

The Authentic Jesus

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- [0 : 00] And we're going to read from Matthew chapter 8, starting at verse 18 and going on to verse 27. Matthew chapter 8. Starting from verse 18.
- Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up 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 his 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.
- And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea. So the boat was being swamped by the waves.
- [1 : 08] But he was asleep. And they went and woke him saying, Lord, save us. We're perishing. And he said to them, why are you afraid, are you of little faith?
- Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm. And the men marvelled, saying, what sort of man is this that even the wind and sea obey him?
- Well, as we move into Matthew 8 this morning, I remembered a story. Well, I remembered a conversation rather than a story. Some years ago, I spoke to a builder.
- And this builder specialized in move-in ready house and land packages. He bought the land, built the house, landscape, did everything, handed the keys to the buyers.
- But in that conversation, he told me he was getting out of the business. Because he was tired of clients challenging various aspects of the home after moving in.
- [2 : 15] Even though personalized options for the design, the internal layout, the landscaping, were all discussed and agreed upon beforehand. That was part of the package. That was all done before the building even began.
- And he lamented this. He said, people don't seem to accept that a package deal is a package deal. And he went on to say that often the problem was that their new house, with all their design options they chose off the drawings, didn't look or feel like what they thought it would.
- And ultimately, then, they thought it was their right to reject aspects of the package they decided they didn't like. Simply because it didn't feel like or look like what they thought it was going to.
- Now, in some ways, I think Jesus had to wrestle with the same issue. He's well into his ministry now. People responded both to his authoritative teaching about the nature and shape of the kingdom of God.
- And also, as we saw last week, he has demonstrated priorities as king of the God's kingdom in exposing and dealing with sin. When King Jesus confronts the world, he does so as a complete package.
- [3 : 29] He's not going to allow people to be super excited about some aspects of his teaching and actions such as healing, while minimizing, ignoring, or rejecting the bits they don't like.

Because in the end, Jesus is both the compassionate, generous saviour, as we saw last week, and the demanding, commanding king.

Now, Matthew, as I said last week, has carefully structured chapters 8 and 9 to illustrate Jesus' authority and priority. And he's done that with three groups of three miracles.

And a cameo focused on following Jesus after each group of miracles. And the crowds, already super impressed by his teaching, were even more impressed by the first group of three awesome miracles.

What a display of Jesus' compassion, love, generosity towards his people. And it was also a display of Jesus' authority, power, priority to reverse the effects of sin.

[4 : 34] And thereby delivering his people from the ultimate cause of their physical suffering and disfigurement. And as Matthew goes along, he repeatedly emphasizes the idea of the crowd, on the one hand, and their response to Jesus, which is following him.

If you look back to chapter 4, verse 23 to 25, they went throughout all Galilee teaching, and his fame spread, verse 24 throughout all Syria. They brought them all their sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, paralytics, and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him. Same thing, same the crowds. Chapter 5, verse 1. In chapter 8, verse 1, the same idea, the crowds growing in number.

Verse 16, the crowds brought others to be healed. Jesus taught the crowd. Jesus healed many of the crowd.

And in response, they followed him. But then in verse 18, the theme continues, but with a twist. Jesus consciously moves away from the following crowd.

[5 : 49] But why would he do that? Because I think King Jesus demands all-in commitment from those who would follow him. It becomes obvious, I think, that what the crowds have in mind as they follow Jesus is not what Jesus wants or indeed is prepared to tolerate.

His idea of following or discipleship is not about gathering a feel-good fan club for consumers of his product.

So when you think about it, Jesus had what most public figures crave. Crowds. Keen to identify with him. Keen to benefit from him.

Now, we all know that carefully managed popularity becomes a really effective political weapon, guaranteeing the success of most political campaigns. But Jesus tries to get away from the crowd because he isn't into politics.

He's not into popularity or appearance. He knew that to most in the crowd, he was just a curiosity. Perhaps fresh and exciting.

[7 : 02] Perhaps a challenge to the establishment. Perhaps just a possible supply of personal benefit. So Jesus isn't interested in that.

He's not interested in the fan club. He's interested in following that is life-changing, life-denying, costly service. And then we move into the two interactions in this first section here, which become, I think, case studies of what real following looks like.

The first case study is the scribe's take on following Jesus. Now, this man was a scribe, and that means he's a high-status academic.

He was a well-known, high-profile teacher of the Old Testament. And he addresses Jesus as teacher, which is interesting because he himself was a teacher. And he declares himself to be a follower of Jesus.

But then we've got to ask, what is his idea of following Jesus? Is it defined by his intellectual and academic interests? Does he see Jesus as his equal, an outstanding teacher and religious man, even though he might recognize the refreshing and radical nature of Jesus' teaching?

[8 : 18] Or does he just see a chance to identify with Jesus and thereby increase his own public profile? We're not really told.

But what we are told is that instead of affirming this man who's just declared he'd be a follower of Jesus, Jesus actually issues what seems like an abrasive challenge. I think Jesus is saying, look, to follow me is to become a refugee.

Going without the basics of life, which people measure stability, reputation, and security by. In a sense, says Jesus, to follow me means I'm worse off than a wild animal or a bird.

Or perhaps he's actually picking up some of the teaching this scribe would know. And perhaps he's saying, I am the son of man figure. In Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 to 15. You know about this man.

You teach about him. And he had none of the things this world measures security and success by. His status, his honor, his security was simply in being the approved servant of the Lord.

[9 : 38] So it's as if Jesus is saying to this man, will you continue to follow me to be totally loyal if it means losing all the things you now value most in life?

To become a nobody in the eyes of the world? Friends, I think there's no doubt this man was very sincere.

But short-sighted in understanding the package deal of following Jesus. Well, the second case study then is a disciple.

He steps forward, another disciple. We're not told whether it's just one of the crowd or perhaps more likely one of the chosen 12, the inner circle. Whatever. Whatever. He steps forward and he declares his willingness to follow Christ.

But in the future, once his father has died. Most likely, the man's father is alive but old.

[10 : 36] And the request then is to delay practical, active discipleship because of his obligation to care for his father until his death. Let me first go and bury my father.

Now, again, at first glance, this seems like a very reasonable request, perhaps even a request that would endorse this man, because it seems to come from an excellent sense of responsibility to his family.

But again, instead of commanding the man, Jesus seems harsh and unreasonable in his response. Verse 22, Jesus said to him, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

Now, it's really hard to understand precisely what verse 22 means. But in the context, the meaning is quite clear. Jesus is not dismissing this man's responsibility.

Jesus is not teaching disregard for family. But what he is saying is that not all obligations are equal. Followers of mine, says Jesus, will be caught up with a primary obligation and desire to honor me, Jesus.

[11 : 52] Such that every other obligation in the normal cycle of life is secondary. Followers of mine, says Jesus, will not be sidetracked by lesser concerns.

They will not prioritize me, Jesus, the Lord and King, down the list until a time in the future that's convenient to them. So again, my friends, I say, there's no doubt this man was very sincere.

But again, he fails to grasp the package deal that following Jesus is. Jesus demands absolute primary commitment.

Jesus will not happily be, he will not tolerate being just one of several equal obligations.

And don't we just hear ourselves in that? But I need to say to you, friends, that playing one obligation off against another, and we do it all the time.

[12 : 57] Oh, I can't do this because of family connection. I can't do this because of work responsibilities. I can't do this because of sport. Playing one obligation of serving Jesus off against another is not the mark of true discipleship.

I would suggest to you this morning it's the mark of unbelief and excusing self-centeredness. We must beware of the trap of speaking about serious discipleship or following of Christ when we're actually living a life of unrestrained but well disguised indulgence and selfishness.

And so often we express that by pleading competing obligations. The next point then is that King Jesus alone has authority to command such all-in commitment.

He does demand it, and he's got the authority to command it. Well, we pick up the story then. Jesus finally gets in the boat to cross the lake, and my dealing with the storm is going to be pretty tame compared to Catherine's.

Jesus finally gets into the boat to cross the lake, and the theme of following continues. Because we're told here by Matthew that some or all of his hand-picked disciples follow Jesus.

[14 : 16] Not realizing that a sudden severe storm would soon test their understanding of Jesus and test their commitment to following him.

And the question comes up then, who is really at home on the sea? As they get into the boat, it's not hard to imagine the excitement, the confidence of these disciples getting back out onto the sea.

This was their familiar environment that had shaped their lives. And you could almost imagine them thinking in their heads, well, Jesus might be good at miracles and teaching, but at sea, we'll be the experts.

We'll be the ones in control. We'll be the ones caring for Jesus as we do what we're good at. And Jesus sits quietly in the front of the boat. Well, a storm like no other storm they had ever experienced broke over them.

And remember, these guys would have experienced many storms and sailed through it quite successfully. But this was something they'd never seen before. And in spite of their collective skill as seamen, they were in desperate trouble.

[15 : 25] The boat was being swamped. They were sinking. And suddenly you can imagine their confidence just waning away. They realized their confidence had been misplaced.

Not only did they not have any control over the chaos of the sea, but they realized that the forces of evil, which infested the white tips of the tumultuous waves in a wild sea, that's what the common belief in that day was, that the forces of evil were crashing down over them.

And they were powerless to stop that either. Until finally, when all their efforts and skill and energy were exhausted, in fear and panic, they looked to Jesus for deliverance.

To add insult to injury, they realized that while they were in deep fear and panic, Jesus had slept through the storm, which is quite amazing given that they were probably an open boat.

And the most he might have had to sleep under was a skin or a tarp. The contrast between their desperate fear and his calm could not be greater.

[16 : 39] So I'll go back to the question, who's really at home on the sea? Even when awakened, Jesus initially appears unconcerned for their plight, more concerned that they woke them because of their fear than because of their need for help.

And it's almost as if Jesus pokes fun at their fear and panic. And he said to them, why are you afraid? What's your problem?

The storm was raging around them. It's almost poking fun at their fear and panic. But in fact, it wasn't poking fun. He was teaching them to recognize his power, his authority, his commanding nature.

He was teaching them to recognize that the sea and physical nature was his area of competency as well. Jesus is totally calm because he is in total control.

Now, once again, verse 25, the disciples address him as Lord. Most likely, they're using the term Lord because it means sir or good sir.

[17 : 52] It's a polite way to speak to a great teacher. But I think Jesus now then challenges them to see the other use of Lord in that word. Same word, i.e., challenges them to see him as God.

To speak to the wind and the waves was a proverbial phrase to mean this is tackling the impossible. And King Jesus next, with a powerful word, does just that.

He does the impossible, at least humanly speaking. The sea was immediately calm. And remember, normally a severe storm swell would take hours to subside.

This was no coincidence. This was a clear miracle, an amazing miracle, in which Jesus demonstrated his lordship over the natural world and the demonic world, in as much as they believed that demons were infesting the tips of those storm waves.

The chaos of storm and evil immediately becomes tranquility and order before King Jesus. Scripture was clear.

[19 : 11] God alone controls creation, including the seas and storms. God alone controls. And in response to confronting the divine presence and power of Jesus, the disciples were filled with awe and reverence.

Scratching their heads, still trying to work out what they'd just experienced, what they'd just seen. What sort of man is this? All of that suggests that in their heads and in their discussion, they would come to the conclusion that surely the only explanation for what we just saw is that Jesus is God.

So we can say then that Jesus called out their little faith, as he describes it here, or immature faith, to encourage great faith.

And I'll refer you back in a minute to chapter 8, verse 10, where the centurion came to Jesus and was commended for his great faith. I think it's not too much to say that here that Jesus expresses surprise and disappointment at their little faith, probably meaning that the immaturity of their faith was exposed under pressure of this storm.

The problem for these guys is that focusing on their circumstances, they were unable to see past what they could see.

[20 : 46] All they could see was the boat sinking, the storm raging. They couldn't see past that to see Jesus. And so fear and panic took hold of them. J.C. Ryle has a lovely comment on this.

He says, it's only too true that sight and sense and feeling make poor theologians.

In the moment, they had forgotten that Jesus had power sufficient to give life, to reverse the chaos of sin, to bring order out of chaos.

They forgot he had the compassion and the priority to save or deliver his people into new peace and security and safety. And this is in stark contrast to the centurion, who was commended by Jesus for his great faith.

And I said last week that that great faith, really, is just his ability to see Jesus beyond what he could see, which is the suffering and near death of his servant, his ability to see Jesus and take him at face value in light of his words and actions.

[22 : 02] The ability to see through his circumstances to the reality and power of Jesus behind those circumstances. So Jesus sent his disciples here and he says to you and me through these words today, trust me.

Entrust yourselves to me. There is no need for fear when you're following me properly on the basis of what you've heard me teach and demonstrate.

Friends, the discipleship Jesus demands is not for the half-hearted.

Nor is it for the faint-hearted. And yet, this too often describes us, I think. So I'm moving towards a conclusion now by encouraging you to see Jesus as the perfect package deal to dispel all fears.

Why is it that so often we're half-hearted in our commitment to Jesus? Well, I think for me, and perhaps it's for you as well.

[23 : 16] I think it's mainly because we fear missing out on things in life which we believe are essential or desirable or pleasurable.

Or because we don't think Jesus can give us all the things we need to satisfy and make us happy and secure in this world. And so then we go down the old rabbit holes of prioritizing career, family, relationships, sport and recreation, our homes, material possessions, health, children, and so on.

The list goes on and on and on. Because these are the things we measure security and success by. When we see those things, we can't see past them. But we need to see them because we're not looking past them.

But as Jim Elliott says, the missionary to the South American tribes, why would we hesitate to give up that which we cannot keep and ultimately which will not satisfy us?

To gain what we cannot lose in Christ and which ultimately will be our deep satisfaction. Half-hearted commitment just doesn't make sense.

[24 : 37] But it's not acceptable to Jesus either. And then we're faint-hearted in our commitment to Jesus because we look constantly to our ongoing daily sin and failure.

Failure to display the attitudes and actions we long to. And so again, when we can't see past ourselves, fear ends up strangling faith.

But then if we could see past ourselves. And if we can see past what we see in ourselves, to see Savior Jesus, who has dealt with our sin and freed us from its power.

To see King Jesus, who loves us, who promises to keep us safe to heaven. If we can see that, faith will strangle fear. And it comes down to this, I think.

Each of our fears, and my goodness, there's been lots of fears demonstrated by Christians recently. Fears from the pandemic. Fear of vaccine. Fear of what the government agenda is.

[25 : 49] And so on and so forth. And fear of death itself. But each of our fears, I believe, reveals a failure to see Jesus relative to that particular fear.

Which in the end is a failure to understand and apply the gospel to that particular circumstance or fear. That was the problem for these disciples in the boat. We need to be able to see past that which we see.

To see Savior Jesus, King Jesus. And to see that all the power of Jesus as God's King and Savior is prioritized, is applied, is engaged on behalf of his died for people.

Go and read Ephesians 1. It will fill your mind with that. Friends, the last sentence I'll say to you this morning is we need to see Jesus and his perfect love.

Because as the scripture tells us, understanding that perfect love drives out fear. Let's be people who can see past what we see, either in ourselves or in the circumstances around us.

[27 : 09] Let's not be people who, on the one hand, claim to be followers of Jesus, and yet practically are shown to be incredibly short-sighted. Pray with me, please.

Lord, help us, Lord, to have our sin and our failings and our half-heartedness and our faint-heartedness exposed.

And, Lord, help us then to come back to you, to see you behind our fears, to see you through our fears, and to have faith strangle fear, rather than the other way around.

Lord, give us such an understanding of your gospel love, your complete commitment to us in a package deal, that we might be able to follow you with absolute confidence in that package deal.

Help us to hear your word. Help us to take it on board. Help us to make the changes we need to in our thinking and our attitudes and actions this coming week. And help us most of all, Lord, to find our confidence, our strength, our security, and everything else in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray.

[28 : 38] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.