

Matthew in Biblical Perspective: A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King – Christ, the Sovereign and Sufficient Savior

Matthew 8:23-34

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

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We will be concluding Matthew 8 in this study. I want to start by looking back one verse to the call of discipleship. Matthew 8:18-23 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." [23] And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.

What will happen as they follow Him? That is what we'll look at in this study. The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

In this study we'll look at two events in this passage. I have chosen to handle these two events together, although I am drawn to handle each one separately but I believe the Matthew has written this text I think we should look at them together. Jesus Christ has said to us that He is coming to the world to save sinners because our problem is sin. Do you believe Him? 'Amen' goes here if you do. Secondly, Jesus said He is the solution to our sin problem and He alone is the solution. Do you believe that? Amen. He also says that if you follow Him you can expect to meet adversity and the whole constituency of those who are in rebellion against Him called the world and Satan. He says in the world you will have tribulation. Do you believe that? He says "Take courage for I have overcome the world. No plan against you will ultimately prosper. In Me you will ultimately triumph and be an overcomer." Do you believe that?

Why would you believe that? Jesus said that. There are many who make promises all the time but have you ever noticed how in our society we have something called 'truth in advertising.' You can get put in jail for saying

something that is not true. Now the government would say “Let the buyer beware” rather than ‘truth in advertising.’ However today it is ‘truth in advertising’ and that gives lawyers a lot more jobs. Here is Jesus making some astounding statements. He says we have a sin nature, a sin record, we stand under the judgment of God, and we only have one Hope. That’s Me. When you come to Me you can expect those who don’t come to Me that system and you can expect Satan to oppose you, an attempt to take down your life and testimony, but I will be with you to the end. I will uphold you and in Me you’ll be an overcomer. Now is that just a promise made or can that be a promise kept? Can He keep that promise?

Part of what Matthew is doing is telling us Jesus is who He said He is, tells the truth and fulfills what He promises. The book of Matthew is a biography that is divided up into five books, aimed at the Jewish people and through them to us to affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah sent by the Father, verified by the Holy Spirit, is to be proclaimed as King to all the nations until He returns and He has not destroyed His enemies but has defeated them all at the cross. That is what the burden of Matthew is. He has divided the biography of Jesus into five sections. We have covered two of them, one in Matthew 1 through 4 and the second in Matthew 5 through 7 called the Sermon on the Mount. We are now in the third book that is focused upon healing, teaching, disciple making and gathering His disciples, the 70, 12 and the 3. Then He focuses on reaching the crowds and preparing them for the mission. That is covered in Matthew 8 through 10.

We are currently at the end of Matthew 8 and we have seen Him doing miracles, teaching and most recently the cost of discipleship. When you come to Me you come to follow Me and when you follow Me there is no other priority over Me. I am not on your list or at the top of your list. I am your list and I’m the One that makes your list. There is nothing you need to depend on beyond Me that you depend ultimately and completely upon me. The One who has no place to lay His head, will be with you and take care of you. Follow Me.

So He is going to the other side of the sea and what is the result? The result is after this call to count the cost, it says that a number of the multitude followed Him. They didn’t all get into the same boat. Here are some reasons I want to treat these two events together is how they are put together theologically, the way they flow together and because of the way they are grammatically put together. Look how these two verses start in Matthew 8.

Matthew 8:23 starts, *[23] And when he got into the boat...* Matthew 8:28 starts, *[28] And when he came to the other side...* They both start with “And when...” This is an historical event. After they went to the other side of the sea they got out of the boat and the two are grammatically put together for a reason and I hope to be able to make that clear to you in this study. You will find these two events in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. So if it is

repeated in all three then these two events must be pretty important. When you pull these two events together from all three of the Gospels it gives you a composite picture. I don't have the time to take you to the other two Gospel accounts of these events but I will draw from them because they do give helpful information and each one gives a fuller picture.

For instance, Matthew says the disciples got into the boat and followed Him to the other side. Mark tells you there wasn't just one boat but that there were boats, plural. I have had the opportunity to take people to Israel thirteen times and the first time I went they had uncovered a boat from the days of Jesus. Now every time I've been back I've gone to see that boat. Josephus tells us that in the days of Jesus that there were 248 boats for he had counted them when the Romans had captured them. Every time I look at that boat and think of this passage, I think this may be the boat Jesus was in. I don't know the statistical chances of whether that boat was the one or not, but it's a boat like that, that Jesus rode in to cross the sea. Very likely the boat that Matthew focuses on was the boat that Jesus and the twelve were on but there were other boats that followed Him across the sea to the other side.

Now they are going to the "other side" of the sea and there is a reason Matthew and Mark don't like to talk about names of the places on that side for they had abandoned their Hebrew names. In fact, it was known in your Bible as the Galilee of the Gentiles. In other words, the Jewish population and the tribes that had settled it after Joshua had over a period of time, amalgamated into the population of the Gentiles and the religions of the Gentiles, when the Assyrians, Babylonians and the Greeks came and they had adopted a lot of the Greek religion and paganism. So it was a place saturated with paganism and compromise of what the Bible says. It was a place that even Satan felt at home. There was demonic possession, anarchy and it was a population that had assimilated paganism into its midst. Mothers back then would say "Good little Jewish boys don't go over to that side of the sea. You ought to see those who live in the cemeteries over there. They will eat you."

Jesus is about to take a short term mission trip and He's putting together a short term mission's trip team. They are headed to the other side. So they get in the boats and now they are on their way over there. If the disciples had known what was going to happen when they had gotten into the boat, I'm not sure they would have gotten into the boat. If they had known what was going to happen when they had gotten out of the boat, I don't think they would have gotten out of the boat. Two events happened so let's take a look at them. Here is the first event.

Matthew 8:23–27 says [23] *And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.* [24] *And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves;* (The word "great storm" is the word for seismos and normally in your Bible that is translated earthquake. It is a storm of great proportions.) *but he (Jesus) was asleep.* [25] *And they went and woke him,*

saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." [26] And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" (Matthew kind of throttles back a bit on what Jesus says but Mark records Jesus as saying "Have you still no faith?" when they come to Him panicked.) Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. [27] And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Why is this happening? Here is an unbelievable storm, the waves are swamping the boat and the winds are rushing. The Greek word used for wind could mean whirlwind or perhaps a typhoon like experience taking place here. These are professional fishermen. They have seen storms before but this one has them utterly panicked. I think there are three possibilities as to what's happening here. One possibility is that they are on their way to the gates of hell. They are on their way to a compromised, pagan city and region where even demon possession has been assimilated into the way of life. The last thing Satan wants is for them to get there. So is this Satan intimidating them with the storm and stopping them from going to this mission field on this short term mission project, with discouragement to send them back?

Possibility number two is that God is doing this. This is God who has sovereignly brought this storm into the moment so that He is creating an occasion whereby in Christ's response He will be affirmed as the Messiah and He will also have a teaching moment in discipleship. So God has created the moment in order to give the occasion to affirm as Christ's response to it – this is the Messiah and He also gets the opportunity to start discipling those who are following Him who have left all to follow Him.

There is a third possibility and that is that both the first two possibilities are true. In other words, a sovereign God has allowed Satan in his attempt to intimidate the disciples to turn back yet the sovereign God because Satan is God's Satan, is using what He is doing to affirm Christ, teach the disciples and give us a lesson that He does not want us to miss 2,000 years later. I would go with possibility number three.

Here is why I believe Satan is involved with this under a sovereign God who is using this for His glory, to teach His disciples and affirm His Son as Messiah. Notice what Jesus does in His response. The disciples respond with absolute fear, they are panicking and they immediately flee to Jesus. When the challenges of life come, what do you do? You flee to Christ. Then they make a prayer request. Every one of you have made this prayer request in some form or fashion if you're a Christian today. Lord, save us or we'll perish. What is Christ's response to His disciples? He has been sleeping on the cushion and they wake Him up. He chides them but He is not chiding them for waking Him up. He is chiding them for the reason they woke Him up which is they are still not exercising a robust faith in Him. Why do you fear? Do you still have no faith?

Where is your faith? Biblical, robust faith in Christ chases out all fear and if it doesn't then fear will chase out faith, an operational faith in our lives.

So the first thing Jesus does is takes the teaching moment. He is not even off the cushion yet. He is still sitting there and takes that moment to teach them. Then when He finishes the One in whom they are to believe who casts out all fear, He rose up. This is the term you would use when a champion arises to defend and to win a victory. It's the warhorse that begins to rise up and paw in the air with its hoof. He rises up from His cushion. He faces the storm, sea and waves and He rebukes it. That's why I believe there is satanic involvement. Inanimates are not rebuked in the Bible. God is rebuking that which is coming in opposition to the glory of the Father. He rebukes the wind and then says "Peace be still." He calms the waves and the wind. They had a great storm and a great calm.

With a great storm, Christ confronts it and rebukes it. Peace be calm! The waves are calmed. The sea calms. The wind calms. A great calm has come. Then the disciples are calmed but they immediately respond to this and they come to Christ. They are amazed and astounded. What kind of a man speaks and wind and waves obey Him? This is a man but not just a man. In other words, they have just seen signs, wonders and miracles. Flip that. The miracle creates wonder to establish a sign. The miracle is the natural that is being used for supernatural opposition and for God's sovereign, equipping, encouragement and affirmation of His Son and Christ rises up, declares His sovereignty over it and calms the great storm.

I think the word *siesmos* is used because the Sea of Galilee is at the top of the Rift Valley. From Mount Hermon through the Sea of Galilee all the way down to Lake Victoria is the Rift Valley. I think there is an earthquake storm going on here and there is a typhoon like wind. These men have seen storms but this is something different. Christ rises up and calms it. The great storm becomes the great calm. What does that do? The miracle creates wonder and the sign moment. What kind of man are you? It's not just any man it's the Son of God come in the flesh. It's the Messiah. Now they finish the trip and they arrive at the other side. Let's see what happens there.

Matthew 8:28–34 says [28] *And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.* (This is intimidation here. Satan goes about like a roaring lion. Intimidation through demon possessed men.) [29] *And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"* [30] *Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them.* [31] *And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs."* [32] *And he said to them, "Go."* (He didn't say if the demon possessed man had enough faith then He could deliver him or He didn't say to the disciples if they had enough faith He could calm the storm. The sovereign God just says "Be still. Go.")

So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. [33] The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. [34] And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

Here He has come into this pagan saturated, compromised, secular community where they have assimilated the demonic. What in the world would Jewish people be doing with a herd of pigs? If you read the Old Testament there is not a big market for pigs with the Jewish people. Mark 5 gives you a much broader scope of this and he focuses on the spokesman of the demon possessed men. Mark takes great pains to make sure this is not somebody that just had a bad day. At the time of Jesus the Rabbis had established five marks that you were to examine to see if there was truly demon possession or if this was a physical issue. In Mark's description he makes sure that you see all five of these marks.

What are the five marks of demon possession according to the Rabbis in the days of Jesus? Mark one is bizarre behavior. The text says they came screaming out of the tombs. Mark two is supernatural strength. In the book of Mark it says they had chains but nothing could bind them. Mark three is sexual perversity. They come out of the tombs utterly naked. Mark four is necromancy – communion with the dead. They are living in the tombs. The fifth mark was not only was it the gothic culture of the day but there was filthiness, uncleanness. Those were the five marks of demon possession and they possessed all five.

As Jesus and the people stand before them with these five marks, the demons make a prayer request. They don't argue about whether Jesus has the authority to do this but they even know they have an appointed end and that end is torment. All they do is request to be sent into the pigs. So Jesus sends them out of the man, into the pigs and then down into the sea. Don't miss this. If you lived in that age the Hebrew mind realized two things in symbolism. The term river is good. The Bible calls the Gospel a river of life. The term sea symbolically was bad. A roaring, foaming sea was bad in its symbolism. So Jesus is making a clear, unmistakable statement. He is sovereign. He sends them out into the unclean pigs, over into the sea, the door, to the abyss, consigning them and making a declaration that they will all be assigned to everlasting torment.

These demons know their end is torment, know there is an end, and knows the Lord will bring them to their end in torment and you might be thinking "Why wouldn't they say save us instead of send us into the pigs?" There are two reasons they don't say that. One is that God in His grace and mercy makes no atoning provision for fallen angels. The second reason is just look around today. You know you're going to die. You know God is holy. You know you're under His judgment but you still would rather have the uncleanness and idolatry of sin than

to repent. Here knowing their end and torment they ask for the pigs and Christ consigns them over the edge declaring His sovereign power.

He also delivered the men from the demons and now they're clothed. Now they are clothed with more than one clothes. They not only have clothes on over their nakedness but they have the garments of Christ's righteousness around them too. Now instead of the uncleanness of this world they have the righteousness of the purity of Christ that clothes them. When God's saving grace happens there are two things that happen. One is He freely takes us where we are and makes us right with Him and now we have a new record. Two He also takes us right where we are and never leaves us and transforms us so that now the unclothed are clothed. Those that were out of their mind are in their right mind. Those who would intimidate the Lord and His company now want to join His company. Mark says they say "Can we go back with You?" It is because God's saving grace is not only redeeming grace but powerfully transforming.

So they make a request to go back with Jesus. Now you can understand why they would want this. They don't exactly have the greatest reputation back home. When people see them I don't think they'll get many invitations to someone's home because people will recognize who they were. They know the reputation they secured with their rebellion and demon possession so they want to go with Jesus. Jesus says "No" to their request but He tells them to go back home and tell their family and friends what great things the Lord has done for them. They are delivered, saved, changed and commissioned as they are sent back.

What about the herdsmen? What about the people? They have just seen their pigs go over the edge and into the sea. I can just hear these herdsmen say "There goes my 401K right into the Sea of Galilee! There goes retirement! There goes everything!" But when they run back to the city they are not talking directly or predominately about their pigs but they were especially astounded at what happened to the demon possessed men. Not only were these men legally right before God through Christ but experientially, personally and relationally growing in the grace of God. They went back and told everybody.

So what happens? The text says the whole city runs out and says "What happened?" "We're clothed and in our right mind." "Who has done this?" "Jesus!" So they say "Jesus will You do that for us?" No, they didn't say that but they begged Him to leave the area. The pigs are more important than people being saved. The prophet of sin and the so called freedom you think comes in slavery to sin, is much more desired than salvation from sin. "Jesus, would You please leave."

I want to leave you with one takeaway. Jesus Christ is sovereign of all and overall (natural and supernatural) whose saving grace is... Here He is making it abundantly clear for His disciples He shows them what He does to the storm so that they will stick with Him when they get to the demon possessed men. He

shows us that He is sovereign over everything, even in a fallen world and He is sovereign over everything in the rebellion of Satan and the kingdom of darkness throughout this world. Jesus Christ is sovereign of all and overall (natural and supernatural) whose saving grace is... and now I want to give you four things from this text.

The sovereign, saving, sufficient grace of Christ overall, through all and in all is one, powerful and transforming. There are great storms and there are great calms. There are demon possessed men with bizarre behavior, supernatural strength, sexual perversity and anarchy, rebellion, now in their right mind, clothed, changed. Sometimes God does that instantly (microwave it) and sometimes it's like a crockpot, slowly, but God grows His people in grace. This is so important! You and I who have been justified by the grace of God are wrapped up with the garment of Christ's righteousness but no one out there can see the garment of righteousness that wraps you. They do see you by God's grace humbly but confidently putting on Christ every day. Then you get to tell them of the perfect garment that clothes you for all eternity. So you see the powerful, transforming grace of God in the natural and in the supernatural as He rebukes the intimidation of the great storm. The Father does that so that we might learn the lesson clearly and then He steps right into the gates of hell and rescues two demon possessed men.

It is the powerful, transforming grace of God. When His grace is powerful and transforming it banishes fear. The Bible says in I John 4:18 that perfect love casts out all fear. Be anxious for nothing why? One of Satan's instruments is fear and he goes around like a roaring lion because he can put fear in your life. Fear paralyzes and controls but when you put your trust in Christ fear is banished. Jesus didn't say to His disciples "Guys, we have a good boat here." It wasn't the boat that got them through the storm. It was who was in the boat. Here you are in this body subject to futility where you'll get colds, prostate cancer, and all kinds of things. Your body has been subjected to the futility of sin's curse in this world and Satan would want you to fear everything about it and fear death but just as we sang, no fear, no guilt in life or death for those in Jesus Christ. It's not the body that you put your confidence in any more than the boat. There is your family where Satan will attack but you don't say your children are different. No at best they are sinners saved by grace. Your confidence is in the Lord who says to His people "I will be a God to you and to your children after you."

Here is the boat of Christ's church in this world sailing through the storms of adversity. Our confidence is not in the preacher or the church although we love His church but our confidence is in the Lord who is in His church and is the Head of His church. The Lord is the foundation and cornerstone of His church. That is where our confidence is so we banish fear. Lord, deliver us from fear. Fears are simply that you haven't gotten a big enough God from the Bible yet. That is what fears reveal. It is a powerful, transforming, life changing, fear banishing grace in our life.

The second thing is the sovereign grace is unstoppable and relentless. There is no place that Jesus won't go to get His people. Jesus went to Capernaum where they had a synagogue. He went to Gadarenes where there was a synagogue of Satan and a cemetery. There is no place that Jesus will not go. There is no power that He cannot overcome. There is no person so lost that He cannot save them. He can save the disciples in the boat. He can save the demon possessed men. He can save those who take the lives of others, like Moses and David. He can save religious terrorists. He is relentless to save a Saul to make him a Paul, a man who kills Christians to a man who plants churches and ends up being the most powerful evangelist of the Gospel. It's a transforming, powerful grace so Briarwood by God's grace will go anywhere and everywhere to save the lost. I know He saves anybody and everybody because He saved me. I know it! With His relentless, unstoppable grace and mercy He'll save you.

He not only so powerfully saves us legally but experientially that it astounds and amazes people so herdsmen go running into the city to tell others what happened to demon possessed men. It is also astounding and amazing that others just won't believe it. The herdsmen tell others what God does when He saves someone and how much they are changed. The calm sea caused wonder in the disciples and converted sinners growing in grace. I'm all for special services, programs and events to get people to come and hear the Gospel and the one thing that will get people to come to hear the Gospel more than anything else is changed lives. These demon possessed men had changed lives in which the promises of God had been delivered to them for a right standing and the power of God was at work within them with a changed life. I'm sure they weren't perfect and their first prayer request even got a 'no.' You can't go join our church over in Capernaum. Stay here. You were a mission field but you're now a missionary. So He not only freely saves you and starts changing you by grace but now the Holy Spirit will commission you to go so that others will be saved.

I'd like to close with this final thought. His sovereign, saving grace is required and necessary. Do you know why these people in the text want Jesus to leave? It is because God's grace hasn't given them eyes to see and ears to hear yet. Not only does God's grace take you when you come to Him and change you when you focus upon Him, but it takes God's grace to get you to come to Him because you're dead in your sins. Men and women will always prefer the industries of sin to the living Christ. There is none who seek Him, no not one. Even with an amazing testimony, God's grace has to give a heart to see, eyes to see and ears to hear. Do you believe that or do you believe that maybe you're just a little bit better than someone else and that's why you went to Jesus? Or did Jesus have to give you eyes to see and ears to hear or you would have been just like the herdsmen and the people who said "Jesus would You get away from me?"

If you believe that then there is no way we can be arrogant when we go to people in the world to lead them to Christ. Here is what we know. We would be doing

what they're doing if God's grace hadn't laid hold of us. That doesn't mean we don't rise up to confront sin but it does so that we do that with no arrogance, no self-righteousness because our righteousness is in Christ, our changed life is in Christ and we wouldn't have even come to Christ to be right with God and to be changed without God's grace bringing us from the tomb of sin to the triumph of Christ. So that dismisses self-righteousness and arrogance. I'm not saying we are not moved to the pits of our heart because of sin. The world would much prefer to redefine marriage or sexuality no matter what because there is something profitable in it. Man's rebellion to God can make us build industries that make us want trash more than the treasure of Christ – pigs more than people to come to Christ. I also know that I would be doing the same thing and I did the same thing without Christ working in my heart and life. Therefore, when I get self-righteous and arrogant there is a warning sign. There is a place in your life that you actually don't think you're saved by grace or you think you had something to do with it or God could not have done it without you, instead of I am what I am by the grace of God.

Can't you imagine what this must have been like? Just a couple of years later from this, Jesus is going to come back to the Galilee, will get His disciples together, probably at the place where He did the Sermon on the Mount, and this resurrected Jesus will say to them, "All authority has been given to Me on heaven and earth." I have a feeling some of those disciples backtracked right to this moment when they heard Him say that – storms, wind, seas, demons – we believe! "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. There is no place, no power or person that I want you to run from. Do not fear for I am with you. Don't put your confidence in the boat. Put your confidence in Me. I am with you. I will take you from the fire at times, I'll take you through the fire. In Me you're more than a conqueror. Do not fear."

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 of all nations, 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."* The One with all the authority is with you always and to the end of the age. The sovereign, sufficient Savior with His powerful, transforming, relentless, unstoppable, amazing, astounding, necessary and required grace will be with you. Do not fear. Your Savior has already risen up from the grave and He is with you to the end.

Go check Matthew 14 for Jesus comes back here a few months later and these same people who are begging Him to leave, in this same place will be 5,000 men and their families who Jesus will have to feed with a few loaves and a couple of fish, and all because of these two converts (demon possessed men that were saved) who are missionaries have primed the pump for that area. The next time He comes back, throngs in this same place are going to be begging Him to save

them because the grace of God has come and two men now by God's grace sent the reverberation of the glory of the Gospel, praise His Name! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You that we are assured that not only did Jesus rightly diagnose us but rightly give us solution, a prognosis of the future and rightly tells us that He will be with us, but we are affirmed from the Words of Scripture as well as the experience of our life that He is able. God, may the relentless, unstoppable, amazing, astounding, necessary, required, powerful and transforming grace of God be upon us. Today you may be reading this and you know that this Jesus has come to the other side to save you. Please do not leave to go to the pigs of sin. There is a Savior who is calling you. Come to Him and say "Jesus, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Your cross I cling." Amen.

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