

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY THREE

How *Not* to Follow Jesus

Matthew 8:18–27

Jesus isn't looking for a following; He is looking for followers—committed, dedicated disciples, men and women who mean what they say.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOON after Mary gave birth to Jesus, wise men from the East travelled to Israel in search of the one born king of the Jews. They had seen “his star as it rose,” so they came to worship Him (Matthew 2:2).

Years passed and Jesus grew up in quiet obscurity. But when He launched His ministry, His “star” rose once more—in the form of national notoriety. Jesus amazed audiences with His teaching, and His miracles drew attention from people far and wide. More than a few witnessed His dazzling displays. Matthew wrote, “Large crowds followed Jesus,” implying not just one crowd but many crowds (8:1).

However, not everyone sought Jesus in genuine devotion as did the wise men. Some were curious stargazers who came for the thrill of seeing a miracle. Others got swept up in the excitement, professing allegiance to Jesus only to abandon Him later. Still others wanted to share in His fame solely for personal gain. But Jesus could spot the phonies. Because of His keen discernment, He perceived people’s self-seeking motives beneath their sincere-sounding words.

Matthew purposefully inserted into his account of Jesus’ miracles a revealing glimpse at the types of people who followed Jesus and how Jesus responded to them. If we pay close attention to our study of Matthew 8:18–27, we will learn by their example how *not* to follow Jesus.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whenever we read Jesus' words in Scripture, we sense His call to follow Him. Prepare your heart in prayer to respond to Jesus' will through this study.

Father, speak clearly through the Scriptures today that I may hear the voice of my Shepherd calling me as one of His sheep, and may I respond with understanding and obedience. In Christ's name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you read *Matthew 8:18–27*, look for four categories of people: the *crowd* (Matthew 8:18), the *scribe* (8:19–20), the *other disciple* (8:21–22), and the *twelve disciples* (8:23–27). Jesus' responses to these people revealed their true motives. Let's look through His lens of spiritual discernment to see what Jesus saw in them and then reflect on what He might reveal to us today.



Observation: The Discernment of Jesus with His Followers

Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes that observation is “the process of seeing what the Bible actually says. . . . You're simply reading the words on the page.”¹ Use your skills of observation to answer the following questions.

First, let's consider Jesus' response to the *crowd*. Where was the crowd, and what did Jesus say to His disciples (*Matthew 8:18*)?

From Capernaum, Jesus told His disciples to take Him across the lake to Gentile territory. Jesus didn't give a reason for departing, other than seeing the crowd “around him” (8:18). We'll explore the meaning of His response to the crowd in the interpretation phase. For now, consult your Bible map to see where Jesus went across the sea.



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Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Bible maps are a vital tool in *Searching the Scriptures*. Reference the map in the back of your Bible or in your Bible atlas to find Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. You can also locate Capernaum on the map, *Ministry of Jesus*, on the Insight for Living Ministries website. Jesus embarked from Capernaum heading southeast. Find Gergesa, a seaside village in the region of Gadara. Gergesa is a possible site where Jesus cast out demons—which we'll read in our next study on Matthew 8:28–34. Trace the distance between Capernaum and the land of the Gadarenes.

Second, consider the *scribe*. Scribes were highly respected members of the religious elite and were accustomed to first-class treatment. What did Jesus tell the scribe to expect if he signed on as a disciple (*Matthew 8:19–20*)?

Third, how did Jesus respond to the *other disciple*, who said he wanted to follow Jesus but not right away (*8:21–22*)? We'll dig into the meaning of Jesus' interesting statement later.



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Fourth, what did Jesus say to the *twelve disciples* when they woke Him during the storm, and what did He do to calm the wind and waves (*Matthew 8:23–27*)? Notice the extreme contrast between the “fierce storm” (8:24) and the stillness of the “great calm” (8:26). How does the storm illustrate the disciples’ inner turmoil, and how does the calm sea reflect Jesus’ inner rest?

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ miracle? Remember to fit this event in the context of Matthew 8. Compare the questioning disciples with the confident centurion, who saw Jesus for who He was and who acknowledged Jesus’ infinite authority (8:8–9).

The disciples thought they would drown. Hold it. They were with God! God doesn't drown! What concerned Jesus? Not the disciples' normal human fear but the panic . . . the excessive fear that fears the worst. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Four Principles for Following Jesus

Once we uncover Matthew’s intended meaning for his original readers, we can craft our interpretation into a principle for today—a timeless, universal truth. How are we *not* to follow Jesus? Let’s consider four pitfalls to avoid.



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Following the Crowd—Matthew 8:18

Jesus perceived something in “the crowd around him” that made Him wish to leave (Matthew 8:18). What do you think concerned Him about these curiosity-seekers?

Jesus was more interested in gathering faithful followers than large followings. What principle can you write about the pitfall of following a crowd instead of following Jesus?

Jesus is looking for dedicated disciples. Do not follow Jesus because of the size of the crowd.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following for Personal Gain—Matthew 8:19–20

Hearing Jesus tell His disciples to cross the lake, the scribe wanted to hop in the boat with them: “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go” (Matthew 8:19). But did the scribe, who was used to studying in the comfort of libraries, get the full picture of life on the road with Jesus?



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To find out more about scribes and their drive to share in the fame of a popular rabbi for their own gain, read pages 152–153 in Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. What do you discover about scribes and the reason Jesus wanted this man to understand the cost of discipleship?

Write a principle about the problem of following Jesus to promote oneself.

Don't follow Jesus full of yourself. Be ready to deny yourself, not going your way but going His way. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following with Reservations—Matthew 8:21–22

While the scribe considered what he must do to follow Jesus, the next man had to consider what he must leave behind. The man's stipulation, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21), meant he wanted to stay home until his father dies. Jesus said, "Follow me now" (8:22). Consult your resources and page 154 of Pastor Chuck's commentary to explain what Jesus meant, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead" (8:22).



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What principle can you write about the peril of postponing following Jesus?

Do not follow Jesus with reservations. Don't have your own agenda.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Following with Little Faith—Matthew 8:23–27

We don't know whether the scribe or the other disciple obeyed Jesus, but the wind and the waves certainly obeyed Him when they stopped at His command! “Who is this man?” the disciples asked in amazement—which is the central question in Matthew's gospel. The answer determines our faith. Matthew builds a case that Jesus is the King of all creation, and Jesus' calming the sea leaves no doubt.

Who do you say Jesus is? How does your belief in Christ as your sovereign ruler help calm your waves of fear? Write a principle about the importance of building your faith on Jesus' identity.

Don't follow Jesus if you're going to doubt His sovereignty when the situation becomes impossible. In the storms of life, He is the eternal life preserver! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: The Son of Man

For the first time in Matthew, Jesus refers to Himself as “Son of Man,” a title He used again and again throughout His ministry. It’s a reference to [Daniel 7:13–14](#)—which the scribe would have immediately recognized. What did Jesus want the scribe to realize about His identity?

And yet, Jesus, whose “kingdom will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14), did not reside in royal comfort or rule from a regal throne. The same King who was laid in a manger lived as a humble peasant with “no place even to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). What does this juxtaposition of sovereignty versus lowliness tell you about Jesus as our “Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us’” (1:23)?

None of the people in this study truly grasped who Jesus was. “Who is this man?” the disciples asked, and none of them knew the answer—not yet, anyway. But we do! As you apply this study, allow your understanding of Jesus as the one born King inspire your dedication to Him as your sovereign Lord.



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Application: Following Jesus as Dedicated Disciples

Look over the principles you wrote earlier about how *not* to follow Jesus: by following the crowd, for personal gain, with reservations, and with little faith. Into which of these pitfalls do you tend to slip?

To avoid these hazards, use the following statements to affirm your willingness to follow Jesus with your whole heart.

- *I will follow Jesus even if I'm the only one.*
- *I will follow Jesus even if it means sacrificing personal comfort, reputation, or gain.*
- *I will follow Jesus today and not postpone my commitment.*
- *I will follow Jesus believing Him to be the ruler of all things, my sovereign Lord in whose hands I entrust my life.*

What words would you use to express your dedication to being Christ's disciple?

As the storm calmed on the Sea of Galilee with just a word from Jesus, the disciples made a declaration that you can keep in mind: “Even the winds and waves obey him!” (Matthew 8:27). Let the storms you encounter today prompt you to remember this truth and renew your faith in the one who rules the seas!



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You allow turbulence in my life so that I will come to Your Son—like the disciples in the wind-tossed boat, who shouted, “Lord, save us!” Fill my heart with faith in the one who can calm the storm. And give me the peace of Christ so I might rest in Your sovereign care. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 71. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

