

## Two Disciples: Hasty & Hesitant

Matthew 8:18-22

*Halifax: 5 December 2004*

### **Introduction:**

For the past several weeks,  
we have been looking at Christ's healing miracles in Matthew 8.

We have seen how He

cleansed a leper,  
healed a paralysed servant,  
cured a woman of a serious fever,  
and cast out demons.

When you see what He did,

it becomes clear that He is the Son of God Himself,  
come down from heaven to deliver His people.

And before chapter 8, (you will recall)

Matthew presented to us Jesus powerful preaching by recording the Sermon on the Mount...

And we saw how He spoke with words so penetrating that the people marvelled at the authority...

When see how He spoke,

it becomes clear that He is the Son of God Himself,  
come down from heaven to speak to His people.

Does your heart not burn within you when you see Him and hear His words?

Of course it is true!

Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, come down from heaven to save His people.

Everything about Him compels you to believe Him and follow Him!

That is the way it is with all that is truly holy!

We are, in one sense drawn to the holy, there is an attraction to Him...

and in another sense terrified to come near, there is a fear—

Holy things attract us and repel us at the same time.

As sinners we see on the one hand that here is the answer to all our problems...

But on the other hand, we see that that answer will destroy our present life in giving us new life.

And Matthew, recognising this,

masterfully interrupts his presentation of Christ's miracle ministry to show us how two disciples responded to Jesus...

In these two disciples,

We see how one was ready to rush in to find life without considering that he must die...

and how the other hesitated, not sure if he should leave all for Christ just yet.

You see, this interruption in the account of Jesus' miracles is a very deliberate interruption for all who read Matthew's gospel...

Now that you have learned so much about Christ,

(His preaching and His miracles)

It is designed to check you:

Are you about to rush in to find life from this man without realising that you must die to all that you are?

Or are you hesitating and procrastinating because you are not quite ready to die?

**Brothers and Sisters, I come to you this morning in Christ's name with this great burden!**

You are among the many who have been privileged to crowd about Jesus Christ.

Jesus always attracts great crowds...

In Matthew 8:18, it says:

Matt 8:18: "And Jesus saw great multitudes about Him."

They were drawn to this man who spoke as no man ever spoke...

They were attracted to this man who performed such mighty acts.

It was not just a **crowd**;

Matthew uses the plural here—

it was great **crowds** or **multitudes** that were there.

Jesus was a great spectacle.

Ever since Jesus came to the earth, it has been so...

How much interest Jesus has attracted since He came into the world!

Millions of books have been written about Him...  
Billions of sermons have been preached about Him...  
Billions of people have been drawn to Him.

This very morning, there are billions over the world who gather to worship Him  
and to hear His word...

Jesus sees them all, just as He saw them in Capernaum...  
Jesus sees you gathered here today in His name.

And I say, what a privilege it is to be among these multitudes who see Him and hear  
Him as He is presented in word and sacrament!

The Son of God has come down to earth to visit us and to bring us salvation!  
What greater blessing but that you should be gathered about Him!

But I am burdened for you because Jesus sees you...

He sees the multitudes...

And He knows what you are like...

He knows that there are **many** who sit under His word and who witness His  
divine power and grace,  
and even many who follow after Him as disciples,  
who will not **continue** to follow Him.

In John's gospel, we are told what Jesus knew about the crowds who gathered  
themselves about Him:

John 2:23-25: Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many  
believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not  
commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, and had no need that anyone  
should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

Even though these are said to have believed in His name...

Jesus knew that many of them were there for the wrong reasons and would  
not continue to follow Him when it got hard.

Jesus knew about the crowds in Matthew 8 also...

You see what Jesus does...

He gives a command to go to the other side.

He does this partly because it was His desire to spread His light in other cities  
of Galilee...

but he also does it to test His disciples...

It is one thing to follow Him when He is just around the corner...

But who will continue with Him when it is not so convenient?

Who will follow when following requires sacrifice?

It is one thing to obey when there are no trials or temptations,

quite another when you are called to die to yourself.

As soon as Jesus issues the command to depart,

Two sorts of disciples come forth...

One is hasty, the other is hesitant.

The hasty one is rash and has not counted the cost...

The second is hesitant and procrastinates because of his attachments to the world.

But before I go on, I want to clarify something...

I don't mean to suggest that the whole crowd should have followed Jesus to the next city...

That was not the calling of most of them...

But it was their calling to follow Jesus where they were—

to be totally and unconditionally devoted to Him no matter what the cost.

He was the Lord of Glory, and nothing else was acceptable.

But you see, these two disciples who were called to follow Him physically...

to actually go with Him into the next cities...

They represent what was going on in the crowd as they faced opposition about their attachment to Jesus...

One did not realise he must break with the world to follow...

Another was not sure if he was ready to break with the world to follow.

These two men are representative of the crowds in Capernaum and they are representative of the crowds that learn of Jesus today.

Do you know what one of the hardest things about the ministry is?

It is to look back over the years at those many who have not continued to follow Christ...

Those who were once fervent, but who did not endure to the end.

And those who were always hesitant and have now gone away...

I could give you many names of those who have turned back...

and most of you could do the same...

It is a sad fact that many who learn of Christ and even become His disciples do not continue.

In Galilee, Jesus later has 5000 families who were ready to make Him king turn and walk no more with Him.

It is an incredible thing that those who learn of Christ and who come near to Him and hear His words and see His miracles should forsake Him...

How could it be that anyone who sees that Jesus is the Son of God,

that He came down from Heaven to save us by bearing the curse of sin for us...

that He speaks words of love and grace and forgiveness, giving Himself wholly for us...

that He receives our prayers, speaks to us daily, nourishes us and cherishes us as His own body...

that He promises deliverance from God wrath and curse and an eternal inheritance in glory to all who follow Him...

How could anyone who sees all this depart from Him and walk no more with Him?

I recently pointed out that Jesus is only said to have marvelled at two things.

At the **belief** of the centurion...and at the **unbelief** of the Jews.

The centurion was a gentile who believed that Jesus could heal his servant without even coming to his house...

The Jews heard His word and saw His miracles, yet many of them did not believe.

It is a marvel how anyone could learn of Jesus and not believe!

And yet I tell you that this happens all the time!

My prayer for you, you who are assembled here this morning...

you who in some way are attracted to Jesus Christ and who have become His disciples...

My prayer for you is that you will understand what it means to follow Jesus and that you will truly follow Him.

That, my friends, is the concern of Jesus for the two disciples to whom He spoke in this passage...

And that is the burden of Matthew for all who read this gospel—

**First of all, you must learn not be too hasty or precipitous about following Jesus.**

**Realise that in order to live in Him you must die to self.**

Consider this scribe as he presented to us in verse 19!

What a wonderful profession he makes!

He comes of his own accord...

No one appears to be coercing him—He comes as a willing volunteer.

Some disciples have to be continually spurred along and reminded of their duties, but this man is a self-starter.

What an encouragement this is!

And note further how complete his commitment is!

He says, “I will follow you **wherever you go.**”

There is

no hesitation,  
no uncertainty,  
no qualifications,  
no conditions.

He has seen enough of Jesus to know that he is prepared to let Jesus call all the shots...

He will do whatever Jesus wants, and go wherever Jesus wants him to go.

There is a complete trust in Jesus leadership.

And truly, this is the only kind of commitment that is proper if Jesus is Lord.

You must give everything over to Him—

Your life is no longer about doing your own will, but about doing His will.

Anything less than a total commitment is to misunderstand that He is the Lord!

You must recognise His absolute claim upon you and lose your life in His service—in glorifying and enjoying Him!

You must give yourself to Him to be shaped by Him!

TRANS> This man's profession is both free and complete, and that is not all the good that can be said about it!

It is also commitment that includes a rare humility!

The apostle Paul pointed out that there are not many scribes in the church!

Yet, here is a man who was officially a scribe,

He had finished his discipleship!

Yet, having found Jesus,

he is willing to put aside his position as a fellow teacher and make himself a disciple!

He recognises that One greater than himself is here!

Just compare this scribe to some of the other scribes you meet in the gospels!

They come to Jesus as equals if not superiors to test Him...

“Which is the greatest commandment of the law?”

And then when Jesus answers, there is the arrogant response:

“Well said...”

How condescending!

No one has a right to speak to Jesus like that!

But this scribe in our text comes calling Jesus “Teacher,”

not as a fellow teacher of the people,

but as his own teacher, his own master...

He is prepared to sit at His feet and learn.

TRANS> Now you might think that Jesus would be delighted with such a profession!

How much good a man like this could do in His service!

Was he not worth at least twenty fisherman?

But Jesus surprises us with His response!

Right here from the start, He gives this man His first lesson!

He perceives that this man has been hasty and has not counted the cost!

Here was a man who was used to the comforts and conveniences of life as a scribe...

As he saw it, Jesus was sure to acquire much greater comfort and wealth,  
being such a popular teacher and able to perform miracles.

There are many who are ready to follow Jesus when He is popular!

When it is the thing to do in a society and when there is a lot of honour  
about it and much to be gained from it in this world!

But Jesus tells this man what following Him involves!

In v. 20, Jesus says:

v. 20 “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man  
has nowhere to lay His head.”

In effect He says...

“You are a master teacher and you think I am a greater master-teacher;

but do you realise that I have less of this world’s comforts than you?”

“Do you realise that I am a wanderer with no place to call home?”

“Do you realise that I am dependent on the hospitality of others for my  
living?”

Instead of promising him a comfortable living and great honour,

Jesus promises him hardships and poverty.

Indeed, He doesn’t even tell him the half of it!

He doesn’t tell him that he will soon be rejected by all and crucified...

He doesn’t tell him that the multitudes that follow Him so gladly today  
will soon go away and walk with Him no more.

But He tells him enough to turn him away if he is only after worldly gain.

We cannot possibly know what we may face tomorrow as Christ’s  
disciples...

But as Jesus has taught elsewhere—tomorrow is not our concern...

But it is our concern to take a serious look at what following Him  
today involves.

He will not overwhelm us with the cares of tomorrow,

but He wants us to know if we are **really** prepared to follow Him  
today.

If we are ready to die to what He is calling to die to today.

You see how this applies to you!



You must not follow Jesus in a superficial way—

you must understand what is expected of you today and be willing to pay the price of serving Him today.

It is so easy to make a commitment when you don't know what the commitment involves!

I am amazed at how common this is in our society in everyday affairs!

A couple will get married even though they have no idea of what they are committing to in the marriage covenant!

So many enter into marriage like they are going into a garden with no thorns and no tilling...

Everything will just fall in place and be wonderful!

In the same way, a man will take a new job—he wants a position—

but he takes no thought as to what will be required of him!

He looks at it through rose coloured glasses—“it will be easy, it will be great” he tells himself.

Another person takes out a loan without considering what will be involved in paying it all back...

She says,

“It is great to have my credit card so I can buy all those Christmas presents today”

but she forgets that in every purchase a commitment is made to pay everything back with interest!

We even take on simple projects at home—to build something or make something...

We begin with all the enthusiasm of this scribe...

But never finish the project because we did not count the cost.

We started with great enthusiasm, it seemed like a great idea, but now all that enthusiasm is swallowed up and spent.

As a pastor, there are so many times that I see people in every day affairs with their rose coloured glasses...

If a person is getting ready to go on journey, it is heartening when he says:

“I know this journey will be hard—

There is a hedge of thorns that I must go through here...

Then I must bear the heat of the sun...

No doubt, there will be storms on this part of the journey and robbers  
will likely pursue me here...

And on this leg, I expect to face lions and snakes...

But I believe this is something I must do and by the grace of God will be  
able to do...

Pray for me, I know it won't be easy.

When a man is going on the same journey and he says,

I am sure there is a rosy path through those thorns...

I like the heat of the sun, and storms do not bother me...

I can handle the lions and the snakes—no worry...

For that man I am concerned.

The problem is that in looking at following Jesus, the hasty disciple sees only a part  
of the picture—the good part!

As Lenski says,

Such a one “sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms, and the glittering  
arms and is eager to join,

forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps  
unmarked.”

And if I may put it in the context of discipleship...

He sees happy Christian homes with lasting marriages,

he sees obedient children that love their parents,

he sees loving people in the church who serve one another,

he sees self-control,

he sees the joy of the Lord,

he sees the promise of heaven...

But He does not see—

the husband having to lead his wife when she does not agree with him...

or the wife learning to submit to her husband when he is slack...

or the parents disciplining their little children day after day after day  
when they would rather be ignoring them...

or the long hours of teaching the word of God to them...

He does not see them forgoing hockey or soccer because it requires  
breaking the Sabbath...

or the long sleepless nights in agonising prayer...

or the long battle and wrestling to overcome some besetting sin...  
or the humiliating times of having to go and confess and ask forgiveness of your neighbour for the wrongs you have done...  
or the struggles with parents who think your children should be in government schools...  
or the demeaning comments directed at you as a woman because you are a keeper at home instead of pursuing a career.

He does not see the people at work laughing at you because you believe God created the world in six days

or the people in your family despising you because you believe Jesus is the only way.

There is the certain, hasty, optimistic kind of disciple who always looks at the bright side

No doubt there is something of that in each one of us,  
though some gravitate to it more than others!

Jesus warns you not to follow Him with such an attitude!

The trials and temptations will come!

You must be realistic about the cost when you begin.

As J. C. Ryle says when speaking to those that would follow Christ:

“Let us tell them plainly that there is a crown of glory at the end; but let us tell them no less plainly, that there is a daily cross in the way.”

If you follow Jesus blind to these things, you will not last...

Trouble will come and you will retreat...

Temptation will come and you will surrender.

TRANS> So you see the danger of hastiness in following Christ...

But it is no less dangerous to be hesitant...

To know what you should do and do it not.

**The second thing you must learn is not to be too hesitant in following Jesus... you must not procrastinate.**

Consider the second disciple to which Jesus refers.

This man comes to Jesus making what seems to be a very reasonable request...

He says:

“Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

As with the scribe, there are things to commend about his approach!

First, it is commendable that he comes at all...

He might have just slipped away to bury his father, but instead he comes to ask permission.

And in asking, he calls Jesus “Lord,”

in this way showing that his plans are subject to Christ.

This is what you should always do as Christ’s disciple...

Make all your plans subject to Him...

Do not just assume without seeking His wisdom by prayer and Bible study and perhaps by Christian counsel.

Secondly, it is commendable that he comes as one who fully intends to follow Christ.

He is not looking for a permanent release, but only a temporary one...

He has something to do first, but then he has every intention of following Him.

TRANS> Not only can we commend him about the way He approaches

But even the thing he requests appears to be commendable...

He wants to fulfil his duty to his father!

He is not asking for leave to go on cruise or go skiing in the Alps!

He is not asking to go and see about a new ox he wants to purchase...

He is asking to go and bury his father...

But we need to understand this request for what it is.

The phrase “to bury one’s father” is a traditional idiom that refers specifically to the duty of the son to remain at home and care for his parents until they die.

This same figure of speech is still used today:

A missionary to Turkey gives the account of inviting a young Turkish disciple to accompany him on a mission who said,

“I must first go and bury my father...”

The missionary expressed his sympathy until the man explained that his father was not dead, but that he was to help him in the

family business until he died and the inheritance was distributed.

I believe that this is what this man was requesting...

If his father had just died or even was about to die, he would surely have been asking Jesus to come and heal him...

And if he were not coming for that, he would have been busy burying him instead of talking to Jesus about discipleship...

Burial was something that was ordinarily done immediately—within one day of death.

He would have been busy at home if his father had just died.

Nevertheless, this was not an unreasonable request.

It is right for a son to care for his parents in their old age...

In 1 Timothy 5, the Bible says that a man is worse than an infidel who will not care for his own widowed mother if she is in need...

And Jesus rails on the Pharisees for the pious evasions they had concocted to avoid providing for their parents...

And not only that,

but you have the example of Jesus caring His own mother after Joseph died, and giving this responsibility to John when He was dying on the cross.

So there is a sense in which the thing this man wanted to do was a good thing.

This makes Jesus' response to Him all the more striking!

He says to Him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead!"

A man is responsible to care for his parents if they are in need,  
but this does not mean he should be tied to them!

A man is called to **leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife...**

He must go out and form his own household under the Lord...

And if his parents have need,

he must either provide support for them or else take them into his home where he pursues his own calling.

Jesus Himself was obviously taking care of his mother when he gave John that task...

but He did not go and live with her!

He took care of her on His own terms, not on her terms.

It would seem that she travelled with Him along with some of the other women and ministered to Him and the other disciples.

Jesus' words seem to indicate further that this disciples' parents were able to tend to their own affairs...

They were not particularly in need in this case and could take care of themselves...

By calling them "dead," Jesus also seems to indicate that they were unbelievers...

Certainly they had their concerns about their son and about the family business, but there was a greater business at hand!

This disciple must break those ties and follow Jesus!

And that is perhaps the most important point!

Jesus has called Him to come now,  
and that must take precedence over everything else!

When God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, that was what Abraham must do—period...

TRANS> So what can you learn here?

You must learn that God's word must always be obeyed unconditionally, no matter what might seem to stand in the way!

First of all,

I want you to think about what you do—or at least are tempted to do—when you are asked to do something that is either distasteful or difficult...

Is in not the case that as soon as you are made aware of that distasteful or difficult thing—

you suddenly think of something else that you really must do first!

You have been goofing off all day and taking it easy, and then it occurs to you that you haven't spent any time in prayer—

All the sudden you realise that you need to iron the clothes...

or that you are really quite hungry and need to eat...

or that you must go and repair the roof or check the email.

And incidentally, it may not always be prayer—

It may be that the distasteful thing is the ironing or the roof repair and you suddenly realise that you need to go and pray.

But you get the point...

Finding something very important to do is often a very deceitful way of avoiding what you really ought to do.

An unwilling mind always has an excuse.

Now I am not prepared to accuse this disciple who came to Jesus of this because we are not given enough information to determine it...

but I am prepared to say that unwillingness because of perceived difficulties is often what makes us procrastinate...

whatever excuses and reasons we may come up with, unwillingness is often at the root.

Learn here that you must never put forward your own conditions when God has clearly called you to do something in His word.

If you are convicted of sin in your life, you must repent...

Do not say,

“I will start keeping the Lord’s Day after we finish building our house.”

or,

“I will stop making personal calls at work when they increase my wages...”

or,

“I will give up the pornography after I get married—or when my wife starts showing more affection...”

If you know that you are disobeying God, you must repent immediately or you cannot be Christ’s disciple.

If He is Lord, He must be obeyed immediately and unconditionally.

I don’t mean that you won’t stumble and fall into sin,

but you must not abide in it and be content to live in what you know is wrong.

In the same way, if you realise that you are omitting a duty to which God has called you, you must not procrastinate about taking that duty up!

If you have sinned against your brother, you must go to him to ask forgiveness...

Don’t say, “First, I want to go and help that widow—what was her name?”

or “First, I need to go and pray and study the Bible...

no, first, you need to go and reconcile with your brother, then you will be able to study the Bible.

Do not promise to fulfil your duties when certain conditions are met...

“I will submit to my husband when he starts loving me...”

“We will return to church after hockey season is over...”

“We will begin family worship when the children get older...”

“We will tithe if God gives us more income.”

“I will go to a biblical church when my wife is ready...”

“I will defend what I believe at work when I get more understanding...”

“I will reach out to other people when God takes away my shyness.”

My friends, you are not Christ’s disciple if you put conditions on what He calls you to do!

He is Lord and He must be obeyed immediately and completely.

Do not procrastinate or hesitate when He calls.

TRANS> And so you see that hesitation can be just as fatal to discipleship as hastiness.

**We do not know what either of these men did after Jesus spoke to them.**

Surely Matthew has withheld that from us on purpose!

He does not complete story because you must complete the story!

The question is, what will you do when you realise that you have been hasty or hesitant?

It is not your concern what these men did, but it is your concern what you will do and what those under your care will do.

You must decide each time Jesus calls you to go to the other side!

Each time His call comes to you to do something challenging—difficult or distasteful in some say...

Will you rush to get the blessing and forget that you must die to self?

Or will you hesitate and make excuses because you don’t want to die?

These are questions that come to you as those who are part of the crowds who have learned about Jesus.

It is a great privilege to see His miracles and hear the word of the very Son of God who came down from heaven to save us.



But what will **you** do now that you **have** learned of Him?

I want you to consider the kindness of Jesus in bringing this instruction to you.

When He sees a hasty disciple, He graciously stops him in his tracks...

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

“Do you realise that if you are going to follow me, you must die to self?”

He does not want you to be deceived lest you stumble...

Has He met you this morning and reminded you that following Him calls for you to die?

What are you ignoring that you need to die to?

And likewise, when Jesus sees a hesitant disciple, He says:

“Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

“Die to your self and to your own desires so that you can follow me.”

Jesus compels you to come on

Do not hang on to your own life, but find your life in Him.

He is a pleading Saviour...

He does not leave us to go astray without speaking to us and warning us.

Sometimes He uses a sermon...

Sometimes He uses a friend...

Sometimes He uses your memory...

Sometimes He uses difficulties and trials...

Sometimes He even uses an enemy...

But He always has His way of calling us to follow Him aright.

He even pled with Judas on the very night that Judas betrayed Him...

And you know that Judas did not listen, but went on his folly to destruction and eternal misery.

If you do not hear His voice, it will be the same for you...

But if you will hear Him, He will bless you forever and ever.

Do not think that He is indifferent...

He is the One who came to shed His blood that we might live.

