

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### MATTHEW 8:18-34

THIS section of the Gospel consists of a brief paragraph, revealing certain effects produced by the works already recorded; and of further illustrations of His power.

**“Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.”** This decision on His part called forth the words which show the effect produced on the minds of some who had seen His works. One man said to Him, **“Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest;”** and another said, **“Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”**

These were typical cases, and reveal what, in all probability, was going on in the minds of vast numbers of the people. The King’s methods of dealing with these first impressions made by His words and by His works are clearly revealed. Then follows the account of how the King crossed the sea in the boat with His disciples; and we have a new manifestation of His power operating in a new realm; a manifestation made, not to the multitude, but to His own, who were in the boat with Him.

As to actual realization at the moment the whole Kingdom of God was in that boat the King and His subjects; and to that inner circle He revealed a new plane upon which He moved with the same quiet, Kingly authority, as that which they already had seen Him exercise upon the plane of physical disease.

Finally, we have the story of the demoniacs; and the King’s power is seen exercised in yet another sphere.

With quiet dignity and authority, free from all perturbation and feverishness, He approached that strange and mystic realm, of which men have ever been more or less conscious - the spirit-world. This manifestation was to the whole company of people, and not merely to His own.

Let us consider first the effects immediately produced by the words already spoken, and the works already manifest.

We see the multitudes, and we see the action of Jesus because of the multitudes - a somewhat strange action as it appears at first and then we have these two illustrations of the feelings of probably hundreds of people gathered round about Christ.

The multitudes were growing in number. He had gone up into the mountain, taking with Him a few disciples, and to them He had enunciated the ethic of His Kingdom. As He taught the disciples, the multitudes had climbed the mountain, had come nearer to Him, and heard Him, and by the time the last sentence of that marvelous Manifesto had passed His lips, it is recorded that those outside the little group to whom He was primarily speaking, “**were astonished at His doctrine** (teaching), **for He taught them as One having authority, and not as their scribes.**” When He was come down from the mountain these multitudes followed Him, and He entered into Capernaum.

As we have seen, at the beginning of His ministry, “**He came and dwelt in Capernaum,**” in “**Galilee of the Gentiles,**” which was despised because contaminated with Gentile thought and Gentile connection.

He now came back into the same city, and the multitudes who had followed Him from the mountain were swelled in number by the city folk. They all knew of the leper cleansed on the way down the mountain; of the servant of the centurion healed from a distance; of the fever-stricken woman restored in the house of His disciple. Attracted first by His words, their interest was deepened by these things. Then, suddenly, as already noticed, when Jesus saw them, “**He gave commandment to depart unto the other side.**”

This was a strange action, one which inevitably arrests our thought.

He was attracted by the crowds; the crowds sought Him; and yet, over and over again, just as the crowds were gathered, just as the moment seemed ripe for proclaiming the Kingdom, asserting His claim, stirring up the populace, beginning the march, He withdrew Himself from them. But He never left them because He did not love them; He left them because He did love them. These people were impressed with material values only, and Jesus withdrew in order that, having fixed and centered attention upon Himself, He might presently return to them for deeper matters, and higher things.

If we study this ministry of Jesus Christ, whether in His propaganda as King, which is specifically brought before us in Matthew, or whether in any of the other phases, as taught in the other Gospels, we find this constantly that our Lord discounted the value of His miracles. That is to say, *He never appealed to men by miracle, save as a secondary method.*

The whole philosophy of this may best be expressed in His own words, when He said to Philip, “**Believe Me . . . or else**” - if you are not equal to that, if you cannot be persuaded by the supreme credential, by the final argument “**believe Me for the very works’ sake.**”

But the “**works’ sake**” is secondary. Jesus did not work miracles in order to convince men; and when men, impressed by works of wonder wrought in the material realm, wanted to see what other thing He could do, He took ship and left them, with a larger intention in His mind.

*It was just as our Lord was leaving that the events transpired which constitute our two illustrations.*

A scribe came to Him and said, **“Teacher, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.”** And then a disciple said, **“Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”** But we will first take them together.

When Luke told the same story, he introduced a third man, who said, **“Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.”**

Most people imagine that none of these men followed Christ. There is not a word to prove that they did not follow Him. We are not told the sequel, and we have as much right to think that they ultimately followed Him, as that they did not.

*Let us look at this first man, the scribe.*

He was one of the literary men of his time. He had listened to Jesus in all probability, and had watched Him. Just as his interest was becoming deeper, he saw that Jesus was leaving the crowds, and was going towards the boat, and, pressing through the crowds, he said to Him, **“Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.”**

We call this *impulsiveness*.

Would that there were a great deal more impulsiveness of this kind in the world to-day! May God give us a new baptism of emotion! Here was a man who laid bare his heart to Jesus Christ; and to whom, therefore, Jesus could lay bare His heart. This He did in the unveiling of His poverty. He looked at the man and said, **“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.”**

That was heart answering heart. When a man out of his heart said, I am going to follow Thee, Lord, the Lord told that man what He did not tell to everyone - the secret of His poverty, the secret of His homelessness. Someone has written about the blessed poverty of Christ. There is no such thing as blessed poverty. Poverty was part of the curse He bore, the curse that rested upon humanity on account of sin. It was part of His sorrow, and He told this man of His sorrow of homelessness.

Yet this is not the deepest note. This scribe, impulsive, daring, had undoubtedly been moved by the physical miracles; and it seems to me that Jesus not merely told of His own personal poverty, but uttered a great word revealing His ideal of life. He called Himself the Son of Man.

It was Christ's favorite description of Himself; He seems to have loved it. It is on the lips of Jesus an illuminative word, standing for humanity as true to the ideal. It would seem as though Jesus looked at that scribe, captivated by His words, impressed by His works, and said to him in effect; For what are you coming after Me? Do not forget that the Son of Man is homeless in this world. The ideal Man in the midst of such conditions as I am in, and as you will be in, if you follow Me, will have no anchorage here. **“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man,”** the Master of the new order, the King of the new Kingdom, in the midst of present conditions, can have no home.

Thus, to the man who bared the deepest thing in his heart, Christ revealed the cross. Not Christ's Cross for the man; that is not revealed here; but the man's cross, if he would come into the Kingdom and into power.

To him Christ said, Everything must be lost. You must be homeless if you would be with Me. Every tie that binds you and hinders you and fetters you must be dropped. Men who are coming after Me wherever I go, must come to homelessness, must understand that there is no rest until the Kingdom is built; the Son of Man can only be homed in the very Bosom of God.

*Then another man spoke to Him, and Luke tells us that it was in answer to something that Jesus said to him.*

Jesus said, "**Follow Me,**" and the man replied, "**Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.**"

Notice that Matthew calls this man a disciple, so that when Jesus called him to "**follow,**" it was not a call to discipleship, but to service, for Luke again introduces something which Matthew omits. Jesus said to him, "**Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God.**"

What was the trouble in this man's case? There was in his heart a conflicting affection that for his father. We have hardly caught the real value of this story; we have treated it as though this man wanted to attend a funeral, and asked time to do so.

Dr. George Adam Smith tells of how he was one day trying hard to persuade a young man to go with him as a guide into a district not frequented by travelers. Healthy and robust he stood by his tent, a genuine Arab; and there, sitting in the doorway of the tent, was his father, of patriarchal appearance, but well and healthy. The intended journey would have occupied some months at least, and the young man at last, with peculiar courtesy, said, "Sir, suffer me first to bury my father," thus using the very words of the Bible story, and revealing its true meaning.

There was no immediate prospect of the death of the father; but the son said, I cannot leave my father, a most admirable thing, a beautiful thing, examined by all the canons of human conduct; a noble decision on the part of the young Arab, and right, if anybody else called other than the King.

But here at once we see the claim of Jesus.

He was perpetually setting up these superlative claims for Himself. He had none of the humility of the human teacher. His claim was always the claim of an absolute supremacy. He never admitted that any other tie of affection could be allowed for a moment to interfere with the soul's loyalty to Himself, and He crystallized this fact into one burning sentence when He said, "**He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.**" That is the principle He applied when He said, "**Let the dead bury their dead.**"

So far, then, the King having given the first evidences of His power, two men spoke of following Him.

- To the man who bared his heart, Christ revealed the deepest fact, the necessity for the cross.
- To the man who had a tie of affection that hindered him, Christ gave rebuke in most stern words.

Having thus dealt with these men, He entered into the boat and left the multitude.

The King's power was now exercised on other planes.

- It operated first in the sphere of the elements, which is peculiarly retained for God;
- It operated in the spirit-world, of which man is conscious, and by which he is influenced, but which he never yet has been able to master.

It is a great comfort that even to-day God has kept some things absolutely in His own hands. The winds and the waves are under His command. The King now revealed Himself to that little inner circle of His disciples as Master there also. It was a revelation of Himself made to His own.

*They saw that day, perhaps as they had never done before, the composure of the King.*

He could sleep when the storm was sweeping. They were fishermen used to the sea. He was a landsman. They who were used to the sea were perturbed, but He was fast asleep through it all.

- They saw His sympathy the moment they roused Him.
- Then they saw His authority.

Standing on the side of the vessel, He looked out on those heaving waters, and said very literally, "Be muzzled." And, like dogs, hounds held by the leash, the waves cowered back, and the sea was calm. They saw His supremacy also, not merely as manifested in His power over wind and water, but in the strange thing He said to them.

Before He rebuked the sea, He rebuked them, in the words, "**Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?**" by which He meant that men never ought to be afraid if they are with Him. This again was a superlative claim.

We dare not say such a thing to our children, except under certain very restricted circumstances.

When they saw His power they said, "**What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?**"

*There is also a revelation here of these men.*

They were loyal; they went with Him; they sought His aid; but they did not rightly know His power. "**Carest Thou not that we perish?**" That is what they said when they woke Him.

I do not believe it was the cry of personal fear so much as the revelation of their conviction that if that boat went down, all the Kingdom would perish. Sometimes it is better not to wake Jesus when we are troubled. There is a higher faith; a faith that waits for deliverance out of a storm; a faith that says, If He is here, it is all right; let the waves roll, let the waters beat -

“With Christ in the vessel,  
I smile at the storm.”

*There is here also a revelation of the Kingdom.*

The perfect King and the imperfect subjects; and the King perfecting the subjects by process.

They cannot bear the storm, they are afraid. Then He will hush the storm, and He will answer the prayer of imperfection in order that He may build upon it. Some day they will brave the storm, and will be content to abide it, trusting Him for peace under all circumstances.

*When He came out of the boat on the other side, they had a new manifestation of His power.*

This was a manifestation both to disciples and to the multitudes, in which we touch for the first time in the progress of our study, the fact of demon possession.

This is the story of two possessed by demons. As to who these demons were, all kinds of theories have been advanced. Probably they were fallen angels under the control of the arch-enemy of the race, the personal devil, and no doubt there is still a good deal of demon possession in the world.

This is a terrible illustration of the power of a demon over a man, first obsessed, and then possessed by the spirit. First there was the temptation to give way to the evil spirit, and the struggle that followed; and then the bringing of the man into subjection by the demon, who obtained entire possession of him. Here were men so fierce that none could tame them; so fierce that men were afraid to pass by their way.

In the presence of that awful fact of which men were conscious, but with which they could not deal, the Lord came.

*His authority was acknowledged by the demons - “**What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God?**”*

That authority He immediately exercised; and when the demons asked that they might pass out into the herd of swine, He uttered one word, “**Go.**”

Thus the King exercised His power beneficently:

- For the individual, by freeing him of possession;
- For the community, by freeing them of their swine, for all traffic in swine was forbidden within the area of the Hebrew economy.

We have a strange ending to the chapter. **“Behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts.”**

This is our King. The human limitations have passed away. His essential powers are abiding powers. There is no sphere in which He is unable to act. We listen to His teaching; it is superlative teaching. He came down from the mountain top, and the question arose, What can He do? His works gave the answer. In the physical plane He was Master; among the elements He was Master; and in that strange spirit-world, which encompasses us, and of which we know so little, He was Master also.

There is no limit to His power. Yes, there is limitation. His power is limited in us.

- We may send Him away, as did the Gadarenes.
- We may limit Him as did the disciples; by the very deliverance they procured, preventing Him working out a more marvelous manifestation.
- We may love father or mother more, as the man seemed to do when he came to Christ.

Let us rather say to Him, with the scribe, **“Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.”**

And let us say it though He has shown us the cross, though we know it may mean homelessness in the deepest sense of the word; though we know it must mean sacrificial living, if we are to live for the saving of men.

**~ end of chapter 19 ~**

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