

Reading: Matthew 8:14-27

Theme: Is it worth following Jesus?

Matthew provides us with a fascinating history of Jesus. He wrote to show that Jesus was the One promised in OT, but also that the salvation He brought was not exclusively for the Jewish people, but was for the whole world. Matthew shows us Jesus as the King. Matthew's style is to move events along and then suddenly enlarge on some aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. We have seen this in chapters 5-7 where the Sermon on the Mount is given in detail. Here in chapter 8 we have a series of miracles recorded in rapid succession. Matthew records the teaching of the King and goes on to show the power of the king - over disease, over creation and over demonic forces.

We have seen earlier in the chapter of Jesus' power to heal by a touch and also just by speaking. We read of the same ways used as He healed Peter's mother-in-law and then later as He dealt with many who were demon possessed and drove out the spirits with a word - it also seems Jesus healed all the sick by speaking. Matthew links His healing power to the fulfilment of prophecy in **Isaiah 53:4** as it was demonstrated in His life.

Matthew will go on and show Jesus' power over creation, but right in the midst of all these miracles Matthew has in v18-22 a few verses that seem out of place! The whole chapter would read fine even if these verses were not present as it would be a series of miraculous events that Matthew records. Yet this is not the case. God in His wisdom saw fit to inspire and guide Matthew to write and to include these verses here. I feel they stand as a challenge to us all as we consider the Lord Jesus

Christ and our following Him. I hope this will come out as we look at these verses for they are relevant for us all to look at and think about. See 3 things:

1. Moving on With Jesus. (v18)

It seemed that Jesus was still followed by large crowds. We often see Him followed and surrounded by large crowds and at times read of Him dismissing them, sending them away. He did this for the benefit of the crowds - allowing them to rest, eat, work etc. It was for the benefit of His disciples for the same reasons and even for Jesus Himself. Yes, He was God with a real human body and as such He also knew tiredness, hunger and He, in His humanity, needed rest, food, prayer and time to be quiet and be refreshed. Besides which, the enthusiasm of the crowds needed to be controlled and not reach a fever pitch and draw unnecessary restrictions from the authorities.

The time had come to move on from Capernaum for a while and to minister elsewhere. It gave Jesus opportunity to do good in other places; it also gave the crowds time to consider all they had heard and seen, to allow them to weigh up whether it was worth following Jesus. For the people there it would have been so convenient to follow Jesus while He stayed in their neighbourhood; to follow Him while He was nearby and doing miracles. Yet would they follow Him if it meant disrupting their cosy lifestyle, or having to leave friends and family? A true follower would go with Him, but thrill seekers and those who enjoyed the spectacle would not bother to do so. There is the same question for us this morning *“Is it worth following Jesus?”*

We need to be ready to move on in following Jesus. To move on in our lives as God wants, to move on and trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour; to move on to grow in our love and obedience to Him, perhaps move to another place for work, study, home and even a new church if we are moved away from the area. Jesus' immediate disciples heard His command to cross to the other side of the lake and then **in v23** we see them going with Him as He instructed. We need to obey and move on with our Lord Jesus as He would direct us.

The wonderful teaching of the King, His miraculous works of power must have excited many, caused them to feel *"Yes, I'll follow this one"*, caused others to think *"He's the rising star in Israel and I want to be part of that success."* Some may have considered His teaching and realised the great commitment, cost involved in serving Him and may have weighed things up as to if it was worth following Jesus. Perhaps someone here is like that! This is why I feel these verses are so important and are recorded for us. They warn us, instruct us of the need to make a definite, clear commitment to follow Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and not to hold back in our following Him. There are 2 opposite ways to follow Jesus that are to be avoided, See:

2. Too Hasty in Following Jesus. (v19-20)

That sounds a strange thing to say! In these verses a teacher of the law, a scribe comes to Jesus and says remarkable, amazing words. The scribes as a whole body were later opposed to Jesus, all He did and taught, so for this one to come and say v19b to Jesus is remarkable and amazing. It is a ready

commitment to follow Jesus from this scribe, which came unprompted, was not pressurised or forced, it was not even suggested to him, but he, of his own free decision, comes and makes this willing commitment to follow Jesus. It appears that he was ready and willing to follow Jesus wherever Jesus went.

These are very impressive words and sounds so fine and are, if we are honest, words we'd love to hear people say about their decision to follow Jesus now. Yet Jesus' reaction to this man is even more remarkable and amazing! Jesus as King, as God, knew this man, his intentions, thoughts, desires and emotions. Jesus warns the man of the cost of following Him in v20 - which seems a strange answer, but it **underlines the poverty and the uncertainty** of the life Jesus lived on earth and showed the stark, harsh lifestyle He had.

Probably this scribe would have been a man of influence, a man of learning, with a well above average education, a man whose lifestyle would have been a quiet, comfortable and easy one. Perhaps he was moved at Jesus' teaching, at Jesus' displays of power and he wanted this because he imagined a life of ease with no illnesses, no pains. Perhaps he was caught up in the excitement and the wonder at this miracle working teacher and he was emotionally charged up and uttered these words of commitment to follow Jesus.

Yet instead of being enthusiastically welcomed, his bubble is burst by the Lord Jesus and he is shown and comes to realise the cost of following Jesus – a life of self-denial, of hardship, of uncertainty, of few material benefits. We are to recognise

that this scribe had not counted the cost of following Jesus and imagined it would be a bed of roses - forgetting that roses have many thorns on them! Anyone who would follow the Lord Jesus needs to sit down and count the cost, to ask the question *“Is it worth following Jesus?”*

There is a cost involved in following the Lord Jesus, even at our time. It is not a flash in the pan, emotional decision and then when things don't work out as we imagine, then we dump Jesus along with the lucky rabbit's foot in a bottom drawer. We are not to be those who receive God's word as the seed that fell on **stony ground** - that grew so quickly and then it faded away in the heat of persecution, pressures or cares of life.

If anyone here is considering Christ and His claims on your life, then I truly encourage you to do so, but do so realising there is a cost in following Jesus. For it means we deny our self and obey Him. He doesn't want those who falsely, through haste or what we will get out of such, decide to follow Him, and yet they are not true followers and believers. Yet there is another way of following the Lord Jesus that is also to be avoided and it is at the opposite end of the scale to being too hasty in following Him and so we see:

3. Too Slow in Following Jesus. (v21-22)

Another person, an unknown man, comes to Jesus and this man was following Jesus already as he is termed *“another disciple”*. He had decided to follow Jesus, to serve Him. His desire to serve Jesus was not too hasty, he was not emotional in his decision, but as he saw all that is involved, he realised

that it would affect his life and other things were put as more important to Jesus and took the place of serving Jesus at that moment.

Yes, he was ready to follow Jesus, but not yet... he would follow Jesus, but... Please don't get me wrong when I say that. His request would seem to be natural, to bury his father. Commentators have discussed this and they conclude that it does not mean his father was dead. The Jews then, as now, go into immediate mourning and bury their dead that day or the next. It is thought that what it means is that his father was old, even ill and the man seems to be using it as a reason not to follow Jesus at **that moment**. That was his excuse, his escape clause to following Jesus at that point in time.

Many people use various excuses why they could not become a Christian **now**; as to why they cannot serve Christ in a better way **now** - family, friends, jobs, finances, studies backgrounds... I suspect if they were all done away with, then other excuses would be found. It is said that an unwilling mind and heart, never lacks an excuse - to begin many things e.g. a new fitness regime, a new diet, a course of study and especially trusting and following Jesus.

Jesus' answer may seem harsh. Please do not wrongly misunderstand what Jesus says - He does not say our families do not matter, nor is He saying that we do not need to honour mother and father. Jesus knew this man was using even a God honouring legitimate thing as an excuse to hide behind and so Jesus speaks to show that his greatest need was to let nothing hinder him following Jesus. Whether the man realised it not,

his prime duty was to follow Jesus and let nothing stand in his way. Jesus and His disciples were going to leave, orders had been given to cross the lake; it would be some time before Jesus returned. Would this man be ready even when Jesus returned? Realise if it is worth following Jesus, then the time to begin is definitely now, today!

If Jesus is the sovereign Lord, is the King, then He should be followed whatever the cost and without hesitation. Our love for Jesus as our Saviour is to supersede, override even our natural family ties. If we love Him, we will serve Him wholeheartedly and even be willing to rightly forsake parents and family e.g. serving on a mission field involves being separated from parents, even from children - if no education facilities are nearby and all this for the sake of the Saviour. Think of those many missionaries who left to serve the Lord Jesus in previous centuries and never ever saw **family members** again and yet they did it because they loved Jesus and followed Him whatever.

The exact meaning of Jesus' reply in v22 is discussed and debated by commentators. Basically, they see 2 meanings - which are not mutually exclusive. On the one level it is taken to mean that mortal men will not leave a dead body around too long - so the mortal ones will bury their dead. In other words, this man's father would die sometime but he would be buried and in this, responsibility did not exclusively rest with this son.

On another level, it is thought that the first term "dead" means those who are spiritually dead - they're concerned only about

here-and-now matters and can see no further than that, so let them take care of such things, but this man, as a disciple, had a far higher calling for his life - Dr Luke tells us Jesus said to him “*Let the dead bury their own dead, but **you** go and publish the kingdom of God.*” (9:60) This man was to be concerned with matters of eternal life and had to get His priorities sorted and He had to evaluate the cost and be ready to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Is it worth following Jesus?

As we look inward at our lives, as we consider Jesus, who He is, what He has done, His claims on our lives, are we ready to move on in obedience and to follow Him? Perhaps He is calling someone to trust Him for the first time, to obey His word and leading in our lives. Maybe we are too slow in following Jesus, as we feel He’s not really worth following. We should not be too hasty either for we are to realise there is a cost of following Jesus, but also realise the cost of **not following** Jesus is far, far greater - as we could gain the whole world and lose ourselves and we will eternally regret not following Jesus.

My prayer for us all is that we will go on to follow the Lord Jesus, live for His glory in all things, doing so all the days of our lives and we follow and serve Him wholeheartedly because we will discover that He above everyone else is worth it and worthy of being followed in this wholehearted way.