
The Authority of Jesus over Followers

Matthew 8:18-27

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What does it mean for Jesus to be King?

What does it mean for Jesus to be Lord?

What does it mean when Jesus tells you to do something?

You should obey, right?

What if being a disciple is tested by what and when Jesus tells you to do something *you don't want to do*?

What if being a disciple is about your core commitment to submit to Jesus as King? In other words, if you are not willing to obey Jesus in all His commands, are you a disciple at all?

The Cost of Discipleship (v.18-22)

The first two people who want to follow Jesus do not understand the cost of discipleship.

For our Obedience (v.18)

¹⁸ Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.

Jesus observes the crowds pressing in. What He does next is distinctly a reaction to them. This is very unlike most of evangelical Christians. Getting a crowd is what it is mostly about. Jesus' reactions to people pursuing and pressing against Him is sometimes of compassion and sometimes of distancing.

Matthew notes that Jesus gave orders, commands to cross over the lake. His orders were to go over to the other side. This is not seeking refuge in a home or getting away to a quiet place. This is a big deal. A boat will have to be procured. It will need to be prepared for the crossing. The people going will have to be chosen.

What Jesus orders, they do. There seems to be no question. As Matthew records it, they move away from the crowd down to the beach or dock. Everything is ready. His orders have been followed.

Following Jesus means obeying Him implicitly.

For our Comforts (v.19-20)

Following Jesus means that we will have to set aside our comforts, pride and independence.

¹⁹ And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰ 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."

A religious person commits to follow Jesus across the lake. Who is this person? He is identified as a scribe. Jesus has roundly criticized such people in the sermon on the mount, lumping them with the Pharisees. We will see more of his type in later stories. In Jesus' day, a scribe was a Bible scholar and teacher. He was an expert in the Scriptures. As an academic, he had a respectable occupation. It took intellect and skill. As a result, people looked up to them and trusted their pronouncements about the Scriptures. The study of the Old Testament is what they had given their life to.

Matthew raises a question in our own mind. Why does Jesus respond with a sentence that doesn't seem connected to his statement? The scribe is not challenging Jesus. The scribe does not ask a question. He is making a commitment. He is ready to follow Jesus. At some level, this would seem to be like this, "I have heard you teach. I have seen your miracles. I know the Old Testament. And now, even going across the lake, I will follow you..."

Jesus' response certainly means that He detects something wrong in the man's attitude or assertion. Several clear possibilities can be observed.

This man is full of his own self-importance. He will bring some academic and intellectual status to the followers of Jesus. Jesus's followers are not the best class of people: fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot... So, his following Jesus would give Jesus weight and access to people who would not normally listen to a lowly, itinerant rabbi.

This man fails to recognize who Jesus is. He calls him "Teacher". This is in sharp contrast to the people whom Jesus healed in the context. The leper and the Roman soldier address Jesus as "Lord." That is the point. The Lord, the King, has given an order. The scribe sees someone who may be, at the best, his equal. Jesus recognizes this and responds accordingly.

This man fails to recognize what following Jesus means. This is clear from Jesus' response. "You, full of your self-importance and your lack of acknowledging me as Lord, you have no idea what following me entails. It is going to mean giving up all your comforts." Jesus has no home. Going to the other side is away from his home and into being "homeless".

But notice the connection to the sermon in the mount. Jesus may have no place to lay His head, but He is trusting the Father's care who takes care of the foxes and the birds. Is the scribe willing to do this? Is the scribe willing to lay down everything to follow Jesus as Lord, not merely as teacher?

One commentator wisely notes, "You see, Jesus had no faith in this man's "faith" because he knew that at the heart of this scribe's bold declaration was self-love, not self-denial, and a desire for power, not a willingness to be

powerless – without a home, esteem, and possibly a life. Jesus wants disciples. But here he teaches us that he will not accept just anyone! He will not even accept a scribe who comes with airs, who comes without humility and recognition that the road to the cross lies ahead.” (O'Donnell, p.124)

This is an issue today.

People think they can add value to God's kingdom. We are excited when some important person, some celebrity makes a profession faith. We often think deep in our hearts that the kingdom is better for our being a part of it.

People think they will follow Jesus without interrupting their lives. They will add Jesus to the rest of their life. This is evidenced in how they treat the church. It is another thing in the box of things that make up their lives. Believing and bowing to Jesus is going to majorly disrupt your life. Count on it.

People think they can follow Jesus merely as a teacher who tells them what to believe. Faith in Jesus is reduced to a set of truths or even worse, simple sentences that if you can say them you are now a Christian. This is simply not true.

People think they can follow Jesus without calling Him Lord and bowing to His commands. Jesus is not interested in people who acknowledge who He is without bowing to His authority. Even the devil knows who Jesus is and probably is a pretty good theologian... He is just a disobedient rebel. True saving faith that is in a follower of Jesus will be accompanied by a bowing to Jesus. Jesus is not merely a teacher... He is the King.

Do you still want to follow? Are you willing to set aside your pride, your self-importance and follow Jesus no matter what it costs?

Following Jesus means being willing and often having to give up your comforts.

For our Priorities (v.21-22)

Following Jesus means we must do so without excuse and without compromise.

²¹ Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ²² And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

A disciple, but not one of the 12, wants to come but has what he thinks is a responsibility, a priority. He is earnest. His culture tells him he should do this. But now he is caught in a tension. Yesterday the teaching and the miracles and everything were amazing. But today? He must make a choice, and a hard one at that.

This phrase, ‘bury one’s father’ does not mean that the father is dead and only the funeral needs attending to. This meant to wait until one’s father was dead and buried. This man wants to go home, run his father's business, attend to his family's needs for an indefinite time. This man was presented with the urgency of the decision to obey the King and follow Him now. The King has ordered a

boat and for His disciples to board. It is time to go because of the press of the people. But this one asks to be excused. The excuse sounds reasonable.

Jesus does not make it any easier. The King has said, "Let's go..." You think, "But I need..." Those who love parent or child more than Jesus are not worthy of him. The challenge of the kingdom will not brook delay.

This one is really hard for us. Whether we want to admit it or not, Jesus seems to be unreasonable. His response sounds harsh, unmerciful, and uncaring when this man is simply wanting to take care of his family. Maybe he is wanting to ensure his inheritance. Maybe he is earnest and is torn. Maybe he is seeking Jesus' approval to be excused from his obligation.

But we are not talking about discipleship in the sense of signing up for a course, or an event or whatever the "extra" you think discipleship means. Jesus is making this clear. Matthew is making this clear. I want to make this clear. Discipleship is not second tier Christianity after you are converted. It is not an add on, an option, an extra if you want it. You are either all in or you are all out.

Does the call to follow Jesus mean that you ignore your family, your job, your spouse? No, but it sure means that you had better count the cost and be willing to pay the price. Otherwise, you cannot be His follower. Becoming a Christian involves becoming a disciple with all that it means. Too many of you were converted without a call to discipleship. That is sad. That is creating enormous tension in your life. You know you want salvation, but you are pretty certain you don't want this. So now what? Yes, now what are you going to do?

What do you think about this?

Tongue in cheek, Green says, "This is a warning against missing the boat. This and the next paragraph are meant to be linked. It is a challenge to respond and begin discipleship while the opportunity is available. It may well be that in so well-planned a Gospel as Matthew's there is an intended run-on to the next story, the stilling of the storm. The waverer, poised on the brink of discipleship, is given a promise of security in the midst of rough seas if only he will keep his eyes on Jesus." (Green, p.118)

Another writer observes, "Jesus doesn't have a flattering view of the world. He doesn't think that if only we educate everyone, things will all work out. He pictures the world as a bunch of dead men walking. He talks about what cannot literally happen: corpses burying corpses. What he means is that the spiritually dead will take care of business. They'll make sure all worldly matters are taken care of, but we must put the kingdom of God and his righteousness first, knowing that all these things will be added. So, if we choose this world we've chosen death; if we choose Jesus we've chosen life." (O'Donnell, p.216)

Following Jesus means radically adjusting your priorities, responding immediately without wavering.

The Risk of Discipleship (v.23-27)

The story now moves the focus onto Jesus. The storm, the disciples, the fear are all backdrops for the King.

We must follow Jesus without fear...

²³ And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

The Disciples Following (v.23)

A boat was ordered and procured. This is probably a much larger boat than is commonly portrayed in paintings. It is often thought of as a large rowboat, but it was large enough for at least 13 men. It was not going to be fishing along the shelf near the shore. It was going to be crossing the open lake.

There are several fishermen among the disciples. But most of the rest would not have been familiar with boats. The storms that often rose on the sea of Galilee were mostly experienced from the shore. The lake was notorious for its quick and vicious storms. But these experienced boatmen would have given all attention to proper preparation for the trip.

Jesus is leading the way into the boat. The disciples and possibly others pile in to go with them. They are leaving a crowd on the seashore and heading across to the other side of the lake. Matthew is making a point of this even as the other gospel writers do. It is late. The day has been long. The crowd is pressing, demanding, needy. But Jesus leads His disciples probably knowing full well what is next.

The Storm Rising (v.24-26)

As they are crossing the lake, a massive storm arises. The word translated storm in verse 24 is *seismos*, which generally means an earthquake. Some mighty force had suddenly stirred up the placid lake into frenzy. Matthew is pointing either to some physical cause for the waves or possibility, to some spirit-realm cause.

Jesus Sleeping (v.24)

Here is the One whose faith and trust in His heavenly Father is absolute. Yes, He is exhausted. But this is not a slow rising storm. This is sudden, violent. The boat is being steered into the waves. The water is splashing over the gunwales. The boat is beginning to flounder.

And Jesus is sleeping.

They begin to bale the water as the storm rises. The sail has been taken in. To maintain steerage, some are rowing. Up one side of the waves and down the

other. The problem in an enclosed lake is that waves often do not run in patterns like the open sea. They will follow the swirling winds.

And Jesus is sleeping.

The labor is growing more and more frantic. The howling winds and slamming, splashing waves threaten to capsize the boat.

And Jesus is sleeping.

Jesus is not serving two masters. Jesus is not full of anxiety and worry. Jesus is living the sermon on the mount. Do you see the picture? He is calm, quiet. His faith is in the firm foundation even as the storm rages. Why? Because His Father is in charge of storms. According to the Psalms, His Father causes the waves to rise, the mountains to fall, and the trees to dance.

So, Jesus is sleeping.

Jesus Challenging (v.25-26)

²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing."

The disciples come to the right person. They understand their imminent danger. They are going to drown. They know what He is able to do. They cry out over the wind and waves, "Save us." Matthew carefully chooses his words. These are the words of desperate disciples on the verge of capsize and dying in the sea.

But these are also the words of dying people on the verge of eternal damnation in hell.

There is an acknowledgement of their condition. No one can cross the threshold of salvation, of becoming a follower without a recognition of our sinful condition and the judgment awaiting.

There is a confession of Jesus as Lord. Salvation puts in the mouth of the humbled sinner the confession of the Lordship of Christ. He is not just the master. He is not just a good teacher. He is not merely a great miracle worker. Conversion and discipleship begin on the bended knee.

There is a plea to be saved. This is calling upon the name of the Lord. This is being Biblically specific what we are asking for. We want to be saved. We are not asking Jesus in our hearts. We are not saying some simplified, culturally acceptable prayer. This is asking the Lord to save us.

Jesus' response is surprising. Now, you are going to have to let Matthew tell the story the way he does, not the way you would have. We have to listen to what the Bible actually says, to what Jesus actually does, to what the disciples are actually failing at or we will not be challenged nor changed by this story as Matthew intended.

²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

Why are you afraid? What a question! There is a lot to be afraid of! When fishermen who are regularly on the sea are afraid of what is happening, isn't it time to be afraid? Maybe, if you are not a disciple, a follower. Maybe, if you had not just heard the sermon on the mount. Maybe, if you had not just seen Jesus' powerful miracles. Maybe, if you had not just recognized the quiet leadership and calming trust of Jesus.

They have little faith. Their panic and fear and desperate cries to be saved are signs of little faith. Jesus challenges them. Jesus rebukes them. For disciples, it is never a question of the greatness of the storm. It is always a question of the reality of our faith. Now we are not talking about the "faith in faith" nor the "faith as magic" of certain religious groups. Faith here is the kind of belief in God and His Word that causes us to respond rightly. To be ruled by fear no matter what the situation is evidence that our faith may be "small". That is not always the cause of fear, but it often is. Certainly, here we have the Lord's diagnosis of the cause of their fear. They do not believe that God is in control of their situation and that His purposes will be carried out. They are not resting in God's care like Jesus did. Frankly, He has faith not only in His Father, but in the skill and ability of the fishermen who are responsible for the boat.

Jesus is not going to commend your "little faith". Don't come chasing me to argue about "mustard seed" faith. That is not what this is. In effect, this is doubt. Fear has ruled. Faith has not. If the storm of this COVID season has filled your life with fear, anger, discontent, grumbling, craving for escape, and rebellion then your heart is not ruled by faith. It is that simple. It is time for those who claim to be followers of Jesus to have a serious heart check. If Jesus spoke directly to you now, would these be His words?

Jesus Rebuking (v.26)

He has rebuked the disciples whose little faith has been the seed of great fear. Now He rises and rebukes the winds and the sea. A special word of rebuke and command to the winds. And then likewise, a command to the seas. Jesus our King is in control of all. He is obeyed by heaven and earth. His power and purposes are manifest everywhere.

Could God have prevented the storm? Yes. Did God plan the storm? Yes. Was there a physical and possibly spiritual agent that caused the storm? Yes. Yet Jesus, in the midst of the storm left us a lasting image of trust and calm... He was asleep in the boat. And, in the storm we see the amazing, astonishing power of King Jesus.

Jesus speaks, commands, rebukes and immediately, all is still. The wind instantly stops. The lake is instantly calm. The raging elements immediately obey the King. There is a great calm.

The Disciples Marveling (v.27)

²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Why the word, "Obey?" Because this is the point. This is what Matthew is on about. The disciples marvel at the immediate obedience of nature. But what about those who want to follow?

Think of their question... "What kind of man is this?" That is precisely the problem with the scribe, with the excusing disciple and even with the twelve. They are taken wholly up with what they can see. Jesus could heal the leper. He could raise the crippled boy from a distance. He could send a fever away with just a touch. Why are they still asking a "what kind of man" question? Because they have little faith. They have great fear. And so, they need to learn that the King, King Jesus, is to be obeyed. If the winds and sea obey Him, then how much more should followers obey Him?

What do you think about this?

Following Jesus requires faith not fear.

How do you grow your faith? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The primary way to increase faith is through the Word of God. If you are not regularly in the Word and under the Word and living the Word then you will have weak, small, untested, unrefined faith. And you may not be a true disciple at all. Remember, among the twelve, on the sea, was a man named... Judas.

Following Jesus will send you into risk.

I guarantee it. There will be the risk to all that you hold dear. There will be the risk to your name, your reputation, your job, and maybe even your family. Those are just the ordinary risks of following Jesus... but what about the extraordinary ones? How will you move into the storms God brings? How will you respond when life is threatened? Will fear drive you?

Following Jesus is going to call for the courage that comes with faith.

It means trusting God exactly as the sermon on the mount said. It means that you will not be fearful when there is every reason to. You will obey the Lord regardless. This is not a call to brashness or manly bravado. This is not a call to sinful confrontation of brothers and sisters. This is a call to the kind of Biblical courage that simply looks like trust and calm in the storms.

Following Jesus means having a courageous faith that trusts God implicitly.

Reflect and Respond

We have made following Jesus so easy that now there not many true disciples. Oh, there are crowds, but few cross-bearing disciples.

What does following Jesus mean?

- Following Jesus means obeying Him implicitly.
- Following Jesus means being willing and often having to give up your comforts.
- Following Jesus means radically adjusting your priorities, responding immediately without wavering.
- Following Jesus means having a courageous faith that trusts God implicitly.

How do you respond when life implodes, storms threaten, children rebel, COVID continues? Are you fearful, anxious, desperate, discontent, rebellious? Are you full of faith, trusting in God, calmly guiding the souls entrusted to your care, resting in full assurance that all is well, all is well?

Some of you think you are disciples, true followers and yet the Spirit is convicting you that you are not. You know that this is not the Christianity as you envisioned it nor as you want it. This is not your next best life. This is not pious platitudes and fake formulas. But this is what Jesus called His disciples to. This is what Matthew called the church of his day to. This is what being a true disciple means today, in this hour.

For some of you it is time to call on Jesus to save you.

Will you acknowledge your sinful condition and desperate need?

Will you submit to Jesus as Lord? Truly, salvation and discipleship begin on the bended knee.

Will you cry out to Jesus to be saved? Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved.

Finally, let us marvel at Jesus, our King. Even the winds and waves obey His word. Do you?