

Matthew 8:1-34 | “The Authority of Jesus, Part 2”

Preached on July 23, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 8, as we will be once again in this chapter for part 2 of a sermon on the authority of Jesus. *[pause]*

Last Sunday, we looked primarily at the miracles found in the chapter, seeing what they displayed to us about Jesus’ power and authority.

Now today, we will see more so the theme of faith and discipleship woven throughout Matthew 8. *[pauseeee]*

We like to see how people react, don’t we?

There are even popular YouTube videos based solely on people’s reactions to watching something. *[pause]*

When something scary happens, we like to look at the reactions of those around us to see how they responded...

Did their eyes get big?

Did they jump?

Did they put their arms around someone in fear?

Or did they stoically act like nothing happened? *[pause]*

Another reaction we like to see is people’s reactions on a rollercoaster.

You know how some roller coasters take your picture at one of the most intense moments of the ride?

The pictures are often hilarious.

We all go down to look at the picture taken of us or others, and we can’t stop laughing. *[pause]*

We love to see the responses of others to something, and it’s not only in regards to scary moments and roller coasters. *[pause]*

When something interesting or big happens, we go to see how our friends are responding to it on social media.

Or we call up someone and tell them what’s going on, and listen for their reaction. *[pause]*

We also go on the news, or look up our favorite analyst’s page to see what they are saying about what went down.

And what we find is that different people react and respond differently to the same situation.
[pause]

And that's no different than how people responded to Jesus.

In Matthew 8, you have people with strong, confident faith all the way down to complete rejection of Him.

And so this chapter makes us ask ourselves: "How will I respond to Jesus?" [pause]

But first, before we get into the responses of people, let's recap what we learned last week...we saw...

I. Jesus' authority: all-encompassing!

Through 5 miracles, we saw Jesus' authority and power on display. *[pause]*

We saw his authority over physical illnesses as He healed people of various things. [pause]

He healed a leper, someone paralyzed, someone with a fever, and all those brought to Him.

Any kind of sickness was easy for Him, and He did it instantaneously. [pause]

We also saw His authority over the natural world, when He calmed a raging storm.

In a moment, the storm went from hurricane-like weather to so calm that Matthew could say that there was "great calm".

No one could do such things other than God, and the disciples marvel, and say, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" *[pause]*

And then thirdly, we saw Jesus' power and authority over the spiritual world...

Jesus confronted demons that were in two demon-possessed men, and they were fearful of Jesus.

They ask to be sent into a herd of pigs, and they are sent out by Jesus, and go into the herd of pigs, who drown. [pause]

In each story, Jesus easily and immediately did a miracle.

Nothing is too hard for Him, and He has authority over each realm. [pauseeeee]

Truly, His authority is all-encompassing.

There is nothing outside of His power and control.

And so do you know what that means?

Jesus' all-encompassing authority includes complete authority over us. [pause]

Do we really think that the One who has power over physical illnesses, the natural world, and the spiritual world doesn't have authority over us?

Do we really think that we can just reject Him and be fine? *[pauseeee]*

What we will find this morning in Matthew 8 is that we should have a certain response to Him, and that response is...

II. Our response: faith & commitment

Have you ever started a new job and have to watch the training videos?

You know, those boring, often out-dated videos of how to handle conflict, a training video on harassment, or something like that. *[pause]*

Or, if you have ever had a child, they make you watch a bunch of videos teaching you how to properly care for a child, like how to put them in their crib or car seat. *[pause]*

In those videos, they normally show a vivid example of how you should or shouldn't act or respond to a situation.

Well in our chapter this morning, through the various stories, it's like it's showing us vivid examples of how we should or shouldn't respond to Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

The chapter begins with two great examples, as you have a leper and a centurion show great faith in Jesus.

And in each one, we see what Jesus is looking for: people who trust Him fully. *[pause]*

Remember the leper?

Look at verse 2, "And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." *[pause]*

Talk about full, confident faith in Christ!

He calls Jesus "Lord".

He fully believes that Jesus *can* make him clean, there's no doubt in his mind.

He knows that Jesus has the power to do so, but the leper also submits the decision to Jesus' will.

It is only *if He wills* that He will be made clean. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that such a good example of faith? *[pause]*

Faith fully acknowledges who Jesus is: He is Lord.

Faith believes that Jesus has the power to heal.

But faith also submits to the Lord's will. *[pause]*

We don't act like our faith must automatically *make* Jesus heal us, like some faith healers today incorrectly teach.

We don't think, "As long as I have enough faith, then Jesus must heal me."

Rather, we trust that He can, but we submit it up to His all-wise choice. *[pauseeee]*

We also don't act like He's not good, if He doesn't heal, but we say, "Lord, if you will," and we leave it there.

That's true faith. *[pause]*

Faith trusts in God's power, but also trusts in God's purposes.

You can't say, "I trust in your power, but not in your wisdom," but we bow the knee in reverential trust. *[pauseeee]*

Notice how Jesus responds to the leper: with grace!

Any normal person, after teaching so much, and after getting such great attention by the crowds would not want to deal with a social outcast, like a leper.

Most people in that position would think that interacting or helping a leper would be beneath them, but not Jesus.

He's willing to help the needy.

He doesn't consider Himself too high up that He can't minister to even the social outcasts of His day. *[pause]*

What humility! What love!

Isn't that good news for us as sinners?

Like the leper, we *need* Jesus to be healed of our sin problem.

And by grace, Jesus helps the needy, and doesn't disregard the desperate, deprived, and destitute.

He doesn't shun the social outcasts, but willingly stretches out his hand and touches them so that they can be clean. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you grateful that Jesus was willing to save you?

Aren't you grateful that He didn't avoid you, but willingly stretches out his hands towards you? *[pause]*

He went so far as to stretch out his hands on the Cross, so that your relationship with God could be healed.

His love reaches out from the Cross, touches our hearts, and says, “Be clean!” *[pauseee]*

When we place our faith in Him, *immediately* we are healed of our sin problem before God, and we are made right with Him.

The love of Christ is seen in that He would do that for us, and that He would do this for this leper. *[pauseeee]*

Another beautiful picture of a faith response to Jesus is found in the centurion. *[pause]*

Here’s a Gentile, who willingly goes to Jesus, and boldly places his faith in Him.

He simply states his sad situation to Jesus, knowing that Jesus can heal his servant. *[pause]*

When Jesus says that He will go to his house and heal him, the centurion could have just been excited and led Jesus to his house.

Yet the centurion’s faith wasn’t a self-focused faith, but it was a God-honoring faith. *[pause]*

He didn’t go to Jesus just to get, get, get, and only think about himself.

But listen to verse 8, “But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.” *[pauseeeee]*

As he stands before Jesus, he admits his unworthiness and acknowledges Jesus’ greatness. *[pause]*

Now that’s faith!

Faith admits our unworthiness and need, and trusts in God’s greatness and power. *[pause]*

This reflects the Gospel truth of faith in Christ alone.

We must humbly admit our unworthiness and need, as we are sinners before a holy God, who can’t save ourselves.

And we must trust in God’s greatness and power to save, as we trust that Christ is the only way to be saved. *[pauseeee]*

Pride and faith cannot coexist, for they are opposites.

You can’t think you are great, and trust in Jesus.

You can’t think that Christ is small, and trust Him to save.

You must say, “Lord, I am not worthy to be saved, but only say the word, and I *will* be saved!”
[pauseeee]

It’s this faith that the centurion has that causes Jesus to marvel and say to his followers in verse 10, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.” *[pause]*

He then goes on to talk about how people from all over will “recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven...

...while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” *[pauseeee]*

The blessing of life and the kingdom is open to all those who trust in Christ, while those who reject Him face judgment. *[pause]*

All people can go to Christ and find salvation!

Are you a social outcast? He can heal your sin problem when you trust in Him alone.

Are you a Gentile? There’s a seat at the table reserved for you, if you trust in Him.

There’s no barrier to Christ, but you can freely go in faith and receive forgiveness and life!
[pauseeee]

What two great examples of faith in Christ, but as you go further into Matthew 8, you find less and less faith displayed. *[pause]*

The disciples in the boat during the storm are examples of “little faith”. *[pause]*

Here they have Jesus Christ, who just performed amazing healings, in their boat during a storm.

Yet they do not trust Him, but stand in fear of the storm on the sea.

No wonder Jesus says in verse 26, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” *[pause]*

This is because when we fear, we are demonstrating a lack of faith in Christ.

If they had great faith, they would have focused on Jesus, but in fear, they were focused on the storm.

Their circumstances loomed larger in their minds than their Lord. *[pauseeee]*

I’ll say it this way: faith is focused on the power of Jesus, but fear focuses on the power of your circumstances. *[pause]*

So consider: what are your fears demonstrating about the status of your faith?

What circumstances in your life loom larger in your mind more than Christ?

Do you trust Him or doubt Him?

Hand over all of your fear-inducing situations to Him, who has all power and authority.

[pauseeee]

With the leper's strong faith, Jesus acknowledged it.

With the centurion's solid faith, Jesus pointed out its great quality to others.

But what does Jesus do with our "little faith"? *[pause]*

Some people think that Jesus is so angry over their little faith that He is ready to hit them over the head.

Some people think that Jesus chides them for their little faith and walks away in disgust.

But what does Jesus do in the boat with the 'little faith' disciples? *[pause]*

He certainly points out their little faith, so that they are confronted with what is going on in their hearts.

But here's the thing: He doesn't leave them in their little faith.

He doesn't say, "You know what guys, I'm done. You just don't get it, and you never will. I'm not wasting my time with you anymore."

He instead uses this boat trip to move them along in their faith. *[pauseeee]*

Have you been having some 'little faith' recently? There is grace available to you to grow in your faith.

Jesus wants to carry you along in your faith.

He wants to take you from point A to point B in your faith journey, and many times He uses storms and trials of life to do so. *[pause]*

In the moment for the disciples, this boat trip was a scary journey, but later on they got to realize that this boat trip was a journey in their faith filled with grace.

They were being swamped by waves in the boat, but really, they would soon realize that Christ would use this storm to swamp them with His glory and grace. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you thankful that Christ doesn't turn away from us in disgust when we have such little faith?

Aren't you thankful that He doesn't give up on us, when our lack of faith is so glaringly foolish? *[pause]*

Look with new eyes at the trials of your life.

See your gracious Lord saying to you kindly, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” *[pause]*

Stand amazed at the fact that by saying that, He isn’t pushing you away, but desiring to draw you in closer.

He wants to move you along in your faith, but will you open your eyes to see what He may be doing in your situation? *[pauseeee]*

The disciples showed us an example of little faith here in Matthew 8, but we also see an example of ‘no faith’ in this chapter. *[pause]*

At the end of the chapter, remember the townspeople’s response to Jesus after he cast out the demons of the two demon-possessed men? *[pause]*

Verse 34, “And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.” *[pause]*

This is the sad reality: while some people trust Christ, others reject Him.

And the people from this city show us the *absurdity* of rejecting Christ. *[pause]*

Jesus miraculously cast out demons out of two men who were possessed and oppressed by demons.

You would think that the people of the city would be rejoicing at what happened and thank Jesus, for these men had been oppressed and also affecting the area. *[pause]*

You would think that they would be astonished at Jesus’ power, and want Him to stay as long as possible.

But they beg Jesus Christ to leave their region. *[pause]*

Imagine that!

The One who teaches with authority, could heal so many of their people, could cast out any more demons in their region, and could still storms is pushed away! *[pause]*

They beg the all-powerful, all-gracious Lord to leave!

They should have been begging Him to stay! *[pauseeee]*

This is the absurdity of rejection of Christ among sinful humanity - it doesn’t make sense.

People push the Giver of life away.

They beg the Forgiver of sins to leave their life.

They drive away the all-powerful Lord.

And what does Jesus do with such people? He leaves -- and there is no more a dire situation to be in.

Because when the true light is pushed away, the people remain in darkness, and what a sad state that is! *[pause]*

Faith cannot be forced, and so many people reject Christ and face the ramifications of their rejection.

So if you have never trusted in Christ, do not be like these townspeople, who pushed Jesus away.

But acknowledge who He is, what He has done on the Cross for your sins, and trust in Him as the only way to be saved of your sins and to escape the penalty of your sins.

He will save, He will forgive! *[pauseeee]*

The last example of faith that is found in this chapter is found in verses 18-22, which shows us half-hearted and hesitant faith.

I'll READ those verses for you. *[READ VERSES 18-22]*

Before Jesus and his disciples go out into the boat, two prospective disciples come and talk to Him, sharing their interest in following Him. *[pause]*

Most people would be like, "Great! The more the merrier!"

But not Jesus. *[pause]*

We are way too focused on numbers, but Jesus was focused on having true, dedicated followers. *[pause]*

We count our numbers, and think that we are being successful, if the number goes up...

...But if you notice Christ's ministry, He regularly did things to filter out the fake, uncommitted followers, and His number of followers would go down. *[pause]*

He would often say things to shock people, and they would walk away, and this is no different here. *[pauseeee]*

In Jesus' ministry, when the miracles were on full display, people wanted to join Jesus, but did they really know what's involved? *[pauseeee]*

First, a scribe wants to follow Jesus and even confidently proclaims, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." *[pause]*

For most people, they would think, “Yes, we get a scribe to come with us! We get a smart guy, who can aid our ministry!...

...He even shows commitment by saying that He will go wherever is needed! What a good situation!” *[pause]*

But Jesus doesn't do that.

Instead, what He does is he peels down underneath this scribe's profession of commitment to reveal whether he's actually, genuinely committed or not. *[pause]*

Jesus essentially is asking the scribe, “Really? Are you really and totally committed to following me? Are you ready to not have a place to sleep?” *[pause]*

Jesus wants him to count the cost: does he truly know what he's getting into? *[pause]*

This is an all-important truth for any prospective disciple: you must know that following Jesus is not easy.

It will take facing hardship, it will take sacrifice.

As Jesus teaches this scribe - following Him is demanding, and so it takes total commitment.

You can't half-heartedly follow Christ, or else the hard times will reveal your lack of commitment. *[pauseeee]*

Like this scribe, many people only want the comfortable, glamorous parts of following Jesus.

But when following Christ gets hard, they bolt. *[pause]*

Many people like when following Jesus is culturally acceptable, but when it's no longer culturally acceptable, they either leave the faith or adjust the faith to be more in line with the culture. *[pause]*

Many people like when following Jesus keeps them in their comfort zone, but don't you dare ask them to do something that pushes them outside of their comfort zone. *[pause]*

Others like the flare and the glitz of Christianity, but not the grueling mundane.

But Jesus wants each of us to count the cost of following Him.

Evaluate whether you are half-hearted, or if you are totally committed to following Him. *[pause]*

It's not easy, it's hard, it takes sacrifice, but it's worth it because of *who* we follow. *[pause]*

Are you willing to follow Jesus at the cost of feeling materially insecure?

Are you willing to be pushed outside of your comfort zone?

How far are you willing to go to follow Him? Only until it gets uncomfortable or hard? *[pause]*

In order to count the cost, and follow still, Christ must be more precious to you than the cost!

And let me tell you, He is!...

He's the One with power over physical illnesses, over the natural world, and over the spiritual world.

So follow Him fully! *[pauseeee]*

The second prospective disciple says to Jesus, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

And Jesus responds with, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." *[pause]*

Now that's shocking, isn't it?

We think, "The poor guy just wants to go bury his father, why does Jesus have a problem with that?"

Well there's probably more than meets the eye here. *[pause]*

If you think about it, this man's father probably didn't just die, for in that day, they would bury someone basically right away, within 24 hours.

So if his father literally *just* died, this man wouldn't be out and about. *[pause]*

So many people believe that what's going on here is that this man has an elderly father who may die at some point in the near future, and this guy wants to delay discipleship until then.

Either way, this man's response revealed his priorities: Jesus was second place in His life to his family.

And let me tell you, Jesus will not take second place in your life, even to your family. *[pause]*

Christ must take top priority in our lives!

This involves sacrifice because we have to sacrifice other competing interests, but it's worth it because Christ is worth it. *[pause]*

Many of us think that our family takes precedence over everything, but Jesus is showing us that following Him takes ultimate precedence over *everything*. *[pause]*

To many of you that is shocking, *and it is shocking*, but this is the truth, and Jesus Christ Himself is saying this to us. *[pause]*

A key thing to think about here is this...

You don't serve your family most by putting them over Christ, but rather, you serve your family most by putting Christ over them.

The most important thing that your family needs from you is for you to be dedicated to following Christ above all because it will impact how you treat them. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus is reminding us that truly following Him takes total commitment and complete submission to Him.

He's not just another option, among many others. *[pause]*

As a disciple of Jesus, you don't add Jesus to your life, like adding a hobby, new interest, or nice little side benefit.

As a disciple of Jesus, He becomes your life. *[pause]*

You see, Christ is seeking totally committed disciples, not half-hearted, hesitant disciples.

He wants us to count the cost first, and then go "all-in".

And once again, in order to do this, Christ has to be more precious to you than anything else. *[pause]*

Is Christ more precious to you than anything else?

What's more important? What's more precious?

Have you truly "counted the cost"? Are you "all in"?

Or is following Jesus a nice little snippet and thing on the side that you do? *[pauseeeee]*

Discipleship is truly radical!

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, we don't say, "But first, hold on..." Rather, we start walking.

There is nothing more important and pressing than completely following Christ with our lives.

He is the most important Person in the universe.

It is He "who is and who was and who is to come".¹

"He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."²

He is "the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth."³

¹ Revelation 1:4.

² Revelation 1:7.

³ Revelation 1:5.

It is He who has “the keys of Death and Hades.”⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Christ has all power and authority, so trust and follow Him completely!

How will you respond to Christ’s power and authority?

Reject Him like the townspeople?

Doubt Him like the disciples in the boat?

Hesitate or half-heartedly try to follow like the two prospective disciples?

Or will you go “all-in” in faith like the leper and centurion? *[pause]*

As one commentator talks about: Matthew leaves the story as to what happened with the two prospective disciples open-ended, so it causes us to complete the story.⁵ *[pause]*

What will you do?

Will you count the cost of following Jesus, and follow completely?

Will you see Him as taking precedence over everything? *[pause]*

Following Jesus is costly and takes total commitment, yet it’s totally worth it!

Just look at His power and authority over all things, and just look to the Cross and the Empty Tomb.

He’s worth everything!

⁴ Revelation 1:18.

⁵ Daniel M. Doriani, “Matthew,” in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 139.