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Matthew 8:18-22 | The Tale of Two 'Would-Be' Disciples
July 2, 2023

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 8.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday, we wrapped up the third healing miracle after Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The first miracle was that of a Leper—a civil outcast.

The second a Roman soldier—a political outcast.

The third, Peter's mother-in-law—a social outcast.

So, Matthew, our Gospel writer, provides three dramatic healing miracles back to back.

And we asked the question, why?

The obvious answer—is that if Jesus didn't heal any of these three, they most likely would have died.

Which is true.

But we also ^{discovered} learned that there is a much more substantial and spiritual answer.

LW KEYPOINT:

The primary purpose of miracles has always been to validate God's message.

We looked back in Biblical history to learn that God's message of salvation always takes priority over the temporary benefits of physical health.

LW KEYPOINT:

God's people get sick and die.

Prosperity preachers will tell you that if you're a Christian and have enough faith, you won't get sick—

Or God's plan for your life is to be healthy and wealthy.

In Greek, it's called 'buh-lone-i-e.'

This is not our best life now—far from it—if we're disciples of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION:

If Matthew's Gospel were a symphony, today's passage would be in an interlude.

Matthew has revealed three miracles back to back, and now he provides a short break from the action because, after this break, Jesus provides three more miracles before the next interlude.

And it's within this interlude that Matthew gives us a short synopsis of two conversations that Jesus had with two men who want to be Disciples.

Both men said they would follow Jesus—so how does Jesus respond?

Probably not like the way we would—Jesus says, *thanks but no thanks*.

There's a lot to this little story—and it has much to teach us about our own faith than we might guess.

How so? Let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:18-22 CSB

Matthew 8:18— *When Jesus saw a large crowd, around him, he gave the order to go to the other side of the sea.*

Matthew 8:19— *A scribe approached him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."*

Matthew 8:20— *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."*

Matthew 8:21— *"Lord," another of his disciples said, "first let me go bury my father."*

Matthew 8:22— *But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

*Help me understand your instruction,
and I will obey it
and follow it with all my heart. (Psalm 119:34)*

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 8:18— *When Jesus saw a large crowd, around him, he gave the order to go to the other side of the sea.*

Crowds begin to form whenever someone claims to do something miraculous or supernatural.

Crowds also form because people want to be entertained.

Jesus is not a big fan of crowds. Why?

Crowds become unpredictable—and crowds are dangerous.

In our day and age, we tend to be impressed by crowds.

For example, we like to judge a church by the size of the congregation.

But since Jesus lives within the Kingdom of God—and not the kingdom of this world, He is not impressed by crowds.

Jesus repeatedly does something that most preachers don't— He leaves the crowds behind to preach the Gospel.

And that's precisely what Jesus does here.

+ **Matthew 8:18**— *When Jesus saw a large crowd, around Him.*

Jesus is the focus of the crowd's attention, yet Jesus knows that crowds are trouble.

Crowds draw in desperate people—and desperate people do desperate things.

So, as people continue to watch Jesus perform these miracles, they are immediately drawn to Him.

They want to be around Him.

They want to be near and associated with Him.

And they don't leave.

+ **Matthew 8:18**— *He (Jesus) gave the order to go to the other side of the sea.*

Jesus makes this decision because as we learned last Sunday—Jesus' primary mission was not to heal people physically—it was to heal them spiritually.

Jesus knew it didn't do much good to heal someone physically if they didn't believe in His message.

And yet most people didn't believe.

Secondly, Jesus wants to ditch the crowd because He's exhausted.

As we'll see next week, Jesus gets in the boat and falls asleep during a storm.

So Jesus gives an order to the Twelve Disciples to get boats ready so they can cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

As the Disciples were making preparations to leave...

Matthew 8:19— A scribe approached Him (Jesus) and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

First things first—A Scribe is a religious leader who ran with the Pharisees.

A Scribe has a Ph.D. in teaching and interpreting the OT/Mosaic Law.

They were the scholarly/elite class of Jewish society.

In Jesus' day, to be a Scribe was a highly respectable and impressive occupation—like a brain surgeon today.

Throughout the Gospels, however, we see Scribes being hostile toward Jesus.

So this conversation is a bit odd.

Typically Scribes were teachers, not followers of teachers.

Scribes were incredibly reluctant to follow a teacher like Jesus. Why?

Because Jesus was not formally educated in a Rabbinic School.

Jesus didn't attend Jerusalem Theological Seminary!

Not only that, but Jesus rejected the very traditions that this Scribe held sacred.

Regardless...

+ **Matthew 8:19**— A scribe approached Him (Jesus) and said, "Teacher,

Note here that the Leper and Centurion addressed Jesus as *Lord*.

However, the Scribe addressed Jesus as 'Teacher.'

The title 'Teacher' sounds fairly noble, doesn't it?

The title is *accurate*— but nowhere near *adequate*. How so?

Other people called Jesus 'Teacher' in Matthew's Gospel—

It just so happened that most of these people are people who refuse to become disciples.

For example: Other Scribes and Pharisees Matt 12:38, 22:16, 22:36.

The Rich Young Ruler in Matt 19:16.

+ **KEY QUESTION:**

Is Jesus your Lord, Teacher, or both?

+ **Matthew 8:19**— "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

The Scribe professes absolute allegiance!

What an amazing statement of dedication!

Now let's pause....can you think of other people in Scripture that did something similar?

For example—at the Last Supper, Jesus said this to Peter.

Luke 22:31— *"Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat."*

Luke 22:32— *"But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*

Luke 22:33— *"Lord," he (Peter) told him, "I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death."*

The rest, as we say, is history.

Augustine, one of our early church fathers, ^{made this declaration} ~~prayed this~~ as a young man, "Lord, give me celibacy and self-control, but not yet." _{single}

There is something very attractive about the words, "I will follow you wherever you go."

This phrase might sound familiar.

In the OT, during the time of the Judges—

^{BTW} Judges is the darkest time in all of Jewish history.

Yet, there are two women who have an amazing story during such darkness.

Naomi and Ruth. Naomi is the mother-in-law to Ruth.

Both women lost their husbands.

Naomi tells Ruth to go back home and leave Naomi behind to die alone.

And Ruth ^{Appalled} says this...

Ruth 1:16— Don't plead with me to abandon you
or to return and not follow you.
For wherever you go, I will go,
and wherever you live, I will live;
your people will be my people,
and your God will be my God.

Ruth 1:17— Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
May the Lord punish me,
and do so severely,
if anything but death separates you and me.

Wow, talk about commitment!

I think we have a new verse for Church membership?!

Now, is that level of commitment—what this Scribe is saying to Jesus at this moment?

Matthew 8:19— "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

If you shared the Gospel with someone and they said, "Yep, I'm in. I want to be baptized, discipled and join your church."

How would we respond?

Most of us would be excited.

Look how Jesus responds to this man's fervor proclamation.

Jesus looks him in the eye - outside

Matthew 8:20— 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."

Wow, what a buzzkill.

Jesus' understanding of discipleship is way different from ours.

Jesus rejected His enthusiasm.

Jesus clearly sees through this man's grandiose profession of allegiance.

How so?

This Scribe saw crowds, miracles, and enthusiasm with his own two eyes and wanted to be a part of it.

He knew that Jesus had something ~~none of the seminary professors, mentors, or colleagues had.~~

That no one else had. And he wanted to be a part of that "some thing!"

People are attracted to Jesus in the hope of personal benefit—that's why everybody makes such a big deal about miracles.

And yet, Jesus pushes back because He knows that this Scribe has not counted the cost.

This traveling preacher from Nazareth has no home to call His own.

Even though we think Jesus responds in an unusual way—the Scribe knows precisely what Jesus is saying.

Jesus explains what true discipleship entails.

He doesn't want anyone to underestimate the cost.

A True Disciple

He must count the cost before he builds the tower.

It's like the Scribe is seeing Jesus' miracles as a wartime parade— where the nation rejoices because its soldiers have come back—all the medals—all the accolades.

Yet, the Scribe doesn't realize the actual cost of war.

It also reminds me of watching the Olympics—

Someone may dream of winning a gold medal— until he learns about the personal cost and sacrifice.

The 4:00 am training sessions, strict diet, and limited social life—

All of that and more—for years—to train like that to even get to a level to be considered a world-class athlete.

This text also reminds me of when someone famous makes a profession that 'Jesus is Lord,' and the world says, "wow."

But Jesus is not impressed. *Neither should we.*
Here's why...

Jesus knows that a strong profession does not automatically equal a strong commitment.

Jesus' response is brilliant—it's in a proverb.

He doesn't question the man's sincerity — Jesus doesn't insult him.

But instead mentions the demands that true discipleship requires.

Matthew 8:20— 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."

In other words, Jesus is inferring, *I can't help but notice the way you dress—are you prepared to be homeless?*

And as Jesus tells this Scribe that He has fewer physical comforts than many animals—He drops a bombshell that the Scribe would instantly recognize.

Jesus doesn't say, "I've got no place to lay my head."—

He says, "*But the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*"

It is not an accident that Jesus inserts this phrase about Himself.

The *Son of Man* is Jesus' favorite title for Himself.

We see it used over eighty times in the Gospels. *—So what's it mean?*

The Son of Man comes from the OT prophet Daniel 7:13.

Daniel chapter seven is where he describes Jesus' return to Heaven following His earthly ministry.

So this is what happened after Jesus' ascension in Acts chapter one.

Daniel 7:13 NLT— As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient One (Ancient of Days/God the Father) and was led into his presence.

Daniel 7:14 NLT— He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

Jesus is the Son of Man.

And as we can see, this title is not only a title a of humility.

Daniel peels back the layers of the preexistence of Jesus.

Jesus stepped down off His throne in God's heavenly throne room to become his own creature and pay the sin debt for those who believe.

In Daniel's vision, Jesus had done that and now returns to where He came from—but something is different.

Jesus returns to Heaven in a glorified human body.

And because Jesus accomplished His mission perfectly, God the Father gives Him everlasting authority over all the world.

So, the title of "Son of Man" focuses more on Christ's divinity than on his humanity.

In fact, if we fast forward to the trial of Jesus, Jesus unveils his identity to the High Priest.

Matthew 26:63 NLT—Then the high priest said to him, "I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

Matthew 26:64 NLT— Jesus replied, "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of Heaven."

Jesus points the high priest to Daniel 7

So as an expert in the OT Law, the Scribe would have recognized what Jesus was unveiling with that phrase.— *Son of Man*

So, it seems that Jesus is testing the Scribe's own humility...

Because what this Scribe proclaims about following Jesus could be interpreted this way—

Teacher, as one Bible expert to another, I couldn't help but notice who is on your team so far—fishermen, lepers, soldiers, and middle-aged women. So I've been thinking—maybe, just maybe—you could use someone with a bit of religious respectability. Say ... someone like me! This is your lucky day, for I will follow you wherever you go. I'm with you 110 percent. Let's do it. You and me—we can bring about this kingdom stuff you've been talking about. What do you say?!

And using our sanctified imaginations, Jesus might have replied...

Friend, you don't know what you're talking about or who you are talking to. Listen, I'm the Son of Man. I'm not a Scribe acting like God. Unlike you, I'm not a lowly, overly educated, confused, audacious Scribe. I'm not just a better Bible teacher that teaches the Word—I am the Word! I'm the king Daniel wrote about, you knucklehead. You clearly don't know who I am. And you certainly don't know where I'm going. I'm going to Calvary. I'm going to die for your pompous sin. Are you willing to follow me there? Are you ready to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me? Because homelessness is the least of your worries, if you say "Yes."

In other words, Jesus had no faith in this man's "faith."

Isn't it fascinating that Jesus wants disciples—and yet at the same time teaches that he will not accept just anyone!

This conversation should challenge the easy gospel mentality that our culture has — "Pray the sinner's prayer, sign the card, walk the aisle, come as you are."

And evidently, The Scribe walked away disappointed and probably shocked that Jesus said, "thanks, but no thanks."

But don't worry. Here we have someone else trying out for the team...

Matthew 8:21— "Lord," another of his disciples said, "first let me go bury my father."

As a side note, the term "disciple" can be used for the Twelve Disciples or a more general term for any follower.

And we see this loose meaning of 'disciple' in verse 21—so this is not one of the Twelve.

This man probably followed Jesus around the countryside for a bit—and like everyone else, he was fascinated by what Jesus was doing.

Matthew 8:22— But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Wow! What happened to sweet Jesus?

What happened to our meek, mild and humble Jesus?

What happened to our 'all you need is love Jesus?'

Where's that nice blue-eyed, blond-haired, hanging-on-your-nursery-wall, wouldn't-hurt-a-fly Jesus?

Let's get this straight, this man's father dies— and this is Jesus' response?!

No, that's not what's going on—

In a first-century Jewish funeral, the burial happens within twenty-four hours after death because the Jews did not embalm the deceased's body.

So if this man's father had died, he would be at the funeral.

So did this man lie to Jesus?

No. The phrase, 'bury the dead,' was a common figure of speech that referred to a son's responsibility to help his father in the family business. — *IT DOESN'T MAKE*

ANY SENSE TO US.

But, We use figures of speech all the time which do't need explaining in our culture.

"It's raining cats and dogs," "Break a leg," or "I'll give you a piece of my mind."

So reading between the lines, if this man were somewhat young, he asked Jesus for permission to put his spiritual life on hold for the next twenty or thirty years.

Not only that—but after his father did actually pass, he would receive an inheritance.

So what seems like a harsh response from Jesus is actually the opportunity of a lifetime.

Jesus invites this man in as a disciple!

But, Jesus sees the idol in this man's life, just as Jesus saw the idol in the Rich Young Ruler.

So when this 'would be' disciple said the phrase, "I must bury my father," he was saying, *I want to wait until I receive my inheritance.*

Following Jesus would have cost him his inheritance.

How convenient is that?

Look at this man's statement again...

+ **Matthew 8:21**— "first let me go bury my father."

Notice the word, *first*.

It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Ah, I see you didn't take notes from my Sermon on the Mount. *- or maybe you were thinking about lunch -*

Do you remember the part where I said, "You can't have two masters? And how it's impossible to serve both God and money?" (Matt 6:24)

Do you remember how I said that you must "seek first the Kingdom of God." (Matt 6:33)

Jesus sees through all of that—

And responds with another figure of speech.

Matthew 8:22— "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

In other words, "Let the world take care of the things of the world."

The spiritually dead can take care of each other.

Luke adds an interesting detail in his Gospel...

Luke 9:60— *But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God."*

If this man were to become a Disciple, his primary responsibility would be proclaiming the Gospel.

This means bringing the good news of eternal life to the spiritually **dead**.

So when Jesus says, "Follow me,"—He means right now.

In other words—*The rest of my Disciples are getting in the boats—and were leaving right now—what are you going to do?*

+ **Matthew 8:23**— As He (Jesus) got into the boat, his disciples (The 12) followed him.

So, like the Scribe, nothing else is mentioned about this 'would-be' disciple.

He walked away from Jesus just like the Scribe.

+ **PREACH:**

So we have the tale of two 'would-be' disciples today.

The Scribe was too fast, and the other guy too slow.

~~The Scribe was overeager the other undereager.~~

As Jesus looked both of them in the eyes, He quickly determined that the Scribe ^{was} ~~was to fast to write~~ a check that he couldn't cash—
writing

While the other man was too slow to ~~perform~~ ^{to get in the boat.}

So, Jesus disqualified both men as disciples.

+ **KEYPOINT 1:**

We come to Jesus on His terms— not our own.

Just as Jesus, who has authority over sickness, demons, and next week, nature—

Jesus also has full authority over the lives of His disciples.

Jesus determines what following Him will involve, not us.

Recruits - before Sr. Grad.
Military recruitment illustration? - Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines.

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

- We don't become Christians because we say we're Christians
- Scripture says that it's the Father who draws people to Himself (John 6:44)
- Are you someone who made big promises, but hasn't followed through?
- Are you someone who makes excuses?
- Regardless, we're not perfect - which points us to repentance.
- ↳ Next time, we'll see the cost of Discipleship.
 - ↳ The fear of dying
 - ↳ The terror of being in the presence of Jesus - as God.

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