century, Jews would have a burial, they would place the body in a cave for the flesh to decay. The bones would then be placed in an ossuary (bone box) and reburied. It is likely that this is the practice to which Jesus is referring. The English word, mortician, literally means dead handler. If then The dead is a reference to the morticians of the time, it would make sense. Jesus says the dead can handle "their own dead." He is referring to a specific group of people. Jesus is saying let the morticians do their job. You follow me.

It is clearly an excuse. The man couldn't handle the dead body without being unclean anyway. Why did he come all the way out on this road to see Jesus, only to have to go back to bury his father? Jesus knows the man's heart. He knows ours too. What excuses are we making to not follow him? Do we keep going back to "take care of" things that are already dead? Let the dead bury their own dead and follow Jesus!

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