

## Matthew 8D

- We're back in our study of Jesus' miracles in the Galilee, and we're preparing to move into the second section of the miracles Matthew recorded
  - You remember that Matthew has carefully selected ten miracles to highlight in Chapters 8-9
    - They are grouped into three groups of like kinds of miracles
    - The first group (which we just finished) were miracles over the body
    - Those miracles showed that Jesus is the Creator God Who has power over the body, including the power to grant us eternal life
  - The second group of miracles are miracles over the Creation itself
    - But before we get into that section, Matthew inserts a moment between Jesus and the disciples
    - You may remember when I gave an outline for Chapters 8-9 a few weeks back, that I told you Matthew separates his three groups of miracles with two scenes
    - One scene demonstrates Jesus' authority over His disciples, and the other scene shows Jesus' authority over His enemies
    - So that by the miracles and these scenes, Matthews tells the story of Jesus having power and authority over everything in existence
  - Today, we study the first of these two scenes, where Jesus explains His authority and expectations for His disciples

**Matt. 8:18** Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea.

**Matt. 8:19** Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

**Matt. 8:20** Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

- This scene also appears in Mark's and Luke's Gospels, so we have a good appreciation for all that's happening here

- We know from Luke, that Jesus was in the area of Magdala, a small town on the northwestern shore of the Galilee
  - Today, you can see the ruins of that town being excavated
  - It's best known for its most prominent citizen, Mary of Magdala
  - Jesus healed Mary and several other women of demon possession while teaching in that region
- Luke and Mark also tell us that Jesus had just taught the parable of the Sower and Seed in this area
  - In fact, Mark says Jesus taught the parable while standing in a boat a few yards off shore
  - Jesus taught on a boat to put distance between Himself and the crowds pressing in for healing, so they would stop and listen
- As the crowds become unmanageable, Jesus decided to remain in the boat and ventured across the Galilee to the land of the Garasenes
  - Garasa was the name for the east side of the Galilee, which was largely settled by Gentiles
  - It was located directly across the northern tip of the Galilee, opposite from Magdala
- Notice in Matthew 8:18, we're told Jesus is preparing to cross the lake, which suggests this exchange happened in the same moment
  - Luke also records this conversation happened after the Sower and Seed parable
  - But Matthew records the parable of the Sower and Seed much later in his Gospel
  - So Matthew has left this story in its proper place, but chose to save the parable for later in His Gospel (for reasons we will understand when we get to Chapter 13)
- So, in Matthew 8, Jesus is about to start a short journey by boat across the northern tip of the Galilee
  - And as Jesus is standing in the boat and preparing to depart, a scribe in the crowd proclaims that he will follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes
    - The scribe calls Jesus "teacher", which is another word for "rabbi"

- So the man is indicating his desire to be a disciple of Jesus
- And he makes his pledge of discipleship very publicly, so that everyone would hear it
- That seems a little self-serving, doesn't it?
  - The scribe probably assumed Jesus would approve of his comment
  - Perhaps he expected Jesus to commend him for his self-sacrificial attitude
  - And most likely, the scribe was hoping Jesus would reward him by inviting him to accompany Jesus in the boat as they crossed
- This was certainly the way Pharisaic Judaism worked
  - Disciples were expected to lavish praise and honor on their rabbis, who in turn, favored these students
  - It was a mutual admiration society, and scribes learned how to work within this self-serving system
  - But this guy isn't fooling anyone by playing this game, certainly not Jesus
- Jesus seizes on the scribe's pledge of devotion to expose his insincerity
  - Jesus begins by rejecting the scribe's attempt to ingratiate himself
    - The scribe's declaration wasn't a pledge of personal sacrifice...it was flattery
    - Remember the scene...Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of thousands, scrambling to get close to Him
    - And He's been moving about the Galilee constantly to minister to the crowds – and at times, to escape the crowds
  - But this wasn't a typical rabbinical pattern...rabbis tended to stay put in a single place to run their rabbinical schools
    - They didn't need to move about constantly in this way, since they didn't command such attention
    - But clearly, Jesus was on a different level...He's the talk of the Galilee

- So in the midst of this throng, this man offers to follow Jesus anywhere
  - It's like teenage groupies shouting at the popular rockstar, "I want to have your baby!"
  - The scribe is flattering Jesus by acknowledging His popularity, that Jesus is a man widely traveled and in demand
  - And as the scribe pledges to go anywhere with Jesus, it's hardly a statement of sacrifice...he's trying to get invited to the party
- I've heard similar things said to me from time to time (though not the "have my baby" comment)
  - For example, when I mention I'm booked to teach at a church in Hawaii or Singapore or London or Costa Rica or Norway or New Zealand...
  - Inevitably, someone will say, "If you need someone to carry your luggage on your trip, I'd be willing to go with you..."
  - Obviously, they're making a joke about how nice it is to travel to such beautiful places, and they want to go too
  - But they don't realize how difficult ministry travel can be...
- This is how we need to understand the scribe's offer to Jesus, although he wasn't joking...he wanted to join Jesus in His ministry adventures
  - But Jesus is having none of it, so He rebukes the man, resisting any suggestion that His ministry is glamorous and appealing
    - He says the foxes have holes in the ground and birds have their nests, but Jesus doesn't even have a home of His own
    - In other words, even animals have something in this world to call their own...holes and nests and the like
  - And yet we never feel any envy over what they have, do we?
    - We wouldn't trade the comfort of our home for a fox's hole in the ground? Certainly not
    - But that's what this man was signing up for, though he didn't understand that
    - Jesus says the Son of Man didn't even possess the basic necessities of life, like a home – something even animals have

- The term, “Son of Man” refers to the Messiah, and Jesus used it whenever He wanted to emphasize the Messiah’s humility and suffering
- Jesus was pointing out the scribe’s false assumptions about discipleship
  - Discipleship under Jesus wouldn’t be a pursuit of the best things in this life...instead, it was a life of self-sacrifice
  - Jesus was very unlike the rabbis of His day, who used their popularity and power to enrich themselves
- Jesus set a different example, of not pursuing the world’s agenda
  - He didn’t focus on earning a living, climbing the social ladder and seeking a secure retirement
  - Jesus wasn’t destitute, because He had His benefactors, but He was not a Man *seeking* wealth or privilege
  - But Jesus pursued a Kingdom that was not of this earth, so He sacrificed the daily pleasures of life to obtain Heavenly praise
- So the scribe’s assumptions were completely wrong
  - Following Jesus wasn’t an adventure vacation
  - It required personal sacrifice in this life for the promise of a better eternal life
- By His response, Jesus established the first of two important rules of discipleship
  - Jesus’ disciple must be prepared to deny himself what he wants in this life, so that he may follow and serve Jesus
    - Discipleship requires we step back from pursuing the world’s agenda
    - Because we only have so much time on earth...you only have so much energy and resources at your disposal
    - And you can’t spend it twice...when it’s gone, it’s gone
    - So if we pledge ourselves to following and serving Jesus in this life, then it requires we forgo our own desires
    - You can’t have your cake and eat it too

- Now at this point, I need emphasize that following Jesus as His disciple is different than coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ
  - Our faith in Jesus is a gift, the Bible says
  - And we enter into our relationship with Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit, not by our own effort
  - Our salvation comes by faith alone, not because of anything we have done or will do in following or serving Christ
- So when Jesus speaks about the need for commitment and sacrifice, He's talking about how we serve Him, not how we come to know Him
  - Discipleship is a process of becoming a faithful follower of Jesus, and it's a mindset that manifests in a life lived differently
  - It's a changed outlook in life, made possible by our new identity in Christ
  - But not everyone who has come to saving faith in Jesus will embrace this changed outlook
- Simply put, not everyone who is born-again becomes a disciple of Jesus
  - You became a child of God because God crucified Jesus
  - You become a disciple of Christ by crucifying your own flesh
- Over the centuries, millions of believers have come to faith and received eternal life in Christ, yet never took the next step of serving Jesus as His disciple
  - They confessed Jesus as Lord, they went to church, they may have even read their Bible from time to time...they were typical Christians
    - But they didn't change their direction in life
    - They merely scheduled Christianity into their life, just like making room for bowling night and kids' soccer games
  - They trusted in Jesus for their salvation, but trusted in the mighty dollar for their security and satisfaction
    - They pursued fame or career or recreation or hobbies or whatever...instead of pursuing a life of serving Christ
    - And those choices came at a cost...they traded the opportunity to build an eternal Kingdom to chase after a fading world

- This is perhaps the greatest self-deception within the 21st century Church, particularly in the West
  - Our world is so wealthy, our culture so inviting, and our comfort so important, that we have no appreciation for the cost of discipleship
  - In fact, churches routinely preach that following Jesus is a win-win
  - We get Heaven when we die, and in the meantime, our life here gets shinier, brighter, happier and more prosperous
- Now of course, all Christians have to live in the world, so by necessity, we are all pursuing the things of this world, at least to some degree
  - But Jesus isn't demanding we live as if the world didn't exist
  - He's talking about our heart's desire, the thing that gets us up in the morning and defines our goals in life
- Believer, are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you live to please yourself or are you committed to pleasing Jesus?
  - Do you care more for the world's approval than what Jesus thinks of you?
    - Do you live with eyes for eternity? Are you thinking about that Kingdom that's right around the corner and coming up fast?
    - Or are you still trying to build your own kingdom in this world?
  - If we're not careful, we are tempted to think about discipleship like this scribe
    - We'll follow Jesus anywhere...so long as it fits our schedule and preferences!
    - We'll follow Him on a short-term mission trip...to an exotic destination with safe drinking water, nice beaches and souvenirs
    - We'll follow Him to church...so long as it's a sensible contemporary worship service in casual clothes and without having to sing too loudly
    - We'll serve in the Church or join small groups or give within reason...so long as it doesn't disrupt our plans for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

- But that's not discipleship, according to Jesus
- This scribe wanted to be Jesus' disciple for the thrill and excitement and privilege of being associated with a rockstar
  - But he hadn't counted the cost
  - He wasn't considering how much sacrifice discipleship requires
- So Jesus said if the Messiah didn't have a home in this world, how much worldly reward do you suppose you will gain by being His disciple?
  - Is the disciple greater than his Master?
    - If a disciple truly desires to follow Jesus, we must be prepared to deny ourselves
    - Jesus asks His disciples to do things and sacrifice things that our flesh or our spouse or parents or friends don't want to see us sacrifice
  - He's going to ask for your time...time you would rather spend on yourself or your family or your career
    - He's going to ask for your money...money you would rather spend on yourself or not spend at all
    - He's going to ask for your blood, sweat and tears
  - It's easy to be a Christian...just believe! But discipleship is hard
    - He's going to ask you to leave things behind, so you can serve Him in building the Kingdom
    - Not every disciple will be poor, but many will
    - Not every disciple will be weary, but some will
    - Not every disciple will be persecuted, but a few will
- That was the first rule...disciples must be willing to deny themselves to serve Jesus
  - So let's look at the second rule

**Matt. 8:21** Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."



[Matt. 8:22](#) But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

- As Jesus is departing, a second disciple of Jesus offers Jesus an explanation for why he couldn't accompany Jesus across the lake that very moment
  - The scribe had made the mistake of committing to discipleship too quickly, without counting the cost
    - Now, this man is making the opposite mistake of hesitating to make a commitment
    - He asks Jesus for opportunity to deal with family matters first
  - He says he has to bury his father, which seems like a reasonable request to us, doesn't it?
    - Who shouldn't be allowed a little time off to take care of such an urgent family matter?
    - Which makes us view Jesus' response seem harsh and uncaring
  - But things are not as they first seem, because the man is working from a particular aspect of Jewish culture
    - In a family, the oldest son was expected to honor the father by remaining in the home until he died
    - He cared for the father in his old age and worked the family business or land until the father passed
    - That event was probably still years away for this man, so he's not asking for a short delay
    - He's telling Jesus his family responsibilities exempt him from making the lifestyle change that discipleship requires
- But once again, Jesus is having nothing of it...He says, let the dead bury their dead
  - That's a euphemism, because obviously, a literal interpretation makes no sense
    - A dead person can't bury another dead person, obviously

- But first, mention of the dead refers not to physical death, but to those who are spiritually dead, meaning unbelievers, the unsaved
    - The Bible calls unbelievers those who are dead in their trespasses and sins, as Paul says in Ephesians
  - And this world belongs to unbelievers
    - This world is not our home...it's passing, and we are destined for something better
    - As I like to say, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, this world is as bad as life will ever be for you
  - But if you're an unbeliever, this world is as good as life gets
    - Because as rough as this world is, it's all the unbeliever will ever have to call his own
    - So Jesus is saying to His disciples, let the unbelieving world attend to the business of this world...it's their world, it's not ours
- A disciple of Jesus has better things to attend to...Kingdom matters
  - Our Kingdom hasn't arrived yet
    - So we're to live like Abraham lived in his day

**[Heb. 11:8](#)** By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

**[Heb. 11:9](#)** By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

**[Heb. 11:10](#)** for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

**[Heb. 11:13](#)** All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

**[Heb. 11:14](#)** For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

**[Heb. 11:15](#)** And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

[Heb. 11:16](#) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- Abraham was called to follow the Lord by living in a land that God showed him
  - The Lord brought Abraham to Canaan and told Abraham that this land would be his in a future day
  - But Abraham understood that it wouldn't be his until after the resurrection
  - According to God's promise, Abraham and his descendants would possess it in the Kingdom
- And Abraham believed God would be faithful to that promise
  - And as a disciple of the Lord, Abraham pledged to live life as a nomad while in the land, never entering the cities or claiming any land for himself
  - Hebrews says that Abraham chose to live in this way as a testimony to the world that he knew his reward wouldn't come in this lifetime
  - He was content to set his sights on what he would receive in the Kingdom to come, so he turned his back on the world's offerings
- That's living with eyes for eternity, and it's the second rule of discipleship
  - The second rule is that discipleship requires placing the needs of the Kingdom above any earthly obligations or commitments
    - We should let nothing distract us from the mission, nothing tempt us away, nothing scare us into quitting
    - Because we have no relationship to this world now that we've come to Christ
    - Like Abraham, we're looking for that city God has prepared for us in the Kingdom...we're passing through this life, ambassadors for Christ
    - So earthly obligations must take a backseat to answer Jesus' call to follow Him

- These two rules of discipleship work together in keeping us focused and obedient to Christ
  - Rule #1 warns us not to let our own desires get in the way of obedience
  - And Rule #2 reminds us to keep our eyes focused on eternity
- Because discipleship, taking up your cross to follow Jesus, brings a reward
- We will be called to make sacrifices here and to set aside the world's priorities, but in the Kingdom, we will see the fruit of that sacrifice
  - Elsewhere in this Gospel, Jesus reminds us of this fact

[Matt. 16:24](#) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

[Matt. 16:25](#) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

[Matt. 16:26](#) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

[Matt. 16:27](#) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

- When Jesus returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom, believers will join Him in that future world of glory
  - And as we all arrive with Jesus, the Lord says we will receive our eternal inheritance
  - He will repay us according to our deeds, referring to the deeds of service we did in faith as His disciples
- Discipleship means following Jesus faithfully, so that He may be pleased by our service
  - And as we please Him, He promises to reward us, which makes our sacrifices well worth it in the end
  - Remember, the statement Jesus says His disciples will hear?

[Matt. 25:23](#) "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

- That's what we all want to hear when we see Jesus
- It starts with setting aside a love for the things of this world
- And it continues in a life of placing the needs of the Kingdom above the priorities of this life
- Now if you're wondering how to put into practice what Jesus has said, then let me suggest a simple rule to get you started
  - Christ typically asks us to follow Him in a life-long series of steps
    - He knows it's hard for us to move away from the world and toward serving Him and the Kingdom
    - So in grace, He will move us in that direction bit by bit, much as He told Abraham go to a place I will show you
    - That is, Jesus showed Abraham the place to go, even as Abraham was already moving
  - So as someone once said, God can't steer a stationary object...we need to be in motion for Him to steer our lives
    - So the first step of discipleship is to do the first and obvious thing Christ is calling you to do
    - And then trust Him to reveal the next steps as you walk with Him
    - You might ask me, "What is that first and obvious thing?"
  - I don't know...it will be personal, based on what Christ is speaking to your heart...but I can assure you, it will be obvious
    - It's something you already know you should be doing... something you need to start or stop
    - Something you need to give up or give away
    - Something you need to change, something that will please Christ

- It's probably that thing you've been thinking about doing for some time already, but you've been delaying...maybe for the reasons these men had
  - Maybe the cost seems too high
  - Or maybe you're too invested in serving the priorities of this world
  - And if that's true, then Jesus has placed a test of discipleship in your path, and He's waiting to see if you will pass that test
  - Will you be His disciple?