

“Counting the Cost”

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Texts: Mark 2:1-12 and Matt. 8:19-22

Mark 2:1 **When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.** 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. 3 And they **\*came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.** 4 Being unable to **[a]get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof [b]above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.** 5 And Jesus seeing their faith **\*said to the paralytic, “[c]Son, your sins are forgiven.”** 6 But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 **“Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins [d]but God alone?”** 8 Immediately Jesus, aware **[e]in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, \*said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?** 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He **\*said to the paralytic, 11 “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.”** 12 And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, **“We have never seen anything like this.”**<sup>1</sup>

Matt. 8:19 **Then a scribe came and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.”** 20 Jesus **\*said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the [a]air have [b]nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”** 21 Another of the disciples said to Him, **“Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”** 22 But Jesus **\*said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.”**<sup>2</sup>

Today I want to demonstrate proper exegesis of the phrase **the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head**. I want to do this by developing a scriptural argument defending the view that this phrase is about *the cost of discipleship*. And because some had claimed that this precludes home ownership by Jesus, I will present evidence to the contrary. I will defend the view that Jesus did indeed own a home, and that his home was employed as a teaching and evangelistic tool—it was a strategic base of operations. A well developed, thoughtful and reasoned position is something Christians need. Such

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes

- a. [Mark 2:4](#) Lit *bring to*
- b. [Mark 2:4](#) Lit *where He was*
- c. [Mark 2:5](#) Lit *child*
- d. [Mark 2:7](#) Lit *if not one, God*
- e. [Mark 2:8](#) Lit *by*

<sup>2</sup>Footnotes

- a. [Matthew 8:20](#) Or *sky*
- b. [Matthew 8:20](#) Or *roosting places*

adroitness and skills are compelling evidence that you actually know what you believe and believe what you know!

This passage is often taken to substantiate the claim that Jesus was homeless—the equivalent of a couch surfing vagabond. But a more careful look at this response shows that this passage is not about housing *per se*, but about the cost of authentic discipleship. If you would follow Me, know that you will be hunted and hated—you will suffer ridicule, abuse, persecution and affliction. “Blood, sweat and tears on a toilsome path,” to paraphrase Winston Churchill who was steeling the British for a fight to the finish against the Nazi power, and the Fascist/Axis of evil pertinent to the Second World War. Becoming a Christian is not all peaches and cream, sweetness and light . . . your life will not be trouble, conflict or pain-free; it is a call to suffering and suffering undertaken for redemptive purposes as we align our lives, goals and purposes with those of our Lord, Savior and Regent/King! There is *no place to hide* for the faithful Christian—we are called to live our lives “out there,” publicly and boldly. We are to make a difference because we are different and, as new creatures in Christ, we are Spirit fashioned, and Spirit led. We live for the greatest cause in all of human history: for the glory of God and the salvation of the lost—even the lost sheep of Israel, God’s own children.

So while verse 20 doesn’t establish that Jesus was homeless, it doesn’t prove that he was a homeowner either. To arrive at that conclusion we have to follow the evidence, both direct and indirect in Scripture. There are good reasons to dismiss the idea of a homeless Jesus. Remembering that verse 20 is about the cost of follow-ship and not ownership; let’s look at Mark 1 which covers a Sabbath day in Capernaum. **They went into Capernaum . . . and straightway on the sabbath day, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one that had authority.** (vv. 21-22) Now I am not sure how this man managed to get by the ushers, but there was **a man with an unclean spirit**/a demonic being who disrupted the service, confronting Jesus as **the Holy One of God** but Jesus not seeking demons as his advertising agents, **rebuked him and said, :Hold thy peace, and come out of him.**” Because the people were amazed it is probable that demonic deliverance during a synagogue service was “unusual.” And the congregants noted Jesus’ **authority over unclean spirits**. Immediately afterwards, Jesus and the disciples went to the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law **lay sick of a fever** but Jesus came and **took her by the hand, and lifted her up and immediately the fever left her and she ministered to them.** There was no uproar over deliverance, or healing on the Sabbath—not at this point at least. **And when evening had come**, the Sabbath being over, a healing and deliverance service commenced at Simon’s home: **they brought all that had diseases and were possessed with devils—the whole city was gather at the door and Jesus healed many** of each group. And the evil spirits were **forbidden to speak** of Jesus at all.

Between v. 34 and v. 35 I would suggest that there is a narrative break during which Jesus may well have proceeded to his own home. Perhaps James and John went with him, it doesn’t say. But, regardless, there is an implicit separation because Simon and those with him went looking for Jesus **a great while before daybreak**—Jesus had gone off to pray by himself. They **followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, “Everyone is seeking for you.”** We are left with the impression that Jonah’s, or Simon’s house was quite substantial with space for dining and domestic service.

Things are much more definite when we move on to Mark 2. After a brief preaching tour, **After some days . . . it was rumored, noised about, that he was in the house** meaning his own home, the house where the roof was **lifted off and the paralyzed man was lowered down.** (v.4) We are not informed that this was Simon's house and the lack of reaction fits the Jesus as owner narrative better. In Mark 6:4, the Greek for "builder craftsman," *tekton* is used and while it can refer to a "carpenter," it is not severely limited to carpenter and could cover stonemason and roofer appropriately. That this is where Jesus abode, or dwelt is supported by John 1:38-39 where the disciples ask Jesus where he **abode/dwelt?** Direct evidence that he was such is found in his reply, **Come and see.** They stayed in his home for the day! Andrew leaves from there to seek Simon. And the following day Jesus finds Philip, saying **"Follow me". . . and Philip sets off to find Nathaniel.** Matthew 4:13 concurs with Mark and John by noting that **Jesus came and dwelt at Capernaum.**

From here we can segue right back to Matt. 8:19-22 thematically, reprising **the cost of discipleship.** The discourse has its distinct parallel in Luke 14:25-35 and is somewhat more expansive.

Reverting to Mark 2:15, we read **that Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples for there were many, and they followed him.**(KJSV) Jesus' house must have as much space of ample dining as Simon's house referenced before. This a lot of company and may actually reference the same type of gathering that precipitated the redemptive parables of Luke 15 (the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son) which irked the scribes and Pharisees. Their charge of Jesus' welcoming way, hosting such mixed banquets probably is substantiated by the respective texts. We are aware, from archeological evidence of that period, that middle-income houses in Capernaum were designed with banqueting halls. An analogy we can relate to is that Jesus probably had a home group ministry with his disciples and that his house was operational control central for the evangelism (gospel preaching) that emerged in that region. Missions emanated from that and what we might call crusades as well.

Matthew 9:10 describes just such teaching (on fasting!) activity with food/meat, in the company of publicans and sinners) and v. 28 records his return home after the visit to Jairus' house which included the raising of his young daughter from the dead. His trip to Jairus' house was attended by a secondary healing of a woman who had an **issue of blood for twelve years.** (vv. 20-22) When Jesus had **come into the house** (which it would appear he left in v.10!), two blind men came seeking to be healed. This was done privately and they were charged to not publicize their healing. I have always struggled with this charge to tell no one—how does a blind person get healed and not have everyone close to them know that something has changed?! Of course, the point was to avoid notoriety, but still . . .

Mark 9:28 duplicates this business of Jesus returning home (**come into the house**) and has instruction following relating to his imminent betrayal and death. Verse 34 repeats Jesus being **in the house** again and instruction about humility unfolds as the disciples had debated who should be his successor (i.e. **be the greatest**) on the way home from the mountain of transfiguration!

And as a footnote to this matter of house ownership, Jesus, being the eldest son would have inherited Joseph's house in Nazareth as Simon Peter would have inherited Jonah's house in Capernaum. The latter is referred to as the house of Simon and Andrew and that may be a reflection that Jonah was still alive. But neither inheritance is mentioned in Scripture as Jesus' house, or Simon's house explicitly *and distinctions are clearly made*. This is simply a note on the handling of property in that day and age which supports the idea of Jesus owning property. It is therefore indisputable that Jesus owned property and Simon also. What are we to make of Mark 10:28-31 where Jesus speaks unabashedly of real estate? It is suggested that the disciples forsook their homes to follow Jesus however this assertion is made ambiguous by John 20:10 that after the discovery of the empty tomb **the disciples departed each to their own home**. This dispersal comes after the "forsaking all" to follow Jesus in the kingdom ministry!

**28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30 [if not] but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in [this time] the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."**

Matthew 19:28 reiterates the same point in a parallel passage for those who have forsaken all. ***The cost of follow-ship re-emerges with this emphasis.*** Our persecutions may entail loss of property, possessions, liberty and even our very lives. But we shall have our reward, that of eternal life in fellowship with him whom we love!

So, one conclusion is that Matt. 8:19-22 is plainly not about Jesus being homeless. It certainly doesn't affirm home ownership. Other evidence suggests ownership. We arrive at that conclusion by examining the Scriptural evidence. There is rather a lot, with indirect confirmation from all four gospels, and I speak explicitly about Mark 2:1-12 (the healing of the paralytic with doctrine) and Matt. 9:10ff (where Jesus is dining at home with a mixed company). This latter occasion sets forth Jesus mission of mercy to heal and to save with material from a more private teaching on fasting. This evening is interrupted by an emergency call to the house of Jairus' house to raise his dead daughter (the healing of a woman with case of bleeding *en route* could be dismissed as incidental (except that span of her illness (twelve years) accords, possibly, with the age of Jairus' daughter!). Both women are healed and in v.28 he returns home again (**and when he was come again into the house**). Luke 15 presents an identical replication of this pattern, despite **at home, or in the house** language being absent. Mark 2 and Matthew 10 are not parallel passages; they represent separate incidences. And so does Luke 15.

Those who oppose Jesus' home ownership, generally, point to his homelessness on earth as an indication of Jesus' poverty and humble life circumstances. For me it is enough that Jesus was not born into royal circumstances, nor to rich, well-positioned and powerful parents; but rather in obscurity and unlikely cultural circumstances (from Nazareth?). As Nathaniel opined, **"Can anything good come of Nazareth?"**). Jesus was impoverished by giving up his position, power, riches, honor and splendor in heaven (his glory), condescending to be born a human being (fully human and fully divine). That's

true poverty. Master craftsmen and fishermen weren't necessarily dirt poor and ragged any more than they had to be ignorant and illiterate! And the testimony of Scripture is that Jesus wasn't any of these things commonly associated with dire poverty. And those who sentimentally glorify poverty would be reluctant to consider the evidence I have presented which supports the contention that Jesus owned a home in Capernaum.

**Amen**