

Matthew in Biblical Perspective: A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King – Christ on Discipleship

Matthew 8:18-22

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

June 16, 2013 – Morning Sermon

Let's look in Matthew 8. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Matthew 8:18– 22 says

[18] Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. [19] And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." [20] And 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." [21] Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." [22] And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

It's been fifty plus years that God laid upon the heart of a Presbytery in general, a founding pastor, Dr. Frank Barker, ably assisted by his wife and later family, to establish Briarwood Presbyterian Church, and one mission statement has guided us throughout the fifty plus years. The mission statement is for God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God, to reach Birmingham, to reach the world for Christ. Our vertical is to worship God and our horizontal is to be a witness for Christ to the world by getting in our own Jerusalem.

We didn't just event the key phrase of equipping Christians. It is really a download and a distillation from a number of passages of Scriptures, most notably Matthew 28. These are our marching orders. Matthew 28:18–20 says

[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples (imperative command to all believers) of all nations, (how?) baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20]

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So we have been on this growing, grace empowered, Christ centered journey for God’s glory making disciples. We are somewhere between zero and a hundred percent effective, asking God to keep growing us.

Our Lord is speaking to this issue in this study – discipleship, discipling. He is telling us, while programs and techniques have their place, there is something much more important that you have to get right. If you don’t get it right then you can’t be a disciple or a disciple maker. This is absolutely crucial. Our Lord’s biography has been revealed for us by the Spirit empowered, inspired work of Matthew. Mathew’s focus, theme, is to take Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God having come in the flesh, and affirm initially to the Jewish audience and then to all the Gentile nations of the world, that this Jesus is the promised Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, sent by the Father, verified by the Spirit, proclaimed as King to all the nations until the King returns. As Matthew has done this he keeps repeating as the Scripture said in fulfillment of the prophecy. He keeps making the point that we didn’t invent a religion for this Jesus but He is the fulfillment of the promises, prophesies, types and symbols in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of all to the glory of God and for the salvation of your soul.

Matthew has divided this biography into five parts. Book one covers Matthew 1 through 4, leading up to His ordination and installation through baptism as Prophet, Priest and King. Then book two consists of Matthew 5 through 7 as He ascends up on a mountain following the pattern of Moses as Moses went up on a Mount Sinai to meet Him where He gave him the Law. Jesus goes up on the mountain and gives us grace, power, rule and direction in the Kingdom of God through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus comes down from the mountain and that brings us to book three which consist of Matthew 8 through 10. Four things are being focused upon in Matthew 8, 9 and 10 and one of the things that He is doing is healing or signs, wonders and miracles to affirm He is the Messiah. Secondly, He is teaching. Thirdly, He is discipling and fourthly He is gathering His disciples as He teaches us about discipleship.

Thus we have arrived at a segment of that in which a clarinet, clear call on what it means to be a disciple is announced. If you think of it as a trumpet it is blaring out in just these few verses we have looked at in Matthew 8. We’re going to start by looking at the occasion of this moment where Christ teaches us about discipleship. So let’s get back to real time at what is happening at this moment. Matthew 8:18 says *[18] Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side.* The occasion in real time is that a great crowd is around Jesus. Most of you know this is not unusual. When He was baptized there was a great crowd. When He went across the river Jordan there was a great crowd. When He came back there was a crowd. When He went up on the mountain to deliver the Sermon on the Mount a great crowd followed Him.

As He came down from the mountain going off toward Capernaum, where He did three miracles, a great crowd followed Him. The three miracles had to do with a leper, a centurion's servant and Peter's mother in law. Great crowds from the region followed Him. Matthew 8:18 tells us there is a great crowd around Him and that becomes the occasion for Him to say something absolutely startling. I don't think Jesus would have made this statement in the course of church growth because here is Jesus as the crowds are gathering making a crowd thinning statement. In fact, if I'm to be a faithful witness today this could be a crowd thinning one here but more than that it can gloriously, ultimately liberating if you and I grasp what it means to be a Christ follower, from His own words. So that is the occasion and then He gives orders.

His orders are real clear. Matthew 8:18b says [18] *...He gave orders to go over to the other side.* I do not know why Jesus gave these orders to go over to the other side. I have some suspicions that I want to share with you. I have three thoughts about this. He is telling them to go over to the other side because the crowds have been all around Him since Matthew 4 and He is the Son of Man come in the flesh where He is fully human so with all that has been going on He has to be tired. The second possibility is that Jesus will keep saying for the next three years "My time has not yet come" and the crowd's momentum want to make Him Messiah, even His own brothers want Him to go to Jerusalem to make Himself known. The crowds are pushing but it's not time so He makes a statement to go to the other side away from crowds.

The third possibility may be found in the phrase 'the other side' and the other side actually had a name. It was called Decapolis. Interestingly it was a Greek name for a Jewish town. Years earlier when the Greek empire had been there they had compromised their commitments to God's Word and had embraced paganism. Therefore it had become an open ground for even demon possession. In fact in the next study we'll see what happens in a cemetery with two demon possessed men. Did your parents ever tell you "don't go to the other side of the tracks?" All these people around Him would have grown up on the western side of the Sea of Galilee where there was a hot bed of revival going on and their parents would have said "Don't go to the other side. There are naked people in the cemetery over there. There are demon possessed people over there. Don't go over there."

Jesus has a short term mission's trip and He is about to take them to the other side. In part of the Biblical economy that is being revealed here I would suggest to you that Satan doesn't want Him to get to the other side and that may have to do with Him meeting up with a storm on the way over there. We will see the sovereign hand of God there and then in the cemetery. He is on a mission and He calls His disciples to go to the other side. Jesus says "Follow Me. I know what your parents said but you follow Me." So that becomes the opportunity for Him to give orders and by saying 'orders' in the plural I think it means He gave the same

order multiple times. The order He gives because the crowd is so big is for them to go to the other side.

Once He gives the order there is probably numerous responses by people but we know of three. There were only two mentioned in this Matthew passage but if you go to Luke 9 there are three are mentioned. Matthew for his purposes only mentions two of the responses of those who were with Him but he chose these for the significance of making disciples and being a disciple. One offer is an unqualified offer made by a Scribe and then another disciple makes a qualified offer.

Here is the first offer in Matthew 8:19 which says *[19] And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."* No qualification as if to say "I surrender all" to follow You. This is the Scribe that says this. There are three startling things in that one little statement. In the Bible Scribes loved to be called teachers but here is a Scribe humble enough not to ask Jesus to call him a teacher but he calls Jesus a Teacher. This guy seems to be commended here. Scribes we're like rock stars then, as if Jesus should be putting together a pamphlet that says "Guess who is following Me now!" This is not just anybody following Him but a Scribe, a teacher. He is not only following Jesus but He is following Him with no qualification and calling Jesus a Teacher which Scribes don't call others teachers.

Then Jesus makes this startling response to the offer. Matthew 8:20 says

[20] And 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." Here is the Creator of all things on this mission of salvation who has humbled Himself to come into the world, not at Rome or Jerusalem but to Bethlehem. He grows up in Nazareth where people would say "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" His earthly father and mother were of no reputation. He has humbled Himself to become obedient and being found in appearance as a man. He has no home that He owns. The fox has a hole, the birds have a nest. Will you follow Me wherever I go? I don't even have a home. Will I be your home? Am I your life?

Here is a moment where the Jewish people had to be impressed that one of their Scribes calls Him teacher in which there is no qualification. When Jesus responds this is another key moment. Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man here and He has no home. He is using one of the titles from the Old Testament for the Messiah and you can find it in Daniel 7:13 and He now applies it to Himself. Of all the titles referring to the Messiah this is the one referring to humiliation – the Son of Man. God has come into this world to take upon Himself flesh and He is fully God and fully man. He humbled Himself to be found in appearance as a man. Here is the first time that title is used in the New Testament but it won't be the last time. It will be used 81 times, 78 of them will be found

in the Gospels and the vast majority of them will come from the lips of Jesus. This was His favorite title to refer to Himself – Son of Man.

Now in humiliation, no home does He have. He is not rebuking this man. He is making a clarifying statement – Follow Me. In other words, with all due respect to appropriate motivation this is not Him writing a book “Follow Me for your best life now.” He is saying “Follow Me for in the world you will have tribulation. It has been granted unto you not only to believe in Me but to suffer for My sake. Follow Me and surrender all.”

Another offer comes. Matthew 8:21–22 says [21] *Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”* [22] *And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”* The tradition at that time was such that a son stayed with his dad until his dad died so this isn’t a matter of the man wanting to go with Jesus but I have a funeral to go to and it’s my dad’s. It’s more of the notion of the man following Jesus but the man’s first commitment is to stay with his dad until he dies and after he dies the man will be able to follow Him. There is the incongruity of two words here – “Lord” and “but first.” You are Lord after something else first.

Jesus responds with what seems like almost a nonsensical statement. “Let the dead bury the dead.” How can a dead person bury a dead person? What is He saying? Biblical truth would tell us to let those who are spiritually dead make their priorities around the temporal and bury the physical dead but you follow Me. That doesn’t mean you’re going to be irresponsible or you won’t honor your parents but it means that “I’ve called you to follow Me and what we are doing is bringing life to the dead and absolutely nothing stands between you following Me in that call.”

This is not a full proof example and it falls short because it’s me and I fall so far short but this passage played a part in my being at Briarwood. I remember when Dr. Barker and the pulpit committee called me in 1998 and part of my issue was that my dad and mom had come back to the Lord. I had remarried them and they were getting older and I was in my home town with them. I knew they weren’t going to be here that much longer. I went on a three day prayer and fasting to go before the Lord on it and God was actually calling us here after a long time struggle with this. It had everything to do with my inadequacies. I realized that I wanted to be with my mom and dad when they go to be with the Lord but if God has called me to Briarwood then God has called me there. I’m grateful the elders let me go back for the funeral but I could not modify God’s call based upon burying my parents. I’ll never forget talking my parents through this decision I had come to. My dad said “What is your question son? Go!” It kind of felt like what he did when I got out of high school. My bags were packed and he said “Go! See you later as a visitor.” He was just pushing us out and I was grateful for that.

Nothing should be between your commitment to Christ, even the things that God commends in this world are done out of the commitment to Christ, not our commitment to Christ modified, even the good things. I want to give you some observations. Before I give you the takeaway there are some things in this text that stand out in disciple making. This is so important to us as a church and I did not want to just walk by them. Here are some observations from the text.

One, do not discount or set aside the importance of the public ministry of God's Word and discipleship. Here, Jesus is in the public ministry of the Word and it is being used to get to disciple making. After we get through Matthew 8 we'll get to the 70, the 12 and the 3. When we rightly think of disciple making we think life on life and that's certainly appropriate but the public preaching of the Word of God is crucial because it defines and calls people to be disciples. It clarifies discipleship. It inspires discipleship. It instructs disciple making. So don't divorce the large gathering of God's people in the public ministry of the Word as part of God's discipling agenda, even as He uses it here in the public ministry of Christ.

The second observation is the dynamic of discipleship in the life of a believer and the church. I like to explain disciple making as a funnel. I come to Christ, surrender all, and I come into this wide mouth funnel of the Christian life and then God begins to work me down the funnel. I surrender all but I have no idea of the implications of this yet. I don't know what all this is going to mean for me. It's like when Peter said "Lord, I've given up all to follow You" but Jesus wasn't about to tell him what kind of death he was going to die but He wanted him to die to himself now so that would be taken care of when we get there. So in the dynamics of our growth in grace we are committed to it, understand the call to it, but yet we don't understand all the dynamics of it so God works us, refines us and burns away the dross with all of that at work within our life as we move forward in following Christ. So we go from this crowd, to 70, to 12 to 3 by the time we get to Matthew 10.

We also have that in a church where you have this large group gathering that pulls the trigger on discipleship in the context of worship. You work it into congregational communities and then into small group Bible studies. Then you go into gender specific mentoring and life on life dynamics. All of that is what God is doing in a congregation and in the life of a believer.

The third observation is endings and beginnings are tied together, they're inseparable. He doesn't say "I want you to finish strong and be an overcomer and I'll tell you about that later." No, Jesus wants you to finish strong so at the beginning He says to come with a radical commitment to Him. You don't know what it all means yet but you settle the issue. I surrender all. I don't what the all is yet or the cost is yet but I'm ready to give it all to You. Beginnings and endings are inseparable.

Fourthly, the call of the Gospel cannot be separated from the blessings of the Gospel. The Gospel calls us to follow Christ and when you follow Christ you have the blessings of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone but in that coming to Christ for salvation the blessings of Christ in the Gospel is not separated the call of the Gospel – follow Me. Here is the way we do it – would you like to come to Jesus, pray a prayer and get the gift of eternal life and about four months later we'll try to get you into discipleship. Jesus just settled it right up front – come, evangelism, follow Me. The blessings of the Gospel are inseparably tied to the call of the Gospel.

The fifth observation is salvation is free: discipleship costs. Jesus paid it all. He paid everything for my salvation and it's all free but discipleship costs. How much? It costs everything – you! It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the power of the Son of God who gave Himself for me. Salvation is the free gift that cost you everything because discipleship costs and you're not doing it to merit God's favor or His love. You are doing it because He has loved you and now you love Him and if you love Me you will keep My commandments and your life is not your own for you have been bought with a price. That is precisely what our Lord is getting at.

In conclusion here is the takeaway. Here is the message that is powerfully announced in these verses and these two offers and Christ's response. Those who truly come to Christ as Savior enjoying the benefits of the cross also surrender to Christ as Lord embracing the demands of the crown. We're not talking about rocky soil hearers or thorny ground hearers or King Agrippa almost Christian hearers. Those who have truly had the converting power of God's redeeming grace in their life come to Christ as beggars for the benefits of the cross where He pays for all of our sins so there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Again, we don't know all the implications yet but we do surrender to Christ as Lord.

When I was in college there was this big talk about do you come to Christ as Savior and then later on submit to Him as Lord. Nowhere in the Bible does Jesus offer Himself on an installment basis. Now later on if you would like to go to the a la carte menu to choose lordship and discipleship then you can go there. No, it's not like that for Jesus said "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" He does not negotiate this. It's not that we tuck away our life's assurance policy and then say but my life is still my own. That's saying first I have these things or this comes ahead and we even take the precious gifts of God, like wives, children, recreation, sports, job that God gives us to enjoy and we make idols of them and put them ahead, above or before the Lord. If you belong to the Lord the Lord will not leave you there for He will convict you.

I want to be clear here. This is not what we do to be saved or allow God to save us. This is what those who have truly come to Christ for salvation do. They surrender. Following Christ in this world is a challenge. There is joy in following

Christ. It is an adventure in following Christ. It is a journey to follow Christ but if you intentionally follow Christ because you have come to Christ, you have surrendered to Him and the benefit of the cross are yours and therefore you're following Him as Lord in this broken world, I can promise you it won't be comfortable. In the world you will have tribulation, in Me you have peace. Take courage for I have overcome the world. It has been granted unto you not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake. This may be a crowd thinner but Jesus is going to preach the truth with integrity. Here is the free gift of salvation and it cost you your life. I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.

So what does that mean? Here are three implications to be ready for. Number one, when you're a Christ follower in this world you are under orders. Have you noticed how the -isms and the -ists of this world are making so many in-roads? It could be Islamism, Socialism, Communism, etc. and people are ready to give everything under orders because they think this will make their life. Here are God's people who have been given the gift of salvation. Now what would happen to those who have been freely given the gift of salvation by grace decided clearly, intentionally, no matter what the discomfort that they are under orders so they'll go to the other side, even though parents would have said 'don't go'. This is going to be uncomfortable and challenging but I am under orders to make disciples of all the nations – to worship, to evangelize, to love, to prayer, to study God's Word, to make disciples. I do this because I love Him who first and gloriously loved me and because He is enough.

Disciples are not only Christ followers in this world who are under orders but they are also homeless. I thought about this the other day. When I was in Vacation Bible School at ten years of age we would sing this song. It said "this world is not my home, I'm just passing through, my treasures have been laid up beyond the blue, from heaven's golden door I hear the call, this world is not my home anymore." When you come to Christ you're going to be homeless. You may have an address in this world but it's not your home. That's why Paul says in II Corinthians 5, "I can't wait to be at home with the Lord." You and I are on a green card. We're aliens, strangers, responsibly following Christ's orders in this world for His glory to rescue the lost, to honor His Name, but this world isn't our home. I'm not only homeless, I'm penniless. It's not how much am I going to give Jesus when it comes to our finances. It's how much does Jesus want me to keep. It's His. It's all the blessedness of owning nothing. I'm just being a good steward. We are homeless here and headed there and while we're here we want to honor Him who leads us in the way of life.

Thirdly, in this world disciples live for Christ supremely. There was another crowd thinning moment when Jesus turned to Peter and the disciples and said "Will you leave Me also?" Peter said "To whom would we go? You alone have the words of life. Lord, we have left all to follow You." Paul says "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." That's when I go home. So whether it's Paul in prison or Peter as

crowds are leaving, Jesus is saying don't put Me on the list. Don't even put Me at the top of the list. I am the List. For to me to live is Christ. I will make your list that you might follow Me. Therefore you then say "all to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give" because You have set me free to give it.

Oh the joy of possessing nothing but being possessed alone by Christ. I long for that for you. Come to Him today. If you haven't come to Him simply say "Lord Jesus I know I'm a sinner. Today You are my all and all." You might be thinking "I've done this." Then you say "Lord, I surrender all now get me ready when the time comes to follow You, faithfully in this world, because when it's all said and done I want to give my best for You and hear 'well done good and faithful servant.'"

I would love to be able to roll back heaven for you'd see this gold street and maybe there's a curb but I don't think anybody is sitting on that curb weeping and wailing saying "I can't believe what I had to give up for Jesus on my way here." There will be missionaries like John Peyton with his wife and his child who went to the New Hebrides and laid down his all for the Lord. His wife died from the diseases and the fever and his child. He even had to stretch himself out on the graves for two weeks so that their bodies wouldn't be dug up by headhunters. Today over 80% on that island know Christ.

I surrender all. The only weeping and wailing is in hell where the gilded toys of dust that people would rather hold on to than to come to Christ, have led to an unending, irrevocable judgment. Come to Christ and surrender all. What would happen if 4,300 people surrendered all to Christ? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments that we could be together. We do long for that moment when it is said and done and we hear from our Savior, "Well done, good and faithful followers." So God our God, send those here who have not yet come to Christ to Christ with trust and surrender. For those of us who have come to Christ, help us to rise up, die to self, and know that Christ is all and in all on the way to glory. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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