

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

#### **Introduction**

The chapter began with a series of miracles. Now Matthew presents a serious mandate. Jesus describes the true cost of discipleship to those who say they are serious about being a Christ-follower. It will include a series of tests that included place and money and family.

This should come as no surprise. In chapter 6:5 before teaching his followers about prayer; Jesus taught them how *not* to pray. Don't pray like the hypocrite; don't pray to be seen; don't pray like the pagans who think they will be heard by their much praying. Now our attention turns to the subject of discipleship. First we will learn what it doesn't mean to be a disciple. Jesus will give a series of tests; relocation; riches; relationship.

The Bible teaches that real faith is tested faith. Those who claim to want to follow Jesus will be tested. How do you feel about tests? Military soldiers undergo training. Police officers undergo training. Airplane pilots are tested on simulators with progressively more difficult tasks in order to know how to respond in crisis. In the same way—the Lord will sometimes administer tests. Warren Wiersbe notes that when God permits His children to go through the furnace—He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. What does it mean to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? A disciple is a “disciplined learner”. The disciple of Jesus accepts the whole Jesus. We model His beliefs and behavior. We believe what He taught and practice what He practiced.

Billy Graham once said; “Jesus invited us, not to a picnic, but to a pilgrimage; not to a frolic, but to a fight. He offered us, not an excursion, but an execution. Our Savior said that we would have to be ready to die to self, sin, and the world.”

What hinders us in our desire to follow Jesus? Often it boils down to riches and relationships. Human comfort or human circumstances. We want to satisfy ourselves rather than Christ. We are tempted to disobey the Lord. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote; “Only he who obeys truly believes, and only he who believes truly obeys.”

#### **The Test Of Relocation (v.18)**

*Matthew 8:18–22 (NKJV) 18 And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side.*

In the beginning of Jesus' ministry great numbers of people were attracted to His ministry. The opposition was only slowly starting to build against Jesus. The miracles, the healing, the excitement caused many would be disciples to follow Jesus. The crowds thinned dramatically as Jesus began to make demands on his followers. Many were either unprepared or unwilling to pay the price.

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

Jesus gave a command; “to depart to other side”. He was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The simple act of going to the other side of the lake caused many people to re-evaluate their relationship with Jesus. From Mark’s gospel we learn that several people got into boats and followed Jesus to the other side of the lake.

When Cortez landed in Vera Cruz in 1519 he began his conquest of Mexico. He had a small force of 700 soldiers; he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched as their only means of retreat sank to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat there was only one possible direction—forward into the interior of Mexico and whatever might come their way. In paying the price for being Christ’s disciple—we purposely destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve that whatever the price for being His follower, you will pay it (see Walter Henricksen; *Disciples Are Made—Not Born*).

In one sense all people who come to Christ are “displaced”. They must relocate. We leave the Kingdom of Darkness and we enter the Kingdom of Light. We leave death and we enter life.

Two men will be confronted with the living Lord—Jesus Christ. We have been confronted with the powerful message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—and the power of His healing—and His power over demons. But now we are confronted with the power of His personality! Juan Carlos Ortiz said; “Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is getting to be what he is”.

What would happen if all who claim Christ were willing to lay hold of the meaning of true discipleship? What will be the cost if your teacher is despised or opposed?

### **The Test Of Riches (vv.19-20)**

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

The Lord Jesus will test the scribe’s sincerity as well as security. Scribes are talked about often in the Scriptures. Ezra was an OT scribe. It could be this scribe heard the Sermon on the Mount—witnessed the powerful healings—saw the dramatic deliverance from demonic oppression and possession and said “I’m in”. I will follow you. Follow you wherever you may go—There isn’t an ocean so deep, a mountain so high it can keep—keep me away! I’ll follow I’ll follow I’ll follow—from now and forever—you’ll always be my true love. . .you get it.

Scribe’s were a part of the religious elite along with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Scribes were religious authorities and would have functioned in the role of Doctors of the Law. Scribes were teachers. They were highly educated and considered scholars. They were typically educated in some Rabbinic school and it would have been unthinkable to follow some peasant preacher from some remote village. But this scribe had never heard anyone preach the way Jesus preached. And this scribe had never seen—anything like what he saw when Jesus showed up. Miracles, healing, deliverance. The fact that the scribe calls Jesus “Teacher” must have

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

impressed the disciples; impressed the crowds, but it did not impress the Lord. “I will follow you” almost sounds like choosing to support one presidential candidate when 17 or 18 or running for office—and you say—“I will support your campaign”! Jesus this is your lucky day!

But Jesus is no ordinary candidate. He is not simply a great teacher in a long line of great teachers. Jesus is the Lord. He does not want to simply promote principles that change opinions but power that changes lives. In the early years of the Jesus Movement many people came to Christ. The words Jesus spoke and the miracles Jesus performed—who wouldn't want to follow that Christ? Many of my friends made professions of faith—but have ceased following Jesus—at least outwardly! They ceased ministry activities. They stopped going to church. They stopped reading their Bibles. They offer prayers—you may get a chance to talk to them—and they say—“but I haven't stopped believing in Jesus”.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Can you somehow believe in Jesus and not be transformed?

*20And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”*

Even animals have shelters; places of safety and protection. Animals build places of refuge from enemies. Will you sacrifice comfort? Safety?

This is the first appearance in the gospels of the expression “The Son of Man”. Jesus will refer to Himself using this expression some 80 times (see Matt.16:28; 19:28). It comes from Daniel 7:13 and is used as claim for both the right to rule and His Messianic office. He uses it often in explaining His mission, His death, and His resurrection from the dead. He is the Son of Man in that He is the Son of David, fully man. In this expression He identifies Himself as fully human.

Jesus is never so desperate for converts or disciples that he is willing to lie. This person wants to follow Jesus—well then count the cost. Jesus puts the person under severe scrutiny. So you are smart, educated, rich, influential, enthusiastic. What a wonderful resume. Finally Jesus was going to get a disciple who had something going for him! But Jesus puts him under even more intense scrutiny.

Does Jesus suggest the scribe will have a ministry to the homeless? I don't think so. Jesus is challenging the implications of the statement the scribe makes. The words of Jesus must have been shocking and disturbing. Jesus is making a factual statement; he is homeless. He was also suggesting that the scribe had a home; a comfortable home; a comfortable life. Jesus in His humility was willing to forego the basics to accomplish the will of His Father. Jesus did not have a mansion or palace. Jesus did not live in the gated community of Capernaum. He did not have a home. He did not have a tent. In John's gospel Jesus heals a blind man and the Scripture says; “. . .everyone went to his home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives” (John 7:53-8:1). Jesus spent the night under a canopy of stars that He Himself had made.

## The Test Of Discipleship

### Matthew 8:18-22

The Lord is causing the scribe to take stock of his commitment. It is easy to speak words but it is difficult to follow through with actions. When you become a Christian Jesus might ask you to make some radical changes in your employment, in your life-style, in your companions. Many of my Jesus people friends jumped on the Christian band-wagon in the 60's and 70's and jumped off in the 80's and 90's. People have no problem following Jesus if it is convenient, popular, and not too demanding. **Jesus does not take advantage of his temporary popularity or the scribes emotional outburst. Jesus does not strike while the iron is hot! Jesus does not gather a following when the polls are in his favor.** Impressive words of commitment are easy to make; but the cost of commitment is not always easy to pay!

Recently Mark Zuckerberg the founder of Facebook was named the 9th richest man in the world. Imagine all you had to do was ask Jesus to be your friend and like Him on your page.

Imagine a wealthy woman or influential man or talented individual makes a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine Jesus says "I want you to give your money to the poor" or "your talent to the ministry" or "your skill to the mission field".

Some pitch Jesus like a candidate for office or a product to be consumed or a cure for psychological ills or a magic formula that will make fear go away. Some imagine a Jesus that will simply accept your sin and make no demands on you whatsoever. For the person who says; "Just love Jesus" or "just accept Jesus" and "now is not the time to talk about tests or discipleship"; may be doing the person a disservice. Jesus in Luke's gospel (14:26-27) says "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (27) "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Vance Havner wrote; "What our Lord said about cross-bearing and obedience is not in fine type. It is in bold print on the face of the contract."

The Lord Jesus does love you. You are saved by grace through faith alone and Christ alone. You cannot earn salvation and salvation obtained is not kept by works. But we are making a mistake if we say that Jesus will make no demands on His disciples. The way some people preach the gospel; that Jesus was so nice you wonder how he ever made anyone mad enough to kill him.

Matthew 10:24-25; "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25) "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!"

We are not told what happened to the scribe. He is not mentioned again. Like the rich young ruler, he may not have been willing to pay the price. Olympic athletes pay a dear price to simply compete. Strict diet, painful workouts, limited social life, fierce competition. Olympic champions deny themselves all most everything as they pursue one dream—to win.

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

**Matthew 8:18-22**

### **The Test Of Relationships (vv.21-22)**

*21 Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

Jesus tested the scribes' sincerity and security. Now Jesus will test this disciple's **priority and faith**.

*22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

This expression might better be understood as "let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead". Jesus is not suggesting disrespect towards parents (note: the father isn't dead yet in the passage!).

Jesus is insisting that priorities be made. It is better to preach the gospel and give life to the spiritually dead than to wait for your father to die and then bury him (Warren Wiersbe p. 34). Jesus is in effect saying, "let the dead bury the dead and you follow me". We are not allowed ungodly relationships from hindering us in our following Jesus.

The disciple is in effect saying; "After my father dies, then I will be free to follow you. But I have responsibilities that must be fulfilled now in my home." He was in effect, choosing to remain in the world, preoccupied with the people in this world.

The world is a place filled with the spiritually dead. Our own culture is fascinated by Zombies. The re-animated dead—who feed on the living. The spiritually dead reap the benefits from those who are spiritually alive. Jesus does not see the world of the spiritually dead as hip—exciting—fascinating—but a community of the dead. They are dead to God and Christ and the gospel. They are alive to money; they are alive to materialism; they are alive to rebellion; they are alive to self-serving relationships; they dream of peace; they dream of acceptance; they fabricate meaning—they must borrow from the Christian Worldview in order to have some kind of sustainable hope.

### **Whenever an unbeliever in grief buries the body of another unbeliever, the dead bury their own dead.**

Some Christians are hindered by money and the things money can buy. Some Christians are hindered by people—by relationships that are not godly or God honoring. When you become a Christian you do not cease to have relationships with the ungodly. You may have unsaved family and friends and neighbors. God does not want you to cease loving them or honoring them or respecting them. How else could we go to the people of all nations and make them disciples? Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35 NRSV).

Love people—yes. Honor people yes. **But the Lord Jesus does not want you to be led by the ungodly.** You may have an ungodly friend pressuring you to do ungodly things. You are not to walk with the ungodly or stand with sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful.

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

Jesus does not say; “look if you want to go home—go home”. Jesus says “Follow Me, and let the dead bury the dead.”

The very fact the would be—disciple says “Lord, let ME first”—suggests misplaced priority. He doesn’t say let me go for a moment, or let me go when its time, he says let me give priority to the relationships God has placed in my life. Jesus says; “Follow Me”—I am your first obligation, I am your first loyalty, your first responsibility. The Church Father Tertullian wrote why he could never treat the Roman Emperor as “first”. “Never will I call the Emperor God, and that both because it is not in me to be guilty of falsehood and because I dare not turn him into ridicule; . . . Let him think it enough to bear the name of Emperor. . . to call him God is to rob him of his title”.

We have no right to make anyone God in our life, who is not God. No political leader, no entertainer, no musician, no friends, no family. Jesus is not being cruel to a man who wants to honor his family. **He is putting down the disciple’s secret rebellion.**

**Do you have secret rebellion in your heart?** Is there a human being that you give more honor than God? Is there a political party that you give more honor than God? So many people want to have the opportunity to get in some quality sin and rebellion before turning to Christ!

One girl made the statement that she would follow the Lord when she was older, but she wanted to enjoy herself while she was young. I asked her, “What if I bought you a bouquet of flowers, but I kept them for myself. I enjoyed the flowers—their delicate beauty and color and then once the flowers started to wilt and dry and the leaves started to fall I decided to give you the bouquet—how would you feel?” She said, “Awful”. “But isn’t that exactly what you want to do with the Lord? You want your beauty and energy and youth to be spent on yourself and when you think you are older—when no one will appreciate your beauty or energy you can give what’s left to God!

### **Conclusion**

The Lord Jesus discouraged the scribe from following because he was over-zealous. Jesus encouraged the the second disciple to follow because he too timid and too shy. Are you willing to go where Jesus commands? That is the test of relocation. And what about the test of obedience? Are you willing to do without if Jesus tells you to go without? That is the test of riches. And what about the test of self-denial? Are you willing to abandon earthly relationships that hinder your spiritual growth and discipleship? That is the test of relationship. **Will you make Jesus the priority of your life?**

Jesus is not interested in people who are swept away in a sea of emotion! You may feel a quiver in your liver! You may feel a burning in your bosom. You may not. Discipleship is never mere emotion. Discipleship incorporates commitment. A commitment to follow Jesus. Jesus speaks

## **The Test Of Discipleship**

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

of taking up His cross (Matt. 10:38). Jesus speaks of setting Himself above our most precious possessions or relationships (Luke 14:26). Jesus will challenge and test our hearts; our motives; our willingness to love and serve obey Him. Jesus was sent to fulfill a mission. To reveal the living God to those who are spiritually dead; to communicate the Word of God and die on a cross as the Son of God for sins—and to rise from the dead for our justification.

What are the marks of true discipleship?

<b>A Disciple continues in the Word of God</b>	<b>John 8:31</b>
<b>A Disciple manifests the love of Christ</b>	<b>John 13:34-35</b>
<b>A Disciple is fruitful in his or her walk with Christ</b>	<b>John 15:8</b>
<b>A Disciple is single-minded in service for Christ</b>	<b>Matthew 6:24</b>
<b>A Disciple has no rivals for his or her devotion to Christ</b>	<b>Luke 14:26</b>
<b>A Disciple will follow Christ through good and bad times</b>	<b>Luke 14:27</b>
<b>A Disciple does not love the things of this world</b>	<b>Luke 14:33</b>