

The Demands of Discipleship

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[0:00] Like Kyle said, we're going to be in Matthew 8, right in the middle of the chapter. We're going to be in a little bit of a sandwich this morning.

This little nugget is sandwiched in between some big stories of Jesus' power and authority, some of which we looked at last week with Jesus' power that Mike talked about, exercised for outsiders. Next week, some really cool stories about Christ exercising his power as well. So right in the middle of that chapter, Matthew 8.

If you happen to bump into me in late June of this year, or early July, and you happen to ask what Jess and I are doing in our free time, I might tell you that we're enjoying the TV series John Adams. Anybody seen it? It's a really fantastic TV series. Jess and I enjoy watching this series every once in a while around July 4th.

[1:05] It really helps you treasure the sacrifices of our founding fathers as they struggled in the war of independence. And one of my favorite scenes in this series takes place in the episode where there is an intense debate surrounding the Declaration of Independence, whether it should be adopted by the Continental Congress or not.

And John Adams is very for it. And there are some states who are wondering how much it's going to cost them to sign this Declaration of Independence. And so there's a very intense scene where the final roll call of voting happens.

And as the names of each state are called and finally all the yay votes are tallied and the resolution passes to adopt this Declaration of Independence, you would imagine there would be celebration, but in fact, a hush falls over the assembly as they realize the gravity of what they've just done. They realize that they are all in. They are wholeheartedly now devoted to this cause that if it succeeds, it will grant them freedom, freedom from tyranny, freedom to govern themselves. But if it fails, they lose everything. John Adams makes a speech to the Continental Congress before the vote was cast, and his words capture this wholehearted devotion that the Founding Fathers had toward the freedom they desired.

[2:45] He said this, Before God, I believe the hour has come. My judgment approves this measure, and my whole heart is in it. All that I have, and all that I am, all that I hope in this life, I am now ready here to stake upon it, and I leave off as I began that live or die, survive or perish, I am for the declaration.

It is my living sentiment, and by the blessing of God, it shall be my dying sentiment. Independence now, and independence forever. John Adams can make a good speech.

John Adams and the rest of the Founding Fathers personally and wholeheartedly threw themselves in to this cause. They held absolutely nothing back.

Everything was in. They staked it all on a free and independent nation. Well, today we're going to hear a call to wholehearted devotion in Matthew chapter 8.

But it's not devotion to an idea or a nation or a political cause. It's a call to devote yourself wholeheartedly to a person.

[3:54] So before we read, let's remind ourselves of where we are. It's sandwiched right in between Jesus exercising his authority powerfully for outsiders, and then later on in the rest of the chapter, Jesus exercising his authority powerfully as well.

And it's right in the middle between these big demonstrations of Jesus' absolute power and authority, even just by the virtue of his word. It's in this little nugget episode between these that Jesus clarifies what it means to follow him.

So let's read it together. Now when Jesus saw a great crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up to him and said to him, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Another of the disciples said to him, Lord, let me first go and bury my father.

And Jesus said to him, Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead. So what we're going to find in this passage is that, yes, Jesus has the authority to heal, cast out demons, calm storms, even raise the dead.

[5:20] But he also has authority to call for our wholehearted devotion. Jesus has the authority to call for our wholehearted devotion.

And we're going to see this wholehearted devotion unfold in two conversations where Jesus gives two sober words. The first word is a word of caution and the second is a word of invitation.

So let's look at them one at a time. Afterwards, we'll see what sort of effect Jesus' words of caution and invitation intend for us in our lives today.

So first, let's look at the sober word of caution, verses 18 through 22. At the end, it will become clear what this word of caution is. But let's just dive in. So the scene begins with Jesus surrounded by a crowd.

Jesus is often surrounded by crowds. His teaching and his miracles exude authority and people are drawn to this authority. But it's evident that Jesus is also wanting to get out of there.

[6:26] Whether it's to continue his ministry on the other side of the lake or to get out of the way with his disciples and have some rest, we're not told why, but he's leaving. So he gives an order to embark in a boat to the other side of the lake.

Jesus is in charge here. He's not making suggestions. He's giving commands here. He's the Lord. The Lord has spoken. It's time to move out. So while before Jesus departs, though, a scribe comes to him.

In other translations, a teacher of the law. And he enthusiastically promises to follow Jesus wherever Jesus is going. So this scribe, this is pretty rare actually.

If you read the Gospels, most scribes are not too fond of Jesus. Most teachers of the law don't like him that much. But he's eager to follow Jesus. And so we as readers are like, all right, this is encouraging.

He wants to follow Jesus wherever he goes. And he's a religious leader. That doesn't happen that often. All right, cool. But Jesus isn't interested in just gaining followers for the sake of gaining followers.

[7:28] Jesus is after this man's wholehearted devotion. And so it seems that he saw through to this man's heart and saw something that told him that this scribe hadn't thought through the kind of commitment he was so eager to make.

Jesus doesn't take him up on his offer, but neither does he reject him or brush him off. Instead, he looks at him in the eye, no doubt, and offers a sober word of caution.

Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Now, before we get into what Jesus is saying here in this word of caution, we really need to unpack a really important phrase that Jesus just used.

See that phrase, the Son of Man? It's the first time in the book of Matthew that he uses this phrase, and it's Jesus' favorite way to refer to himself through this gospel and all four gospels.

It's used over 80 times in all four gospels, 28 times in Matthew alone. That's an average of one per chapter. Jesus loves to use this phrase to describe himself, but it's kind of vague. So on the face of it, it could just mean a human being.

[8:43] It could mean a man. Or, there's also, if you use this phrase in the right context, there's some pretty hefty Messiah meaning behind this phrase, and it comes from the Old Testament.

In Daniel chapter 7, you don't have to turn there, but read it this afternoon. It's a fantastic chapter. Daniel chapter 7 loads this phrase, the Son of Man. Daniel sees God in a vision after he's just seen a whole bunch of beasts arise out of the sea and get power and dominion for a time, and then it's taken away from four of these beasts.

But then eventually, he sees God enthroned in power and glory, and he sees one like a Son of Man come before the Ancient of Days, coming on the clouds of heaven.

And to this Son of Man, God gives a kingdom, but not a temporary kingdom, an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom that would never pass away, whose glory would never fade.

And so, it is this Son of Man that becomes kind of the foundation of, oh, this is pointing to the Messiah, the coming one, who would be great David's greater son.

[10:04] And so, in the right context, Son of Man could mean that. Had a freight train of Messiah meaning behind it. But let's look at verse 20. Is that how Jesus is using Son of Man?

He will come on the clouds, victorious and triumphant? No. Actually, he's saying the Son of Man isn't going to have a place to sleep tonight. He doesn't have a place to lay his head.

He's homeless. Even the commonest and humblest of God's creatures, foxes and birds. I was driving home last night and a fox ran across Sheridan Road. Oh, cool. even the most common of God's creatures have places to lay their heads.

But the Son of Man does not. The demands of Jesus' itinerant ministry in those intense three years of preaching, healing, teaching meant that he would not own a home or even have a consistent place to stay.

He would always be on the move. He made himself dependent upon the hospitality of others or he slept in the open. That very night, he would be sleeping in a boat. Jesus' ministry as the humble Son of Man, the Son of Man who entered into our brokenness in order to redeem us from it, it required him to forego the comforts of a middle class life.

[11:29] He did it willingly. He did it voluntarily. As Paul wrote years later in 2 Corinthians, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Yes, he was and is the triumphant Son of Man of Daniel 7. There are plenty of times when Jesus refers to himself like that. But at the same time, Jesus is also the Son of Man who humbly entered into our broken world and walked in our shoes.

He experienced need and hardship, loss and pain, discomfort, even homelessness. Only once he was raised from the dead would it become clear that it is the Son of Man who is both the triumphant King of Daniel 7 and the humble suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

He took our illnesses and bore our diseases. In fact, he is the king who triumphs by means of his suffering. He triumphs because of his humility.

His greatness comes through his lowliness. In fact, the same phrase lay his head in the original language it's used in another place in the Gospels by the Apostle John.

[13:03] it describes Jesus laying his head in another place. Jesus does eventually lay his head somewhere but it's at the very end of his life when he bows his head on the cross and breathes his last triumphant breath.

Jesus had no place to rest his head until he came to the cross at the end of his hard road of self-sacrificing love for us. And here's this scribe signing up for something.

He doesn't know the road ahead. He doesn't know the road that the Son of Man is going to walk. He hasn't counted the cost of what it means to follow this Son of Man. And Jesus wants him to know that he's standing at the entrance to the narrow gate and the entrance to the hard road of discipleship.

And Jesus is asking him whether he's counted the cost of following the Son of Man. That's Jesus' first word. This is the word of caution. Count the cost of following the Son of Man.

Count the cost. Following Jesus is pretty difficult. His grace is free but it costs everything.

[14:25] Following Jesus means taking the high hard road of dying to self day after day after day. It's the road that the Son of Man walked and he has authority to call his disciples to walk it with him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a man who knew a thing or two about the cost of following Jesus. He was a German church leader during the Nazi era and he stood up to the Nazis and he led the church the very small remnant that actually wanted to stand up to the Nazis and therefore he was a marked man.

He was actually in 1939 right before the war started he was safe and secure in a teaching post at Union University in New York City. He did not have to go back to Germany.

Weeks before Germany invaded Poland he decided to board one of the last ships back to Germany. He knew that by doing this he would seal his fate with the rest of his brothers and sisters that were marked by the Nazis.

Why would he do this? He accounted the cost of following the Son of Man. As Bonhoeffer once said when Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.

[15:42] He would later be imprisoned by the Nazis and he was hanged a month before Germany surrendered in 1945. Now before we move on to the second sober word something needs to be clarified.

Jesus is not calling us to pursue discomfort and pain just for the sake of experiencing discomfort and pain. Christians are not masochists. We don't just love pain.

We aren't supposed to. No, like Paul said in Philippians 3 we consider all things loss for the sake of Christ.

We take inventory of our whole life all that we are all that we have and we push it into the middle of the poker table and we say I'm all in. Just like John Adams.

Wholehearted devotion no matter what it costs me. But as we'll see in a moment all that we count as loss is nothing compared to the surpassing worth of what we gain.

[16:45] Let's now look at the second sober word. It's a word of invitation. invitation. It's found in the second conversation that Jesus has from verses 21 to 22. Another disciple approaches Jesus and he promises to follow him but he has some family business to attend to first.

He needs to bury his father. This disciple probably wasn't one of the core twelve but he's at least described as a disciple. He had some level of commitment and interest in following Jesus.

He calls him Lord. That's a little more of a committed term than saying teacher like the scribe did. Now scholars aren't exactly sure what this term bury my father actually means.

It could mean that this man's father has just died and needs to bury him now. Jewish burials usually took place within 24 hours of the time of death. So if this was the case then it was a few days or a week's delay at most before he thought he could follow Jesus.

Or it is possible that this man is referring to the duty of the son to bury his parents whenever they die. Whether that's in the near future or the distant future.

[17:55] His father might have been ill and near to death therefore he's saying hey listen my dad's going to die soon I've got to bury him soon. Or maybe he could have been in decent health. And it just could be this guy saying Jesus as soon as my father dies whenever that may be I'll be free to follow you.

I've just made a commitment to my dad that I'll be around to bury him whenever he dies and I can't follow you until then. So we're talking weeks here months maybe even years of postponement of following Jesus.

Well whatever the phrase may mean now or later Jesus' reply in verse 22 is quite shocking. Follow me leave the dead to bury their own dead.

Imagine the look on that guy's face when he heard that. at the very least what we should hear from this encounter is that Jesus is using some startling language to shock this man's priorities back into the right order.

Jesus is audaciously claiming that allegiance to him takes precedence over all other human priorities even family. It seems that Jesus sensed some lack of resolve in this disciple's commitment to follow him.

[19:09] And he wants to lovingly but firmly remind him that following Jesus is not a when it's inconvenient and my family duties allow it kind of commitment.

No there is an urgency to Christ's call and it overrules all other human commitments and priorities. In fact later on in chapter 10 Jesus tells his disciples whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. So does this mean that Jesus is some kind of egotistical maniac demanding devotion from this man that would prevent him from burying his own father?

Just goes and flies in the face of common decency you would think. Well if Jesus were a mere human teacher then yeah but he's more than that. Far far more than that.

Matthew is expecting us to see in the sermon on the mount and in his miracles that in these startling works of teaching and demonstration of his power that Jesus is more than a mere human teacher.

[20:19] There is divine weight and authority behind Jesus' urgent call but it's more than just an authoritative call it's also an invitation.

Did you notice that invitation? It's in there. He calls him to follow him and then he commands leave the dead to bury their own dead.

It's an invitation to follow him and have life. Jesus is inviting him to leave the spiritually dead to deal with death and to count the cost of dying to every other priority in order to find real spiritual life.

In other words Jesus is saying look following me means entering into my kingdom and my kingdom means life real eternal spiritual life.

There's no life outside of my kingdom. So why are you messing around with death? Your real business has to do with life not death.

[21:27] So if you place any other priority before following me you're flirting with spiritual death. Leave those who are outside the kingdom. They're spiritually dead. Don't hang around the spiritually dead. Come follow me and have life.

Jesus is using this situation as a teaching opportunity. Jesus is not trying to tell this man to neglect his family priorities his family duties. We know from elsewhere in scripture that God desires us to honor our parents, to love our children, to provide for our families, care for our spouses.

We know that's true. And neither is Jesus exhibiting a lack of compassion on the spiritually dead, those who are outside the kingdom. No, this is a matter of priorities. He's looking at this guy in the face who is flirting with spiritual death by delaying his following of Jesus, by prioritizing family more than following Jesus.

And it's keeping him outside the kingdom. like Peter later on walking on the waves of the Sea of Galilee. This man's eyes are distracted and concerned with the waves and wind of human priorities and he has lost sight of single-minded devotion to Christ.

And Jesus loved him too much to let him stay there. So what is Jesus' sober word of invitation to us? It's this. make Christ the governing priority of your life and you will find life.

[22:56] Make Christ the governing priority of your life and you will find life. To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer again, he describes this call to wholehearted devotion in terms of costly grace.

He wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

It is costly because it costs a man his whole life and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and it is grace because it justifies the sinner.

Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son. And what has cost God cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not consider the life of his son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us.

Now, as we look to our own lives, what are we to make of this call to wholehearted devotion? How are we to count the cost of following the son of man?

[24:18] How do we respond to this invitation to make him the governing priority and so find life? Let me encourage you to consider two categories in which Christ is calling you to wholehearted devotion.

The first is this, in the broad trajectory of your life. Jesus is inviting you to make him the governing priority of your life.

And so look at, consider, where is your life headed? What trajectory is your life on? This is no matter whether you're at the beginning of your life, you're a teenager, you're a young person, or

you're in the middle of your life, or you're toward the end.

Jesus is asking your whole life's direction to be aimed at him. So big questions of dreams and careers, issues in your marriage, your parenting of your children, where you live, these are to be subjected to his vast authority and his kingdom call to follow him and have life.

So what big decisions are you considering right now? My wife and I are weighing options about schooling for our children. Maybe you're thinking about if you should change jobs or careers.

[25:41] Maybe you're thinking about moving. Wherever you might be, whatever decisions you're considering that are part of the overall trajectory of your life, Jesus is clearly calling us to serve him and his kingdom in and through these big trajectories of our lives.

Jesus is not an add-on to our life. He is not a separate category that we tend to along with family and children, et cetera, et cetera.

He governs it all because he owns it all. Perhaps you have never considered this. Perhaps you've never been confronted with this.

Or perhaps you've lost sight of this. Wherever you're at today, your Lord is inviting you to make him the governing priority of your life so that you can find life.

Arrange your life around him. The second category is a little more nitty gritty. The second category has to do with the daily grind of counting the cost to follow Jesus.

[26:51] What are the things in your life, not decisions, but the small and essential things that we have to die to ourselves to every day in the daily grind of normal life.

Jesus is asking you to count the cost of following him even in your small decisions. From waking up in the morning and how you spend your time to the commitments and responsibilities of your day, whether you're in school and you're a young person or whether you're retired and everywhere in between, the daily grind of your normal life is to be spent counting the cost of following Jesus.

There is not a sphere of your life that Christ's call to count the cost does not touch. So the Son of Man is beckoning you. He's beckoning you to take the hard road of humility and lowliness and love. Maybe you're the parent of small children and this means desperately asking Jesus for help to treat your children with dignity and gentleness when they're driving you bonkers. Maybe this means submitting your attitude toward your spouse to Christ and seeking to love them with humble care and self sacrifice whether they respond or not.

This means asking your Lord for help in your daily combat against sin. Daily dying to self and fighting temptation. This means seeking to consider your co-workers better than yourself with your actions with your words as well as actively pursuing to tell them about the son of man that you follow.

[28:33] This means submitting to and honoring your parents young people even when you think they're old fuddy duddies. No matter where you find yourself seek to imitate the son of man in the hard road of costly discipleship.

Pursue the good of others before your own comfort and pursue the glory of his name above your own. Let's pray for his help now. Father thank you that whatever your grace demands it also supplies.

thank you Father that whatever you call us to you have already walked that road. Father would you be at work in our hearts by your Holy Spirit would you attend to the daily concerns and responsibilities that are already starting to emerge into our hearts and would you cause us Father to make Christ and his kingdom our governing priority help us to do that as a church and it is in our individual lives give us power oh God to die to ourselves and to seek to imitate the son of man in Christ's name amen