

September 18, 2016

## “The Call to Discipleship”

Matthew 8:14-22

**FCF:** Not knowing what's expected > disillusionment

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Jesus' call to discipleship is more demanding than we know.

(anchor) We need to weigh that if we are to follow Him.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Not knowing what to expect (and thinking you do) is a recipe for disaster. Here's a simple case study - a vacation trip. Suppose you pack a swimsuit when you need a snowsuit. Or you prepare for three days instead of ten. Or you assume that, once you arrive, all expenses have been paid when, in reality, it's all out of pocket. I'd say that you're in for a rude awakening.

Not knowing what to expect is a recipe for disaster. It sets you up for disappointment. And distress. And even disillusionment. Not just with vacation getaways but most anything, especially the weightiest pursuit of all - following Jesus. What does He have to say about this?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 8:14-22](#)

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Captain James Cook, the great 18th century maritime explorer, chartered much of the Pacific Ocean. He made meticulous maps for the sake of commerce and yet he had the heart of an anthropologist. Cook worried about the impact of sailors on other civilizations, the effect their presence could have on the Pacific islanders. So he resolved to observe and not to interfere. Something like the non-interference rule of the “Prime Directive” in *Star Trek*. It was a noble approach. Unfortunately, it didn't play out so well after one of his boats was stolen in Hawaii. Cook took a chief hostage, a fight ensued, and the captain was slain. Good idea, poor execution.

Jesus would not have us to make the same mistake. He would have us be sure in our resolve and clear on His call. His is a call to discipleship. That is, an exclusive, lifelong, whole-hearted commitment to follow Him. It is what we were made for. As surely as wings for flight or the sun to shine, we were made to follow Jesus. But following Him is also demanding.

Jesus' call to discipleship is demanding, more demanding than we know. And we need to weigh that if we are to follow Him. Those demands come out in three ways in our text. Here, Matthew gives us first a picture of discipleship, then our hope, and then finally the cost.

### **I. A PICTURE**

It begins with a picture, an actual event in time and space. But, wondrous as it was, what happened was also something intended to teach and to guide us ([READ Matthew 8:14-15](#)).

#### *A) The Healing*

There are two parts to this, the healing and then the response. Let's start with the healing.

##### 1. The need

This house belonged to Peter and his brother, Andrew. Peter had taken in his mother-in-law. She was laid out with “lake fever”, likely malaria. Which was no light thing. So the need was clear.

## 2. His touch

Such fever was viewed not as a symptom of disease but as disease itself. So it was against Jewish law to touch someone with a fever. Jesus, without being asked, touches her hand. And she doesn’t just come around. She is fully healed. Which is seen in her rising and serving Him.

### *B) The Response*

Which brings us to her response. Again, a real event. But like a living parable.

## 1. She rose

From her state of deadly infirmity, from hopelessness and helplessness, she was raised.

## 2. And began to serve Him

And then began to serve Him. Don’t miss the flow of events here. She was raised to serve Him.

My friends, this is a picture of discipleship, of what it means to follow Jesus.

### *Application:*

We have been raised to serve. What does that look like? What would it mean? What shape should it take? It has to begin with knowing that you’ve been raised to serve Him. The old has gone and the new has come. Your life - your goals and plans, your pursuits and priorities - have been made and can now be new. Secure in a new identity, grounded in His love, indwelled by His Spirit, what is now necessary is also possible - to live not for yourself but for Him. For you have given up your title of master and taken up the mantle of servant. His servant.

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## **II. OUR HOPE**

In fact, this call is so great, it takes a great hope to support it ([READ Matthew 8:16-17](#)).

### *A) Further Miracles*

With broader brushstrokes, Matthew tells us of further miracles there in Capernaum.

## 1. The word spread

Not surprisingly, the word has spread of what had happened. People began to gather outside the house. And Jesus gives the appropriate care - healing for the sick and evil spirits cast out.

## 2. The site today

Archeologists have uncovered the site where all this took place. Over the centuries, a series of churches was built there. But prior to that, by mid-1st century, a structure known as Peter’s house became a gathering place for the church. Given all that happened there, it’s little wonder.

### *B) Prophecy Fulfilled*

Matthew points out that, with these miracles, ancient prophecies were fulfilled.

## 1. Variation in the quotation

But there's a variation in the quotation. Here's how Isaiah put it ([READ Isaiah 53:4a](#)). Now listen to Matthew again ([READ Matthew 8:17b](#)). Why the difference? Matthew is writing in Greek. And as he reads the Hebrew of Isaiah, he recognizes the range of meaning to the words which can allow for our "griefs" and "sorrows" to include also our "illnesses" and "diseases".

## 2. Implication

The implication? Sin, grief, sickness, and suffering are complex and interrelated. Sometimes there are direct consequences to sin and suffering. Sometimes it's more indirect. But it's always tied to the Fall, to sin's entrance and corruption of this world. Here's the thing. Jesus, the subject of both Isaiah and Matthew, came to save us from it all. In every way, He is the Savior.

That's our hope. And - get this - it's a hope that is great enough to support this call. Put another way, we can gauge the heaviness of this call by what it takes to support and enable it.

### *Application:*

The hope we are given here is that all will be restored. All will be made new - partially now and fully then with the return of the King. So, yes, this is a broken world and we need to be realists. But we can also be optimists. There will be setbacks. But we will see progress.

And we need to apply that to everything. To ministry endeavors of all kinds. To our friendships, families, and personal lives. Ours is a realistic optimism and optimistic realism.

So here, in the midst of this teaching on the call to discipleship, Matthew is telling us, "*You need to keep this hope before you.*" Why? Because this call to discipleship is that hard.

Jesus' call to discipleship is demanding. We need to weigh that if we are to follow Him.

## **III. THE COST**

Which then brings us to the third point - the cost of this call, the cost of discipleship. We see this playing itself out in the dialogue between Jesus and two men. And this is vital to hear.

### *A) Materially*

([READ Matthew 8:18-20](#)) This is speaking to the material cost. Following Jesus means a willingness to give up the basics of life, to forego and forsake what we might call "essentials".

#### 1. The statement of the scribe

The scribe, a respected religious man in the community, comes to Jesus volunteering to follow Him. He is too confident, too eager, too hasty. He has little idea what he is signing on for.

#### 2. The response of Jesus

And we see that in Jesus' response to him. Jesus reads him and tells him this will cost him. Not a vow of poverty but a life of homelessness, of a willingness to be utterly insecure, unsafe, and exposed in the eyes of the world. Jesus is not promoting or allowing a life of ease and comfort.

### *B) Relationally*

So there is a material cost. And then a relational cost as well ([READ Matthew 8:21-22](#)). Following Jesus must take precedence over even our greatest and most sacred social obligations.

### 1. The statement of the disciple

Whereas the first man was too quick, this man is too slow. This man is a “disciple” in the looser sense in that he is following but keeping his distance. He is checking Jesus out but not sold out to Him. It’s quite possible that what’s going on here is that his father hasn’t actually died yet. Or that the family is in the midst of the customary two-stage burial process. Which could be a year.

### 2. The response of Jesus

But even so, that’s not really the issue. The issue is Jesus’ authority that trumps the most sacred obligation of that time - the burial of your parents. It’s not family before faith. It’s faith before family. Which then leads to this stark hard saying about the dead burying their dead - much like what Jesus said earlier about the need to tear out the eye or cut off the hand in fighting lust.

That’s the cost of discipleship - both materially and relationally. And it is demanding.

#### *Illustration:*

We read a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the start of the service. It’s worth knowing that he didn’t just write about these things. He lived them out. His early stand against the Nazis was not just dangerous but unpopular. Beyond that, he was willing to be misunderstood and criticized. By theologians when he left Berlin and went to London. By his American friends when he left the States and returned to Germany. By his German friends when he began working undercover for the Abwehr. Not that he didn’t care about what others thought but that he was willing to die to his desire for approval and admiration by others. It was the cost of discipleship.

#### *Application:*

With Jesus, His lordship is absolute. Nothing or no one can come before Him. All others must be secondary to follow Him. And here’s what’s interesting about the accounts of these two men in Matthew. We don’t know how they responded. It’s as though we are to finish the story.

How are we to do that? How do we flesh this out? Let me suggest one area would be in how we make decisions. It’s important that we examine our grid and filters. What is the most important thing? What has to be preserved? Our convenience and comfort? Our personal peace and affluence? The approval and admiration of others? What someone will think or say of us?

Jesus’ call to discipleship is demanding. We need to weigh that if we are to follow Him.

### **CONCLUSION:**

I mentioned Captain James Cook earlier. Let me tell you of yet another captain, Ernest Shackleton. Shackleton was in command of the 1914-1917 Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Its goal was to make the first land crossing of the Antarctic continent. The idea was to send two ships, the *Endurance* and the *Aurora*. The crew of the *Aurora* was to go to one side of the land mass and set up supply depots. The crew of the *Endurance* would then make their way across and utilize those depots to make up for the provisions they would have used up. Quite a plan.

Unfortunately, the *Endurance* became stuck in the ice before she could even reach her destination. Eventually, the ship was crushed and sunk, stranding the 28-man crew on the ice. After months of living in makeshift shelters, they made their way via lifeboats to the uninhabited inhospitable Elephant Island. Shackleton and five others then made an 800-mile open-boat journey to South Georgia. From there, he was able to mount a rescue for the rest of his crew.

It is said that, prior to the mission, Shackleton had placed an advertisement in a newspaper. If accurate, it was surely appropriate, a case of “truth in advertising” (READ quote):

*Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success. Sir Ernest Shackleton.*

Well, when you think of how things played out, you can't say that they weren't warned.

And neither can we. Jesus has made it clear. Through this beautiful picture, this soaring hope, and the astonishing cost, Jesus has made it clear that His call to discipleship is more demanding than we know. More than we know. We need to weigh that if we are to follow Him.

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