

True Discipleship: Gospel Scope (8:18)

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

Jesus and the Crowds

- The text is clear that it is “a crowd” that motivates Jesus’ crossing of the sea. Jesus’ entire ministry to this point has involved crowds (4:25; 5:1; 7:28; 8:1). The Gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus interacting with crowds more than any other Gospel, but it is the Gospel of John that gives us insight into Jesus’ thoughts on the great crowds:
 - In John 2:23-25, many are believing in Jesus because of the healings He is accomplishing. Jesus “*was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and...He Himself knew what was in man.*”
 - In John 6, the crowds are happy to eat the food Jesus miraculously provides, but miss the greater point that the feeding is a “*sign*” that He Himself is the Bread from heaven; they must believe in Him to have true life. By the end of the chapter (6:66), most have left because of Jesus’ challenging words.

Many followed Jesus for the thrill and benefit of His miracles; few followed Him because of the eternal life found in Him alone.

A Test of Discipleship

- This is not just a description of Jesus’ action, but part of a theme that defines Jesus’ actions toward those who would follow Him. He is not impressed by the “*crowd*” size alone. He now tests their dedication by crossing “*to the other side of the sea.*” When He’s not present with Him, will they quickly go back to the lives they had before meeting Him?

A Picture of New Testament Mission

- On the “*other side of the sea*” was the Decapolis, a Greek-establish region marked by a non-Jewish culture (they raise pigs, 8:30-33).

True Discipleship: Lowliness Comes Before Glory (8:19-20)

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

Son of Man

- This is the first time this title is used in the N.T.¹ In several O.T. passages, the title “son of man” is another way of saying “man,” or “human.”²
- In Daniel 7:13-14, however, the title “*Son of Man*” takes on a greater meaning. Jesus Himself references 7:13 numerous times, pointing to His return as Judge and King.³

He Became Poor

- 2 Corinthians 8:9, in the context of chapters 8 & 9, is used of Paul to remind us to use our financial means to help others (he’s speaking specifically of helping other believers in far-off places). Jesus became poor (by becoming one of us) so we could become rich (being lifted up to where He is now); we should do the same for other believers.

Following Jesus: No Guarantees of Comfort

- When Jesus sends the disciples out, He calls them to the same itinerant lifestyle He Himself lives (10:11-14).
 - The apostle Paul also claimed to have a homeless life in ministry (1 Corinthians 4:11).

¹ The Gospel of Matthew records this title 29 times.

² Numbers 23:19; Job 25:6; 35:8; Psalm 8:4; 80:17; 144:3; Isaiah 51:12; 56:2; Jeremiah 49:18,33; 50:40; 51:43.

³ Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27.

- The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Patriarchs of the Old Testament “*confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth*” because “*they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one*” (Hebrews 11:13,16).
- The same writer, remembering the confiscation of believers’ property (Hebrews 10:34), describes some at the end of the “Roll Call of Faith” who were “*men of whom the world was not worthy,*” who went “*wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground*” (Hebrews 11:38).
- While these examples don’t make this life normative for a believer, they do communicate an otherworldliness that ought to mark the heart-attitude of all believers (remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-21).
- “Christ will accept none for His followers that aim at worldly advantages in following Him, or design to make anything but heaven of their religion” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

True Discipleship: Following Jesus Is the Highest Allegiance (8:21-22)

8:21 *Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”* 8:22 *But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.”*

Absolute Allegiance and the Fifth Commandment

- We don’t have enough information to know if the prospective disciple’s father was dead, near death, or if this was a way of saying, “I’ll follow Jesus someday - as soon as my family obligations are complete” (compare with Genesis 50:4-6).
- The problem is the word “*first*.” A follower of Jesus places Jesus “*first*” above all.

- To get a right view of Jesus’ statement, we should read it along with all He says about a disciple’s relationship to his/her family:
 - 4:21-22 seems especially to be significant for understanding 8:21-22. After Jesus called James and John, “*immediately they left their boats and their father, and followed Him.*” On the other hand, Peter’s mother-in-law lived with the apostle and his wife (8:14-15).
 - When sending His disciples out on mission, He warns them that He is a dividing line in the middle of families, and that His followers must love Him more than members of their own family (10:35-37; see also 19:29).
 - Jesus redefines family as those who do the will of our “*Father Who is in heaven*” (12:46-50).
 - Jesus accuses the “*Pharisees and scribes*” of violating the 5th Commandment (Exodus 20:12//Deuteronomy 5:16) with their traditions (15:4-6). He also endorses the 5th Commandment in 19:19.

Children care for parents in their need (as they age), but the parents never replace Christ as first having first place in their lives.

Dead Bury Their Own Dead

- Compare with the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:6-8) or the law for the High Priest (Leviticus 21:10-12) of the old covenant. Jesus could be using an allusion to these regulations as a way of saying that **His followers are called to the highest devotion to God** – a devotion limited to a few under the old covenant.
- Jesus speaks of the idea of being spiritually dead (10:39; 16:25; see also Revelation 3:1); Paul will later develop the concept fully (Romans 6:3; Ephesians 2:1,5; Colossians 2:13).

Greater Than Elijah

- READ 1 Kings 19:1-21 (especially verse 20). While Elijah permits Elisha to go say goodbye to his father, Jesus seems to use this strong challenge to assert His superiority to Elijah.