



WHAT KEEPS MEN FROM CHRIST?

by guest speaker: Frank Brancato

Kevin Presley: Good morning, and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. It's so good to be with you today. It's a privilege to be with you, and I appreciate you for being part of our audience. And if this is your first time to watch, Let The Bible Speak, we're so glad you're here. Welcome and we hope that you'll make an appointment to join us from week to week as we gather here to study the word of God. This is a Bible study program and nothing more. We're not an over-the-air church but, simply, this is a program that is put on in your market by a congregation of the church of Christ that's interested in spreading the gospel. We're not here for your money, we're not here to advance political causes or anything of the sort. We're simply here to teach the word of God and you'll never hear us solicit donations or ask for a dime or try to sell you anything. We are simply here to open up God's word and as the name of the program suggest, to let the bible speak. We turn to the word of God as our standard of authority and religion, and for the answers to life's questions and, most of all, to learn about our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, and to follow him according to his will.

I'm very happy today to introduce to you a guest on our program: brother Frank Brancato will be with us and will be delivering the sermon today. He hails from the state of California. I have known Frank for about 30 years. He labors with the Church of Christ that meets on Planz Road in Bakersfield, California. He holds gospel meetings all across the United States throughout the year and does foreign mission work. He has made, I believe, more than 15 trips to the Philippines to preach the gospel in that country. We're so glad that he's with us today and he's going to be talking about the subject of discipleship and, more specifically, why many people refuse to be the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's much to learn about this great topic. Brother Brancato is a humble servant of the Lord and as you will see, he is a great gospel preacher who can not only delve into the deep truths of God's word, but can teach us great practical truths to live for the Lord. So be sure to stay with us. Brother Frank Brancato will join us after a song from the congregation.

Frank Brancato: In Luke chapter 9 and beginning there in verse 57, the Bible says, "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to him, 'Lord, I will follow you wherever you go'. 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. Then he said to another, 'Follow me', but he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father'. Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God'. And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house'. But Jesus said to him, 'No one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God'."

Just a little bit of a background about the setting. Jesus was on the western shore, the Sea of Galilee, and the crowd was massive. The crowd was pressing upon him, and Jesus needed respite. He needed refreshment. No doubt, there was a lot of people following Jesus for a variety of reasons. There were those perhaps that were following Jesus because of the miracles that he performed. Certainly, he would've got the attention of people all throughout the countryside. Still, others might have been following Jesus because he spoke like no other man had ever spoke before. He truly was the greatest preacher of the world ever knew. Still, others might have been drawn by way of excitement as Jesus was passing by. Well, Jesus had all these people in a great multitude of people pressing upon him and it was time for him to get some rest. And Jesus said, "Let us go to the other side."

I like what Mark's account adds. Mark's account says, "That when Jesus got on that boat and went across the sea, other little boats followed him." I think that's really a picture of everybody today and everybody that needs to make a decision. Am I going to stay on the shore or am I going to get in my boat and follow Jesus? Am I willing to give up whatever it takes to follow Jesus, so Jesus can change my life or am I content with staying just as I am? When they got to the other side, though, Jesus encounters three men. I'm going to talk about those men. On the surface, it sounds as though that these men were going to be great disciples, great followers of Jesus Christ. But there was something that held back. There was something in their life that held them back from totally committing to Jesus.

I want to talk about these three men now. Let's meet them. Here's the first one, verse 57. "Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to him, 'Lord, I will follow you wherever you go'." First of all, the word 'Lord' here, this man was not necessarily calling Jesus Lord and Savior by saying, 'Lord'. In fact, that word is actually a word in its origins and in the original language that's translated in three different English words. One of those words is Lord, one is master, and the other is teacher. In fact, in Matthew's account, he says Teacher there, instead of Lord, it's the same thing. So, obviously, he realized Jesus was a man that was able to do what no other could do and gave him the respect of calling him Lord or Teacher. But he wasn't necessarily referring to him as Lord and Savior.

Matthew's account though says a little bit more about this man. This wasn't just anybody. This was an educated man. In fact, Matthew's account calls him a scribe. The scribes were qualified by Jewish authority to teach. Also, they were those that fell into the category of the people that were hostile to Jesus. And just maybe, we might have looked at that scene if we were there that day. And just maybe, we would've thought this is a great disciple for Jesus Christ, but Jesus knew different. Jesus could do what you and I cannot do. He can judge the motive. He can read the heart. And this is what Jesus says, an incredible statement that Jesus says in response to this man. Verse 58, "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'."

The phrase "son of man" is found over 80 times in the gospels. And it's always referring to the humanity of the Messiah. Jesus is called the son of God in the New Testament. He's also called the son of man. And sometimes people misunderstand what that means. Some people think when it says, he's the son of God, it means he had a heavenly father. And when it says, he's the son of man, it means he had earthly parents, but that's not what that means at all. When the Bible describes Jesus as the son of God, it means our Messiah was fully divine. When it says he's the son of man, it means that our Messiah was fully human. Jesus had to be fully human to be God's sacrificial lamb, to die on Calvary's Cross for the sins of the world. What he's telling this man, by saying what he says here is: Even the son of man, even the Messiah does not have the creature comforts that even animals have. What did Jesus mean by that and why did he say that? Scribes were all about lifestyle and Jesus knew that. They were all about lifestyle and maybe this man was just kind of carried away in the excitement when he said, "Lord, I'll follow you anywhere you go. And Jesus responds by, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head'." In other words, if lifestyle is what you're about, he won't get any increase in lifestyle following me. None of that will happen, even the Messiah has no place to lay his head. Now, what does that mean? I don't think this means that Jesus had nowhere to go. I don't think it means that he was saying that he was homeless. I think what he was saying is, "I have no place of permanence on the Earth."

Jesus could have gone somewhere though. There were places he could have gone. He could have gone to dear friends' houses, Mary and Martha. He could have gone to Peter's house as he had done before. And also, at this time of Oriental or Eastern culture, it was the culture of the day that hospitality was very important. If a person was passing through town and they came into that town and they had no kin there, they had no friends, and they didn't know anybody, it was customary that somebody that lived there would invite them into their home and feed them and give them refreshment, give them rest and let them spend the night. Jesus was not saying, "I have nowhere to go". What he was saying is, "I have no place of permanence on the earth".

I like what one scholar said though. He said, "Before we start feeling too sorry for Jesus who had no place of permanence on the Earth. Ask yourself who really is better off. Jesus, who had no place of permanence on the Earth, but has a place of permanence in heaven and went to heaven to prepare a place of permanence for all that would follow him. Who's really better off? Jesus or the scribe? The scribe had places of permanence on this Earth. He was all about lifestyle and all of that. But he didn't follow Jesus. So, he didn't have heaven as his future abode. Who's really better off? How do I know that's what Jesus was referring to and that's how the man took it? If you look at the end of that verse, there's nothing more said about that man. He's gone. Do you know why? He didn't want to give up anything. He didn't want to give up his lifestyle. I think that's a picture of people today. I really do. There's a lot of folks in the world. They don't want to give up anything. They don't want to give up their lifestyle. They just want to add a little Jesus to it. Give you a little example.

Years ago, I had a guy that I met that was turned out to be a pretty good friend. When we first met, we sat down, we were talking and I mentioned to him that I was a preacher. He said, "That's wonderful. Me and my family are looking for a place to go." And I said, "That's great. How about Sunday?" "Oh, no. No. I got something to do." "What about the next Sunday?" "No, we're going to do this." "What about three weeks from now?" "No, got plans." You see, he didn't want to change anything about his lifestyle. He just wanted to add a little Jesus out of convenience to his life. This man's lifestyle stood in his way, the scribe, and now he's gone.

Let's meet the second one. The second man in verse 59, "Then he said to another, 'Follow me'. But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father'." On the surface, it appears that this is so reasonable. Especially, if his father had already died. If this man was actually dead, Jesus wouldn't have had to wait very long for him because they actually customarily buried people the day they died. You can read commentaries and it says all manner of things. I read one that said one time that the man had not died yet, but he was very sick and probably about to die. I read another who said that the man probably wasn't sick, but maybe he was just really old and death was imminent. Still, others, well, he was dead and needed to be buried. I think there's a better explanation when we look at what Jesus said. Look at the Lord's response first. Then, Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." I think there's a much better explanation about what the man meant when he said, "I must first go and bury my father."

The phrase "bury my father" is a colloquial phrase that was very common at that time and it's still very common, so I'm told, in Middle Eastern countries, even in contemporary times. And this is what it means. I'll illustrate it with a little story. A missionary, one time, from America went to the Middle East and he ran into this young Turk in his travels. And he took a liking into this young man. And he said to the young man, he said, "I really like you. I want to take you with me all throughout Europe. Will you go with me?" And the young man said, "Oh, I would love to, but I just can't right now." He said, "You see, I must first bury my father." The missionary says to him, he says, "I'm so sorry. I didn't even know your father died." And the young man said, "Oh no, my father's not dead. In fact, he's not even sick. That's just a phrase that we use. And this is what it means. I have to stay at my father's house. I have to fulfill my obligation to my father all the days of his life until he passes away. And then when I bury him, then I will have my inheritance." In other words, this man we're talking about in the scriptures now, that Jesus refers to, was a man who had worldly cares and worldly riches standing in his way. And that's why Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." In other words, let the spiritually dead take care of all the things of a dead system. All of that monetary stuff, all that. Let the spiritually dead deal with that. But I'm calling you to a living kingdom. Jesus said, "And you come and preach the kingdom." Secular matters belong to secular people. What happened to this man? The same thing that happened to the first man. This was standing in his way: earthly cares and earthly riches. And now he's gone.

Let's meet the third man. And another also said, "Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." I remember as a boy, a preacher got up and preached on these passages and I didn't understand. In my youth and being young, I didn't understand what the big deal was. All he wants to do is go back and say goodbye to his family. I might say though, in passing, that what family he's talking about. I don't think he's talking about his wife and children. Jesus would not ask him or command him to leave wife and children and abandon them. He wouldn't have done that, especially when the word of God says that a man must provide for his own, especially of his own house. If he doesn't do that, he's denied the faith and he's worse than an infidel. So, I think what he's talking about is he's talking about other family ties with other family members. He's talking about his parents, for example, perhaps. He's also, perhaps, talking about his siblings, his brothers and sisters, maybe distant relatives. But here's the point. It wasn't that the man just wanted to bid them farewell. Jesus knew that this was holding him back. It was family ties and sometimes that happens even today. Jesus responds like this. Here's the response: "No one having put his hand to the plow and looking back his fit for the kingdom of God." What an amazing response that Jesus gives to this man. And really what he's doing is

he's quoting from an ancient proverb that dates back to 800 BC. Amazing proverb and this is what it means: You cannot plow a straight furrow when your eyes are looking back. In other words, the plow that he's talking about is not the plows that we have today. We have modern tractors and modern implements and all of that. You can get a tractor that's fully enclosed and glass up there where you sit. It's got a stereo, it's got air conditioning and a heater and all of that and every comfort you can imagine, a comfortable adjustable seat. You get all that stuff in the farming equipment that we know about, but Jesus is not talking about that kind of equipment. When he mentions plowing. He's talking about the primitive plow. The one that has two wooden handles on it, the one that at the bottom, it has a tooth that rips the ground. He's talking about the kind that has to be hooked up to an animal, who pulls the plow and the farmer has to hold onto the handles of that plow and looks straight ahead to plow a straight furrow. I think that's really a brilliant statement the Lord makes because it's obvious they could have understood that. If you look back while your hands are on the plow, what's going to happen? You won't plow a straight furrow. Your furrow is going to be like this. And the same is true in the Christian life.

I think there's a spiritual application here that applies to everybody, I really do. And that is don't look back at your former life before Jesus. Don't look back at your former life of sin with great fondness when you decide to follow Jesus. If you look back, it's only a matter of time before you turn back and certainly struggle. Jesus knew that family ties were standing in this man's way. Sometimes that happens today, it really does, and I understand that. When I was a teenager, there was a young boy in my hometown, and we used to pick him up and he would go to services with us. And his family thought that was just a great idea and thought it was really great that we spent time with him. Until the time that this young man decided, "You know what I want to do? I want to follow Jesus. I want to be a Christian. I want to be baptized for the remission of my sins." We went over to tell the parents and grandparents that's what he wanted to do. And the grandmother who was very wealthy told this young man, "If you do that, you are out of the will." This young man stood there on his own two legs and he said the words: "then leave me out". Family ties, oftentimes, keep us from doing what we should do for Jesus.

Now, let me just say, as I wrap up my remarks, let me just say that in life, you may not have to give up lifestyle to follow Jesus. You may not have to give up riches to follow Jesus. You may have a comfortable life and that's great. You may not have to turn from family ties to follow Jesus. You may not have to do any of that. You just must be willing to give up everything and anything to follow Jesus Christ in your life. That's the key. I wonder how it is with you today. Are there things in your life that are standing in your way following Jesus? Jesus gave that great invitation earlier on in Luke chapter 9 in verse 23. "Then he said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me'." How is it with you? Are there things in your way? Or are you ready to follow Jesus?

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