

Unwilling to be Second — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 8:18–22 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, August 23, 2026 · *What Man Is This?*

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All right. Well, thanks to the team for leading us in worship. If you have your Bible, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 8, starting in verse 18. And as you're turning there, you've maybe heard the question, what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object? Has anyone ever had that question asked before?

It's kind of like the question, can God make a rock so big he can't lift it? Those questions have always gotten on my nerves because they are literally illogical. You can't have a logical world made by a logical God, and illogical things take place in that world. That would violate the law of non-contradiction.

And so there is no such thing as an unstoppable force that meets an immovable object, and the two exist simultaneously. Definitely one of two things has to change. You either have to move the immovable object, or you have to stop the unstoppable force, because we live in what's called reality, and reality functions a certain way.

And this idea that truth and reality must agree or correspond has been something that Christians have believed from the very beginning. Not just Christians. You've got other great thinkers like Plato and Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and on and on we could go. But it is a theory of truth that I think is better than the rest.

Truth is not what's most popular. Truth is not what works best. Truth is not what the people kind of desire. You can't just construct your truth to believe whatever you want to believe. Actually, you can, but the problem is, reality gets a vote. And if you choose to live by lies, you may get away with it for a while, but eventually reality has a way of punching you in the face, and that's just the way it is, because truth and reality correspond.

And that dynamic, I think, shows up in our passage today, not between truth and reality, but between the difference of power and authority. Power — you might define power as the

ability to do what you want. If you got the power, you can do it, and a lot of you have the power to do a lot of things.

Authority is not the power to do what you want, it's the authority to do what you want, or the authority to do as you please, and those are not the same thing. If you ever doubt that, just try going a hundred miles an hour down the freeway. You may have the power to do so. Your car may be more than equipped.

You may enjoy it thoroughly. You may have all the encouragement in the world, but if you do that and a police officer sees you, he may pull you over, and he may give you a ticket, because you had the power, but you didn't have the right. And he has the right to give you a ticket because of who owns the road, which is the Texas Department of Transportation, and he is their representative.

And so you can have the power to do something, but not have the right. There's a big difference between power and authority. And all of that is sandwiched in our passage today as people who were surrounding Jesus were becoming increasingly aware of that difference. Jesus was powerful.

In fact, he had wonder-working power. He could do miracles that other people could not do. Jesus was not only healing people and casting out demons, he was also saying things that suggested he had authority. In fact, after the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds are amazed, and they said they were so amazed because he spoke as one who had authority.

And the nature of authority is it gets measured by where a person sits. Authority is not like power. It's not so much about what's in here. It's rather what's out there — the place that you sit in the social hierarchy, and all of us are at different places on the social hierarchies in which we inhabit.

And Jesus, when he came on the scene, not only did he demonstrate great power, he began to act and live and speak in ways that suggested he sat at the top of that hierarchy, and he would say things like, "All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me." And people were beginning to wonder what that authority meant for them.

And so when you get to Matthew chapter 8, Jesus is performing various miracles. People could not deny that Jesus had the power. People were increasingly becoming aware they couldn't deny his authority. The question that they were beginning to struggle with was, what does that mean for me?

Everyone in that time period was waiting for the Christ. Some people think Christ is the last name of Jesus. It's not. It's a messianic title, and it meant the person who was anointed by God or set apart by God, and that this set-apart Christ or Messiah was going to establish a kingdom. And all the prophets, all the priests, all the things in the Old Testament were

helping people anticipate this coming kingdom of God and anticipate this coming ruler or Christ, and there were many people who professed to be him.

Just like every election season, there are people who say, "I'm going to fix it all." They were proclaiming to be messiahs, but none of them actually delivered. None of them actually proved themselves to be the true Messiah. Matthew's purpose in writing this gospel is to say Jesus did. Jesus has proven that he is the Messiah, and his goal in the Gospel is to persuade his Jewish readers that that's the case.

And so when we read our text today, you need to know it's within that context of, from the very first chapter, Matthew 1:1, Jesus is the Christ. As Christ, Jesus was saying things no one else would say. The Sermon on the Mount — he violates their religious assumptions. He said, "If you're going to get the kingdom, you've got to be more righteous than the most righteous people."

And then when he came down the mountain, he violated their religious traditions. He broke their cultural taboos. He did what other people weren't willing to do. And so the problem that people had was, this Christ does not fit my box. It's obvious that Jesus has power. It's obvious he has authority, but if he's the Christ, he doesn't fit what I thought he should say and do.

And if that's the case, and he's the Christ, that has implications for me. It means I have to change the way I think or maybe even change the way I live. And so what we're going to see today is that Jesus, even though he's willing to do what other people won't do, and even though he can perform things other people can't, Jesus is unwilling to sit in second place.

Because he has authority, he will not sit second chair to anyone, and that's an inconvenient truth for people in that first-century context. For some of us, it's an inconvenient truth today, because Jesus will often ask you to do things that are inconvenient, things that are unsettling, things that are hard, things that you simply don't want to do, and you'll be confronted with the same question these men were confronted with today.

If Jesus invites me to come, am I also going to choose to follow?

Jesus never turned anyone away. People would come to Jesus for all kind of reasons. Sometimes they were selfish reasons because of what Jesus would say or do. Sometimes they were just kind of curious because of all the commotion around him. But every person that came to Jesus was given an invitation.

The invitation was to salvation, to abundant life, but the cost was for them to turn and follow. And so in Matthew chapter 8, Jesus raises that question to two men. One of them is a scribe, and one of them is another disciple. So if you go to the next slide, this is our passage

today. It says, "When Jesus saw a large crowd, he gave orders to go to the other side of the sea.

A scribe approached him and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus told him, 'Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.' 'Lord,' another of his disciples said, 'first let me go bury my father.' But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'"

Now, right away you can tell I kind of structured this a little bit differently, because Matthew's such an intentional writer, everything he does is on purpose. And this passage opens and closes with Jesus giving a command. He gives the command in verse 18. The command is obeyed in verse 23. And between that command given and obeyed, you have these two individuals who are essentially challenging whether or not Jesus has all authority.

And that works its way to the middle, which is this title of the Messiah. Jesus is the Son of Man, which is a title of all authority. And so what Matthew is doing in this passage is raising that question, and it's, to me, super interesting, because Matthew tells this story very differently than the Gospel of Luke.

A lot of the gospel writers record the same stories, but in different ways. There's a fancy scholarly term for this. It doesn't really matter. I want you to, if you have time this week, to go to Luke chapter 9, because in Luke chapter 9 you'll see the same story, but it's spun a little bit differently.

In Luke chapter 9, there are three men who approach Jesus with faith conditions. In Luke chapter 8 [Matthew 8], there are only two men, and those two men are told just a little differently. In Luke chapter 9, this story happens way later in the ministry of Jesus. It's as they're on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus is about to be crucified.

In Matthew, he puts it up very, very early, and he puts it in the conversation or the context of Jesus performing miracle after miracle and people wondering, "What man is this? What man is this that has the authority to command wind and waves?" Because Matthew is trying to do something that Luke necessarily isn't trying to do.

Jesus says, "Follow me" in Matthew and in Luke, but in Matthew he says it after the guy gives the conditions. In Luke, he says it before. And then finally, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus adds another command, which is to go proclaim the Kingdom of God, which is a requirement for disciples to do. But in Matthew's Gospel, he doesn't say that.

The text ends abruptly with Jesus saying to the second man, "You follow me." And if you take all of those differences into consideration, my point's not to say there are contradictions. There are easily no contradictions in this list. They are easily harmonized together. The reason I point this out is so that you know what Matthew's trying to do.

Matthew's not trying to show us the cost of discipleship or even the nature of discipleship. Matthew's trying to get us to understand that Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of Man. He is the Messiah, and because of that, Jesus has all authority. And we live in a culture and a context where authority is kind of like a bad word, and as a result of that, many of us can fail to bring this biblical truth into our relationship with Jesus.

But when you begin to understand that Jesus has all authority, then you will begin to relate to him differently than you do right now. And so what we're going to see in these two people are what are called conditions to obedience. Faith conditions is what I'm going to call 'em — for why you might not follow Jesus.

People come to Jesus for many reasons. Many of them are even selfish in nature. Jesus never turns anyone away, but he requires everyone to follow. In fact, the way that Matthew opens his passage is by mentioning the crowds. Did you guys notice that? When Jesus saw the crowds, that's when he said, "Go to the other side."

The idea of crowds has been used by Matthew again and again. He uses this word fifty-plus times in his entire gospel, and every time a crowd shows up in the Gospel of Matthew, when that crowd gets big enough, Jesus does something like this. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "It's time to decide. Are you going to be in the crowd or are you going to be a true follower?"

Just because you come to me doesn't mean you're on my team. Those who are on Team Jesus are people who have come and decided to follow." And so when Jesus says, "Go to the other side," he's doing what he's done twice before. He did it on the Sermon on the Mount, and now he's doing it again right here. He's trying to see, are you going to be just another person in the crowd or are you going to be a person who turns and decides to follow?

And when Jesus says to go to the other side, that's itself interesting as well, because the other side in this geographical context was the Decapolis or Gentile area. It was Jesus' way of essentially saying, "I'm not here just to preach to the Jews. I'm not here just to establish the Kingdom of God as you understand it.

I'm bringing in a kingdom that is for all people, because the Son of Man is given authority to rule over all the earth." And so he's saying to these two Jewish men, "If you're going to turn and follow, it is going to disrupt not only your theological beliefs, but the relational priorities of your life." And the same is true for us today.

If you're going to follow Jesus, he may very well disrupt your theological beliefs, and he very well may challenge you to prioritize him in a relationship that matters very much to you, but one that has become an idol in your life. And so let's begin with the scribe in Matthew chapter eighteen [8:19], who says, "Teacher, I'm going to follow you wherever you go."

I would say that this scribe represents coming to Jesus because you are interested in what Jesus has to say. A lot of people look to the fact that the scribe says, "Teacher," and they say, "He's not calling Jesus Lord, therefore he's not a true disciple."

I want us to be careful with that, because for a scribe to say to Jesus, "You're a teacher," would essentially be like the greatest respect he could say. Because a scribe was someone who basically grew up learning the Bible. He knew the Old Testament. He memorized large sections, and he was probably teaching other people as well.

We also know from Matthew that the scribes were not very fond of Jesus, because Jesus was saying, "If you're going to get the kingdom, you got to be better than them." And so this is a scribe who not only took that criticism, but also saw in Jesus a unique ability to understand God's Word. And so when he says to Jesus, "Teacher," he's essentially saying, "I want to learn from you."

I'm interested in what you have to say, even though all of my friends and contemporaries reject you." And so for him to say, "Teacher," is a huge sign of respect. He doesn't call him Lord, but he's coming to Jesus because of what he has to say. And the first warning in our passage is that we need to beware.

Beware of coming to Jesus just because of what he says. If you're only coming to Jesus just because of what he says, there will come a time in your life where he confronts you with whether or not you're really going to choose to follow. This guy is eager. He says, "Jesus, I'll follow you wherever you go."

If you go to the next slide, this is the first warning. For Christ to save you must choose to follow. Point one: beware of coming to Jesus just because of what he says. The way that I would describe it in our context today is the tendency that people have to treat Jesus like Build-A-Bear theology.

Have you ever been to a toy store — or certainly across the pond, when you get off the airport and you go to London, they have this Build-A-Bear cabinet shop, and you can make your bear exactly like you want it to look. It can have all the sports memorabilia you desire. And that's how a lot of people treat following Jesus, because they're so impressed by what he has to say.

And even if you're not a Christian, even if you're what's called a cultural Christian — even cultural Christians look at the teachings of Jesus and say it's legit. He has profound insight on the nature of the human condition. He has incredible power to change a person's life. I know cultural Christians who don't believe in the resurrection.

They don't believe in the miracles. Jesus is not the Son of God — but we should all be cultural Christians, because if we would all be cultural Christians, that would be good for our

society, because there would be, like, organizational structure, and it would kind of tame men and create monogamy and provide stable, healthy families, and we need that to flourish.

And so, "I may not believe the truth about Jesus, but I really respect what he has to say." And maybe you would not go that far, but you would still be of the persuasion, "I'm going to turn up the parts of Jesus that I really like, and I'm going to turn down the parts that I don't. And where Jesus and I agree, we agree really well, and where Jesus and I don't agree," — I might not say it this way, but — "he's basically wrong."

And that tendency to make Jesus just a teacher is damaging to your faith, because Jesus is not just a teacher, he's also Lord. A teacher can inform your mind, a Lord disrupts your life. A teacher can tell you what you might consider, a Lord tells you what you have to do. And so his response to this man is challenging that superficial faith.

He says, "Jesus, I'll follow you wherever you go." And Jesus responds, "Foxes have dens, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He's calling this guy out for a superficial faith. He's saying, "You're focused on what you're going to learn; you need to identify what you're going to lose."

It's not just about getting smarter and wiser and more popular and gaining more influence. If you're going to follow me to the other side, you need to know I'm going to live a life on mission." And I really do believe that's what Jesus means by no place to lay his head. Some read into that, that being a Christian entails a life of poverty.

Jesus was poor, therefore he had no place to lay his head. I don't know that that's historically accurate, because Jesus was a carpenter, and most carpenters were at least middle class. They did financially better than farmers and ranchers. Besides that, Jesus had a lot of places where he could lay his head.

He had Mary and Martha's house. He had Peter and his mother-in-law. He had Matthew and some other tax collectors' houses. Jesus had places to lay his head. When Jesus says, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head," I think it's much more focused on the missional aspect — that Jesus is going to live on the move.

Jesus is essentially saying to this guy, "When you sign up to be my follower, you're signing up for my mission, and that means your life may be inconvenienced. It may be that your life is not full of comfort and ease. Sometimes in following me, you're going to have to uproot your life and your family. You may have to go to another part of the world."

You may have to go to another part of town. You may have to have conversations with people that you didn't necessarily want to have." You're going to have to make sacrifices if you're

going to become a follower of Jesus, because you realize that his main goal in life is not your comfort and enjoyment of all things.

And this guy had not yet considered that. He was mostly focused on the benefits of Jesus making him wiser and smarter and him becoming knowledgeable about what God wanted. And Jesus is saying, "That's great. That's beautiful. I will teach you. Those things are good, but you have to go beyond that superficial faith to be willing to make the sacrifice."

True faith — and what I would call allegiance, true allegiance, which is what true faith is — is willing to make the sacrifice. And that's the warning of the scribe, that's the condition of his faith, and that's the application if you and I want to become true followers. The second guy is not a scribe. He's referred to as another disciple, which to me is very interesting, because it suggests that maybe the scribe was as well.

The scribe very well may have been sincere in his desire to follow. He doesn't respond to Jesus. There's this deafening silence, which to me leaves us with the question. The other disciple — we don't know the nature of why he came to Jesus. In your notes, I'm putting him under the umbrella of coming to Jesus because of what you seek.

And the reason I say that is because this guy was an insider, not an outsider. He was a churchgoer, he was a pew sitter just like you and me, and he had seen and he had heard the things that Jesus was doing. He had probably listened to the Sermon on the Mount, he had seen these miracles take place. He saw Jesus touch a leper and heal him, cleanse him with a touch.

He saw Jesus talk to the centurion and heal his servant with a word. He saw Jesus touch Peter's mother-in-law's hand, and the fever immediately leave her. And then he saw Jesus heal literally every sick and demon-possessed person in Capernaum in a single night, and he probably thought to himself, "These people aren't even disciples.

Jesus is healing the Romans and these crazy people and these demented people. What might he do for me? If I became a follower, would Jesus meet my need?" And that's why a lot of people come to Jesus today. You may be at church this morning because your life has fallen apart, and you have come to recognize that Jesus has great power.

"I saw him heal my son's life. I saw him transform my old boss. You know, the schoolteacher I had in sixth grade, she came to Jesus and everything just changed. And so that's why I'm here this morning. I'm drawn to what Jesus can do, because I have a real need in my life, and I need Jesus to address it."

And if that's the case for you this morning, there's no shame in that. Jesus never turns anyone away for any reason, but there's a difference between coming and following. You can

come to Jesus for any reason, but if you want the salvation, if you want the deliverance and the healing, you've got to be willing to turn and follow.

And this guy was not yet ready to do that, because of what he says when he says to Jesus, "Lord" — which is a confession of loyalty — "first let me bury my father." Now, in Matthew's gospel, the designation Lord is what you want to hear. It's spoken by true disciples, whereas teacher is almost never spoken by a true disciple.

So this guy is walking the walk, he's talking the talk in many ways, but what he's essentially saying to Jesus is, "I'll make you Lord — just wait one second." And his desire to have Jesus wait was for a reasonable request, because he's essentially saying, "I need you to wait so that I can bury my dad." And the responsibility to bury your father, if you were the eldest son, was essentially a sacred duty akin to honoring God himself.

We are not Middle East people. We live in the West, and so we don't live in what's called an honor-shame culture, and so this doesn't resonate as much with us. But in an honor-shame culture, to honor your parents is essentially to honor God himself. It's one of the Ten Commandments — honor your father and mother — and so this guy's saying, "Let me do that."

And some people say that the guy's dad wasn't dead, that he was very healthy and alive, and that the guy was saying, "Hey, give me seven years. Give me 17 years, and then I'll follow." That's not in the text. The people who present that as a possible theory, I think, are doing that to soften what Jesus says. They would say he wouldn't even be here if his dad was really dead, because he would have to be at home and grieving for the seven days that it was required.

I don't know — seven days, seven years, 17 years, can't say. The point is what Jesus responds with, which is harsh and unrelenting. This guy makes a reasonable request: "Hey, let me bury my dad." And Jesus responds, "No. Let the dead bury their own dead. You follow me." Which is essentially Jesus' way of calling out his conditional faith, and his faith condition is what I'm going to call stalling faith, or faith that tries to stall — different from superficial faith.

And people have this faith condition for any number of reasons today. And what's so tempting for us, just like for this young man — when you're on a wicked path, it's easy to see wickedness for what it is. But when you're on a wicked path, and the wickedness is disguised in the cloak of righteousness or family loyalty or family love, it's much harder to see.

And what Jesus is essentially saying to this man is, "I have got to come first, even above your father and your mother. You've got to love me more than even them." I would have loved to see that guy's face and the faces of the other people standing around. No rabbi would have ever said anything close to what Jesus said.

It was crazy for a rabbi to demand that kind of a loyalty, and that's the point. That's what Jesus is saying: "I'm not just a rabbi. I'm not just a teacher. I'm much, much more than that. And if you want to come to me, great. Anybody can come. But if you're going to follow, there are implications." He says it this way a little later in Matthew chapter 10, talking to another group.

He said, "Don't think that I came to bring peace on the earth." — "What about the angels, the Christmas cards, peace on Earth?" — "No, no, no. I didn't come to bring peace on the Earth, I came to bring a sword. I came to bring a sword." And then he lists these family relationships, and then says, "The one who loves a father or mother more than me, they're not worthy of me.

The one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me isn't worthy of me." Jesus is essentially saying, "When it comes to your allegiance, you must have greater allegiance to me than even your earthly dearest relationship." One of the marks of discipleship that we talk about in our church comes from John's gospel — these "my disciple" statements.

Jesus says, "If you abide in my Word, then you are truly my disciples." Jesus says, "If you love one another, then you'll show the world that you're truly my disciples. My Father is glorified by this, that you then prove to be my disciples — you bear much fruit." And those things sound really great. I want to love Jesus, I want to abide in the Word, I want to love his church, I want to bear much fruit.

But then the last part comes from the Gospel of Luke, and in Luke's gospel, Jesus makes some incredibly difficult claims. He says, "If you do not come to me and hate your father and mother" — notice, anybody can come, but if you're going to follow, sometimes it means you got to hate your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — "yes, and even his own life. If you're not willing to do that, you cannot be my disciple."

Now, he's not saying you got to hate your mom and dad. It's an idiom in the Middle East. It's a way of saying, "You've got to love me more than the people you love the most. You got to love me more than Mom and Dad.

You got to love me more than your spouse. You got to love me more than even your children, or you're not ready to follow." And he gives these parables about a builder and a king. A builder, if he's going to build a house, he counts the cost. And a king, if he's going to battle, he's going to count the cost to see if he can win.

And in the same way, any of you who wants to be my disciple must first renounce all that they have, or they can't be my disciple. And I know this is difficult. This is unpleasant. What about the Jesus that's, you know, meek and mild? What about the Jesus that looks at the crowds and has compassion on them?

What about the Jesus that says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and take my yoke upon you. Learn from me — my yoke is easy and my burden is light"? That is the same Jesus who is making these claims, and it's because of his compassion that he says the things that he says. It's because he has all authority that it would be unloving for him to say, "Even though I have all authority, you can make that person the most important person in your life."

"I know that to love your kids like you want, you're going to have to disobey my will for your life. I know that to marry that guy who you're dating, you're going to have to violate my design for your sexuality." — "Ah, it's okay. It's fine. I'll get over it. Maybe I've even changed my mind a little bit." It would be unloving if he allowed you to persist in what's bad for your heart and soul.

And so when he says, "All authority has been given to me," it's because he loves you that he makes these requirements on your life — that "I've got to be the most important person." If you're going to follow, you must follow with a faith that is not superficial, a faith that is clear-eyed and is willing to make the sacrifice, a faith that is even willing to bear the social cost.

And make no mistake, this guy — to do what Jesus was asking him to do, it would have resulted in a significant social cost. For his family, he would've been dead to them. "How could you do that to Dad? How could you deny your cultural responsibility to bury him as the traditions say that we should?"

He wouldn't have just lost his family, he probably would've lost many of his friends. He would've been seen by his community as, like, the prodigal son: "All he cares about is himself."

But true allegiance weighs the social cost and chooses to follow still. And some of you know immediately what I'm talking about. Some of you have felt this yourself. Because when you started to follow Jesus, things got weird in your family. And all of a sudden, maybe at first they were, you know, playful: "Oh, you got religion. Ah, it'll probably wear off. We'll see what happens next year."

Or maybe it moved from that to this kind of polite removal from conversations. "Oh, he probably doesn't want to hear us talking about that. Let's do that outside of his company." So you weren't invited to the same parties, you weren't invited to the same kinds of conversations. So you're sitting there at the Thanksgiving table surrounded by people — you've never felt more alone.

People treat you like the black sheep, because you started to follow Jesus. And if that's how we feel in our cultural context, imagine what it was like in the Middle East. Even today, for a Muslim person to decide to follow Jesus, they are dead to their mom and dad. In some cases,

I mean physically dead. They will issue what's called a fatwa, which is like — if you watch John Wick, it's the, you know, call the people.

You're toast. You're dead. It's just a matter of time. And that's the social cost for many people who choose to follow Jesus. And all that Jesus is saying to the big, big crowd who's all in — "man, look at what Jesus says, look at what he can do" — he says, "If you're going to come to me, you need to know that if you're going to follow me, there's a cost.

And true disciples will bear the social cost. True disciples will make the sacrifice. Not to prove their worth, not to impress me. They will do those things because they see the truth of who I am — that I'm the Christ, I'm the Messiah, I'm the Son of Man." And that's where Matthew essentially lands as he ends this passage.

That phrase, "Let the dead bury their own dead," is an interesting phrase. If you think about it's quite impossible for a dead person to do anything, and so that's led a lot of people to think maybe Jesus is being metaphorical. Maybe he's talking about the spiritually dead. Let the spiritually dead bury the physical dead.

Some people say no, it's symbolic — it's grave diggers. Let the grave diggers bury your dead. Maybe that's the case. I think that's important to note, because Jesus is not anti-grieving. The problem was not that the guy was grieving. The problem was not that he wanted to bury his dad. The Ten Commandments — honor your father and mother — all that's golden.

The problem was his condition. "Lord, first let me do this." It's the order of the word "first." It's because he said, "Lord first" instead of "First, Lord." — "I really want to do this, but first, Lord, since you say this, I'm going to do that." He's saying, "I'd really love to follow you, but first I need to do this other thing."

And so when Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their own dead," he's either saying, "This guy is spiritually dead and you're spiritually dead, and the only way to spiritual life is to follow me. But if you're not going to follow me, you're going to stay spiritually dead — so let the dead people bury the dead." Or maybe he's saying, "Let the grave digger take care of it.

Let some other person in your family take care of it." I'm not sure that you can know either way, but he repeats the word dead two times, which I think's interesting. It's almost as if Matthew is trying to suggest that to follow Jesus is to follow life, whereas to reject him is to choose death. And in a lot of ways, this guy — if he did stay, which we don't know what he did — but if he did remain, what he was in effect doing was obsessing over death.

"Well, my father might die, and I got to be here." And so he's viewing all of his life through that lens. And there are people today who do something similar, in that they're obsessed with death. They're obsessed with death, maybe the fear of death, and that's why they pursue what they pursue.

That's why they work too hard and sacrifice their family — because "I got to have enough. I got to do enough. I got to have all the experiences" — because they're so driven by the fear of death, it's become an obsession in their life. And so when something like Jesus comes along and says, "I'll give you true life, but you're going to have to deny yourself."

You're going to have to take up your cross. You're going to have to let go of your obsessions," they say, "Jesus sounds nice. He actually sounds kind of too religious. This is kind of weird, and people make fun of me, so I think I'll stay with death instead." But some people — it's not even physical death, it's the spiritual death.

It's that they choose patterns of thinking and living that result in spiritual death. They continue in their addictions, which are not giving them life. It is taking from them the things that they love the most. It has stolen their intimacy in their marriage. It has stolen their affection between their children.

It has stolen their vitality and enjoyment of life. All they do is remain depressed, and yet they choose it. They continue in it because of the cost of what it would mean to turn and follow. And there are so many people in our culture today who are engaging in what this second man was doing.

And I don't know what that would look like in your case, but I would venture to guess there are some who, when Jesus would confront you with the choice to follow, you would say, "No — not yet." — "I don't want to say no, Lord. I mean, I know who you are, and I want to go to heaven when I die, but I just — not yet. I need to, you know, fix this thing first. We need to get married. I'm just not ready. I need to make the money that I need to make."

And if that's the case, you need to know you do not have genuine faith, because true faith is willing to bear the social cost. True faith is true allegiance.

Faith is allegiance. Faith is not intellectual agreement. It's doing what Jesus says. It's believing that he's right in what he says, and that because he's right and has authority, I will do that. And so beware of coming to Jesus just because of what he says. Beware of coming to Jesus just because of what you seek.

You want to follow Jesus. You want to become a follower, and the only way you'll truly follow Jesus is if you see him as the Son of Man. Now, I know "the Son of Man," for most of us, is like — what does that even mean? Some people read the phrase Son of Man, and they think that Jesus is being humble. It's like Jesus saying, "I'm just a normal dude, just your regular guy — Son of Man."

That is not what Jesus is saying, okay? It's a messianic title. And again, remember, he's writing to Jewish people who were steeped in the Old Testament, and the phrase Son of Man

comes from Daniel chapter 7. And in Daniel chapter 7, it's not just a little old dude, you know, from — farm boy, back in the country, good people.

That's not what Daniel 7's about. It's about a set-apart, anointed, reigning royal king who Daniel sees in his night visions appearing before God the Father. He — "suddenly one like a Son of Man," which meant he had a human figure. This divine person had a human figure, and he was coming on the clouds of heaven, and then he approached the Ancient of Days, and he was escorted before him.

Then God the Father, the Ancient of Days, gave him authority to rule. God the Father gave him glory. He gave him a kingdom. Why? So that every people — not just Jewish people — every people, the people across the lake, the Decapolis, the Greeks, the Gentiles, every people, every nation, every language would serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. His kingdom is not one that will be destroyed. So what Matthew is — he is literally screaming at us: Jesus has authority. Jesus is the Son of Man. That's why you should follow. Because he has been given rule. He has been given glory. He has been given a kingdom for those who would follow him, and it's not just the special Jewish people.

It's every tribe, every tongue, every nation — any person who would see in Jesus, "you are worth everything. I don't have any conditions. How could I? Why would I, when you're so good, you're so glorious, you're so powerful, you're so the center of life? And so if it requires a sacrifice, then it's a sacrifice I'm going to make, and if it requires a social burden, then it's a social burden that I will bear.

But Jesus, you are worthy of even these things that I must give, because in giving away these things, I possess something so much better." It's the point behind the pearl of great price. It's the point behind the treasure in a field. It's the point of so much of what we see in the New Testament about who Jesus is.

And Matthew's point is: do not miss it. Do not miss who this man is. He is the Christ. He is the Son of Man. That's why you must follow. If you keep reading the Gospel of Matthew, this phrase shows up again and again, and it's really interesting, the literary art of how the Son of Man works. Of course, it begins in Daniel 7 — the Son of Man is given a kingdom.

But if you keep going in Matthew, it says that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins. After it says that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, it says that the Son of Man is a friend of sinners — a friend of tax collectors, a friend of sinners, somebody that hangs out with the wrong crowd.

And not only that, he's the Lord of the Sabbath, which means he's over your religious traditions. The Son of Man in Matthew 20 is then handed over — he's delivered to the

Gentiles, he's delivered, handed over to the Romans, and then he is crucified as a result. Jesus says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served" — even though he had every right to be served as the King of Kings.

He didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. And as a result, that same Son of Man would be raised on the third day. People were confronting Jesus: "Give us a sign. Jesus, give us a sign." He said, "I'm not giving you a sign except one sign — that's the sign of Jonah." Just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish, and on the third day he came out alive, so the Son of Man will be buried in the grave and will be raised on the third day.

And to their chagrin, that's exactly what happened. He was delivered over, he was crucified, and on the third day, he was raised. And then he said in his resurrected glory, "I'm checking out of here, and there will come a day when the Son of Man will come riding on the clouds. And on that day, the people will mourn, because then they'll understand that the same Son of Man who, when I rejected him, had no place to lay his head, now comes with all authority, dominion, and power.

And on that day, it will be too late." And so people will mourn, but the Son of Man will come and establish his eternal throne. And so when we sang this morning, "Christ Be Magnified" — that bridge that says, "If I join you in your sufferings, then I'll join you when you rise" — that is what Jesus is inviting these two men to understand.

"If you're going to come to me, good — you're welcome. Come to me, any who are weary and heavy-laden. But you must know I'm the Son of Man. And as the Son of Man, right now, I have no place to lay my head. But if you will turn and follow me, I will give you life — true life, abundant life, flourishing as God designed it to be experienced.

Momentarily, here and now, it will require some suffering. It will require some sacrifice. It will have a social cost. But if you will continue and be obedient and see it through to the end, then I will demonstrate — I will prove that your faith is well-placed when I establish my kingdom." And what Jesus is asking from you and me, he demonstrated himself.

If you think about it, Jesus does the very thing he's asking us to do. He was obedient to the Father's will, even when there was a sacrifice. Jesus had no place to lay his head. In fact, the same phrase is used as Jesus is crucified. He lays his head, and he bows, and he gives up his spirit. And so it was in obedience to the Father's will that Jesus had to bear the shame.

He paid the social consequence because he was submitted to authority. And so when Jesus says, "I want you to submit to my authority," — "because I'm submitting to my Father's authority, and as I submit to my Father's authority, my Father is going to exalt me and glorify me. And just as my Father has exalted and glorified me, I will exalt and glorify you.

And if you'll join me in these sufferings, then you will join me in my resurrection." And if you look at the juxtaposition between those two things, sometimes people put it in the language of the cross before the crown. The Lord Jesus was willing to bear our shame. He was willing to pay the price for our sin before he inherited his throne.

And what he's asking you and I to do is to pattern our lives after him — not so that we'll possess the kingdom, but because we've already possessed it by faith. This is not something Jesus is saying you've got to do to prove to me you're worthy. It's something you give to Jesus voluntarily, because you know he's worthy.

And so as we take the Lord's Supper this morning, what a perfect symbolic expression of the bread, which is symbolic of the body of Jesus being broken for us, and the cup, which is symbolic of the blood of Jesus being shed for us. And Paul says, "In eating the bread and drinking the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death."

We are proclaiming that right now we may feel the suffering, but we have faith that he's coming again. You will proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. But when he comes riding on the clouds in great glory, the reward of our faith will come riding with him. And so if you're suffering this morning because of what obedience is going to cost you, I would encourage you to persevere, to remain steadfast in your convictions.

And if you're like these men this morning — you have faith conditions. You know what Jesus is calling you to do, but because you're not ready yet, or because you're not willing to pay the sacrifice, I would encourage you this morning to be disrupted and uncomfortable. Because the only way you can have assurance that you're really in Christ is not that you've come to church this morning, but that you've committed to follow him.

And there's a big difference between coming to church and choosing to follow Jesus. And the confidence that you have saving faith is that faith is visible in your life. And genuine faith is not what you think — it's not you agreeing with Jesus. It's you agreeing with Jesus and changing your life, changing the way that you're directed, and choosing to walk in obedience, no matter how difficult or painful, because you believe that Jesus has done that same thing for you to bring salvation.

And so if there's a sense this morning in which you're struggling — it's difficult, you're afraid — I'd be happy to pray with you or pray for you. And I would just leave you with this thought. When Jesus concluded the Gospel of Matthew, he made this statement: "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me."

He told his disciples to go make disciples. He's saying to you to do something this morning. And whatever that thing is, he finishes it with the promise, "I'm with you always." And so whatever it is that you feel Jesus leading you to do, the gift of his presence, the gift of his power, the gift of his authority is attached to your obedience.

And if you would choose to continue to live in disobedience, you're choosing to separate yourself from that reality — to separate yourself from every resource of Heaven at your disposal. I get it. I've been there. It's literally insane to continue in willful unbelief. Maybe this morning, the Lord has you here so that you could turn and follow.

Through allegiance, Jesus Christ will save your soul. But for that salvation to materialize in your life, you've got to follow. It's not enough to believe, it's not enough to come. You've got to turn and follow, so that the saving that Christ can do can come about in your life. And so let's bow our heads together and respond to the Lord as he leads you to.

I know that all of us are facing different circumstances and challenges of different kinds. I'm going to ask our ushers to come forward as we get ready to distribute the Lord's table. But as they do that, would you reflect on your own heart and the invitation of Jesus to you? What is it that he's asking you to do this morning, that you might respond with conditions on your faith?

"Lord, I'll do anything but that. I'll do it any time but now. First, let me do this or that." If that's where you're at this morning, the Word of God is calling you to a place of repentance, and I would encourage you to give that repentance before we take the Lord's Supper today.