

Don't be too quick and don't be too slow

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[0 : 0 0] Matthew chapter 8. There's one more message after this that focuses explicitly on the gospel accounts. Tonight we're in Matthew. These messages have followed an order, and so this is the second to last one. And we're going to, it's a short passage, so it's Matthew 8, verses 18 to 22. I'll just set the background for you as you're finding your way there. The issue in Matthew 8 is one of authority and one of faith. So you've got this whole, does Jesus have the authority to do what he does going on, which he does, but then you have the faith of the centurion compared to the lack of faith of the disciples in the boat. So the issue here is faith in Jesus, but also the authority of Jesus. That's the sort of core of this chapter.

So we're going to pick it up in verse 18, and this is all about following Jesus. So now hear God's Word. 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, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes, and the 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 bury my father. And Jesus said to him, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

Well, we will pray that God will bless his Word, and we'll come back to that after we song this next song. Well, please turn again, if you've closed your Bibles, to Matthew 8, verses 18 through to 22. As you're doing that, let me pray for you. Father God, we pray now that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart, that you would keep us faithfully committed to being committed to Jesus Christ, and that, Father, that if we are here, having not yet followed, that we would follow, and that we would not turn back. That, Father, even for us who have been following for a long time, we pray that what we hear would remind us of the authority that Jesus has, but also the absolute security that we have in following him. So bless his Word to us now, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 5 5] Well, over the past several weeks, we have been looking at what it means to have salvation, and we have concentrated mostly on forgiveness, which is a right thing to concentrate on, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which produces that forgiveness. Nothing else can. As I said this morning that, you know, humans cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, and not even God can make an omelette without breaking eggs. Some things have to be done a certain way because they cannot be done any other way, and that's crucially important when we come to understand the demands of Jesus. So Jesus isn't making demands harder than they need to be.

He doesn't give instruction harder than it needs to be. He just is very clear on what is clear, at least to him. So salvation is about being forgiven. It's also about belonging to God, but what we see here is that salvation is about following. Now, this is where it gets difficult, because a reductionism does happen in any kind of believer's life, and that is at the point of conversion, we seem to be on fire for all of these things, the following, the forgiveness. We love it all.

And then what seems to happen is over the years, there seems to be a reduction in some of these things, where our commitment to Christ can be boiled all the way down to simply a verbal confession, I believe. What we're going to hear this evening is that Jesus is reminding us all, when we say, I believe and I follow Jesus, what that actually means. The demands are great, but it's a great God that we're following, the great God of Scripture. And so what we hear, though on the surface, rubs us perhaps in the wrong way, that this is hard, that this is demanding, but it becomes easy to appreciate when you truly appreciate who it is that's making those demands.

Now, we've all been with people who make demands on our life, and we think, well, who are you to make those kind of demands. But when it comes to Jesus, you know, he has the right to make any kind of demands he pleases because of who he is. So the thing to notice here is in verse 18, Jesus

is on the move, and that's important, because the whole section here is about following Jesus, and we're to understand, verse 18, that Jesus is on the move. So following, and Jesus is on the move. He gives orders to his disciples to go over to the other side, and by the other side, he means the Sea of Galilee, the other side of the Sea of Galilee. After this section, this is where Jesus gets into the boat, and Jesus calms the storm, and he sort of rebukes his disciples for their lack of faith. And as we've looked at already, that faith is your valuation of Jesus, okay? Your level of faith is your level or your value level that you put on Jesus. It's, that's exactly what it is. So little faith means little value in Jesus, and that's spelled out in a number of different ways, especially on how you understand who Jesus is. But more importantly, if you look at the faith as a centurion, you begin to understand that your faith in Jesus for someone else can actually affect them, because the centurion's faith in Jesus is not for himself, but actually for his servant who's unwell. It's a valuation of Jesus. A great faith means that you value Jesus greatly. Like anything, when Jesus says, you know, that God cares for the birds of the air, and are you not of much more value than they, that's a value statement, okay? God values you more than the birds of the air. He is able to tell the difference. So having faith in Jesus rather than faith in something else means that you are being able to tell the difference, the value difference in having faith in Jesus compared to having faith in something else. So your level of faith is always a value statement. So faith is important. The issue here is that Jesus says to his disciples that we are going to go over to the other side. He gives orders to go over to the other side, and this alone should highlight the truth that Jesus has the authority to tell us what to do, that Jesus has the authority to direct your life of a disciple. This means that when Jesus says, we're going here, following means that you go with him. [7 : 46] Now that's the uncomfortable bit, because if Jesus can make any demand he so chooses of his followers, then our worry is, what kind of demands will Jesus make of me? And that's where we get to the hub of the issue here. Before they go over to the other side, you'll notice that two people are around Jesus, and both people have a desire to follow him. Now this is where it sort of rubs me a little, because over the past few weeks, I have been calling you to follow Jesus, and then here we have a passage where Jesus seems to be putting a spanner in the works. I'm asking you to come and follow Jesus, and Jesus is telling you to stop and think about it. What are we to make of this? Okay, Christians get very, very excited when other people want to follow Jesus. Jesus is a lot more cautious, and this is what we see here. Both men have a desire to come and follow Jesus, and Jesus seems, at least on the surface, to be making it more difficult than it needs to be. He's effectively holding these men off to consider what it is they're actually considering. But what Jesus is actually doing is that he is able to spot in them that something that they are unable to spot in themselves. And the first is this, the first man is just too quick to follow. He's too quick, and he hasn't counted the cost. The second man is just too slow. So the first is too quick, and the second is too slow. He wants to follow Jesus, but yeah, I'll get around to it in my own time. Well, Jesus realizes that there's something else here. So with the first man, Jesus wants the man to question whether or not he has really counted the cost. You're so quick to follow me, just hold your horses for one moment. Have you really counted the cost of what it means to follow me? And to the second man, he says, you're too slow. You are failing to see the urgency of following me. That's kind of paradoxical, isn't it? How can a person be on one sense, you know, too quick to follow, and Jesus gets them to consider that? And then on the other hand, a person is too slow to follow, and Jesus is trying to get them to consider that. Well, is there a middle ground? That's not really a middle ground. Really, it's an issue of are you considering truthfully what it means to follow

Jesus? So Jesus responds to the first man, because you are too quick to follow, you need to count the cost. To the second man, because you are too slow to follow, you need to see its urgency. Now, we can go all over the New Testament to find out what it means to follow Jesus, but to be honest, we almost need to go nowhere else apart from this section to understand what it means to follow Jesus. And what it means is this, that when it comes to following Jesus, there is nothing more urgent and there is nothing more costly.

That's the point that Jesus is making. When it comes to following Jesus, there is nothing more urgent and nothing more costly, and this is something that you're to know. We have just sung the song, I have a desire to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. Jesus understands the temptation for anyone to turn back. That's why he says that no one who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is fit for the kingdom of God. In other words, if you're the type of person that starts something without finishing it, you're going to have a hard time when it comes to the kingdom of

God. You're going to have a really difficult time. Now, it's fine, you know, when it comes to DIY, or it's fine when it comes to certain things. You know, you can start it and drop it, perhaps a book, even a good book. It's permissible to read halfway through it and put it down and pick up another book and read and go back to it a later date. That's fine. When it comes to the gospel, when it comes to the kingdom, Jesus is not permitting that. No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks forward, trying to go on with Jesus, and then looks back, is then fit for the kingdom of God. The temptation is the same temptation that

Lot's wife had, okay? Okay, she sees a place where even Lot doesn't want to live there.

Remember, the angels come, and he's trying to convince them not to stay in the city, and you want to ask the question, well, why are you staying in a place where you don't want other people to stay? I mean, get your head around that one. Why is Lot staying in a place where he doesn't want other people to stay? The question, why are you there, Lot? Why are you in the place? Why don't you move out? But Lot's wife, because she loved all the stuff in that city, even though it was being destroyed, you know what happened to her. The issue is, don't look back. Rather count the cost, rather see the urgency, but don't ever look back. So, the demands of Jesus are demanding, but the demands of Jesus come from Jesus.

They come from the very person who can make demands. They come from the very person who has authority overall and in all. When Jesus refers to himself here as the Son of Man, that's taken from the Old Testament, from the book of Daniel, chapter 7. And what it means is this, that God has given him, Jesus, all authority. All authority. All the authority belongs to Jesus. So, Jesus now has the authority to say anything to anyone, including the type of way he wants people to follow him. Now, the interesting thing is, is that the type of demands that Jesus makes on people's lives are different for different people. This is difficult to understand, but nevertheless, we must all be willing to pay the ultimate cost of following Jesus, and we all must be willing to see the ultimate urgency in following Jesus. And so, who but God can make such demands? Well, no one, only God. Okay? No one. And so, Jesus wants us all to understand here that following him is the most important thing that anyone will ever do.

[14:22] There is nothing more important. This is not something that you can put off and get back to later. This is not one of those things that can be treated like any other thing. This is the most important thing that you are being presented with. So, let's deal with the first man then, and the issue is one of cost, and the second one is one of value. The first man, he comes up to Jesus with a desire to follow him, and Jesus stops him in his tracks and says, verse 20, that foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nest, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. The issue here is that you could follow Jesus and end up with less than what you currently have with not following Jesus. That's the issue. If you follow me, be prepared to not have in the future what you currently have now not following me. Is that a cost you're willing to pay? Okay, foxes have their holes, birds of the air have their nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. If you follow me, that's what you're following. Remember the rich ruler.

What was his problem? A loss aversion. He didn't want to lose what he had. Okay, what held him back from following Jesus? Not greed, but rather he didn't want to lose what he had. Jesus said, take everything that you have, sell it, give it to the poor, just give it all away, come and follow me. The issue is, I don't want to lose what I have, and so if I don't want to lose what I have, the very thing that I'm holding on to is the very thing that causes me to lose Jesus. It's the very thing that stops me from following Jesus. He's accumulated all these riches, and now he is being called by Jesus to not take them with him. Just leave them all behind and come and follow me. That's the cost that Jesus is calling this man to consider, because following Jesus is more than a verbal acknowledgement of Jesus.

It's more than just, I believe. It's more than just, I made a commitment when I was 18. It's more than just, I was baptized at 23. It's more than any of those things. It is, I follow Jesus.

My whole life is directed by Jesus. This means that whenever I decide to do something, I not only consider Jesus, but I consider that Jesus has the authority to guide my life wherever he wants it to be. Okay, genuine discipleship is not found in verbal acknowledgements.

It's found in following. Now, the interesting thing here is what is this man being asked to give up, or what is this man being asked to go without in the future? And here's the important thing, really important, that this man, like the rich ruler, is only being asked to give up what God has given to him in the first place. The reason we find it so difficult is because we fail to remember that everything

that we have has been given to us by God. And so, when God asks us to give it up, we think we are giving something up that actually belongs to us. We think that we are doing this great sacrifice because we've worked so hard for it. You know, all my intellectual studies, all my labor, everything, you know, I've got what I've got, and now Jesus is taking it all away. Well, the misunderstanding is you got it because it was given to you. It may have been given to you through your abilities. It may have been given to you through your hard work. But nevertheless, it does come from God. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, and we forget it. We forget that what we give up is given. We think it's been obtained by us, accumulated by us, without any involvement of Jesus. So, what Jesus is asking this man to consider should be fairly easy, that I'm only asking you to go without the very things that

[18 : 33] I wouldn't give you or give you in the first place. But no, we find it difficult because we find it difficult to lose. Loss aversion is a powerful motivator. We don't want to go without. We love our protective hedges. The church is full of hedge fund managers. We are constantly protecting ourselves against loss all the time. There's nothing wrong with that unless it gets to the point of idolatry.

And what this man is being to consider here is the very thing that happened to Job. The temptation or rather the debate between God and Satan over Job was take everything away from him and see if you'll still be faithful. And he was. This man is being considered to have nothing. Homelessness. In fact, this is really important. You do realize that you were saved by a homeless man. That the very son of God who saved you from your sin and gives you eternal life was a homeless man. That's our savior. And it's he who calls us to follow him. Put him first. The second man, I kind of feel a little bit sorry for him. But at the same time, I have to remind myself that it is Jesus who's speaking to him. It seems that Jesus is almost making an unreasonable demand.

But what Jesus is actually demonstrating to him is the place that Jesus should have in the life of anybody who's going to follow him. And that is first place. So the man, verse 21, first wants to go and bury his father. He clearly wants to follow Jesus. It's inferred by the fact that he says, let me first go and bury my dad, bury my father. Jesus says to him, verse 22, follow me and leave the dead, bury their own dead. Now, this needs a little explaining because it sounds hard and it is hard, but it sounds a lot harder than what it really is without explanation. So here's the explanation.

[20 : 46] Number one, if this man had already died, then the man speaking to Jesus wouldn't have been there. Because the custom is, is that if he had died, you would have buried him on the same day.

And if this man, if his father had died, he would have been burying him at that point. You wouldn't have been stood there talking to Jesus. Rather, the issue here is that his father is about to die. It seems likely that his dad is very, very old, on the point of death, perhaps even on his deathbed. You know, he's got a few weeks to live or perhaps a few months to live. And this man wants to do the right thing by his father. He wants to stick around and then take care of the family duties of burying his own dad. That's the legitimate concern. That's a legitimate desire. He just wants to hang around. And what Jesus has to say to him is, you're failing to see the urgency.

And the way Jesus gets this across is by saying to the man, let the dead bury their own dead. And what Jesus means by this is that the dead here is spiritual deadness, not physical deadness. Okay, anyone who doesn't follow Jesus is spiritually dead. And what Jesus is saying is, let those who don't follow me take care of those who don't follow me. But the issue that this man is faced with is following Jesus. Is it difficult? It's really difficult. And the reason it's difficult is because this, this is a legitimate love. This is an honorable thing. And if legitimate and honorable things can keep me from Jesus, then what else can keep me from Jesus? If doing the right thing can keep me from Jesus, then what about everything else? And so the lesson here, which is difficult, but this is the cost and the value, is Jesus comes first. It's difficult because it's a family member. Incredibly difficult when the gospel enters into the family and the husband doesn't see things the same way as the wife does, or the wife doesn't see things the same way as the husband does, or even parents to children, or children to parents, or they're wider than that. It's incredibly difficult. It's easy to be kept back from following Jesus because of your legitimate love for your family. But what this man fails to see is the absolute urgency is the absolute urgency of following Jesus, as if it can be put off to a later day. And Jesus is saying, no, it really can't be. Jesus is not to take first place. Jesus is first place. That's what this man fails to realize. You know, we speak about, well, I'm not putting Jesus first.

No, what's actually happening is you're failing to recognize that he is first. Jesus is always first. Jesus is always preeminent. You may try to dethrone him in your own way by putting other loyalties before that. The issue is not that you're not putting Jesus first. The issue is that you're not recognizing that Jesus is first in all things. Jesus cannot be thwarted or dethroned by us. Rather, it's your alignment to him, not his alignment to you. So, the first man fails to see the cost, and the second man fails to see the urgency. So, here's a few considerations, then, as we move forward. The first consideration is this, is that in verse 18, we are clearly meant to see that there is a distinction between the crowd and followers. Just like in every generation, there is a crowd that will crowd around Jesus, but then there are followers, just like in every church. The church is divided up between a crowd and followers, okay? That's not my words. That's the words of Jesus, okay? Jesus makes it very clear in the gospel that the church is made up, the wheat and the tares grow together, okay? Not everyone is what they are. Not everyone in the same field is the same grain, is the same produce. They're different.

[25 : 11] And so, if Jesus is affirming that you can have a church full of genuine and fake, even though the difference is being able to be told, the same is here. There's the crowd, and then there is the genuine followers. So, you know, which are we? Do we crowd around Jesus by coming to church, liking to hear the things that we hear, but we're not acting out of obedience? Rather, we do everything instead of obedience, okay? We're not really followers. We're a crowd. Wherever Jesus turns up, we're there, okay? We don't mind singing the hymns. We don't mind doing a few prayers, but obedience, well, that's taking Christianity seriously. Well, that's the cost, okay? That's the urgency, and that's the value that Jesus is making here, that true discipleship is out of obedience, not instead of obedience.

And obedience is measured by God's Word. Now, we can all make up our own way of doing the same thing differently. Jesus doesn't allow that when it comes to following Him. When it comes to following Him, we're to understand the cost, because it's a real cost, and it's a real cost that has to be paid, and we're to understand the urgency. No backsliding here. Get a move on. So, here's the exhortation then.

Don't be too quick to follow. Don't be too quick to follow where you have not counted the cost of following, because if you are, you will put your hand to the plow and then turn back. When? A year down the line, five years down the line, 15 years down the line, who knows, okay? But don't be too quick to follow where you haven't counted the cost, but neither. Don't be too slow. Don't be too slow either where you don't see the absolute urgency of following Jesus. Now, you may be thinking to yourself, what if Jesus asked me to do something I don't want to do, right? Now, you're counting the costs, okay? What if I don't do the very thing that Jesus is asking me to do, right? Now, you're counting the cost. You may even say to yourself, this could change everything, right? But now, you're counting the cost. Now, you're beginning to understand what it actually means to be a genuine follower of Jesus. Now, you're beginning to count the cost, and now you're beginning to see the urgency.

Rather, strengthen your commitment in Jesus, and to do that, understand who Jesus is. In other words, know who you're following, and know who it is that is actually calling you to follow him. He's not anybody. He is the one who has all authority overall. He's the one who can direct my life wherever he chooses to, however much I might collide with God's governance of my life, and I often do.

And you often, as I said this morning, will collide with God's governance of the world and God's governance of your life. It is guaranteed. But notice who it is that is doing the governing.

[28 : 28] It is God. And God has the right to govern things the way that he chooses to do so. That's who is calling us to follow him. So, the choice here is not a choice between equals, okay? This isn't equal loyalties here. Jesus comes first because he's first. Jesus doesn't come first in people's lives because they put him first. Jesus comes first in everything because he is first. Jesus is overall because he's overall. Jesus is the preeminent one because he is the preeminent one, not because he is put there by a set of beliefs of people. I believe Jesus is this. No, he is that, and people have come to believe in Jesus.

Jesus has the right to direct the life of a follower wherever he chooses to. So, understand the call. Don't be too quick, but don't be too slow. Don't be too quick where you haven't counted the cost, and don't be too slow where you don't see the urgency. Rather, see the urgency and come. Amen. Amen.