

Sometimes the blessing is in the journey rather than the destination. In this section of Scripture, Jesus departs from His home base of Capernaum to the East side of the Sea of Galilee, where He is rejected. He then returns. While this trip may seem like a waste of time, we know that Jesus never wasted a moment. This trip was God's will and provided opportunity for teaching, refining of faith, and preaching the gospel. When we follow the Lord, we find purpose in every aspect of life.

## The Cost of Discipleship (8:18-22)

Remember when Jesus told the leper to stay quiet about his healing? He didn't listen. He told everyone (Mark 1:45). As a result, word got out about Jesus and people were flocking to Him from all over Galilee, seeking healing. The crowds were proving to hinder His real ministry of preaching the gospel; it was time for a change of scenery. Jesus gave orders to His disciples (consisting of at least Peter, Andrew, James, and John: all fishermen) that they should sail across the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore. We will talk about this voyage in more depth later.

Jesus' departure pressed the issue of discipleship for two men. Jesus was leaving Galilee, would they go with Him too? The first man was a scribe. Let's pause to learn about the role of the scribes.

### THE SCRIBE

Person trained in writing skills and used to record events and decisions (Jer. 36:26; 1 Chron. 24:6; Esther 3:12). During the exile in Babylon educated scribes apparently became the experts in God's written word, copying, preserving, and teaching it. Ezra was a scribe in this sense of expert in teaching God's word (Ezra 7:6). A professional group of such scribes developed by NT times, most being Pharisees (Mark 2:16). They interpreted the law, taught it to disciples, and were experts in cases where people were accused of breaking the law of Moses. They led in plans to kill Jesus (Luke 19:47) and heard His stern rebuke (Matt. 23).

*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*

The scribe who approached Jesus addressed Him as Master (KJV) which means, "Teacher". He recognized the authority and wisdom of Jesus, who taught as no man had ever taught before (Matthew 7:28-29). He professed a willingness to submit himself to Jesus' teaching and authority and follow Him wherever He would go. How did Jesus respond and what was the point of His response?

Jesus was an itinerant preacher. There would be no settling down if this man were to follow Jesus. It would mean a life of constant movement, accompanied by occasional hardship, discomfort, and danger.

Why would Jesus dampen this man's enthusiasm with such a bleak reply? Read both passages below and respond.

Luke 14:25-33 – It is necessary to count the cost of discipleship. Jesus wanted this scribe to know what he would be getting into if he chose to follow Him.

Matthew 13:20-21 – Jesus knew of false professors who would claim faith and a desire to discipleship without the true root of salvation. Jesus was testing his resolve.

When Jesus responded to the scribe, He called Himself the “Son of Man”. This is the first of many times that Jesus would use this title in regard to Himself. We will discuss this a little later.

There is a stark contrast between the first and second disciple. Apparently the Jesus asked the second disciple to follow Him because verse 21 begins with his response. The man asks to first be allowed to go and bury his father. Commentators are divided over the meaning of this expression. Based on my study there are three plausible explanations:

1. His father had just passed away and he wanted to have the opportunity to **bury** him;
2. His father was **old** and he was asking leave of Jesus to care for him until he passed away; or
3. His father was old and he wanted to stick around until he passed so that he wouldn't miss out on his **inheritance**.

The disagreement over the meaning of the man's request centers on Jesus' response. He responded, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (ESV) What does this mean?

“Follow me” is simple, this man was to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Allowing the dead to bury the dead meant that the spiritually dead (those who were lost) should be left to care for the things of this life, including the burial of those who were physically dead.

This passage in Matthew is also recounted by Luke in his gospel. Read Luke 9:59-60. What was Jesus calling this man to do? He was being called to the ministry, to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Elisha's calling to the ministry was somewhat similar. Read 1 Kings 19:19-21. What was Elisha's response to the call? What was Elijah's response to Elisha's request? Elisha asked Elijah for permission to say goodbye to his parents. Elijah's response was one of ambivalence. “What have I done to you?”

What distinction can we draw between Elijah's response and Jesus' response? Elijah was a messenger of God. He didn't call Elisha, God did. Elijah just delivered the message. Elisha was responsible to God. In contrast, Jesus was the one calling this man to carry His message. He had the authority to dictate the conditions of his ministry.

Considering the three options listed above, what do you think this man was requesting of Jesus? Also consider Luke 14:25-33 discussed earlier. I am not certain what the man was requesting, but Jesus' response appears reasonable and consistent with Scripture in any of the scenarios. We cannot water down the call to discipleship to fit our whims. Either Christ is first or He is not. The call to discipleship is a call to make Jesus a priority over all in our life. A believer is called to follow Jesus above all others, even if it brings divisions in our home and among our friends (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

It is interesting that the scribe said he would follow Jesus wherever He went. The second man was commanded by Jesus to follow Him. In light of John 15:16, what do we see occurring in this passage?

We cannot initiate our salvation, our discipleship, or even our ministry. We must work at His calling. He who is called will also be equipped. Those who initiate their own calling will shrivel up like the plant without a real root.

We see in this passage that Jesus' philosophy of ministry was different than is popular in many Christian circles today. He didn't try to candy coat the truth and win as many followers as possible in hopes that they might someday really get saved. He put the clear truth out before them from the beginning. Jesus has a remarkable way of separating the wheat (true disciples) from the chaff (false disciples). Truly, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

When responding to the first disciple, Jesus called Himself, "The Son of Man". This is the first use of this title in Matthew, and the entire New Testament for that matter. Within the gospels, no one ever calls Jesus the Son of Man; it is a title He uses to refer to Himself. We need to go back to the Old Testament to understand how this title was used historically.

1. It was a title used to refer to **mankind**. See Psalm 8:4.
2. It referred to **Israel** generally. See Psalm 80:17
3. It was a title used by God to refer to **Ezekiel** in the visions he received. See Ezekiel 2:1-3
4. He was the One who received a **Kingdom** from the Father. See Daniel 7:13-14.

Given the broad usage of this term in the Old Testament, what did people think when Jesus used this title? Read John 12:27-34. **The Jews had a hard time putting it all together. They understood that Jesus used this title to refer to Himself. They also had a concept of the Messiah; yet they couldn't put the two together.**

This is just the first time we have run into this title. In this context, Jesus says that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. In John 12:27-34 we read of the Son of Man being lifted up. We will also read of the Son of Man forgiving sins (Matt. 9:6), being Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8), sending angels (Matt. 13:41), and ultimately sitting on a throne (Matt. 19:28). What did Jesus mean when He referred to Himself as "the Son of Man"? **All of the uses for Son of Man in the Old Testament apply to Christ. He was man; He was the true seed of Israel; He was the Prophet of God; and He is the One who received a Kingdom from the Father. While some of these usages could apply to us; they all apply to Him. Clearly, it was a title for the Messiah, the One who would bridge the gap between men and God.**

Why did the Jews have such a hard time understanding this title? **The title referred to an aspect of the Messiah that the Jews did not understand. They did not see the Messiah as a suffering servant. Jesus' humanity was the key to His ability to be the perfect Messiah.**

Why did Jesus use such a confusing phrase to refer to Himself? Perhaps the answer lies within the confusion. D.A. Carson writes, "The simplest answer is that He used the term precisely because it was ambiguous: it could conceal as well as reveal... Jesus combined the two, Danielic Messiah and frail mortal, precisely because His own understanding of messiahship was laced with both themes."<sup>1</sup>

How did the disciples ultimately understand the title? Read Acts 7:56.

Stephen's exclamation while being stoned shows that the disciples ultimately recognized this term to refer to Jesus, the Messiah (Christ). Their understanding of messiahship grew to match that of Jesus.

## Calming the Storm at Sea (8:23-27)

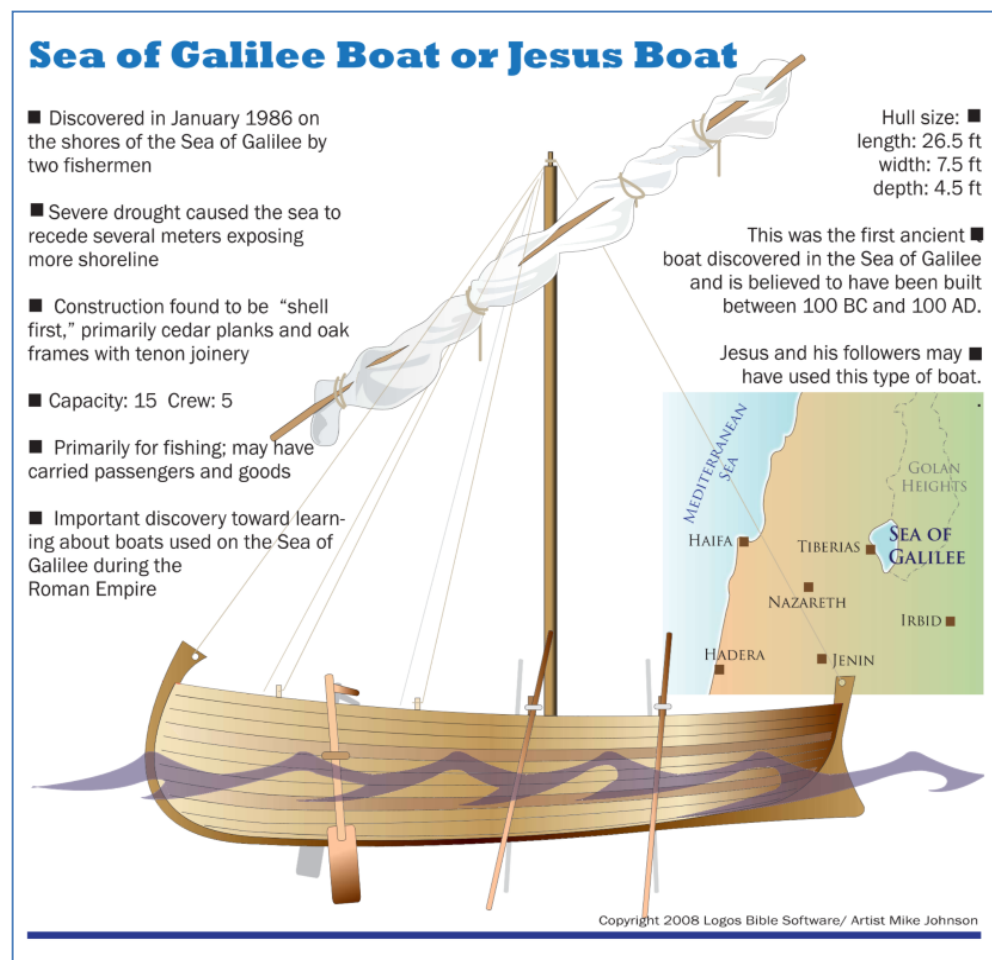
The disciples who followed Jesus into the boat are not identified in Matthew but from the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke it is safe to say the twelve apostles were included. Mark even mentions that there were other boats with them (Mark 4:36).

The infographic gives us an idea of what this boat would have looked like. It was probably a typical Galilean fishing vessel and could have easily carried Jesus and all his disciples.

Parallel accounts of this voyage can be found in Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25. Read both passages to glean some more insight about this event.

Why did Jesus fall asleep on this trip? Mark tells us that they got into the boat in

the evening. They left Galilee because of the demands the people placed on Christ. Riding in a boat can be a very relaxing. Put it all together and it is a great opportunity for a good night's rest.



<sup>1</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Matthew, D.A. Carson, pp 212-213.

## THE SEA OF GALILEE



The Sea of Galilee is a giant inland lake, called the Sea of Chinnereth in the Old Testament and also called the Lake of Gennesaret and the Sea of Tiberias in the New Testament.

It is approximately 13 miles long and almost 7 miles wide at its greatest width. It is also 700 feet below sea level. The waters are not salty (unlike the Dead Sea), but sweet as the Jordan River flows through this lake from North to South.

The Sea of Galilee was a notable fishery in the days of the Roman Empire and because of its location in the Jordan Rift (being surrounded by hills and mountains), it was very susceptible to sudden storms and great winds. There were some plains on both sides of the Sea, but the ones on the East were more abrupt and those on the West were gentler. Several towns were located on the shores of the lake, such as Capernaum and Bethsaida. They frequently communicated and traded with one another.

We read in Mark's account that Jesus was in the stern (back) of the ship, asleep on the cushion. A sudden storm arose, so great in fact that the boat was getting swamped and was in danger of sinking. This wasn't the first rodeo for these fishermen-disciples, yet the storm was great enough to make them fear for their lives. The alarm of the disciples prompted them to awaken Jesus and ask Him to save them from death. Before calming the seas and the storm, He chastened them for their fear and lack of faith. Given the storm and the sinking boat, what was wrong with their fear and faith? Read Exodus 14:10-14, Isaiah 43:1-3, Matthew 6:30-33, 16:8, and Romans 4:18-22. **They were with Christ in the boat. They were where they were supposed to be. Catastrophe struck, but they were still with Christ. Because Christ was with them, their fear was unfounded. Because they were in God's will, their faith should blaze. They demonstrated that they did not truly understand WHO Christ was and how SIGNIFICANT it was to follow Him. Difficulty would come but they were not to be alarmed but trust in Him. The centurion trusted the ability of an absent Christ; yet the disciples could not trust the power of a present Christ. The question you must ask is whether you are in the boat with Christ. It is the safest place to be!**

What response did Jesus' control of the wind and the seas provoke in the disciples?

**They were astounded by His ability. Jesus opened their minds a bit more. They wanted to know who Jesus really was. These types of questions demand answers. We know Peter sought answers from the Father (Matthew 16:16).**

Read Psalm 89:8-9. What statement did Jesus make by His miracle? **Jesus is God. His action was the answer to their question. None could do the things Jesus did except God Himself.**

## Demons and Jesus Cast Out (8:28-34)

The area Jesus came to on the East side of Galilee was locally known as the Gergesenes, near the village of Gerasa and the town of Gadara. These communities were part of a larger league of 10 cities called Decapolis. Though many Jews lived in the area, it was dominated by Gentiles. We see this Gentile influence by the presence of the local pig farmer who was tending his swine near the edge of the Sea. No faithful Jew would have anything to do with unclean animals; much less own a herd of them.

The account of Jesus casting the demons out of the men is recounted in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, both of which record more detail than Matthew. Read Mark's account in Mark 5:1-20. What additional information do you learn? **The demoniacs were so strong that they couldn't be bound with chains. They appeared to be crazy, screaming and cutting themselves. They worshipped Jesus, not a sincere worship, but bowed before Him. The name of the demons was "Legion" because there were so many. There were about 2,000 swine nearby. After exorcising the demons, at least one of the men was found clothed, in his right mind, and talking to Jesus. He desired to stay with Christ, but was sent as a witness to his friends and family in Decapolis.**

What difference do you note between the two accounts? How can it be explained? **Matthew records the existence of two demoniacs. Mark only mentions one. It is likely that one of them was more prominent than the other. This is why the accounts in Mark and Luke only mention one.**

The two men that came to Jesus were demon-possessed or "demonized". While we have encountered Jesus casting out (exorcising) demons in previous passages, this is our first time to get much detail about someone who is possessed. "Demonized" is a broad term which doesn't specify the degree or kind of control the demon has over the individual. In his commentary on this passage, John MacArthur said, "Although its accounts of demonized people reflect many different conditions and degrees of control, Scripture does not clearly distinguish between being possessed, obsessed, or oppressed by demons."<sup>2</sup>

We find in Scriptures that demonic possession can manifest itself in various ways:

- The victim cannot **speak** (Mark 9:17, 25; Matthew 9:32)
- The victim cannot speak or **see** (Matthew 12:22)
- The victim exhibits **self-destructive** behavior (Matthew 17:15)
- The victim possesses **great strength** (Mark 5:2-5, Acts 19:13-16)
- The victim has **convulsions** (Mark 1:26; 9:20)
- The victim expresses **spiritual** knowledge beyond their natural capacity (Acts 16:16-18)

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<sup>2</sup> *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 8-15*, p. 41



Interestingly enough, there is no account of demon possession within Jerusalem. It was common in the more rural and less sophisticated areas. This doesn't mean that Satan had less influence in the city, just that he worked more discretely.

In the case of the two men who met Jesus on the shores of Galilee, the demons were in control of the individuals. The men probably had little to no independent control of their life. They were living in the tombs, most likely caves and cut out burial spots in the hillside. To a Jew, contact with dead bodies was a source of defilement (Numbers 5:2). This was another sign of the demonic control.

The demonized men were incredibly strong and posed a threat to any who encountered them. They came to meet Jesus as He left the boat, possibly with the initial intention of doing them harm. Those who are at this stage of demonic possession are often very violent, both to others and themselves. They immediately recognized Jesus. Mark's account even states that they bowed down before Christ. What did they call Jesus? Why did they bow? Read Philippians 2:10-11 and James 2:19. **They called Jesus by His name and called Him the Son of God, a recognition of His deity. They bowed because they were able to see beyond the veil of flesh and had no choice but to do so in the presence of Christ. It wasn't true worship, but recognition of His power. Such a statement from a demon was a testimony to the true nature and power of Jesus Christ.**

***To know Jesus and yet hate Him is demonic.<sup>3</sup>***

The demons showed no remorse for their crimes but were instead fearful of being tormented "before the time". In Luke's account of this event, the demons begged to not be cast into the abyss (Luke 8:31). We know that there is a final judgment coming for Satan and his fallen angels. Read Jude 5-6 and Revelation 20:1-10. What are these demons afraid of? **It appears that Satan and the vast majority of his demons have (or had) some degree of freedom. There are some demons who left their proper domain (went beyond what God would allow) that are reserved in chains until judgment (presumably the abyss). They have lost all freedom and are simply awaiting judgment. We also see that Satan will be placed in the abyss for the 1,000 year period before being released again. I tend to believe these demons were afraid of losing all of their freedom before the coming Day of Judgment, which will forever consign them to torment in the Lake of Fire.**

Matthew mentions the many swine that were off in the distance. Mark tells us that there were around 2,000, to be exact. We also learn that the demons called themselves, "Legion" because there were so many of them. A Roman legion could comprise up to 6,000 soldiers. They requested they be sent into the swine. Why would the demons want to be cast into the swine? Why did the demonized swine then plunge themselves into the sea? **Commentators uniformly agree on the answer to the first question, we don't really know! When demons have control of an individual, they often seek to inflict harm; therefore it isn't uncharacteristic for the demons to drive the swine to immediate suicide. Perhaps the demons thought that by causing such a great financial loss for a local farmer, the people would turn against Jesus. That is only a guess. Again, we don't really know.**

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<sup>3</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Matthew, D.A. Carson.

Note the simplicity of exorcism for Christ. He cast out a legion with one word, "Go". Consider how some religions claim that Jesus was only a man or perhaps an archangel. How does this passage demonstrate the holiness (otherness) of Jesus Christ? Read Daniel 10:10-13 and Jude 9. **These passages show that Satan and his demons are a strong force to be reckoned with, even among other holy angels. The response of demons to Jesus Christ and His amazing power of this legion of demons is a strong testimony to His identity. He truly is the Son of God, God Himself in the flesh. There is no other explanation for one possessing such great and complete power over a legion of demons.**

The demons request to be cast into the swine. Jesus granted their request. Why? **The intention of the demons may have been evil, but Jesus would use even this situation to His glory. Perhaps the point of the suicidal pigs is that the farmer knew without a doubt that the demons which possessed the man now inhabited the pigs. There was no question that Jesus had complete authority over the demons.**

The response of the people from the city is perhaps one of the saddest events we have encountered thus far in our study of Matthew. They begged Jesus to leave them, to leave the whole area. Some conjecture that they were just upset about the swine. No doubt the death of 2,000 swine caught their attention. I believe their rejection goes beyond the financial loss of the farmer. Read Luke's account of their rejection in Luke 8:34-37. Why would they reject Christ? **They were afraid. Their response to Christ was fear and indifference. "Please leave me alone." It seems to be more about the unexpected and unfathomable power of Christ than the swine. This area was a satanic stronghold, but Jesus overcame the demons. Yet, the clutches of sin held tighter still to the darkness in their own hearts.**

This account is the first opposition to Christ in the gospels. Indifference and fear is probably the most common type of opposition. This is a tough reality check. Sometimes we feel there is so much darkness that people don't have a chance to hear the gospel, like the demoniacs who guarded the shores of Galilee from intruders. In this case, even when the darkness was lifted, most still did not want to hear. It is interesting that they were afraid of Jesus, the one who exorcised the demons from the man who was beyond their control or captivity. He brought clarity and calm to the chaos, yet they wanted nothing to do with such great power.

Fortunately, at least one of the two demoniacs gained saving faith in Jesus and was willing to follow Him. Instead, Jesus sent him to be a witness to those who had just rejected Him (Luke 8:38-39). What a merciful and loving Savior! What a testimony to the power and grace of our God!