

Following Jesus, Wherever, Whatever

Thomas Robinson, *Learning at Jesus' Side*, 2, May 27, 2012

Matthew 8:14-23

Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law

¹⁴ And when **Jesus entered Peter's house**, he saw **his mother-in-law** lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ He **touched** her hand, and the **fever left** her, and she **rose** and began to **serve** him.

Healing the Sick at Evening

¹⁶ **That evening** they brought to him **many** who were **oppressed by demons**, and he cast out the spirits **with a word** and **healed** all who were **sick**.

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the **prophet Isaiah**:

"He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." [Isaiah 53:4]

The Challenge of Following Jesus

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**.

Matthew 6:33

³³ *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Isaiah 53:1-5 From a song of the Suffering Servant of the LORD

¹ Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by others;

a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;

and as one from whom others hide their faces

he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;

yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his wounds we are healed.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 Daniel's vision of the son of man receiving a universal kingdom

⁹ "As I looked, **thrones** were placed,

and the **Ancient of Days** took his seat;

his clothing was white as snow,

and the hair of his head like pure wool;

his **throne was fiery flames**; ...

and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;

the court sat in judgment,

and the books were opened. ...

¹³ I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven

there came one like a son of man,

and he came to the **Ancient of Days**

and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And **to him was given dominion**

and **glory** and a **kingdom**,

that **all peoples, nations, and languages**

should serve him;

his dominion is an **everlasting dominion**,

which shall not pass away,

and his **kingdom one**

that shall not be destroyed."

The Long Road to Pentecost

We have just seen manifestations of Jesus' life-giving authority. First in his teaching – solid rock on which to build an unbreakable life. Then in healing. Jesus touches the untouchable leper. Instead of Jesus becoming “unclean,” he gives purity and healing to the leper and restores him to life in community. Next the Gentile Centurion recognizes in Jesus' power to command disease a kind of authority he has never seen and an authority structure that encompasses everything – faith.

In this section, Matthew sharpens our focus on the meaning of these events. We have first a simple healing: a woman with fever, touched, healed, restored to her life. But the woman is the mother-in-law of Peter. That takes us back to 4:17-20 when Jesus first began to proclaim the Kingdom of heaven and called the fishermen Peter and Andrew with that same authority: *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ... Going where?

Jesus' use of authority for compassion, healing, and new life makes these healings signs of the character of God's Kingdom, but Jesus is not planning to systematically remove all sickness from human life. He is preparing a renewed people – disciples, learners, followers – who can be empowered by his Spirit and his presence to take his authority/his kingdom out into every nation.

Reminding Disciples of God's Long Purposes

It is crucial for us disciples to understand the distinct nature of Jesus' authority / the Kingdom of Heaven, if we are not to be corrupted by our human perceptions of power and authority. Matthew amplifies this process by pointing us to important passages of Scripture.

He helps us see the healings as dealing both with sickness and with manifestations of Satan's oppression of human life in all its forms. He quotes Isaiah 53:4, a line from Isaiah's powerful description of the “Suffering Servant of the Lord,” the 4th of a series of these descriptions.

The Servant is/embodyes/represents Israel but also suffers for Israel. The Servant is also “the arm of Yahweh,” God's unexpected intervention to overcome the sin and brokenness of his people. The images of the Suffering Servant had never before been united with expectations of a powerful Messiah, but for Jesus, the Servant is the starting point – a radically different kind of authority. It begins here and goes to the Cross. He bears our diseases and brokenness not only by suffering but also by healing them. The Suffering Servant is also God's arm to heal and renew.

Matthew points to another part of the ancient story by describing a “scribe,” a man trained or in training as a professional interpreter of Scripture: *“Teacher, I will follow you...”* This was the pattern for training new rabbis/teachers. He wants to be Jesus' graduate student. He is ready to go with Jesus even as he gives orders to cross the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory.

Jesus lets him know that discipleship to him is not just career training. With this scribe, Jesus for the first time uses the self-designation, “Son of Man.” On one level the phrase simply means “the human,” but it also alludes to a well-known, much studied prophecy in Daniel 7. God (*Ancient of Days*) judges human empires represented as fierce beasts, but a “son of man” who represents the renewed people of God receives an indestructible kingdom. Jesus is not just a rabbi but that Son of Man. Surprisingly the one who receives that kingdom is now homeless and wandering. The authority / kingdom are real but the homelessness is also real. Will you follow?

The Call to Follow as Shock and Offense

Matthew describes a disciple with a seemingly reasonable/responsible/unselfish request that should motivate a compassionate, positive answer from Jesus. Astonishingly, Jesus says no! Follow me!

Why? It may correspond to a personal situation, but Matthew doesn't tell us. He wants us to feel the shock, the absolute demand. Jesus comes to us not as one teacher among many, but as life-giving Lord. His lordship and authority are not enforced with violence but filled with healing and God's self-giving love, but he is still Lord. Following him can take second place to nothing.