

The King in Conflict

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. This is the Word of God. Please keep it open. We'll look at it together and ask for His help as we do that. Let's pray for God's help. Father, we thank You for these precious words recorded about the life of Your Son, Jesus. We thank You for His words and His works.

And we pray, Father, that again, You would open our eyes so that we would see the wonderful things that are stored up for us in Your Gospel. Lord, let us see Jesus for who He is and respond to Him, Lord, with all of our hearts. We pray in His name. Amen.

Well, where we left off last week in chapter 8, Jesus, we could say, was warming up for round one. He's just finished His Sermon on the Mount. He comes down the mountain and He begins to prove His Sermon to be true. He claims to be the promised King from God, the Messiah.

And at the start of chapter 8, He began to heal a sick and broken world. He cleansed a man with leprosy with a touch and sent him back into the presence of God whole and clean. He healed a centurion's paralyzed servant with simply a word and sent the centurion home confirmed in his faith.

He healed Peter's mother-in-law and many, it says, who were sick came to him. And with a touch, with a word, He healed them all. Picture that scene. Hordes of people gathered to Jesus' door, sick in pain, demon-possessed. And one by one, He turns the world the right way up.

[2 : 0 1] So that by the end, now a crowd is gathered around Him, whole, healed, cleansed, men, women, and children around King Jesus. God's kingdom is here because God's King has come.

But right in the middle, we saw last time, He gave a sort of pre-match interview where He said this, verse 11, I say to you that many will come from east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So He said people will flood into His kingdom from the outside, but people will also flood out of His kingdom from the inside. And so in the middle, as people flow in two directions, some to Him, some away from Him, well, in the middle, a maelstrom forms where these two weather fronts collide, the hot air and the cold air, a lightning storm will gather.

And so now Matthew begins to show us that conflict forming. He shows us Jesus clashing with people's expectations of expectations of Him, what it means to belong to Him. Soon people will be openly throwing insults at Him. We could say quite literally in our passage that Jesus finds Himself in the eye of the storm. But as we considered last time, He is a King who prefers to answer His critics in the ring. Show, don't tell. Show me, don't tell me. That's the thrust of this section we saw. And what Matthew shows us is that despite people's rejection of Him, while there is simply nothing in existence that can challenge Jesus' authority as God's King over His world. It's pretty obvious how Matthew has put our passage together. In verse 18, Jesus wants to cross the lake. He faces conflict before He goes.

He faces conflict on the way. And He faces conflict on the other side. And then in 9 verse 1, He crossed back the sea to His own town. Three different places, three different conflicts, but only one outcome.

Jesus is victorious because He is King over God's world. Let's look and see then round one. Conflict on home soil. At verse 19, a teacher of the law came to Him and said, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied, Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head. Another disciple said to Him, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus told him, follow me and let the dead bury their own dead. Two men come to Jesus.

[5 : 20] They've clearly been impressed by Him. And yet they haven't grasped really what it means to follow Him. Their expectations clash with reality. And notice, this is before Jesus has got on the boat.

So right now, He's still, we could say, on home turf. This is Jewish territory. One of the guys is even, it says, a teacher of the law. So someone who's spent his life, this is his nine to five, is studying the scriptures, which Jesus says He came to fulfill. And so this is supposed to be the easy bit.

You people on this side of the water were supposed to be able to recognize God's King when He came on the scene and be prepared to follow Him. But these guys come to Jesus one by one, and Jesus says, they're not ready. They're not prepared. Or at least, He doesn't nod them straight through, does He?

Look, verse 20, Jesus does not reply, close enough. You've had a go, that's fine, you're in. He doesn't say that, does He? The scribe says, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus replies, will you?

Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. If you follow me, He says, your life will be less certain and secure than a fox. You will have less of a home than a bird because the Son of Man has no home of His own. And that very Son of Man is enigmatic. It's meant to be.

[7 : 11] It's the way Jesus speaks about Himself most often in the Gospels because, unlike these other two titles that these guys give Him, teacher and Lord, which both have pretty well-known definitions, well, Son of Man is open-ended enough for Jesus Himself to get to define what it means to be Him.

And now we'll see later on in the Gospels, Son of Man has a pretty epic context of its own, but this is the first time in this Gospel Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son of Man, and this is what He says about what it means to be Him. That He doesn't have a safe haven, a bolt hole, a feathered nest to keep Him safe. So neither will those who follow Him.

As Hebrews 13 puts it, He suffered outside the gate like the corpses of the sacrifices burned outside of the city. So then, where do we have to go in order for us to follow Him?

Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp, says Hebrews, and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, no permanent home, but we seek the city that is to come.

So here it is. Would you leave the comfort and convenience of home behind? Your old familiar life, in order to follow where He goes to a place of suffering and sacrifice?

[9 : 04] That's what Jesus is asking. The teacher of the law has said He would follow wherever Jesus goes, but Jesus is not convinced that He would follow that far. This guy has spoken too quickly.

It's a reminder, friends, isn't it, that when we say yes to Jesus, we are not only trusting in a Savior, we are bowing to a King. If you're not yet committed to Christ, you need to know that. If you want Jesus to save you, He will ask you to sign control of your life over to Him. He doesn't just give us a destination to go to at the end of our lives, but He takes control also of the route and the journey through life. And that's not in the small print. Jesus says that openly. You know, He's not a dodgy salesman who ties you into the contract before He hits you with the bill. No, He says, follow me and count the cost.

Because He's not looking for quick converts, but lifelong disciples. But if some of us need to pause a minute to think, well, others need to crack on and follow.

Another of the disciples said to Him, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. Jesus said to him, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead. Again, Jesus clashes with people's expectations of what it means to follow Him. And this time, look, it's even someone who Matthew calls a disciple.

So someone who is a follower. But Jesus says, well, this is a follower in name only. Because again, like Jesus does not say it as a, yeah, that's fine. You do what you need to do first, right? You finish what's important to you, and I'll just wait. And when you're done, you know, you can come and pick me up, and then we'll go. Well, the man only wants to bury his dad. But Jesus says, doesn't he, no?

[11 : 25] No, God's king and his kingdom are higher priority than your dad's funeral, he says. Now, I imagine this guy was pretty taken aback, as I'm sure we are also. It's a shocking reply.

But Jesus doesn't beat around the bush, verse 22, look, follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead. Outside of his kingdom is the shadow and rain of death, says Jesus. People who don't follow him are dead, like cut flowers in a vase. They look beautiful, they smell nice, but they are cut off from the source of life, God himself. So let the citizens of death's kingdom deal with dead people's business, and you come under my reign of eternal life, he says.

Now, not many of us will be in a position in life where we have to choose between burying our parents and following Jesus. The point is that there are a million other things, aren't there, on our to-do list.

A million important things for us to crack on with, which are actually much less important than burying our parents. And yet, there is very little in our life that we will freely say is up for negotiation.

We love, don't we, to be able to say, someone says, how are you getting on? And we love to be able to say, don't we, I'm really busy. I've got loads on. It's non-stop. But Jesus says, really, there is only one thing in life that is a must, and that can't be put off, and that is following him. Because however important and busy our lives feel, it will all end up in a grave, and so will we, unless our priority is trusting in and following and serving the King, Jesus Christ.

[13 : 33] So again, here's the question. Would you leave your busyness, your life goals and ambitions behind? Would you push back your day tomorrow? Would you even rearrange your lunch plans today in order to get on and follow Jesus right now? That's what Jesus is asking.

The fact that neither of these guys can say to him, yes, tells us they don't yet properly grasp who Jesus is. Perhaps like you today, they call him teacher, they call him Lord, but when it comes to it, they stop short, don't they, of following him. And it's really to help us with that dilemma that Matthew now shows us who they and we are really up against for the control of our own lives in two more rounds of conflicts. Let's see our champion in the ring then. Round two, a conflict at sea.

Finally, Jesus gets to the lake shore, verse 23. He got in the boat and his disciples followed him. I take it from the significance that Jesus has placed on following him, that he doesn't just mean that the disciples also got in the boat. I take it that these are people who have weighed the cost and are now all in with Jesus. Indeed, back in chapter four, if we were to go back there, four of these guys we see immediately left their livelihoods and their families when Jesus called them and they followed him. They have given up what they held dear and what held them secure in life to follow God's king. And so they are right there, front row seats, when Jesus steps into the ring a second time, verse 24, and suddenly a furious storm came on the lake so that the waves swept over the boats.

Almost as if, almost as if, almost as if, almost as if, almost as if, almost as if, sensing Jesus' presence, the wind and the waves rise up and swell up in anger to meet him. Now that might be a strange idea to us, but I think not to these guys, because in the Hebrew kind of worldview, the sea was a place of hostility against God and his rule. So as we sang just then in Psalm 93, for example, the sea lifts up its voice and pounds its waves like it's having a tantrum. But the psalmist says, mightier than the thunders of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty. Well, that's the kind of scene, isn't it, we have here. The sea starts throwing itself around when Jesus begins to cross. Jesus isn't the least bit worried, though. He's asleep. But the disciples are terrified. They went and woke him, saying, Lord, save us. We're going to drown. In a sense, then, they do know who they're following, don't they? If they're going to Jesus to save them from the sea, well, they must know he can do something about it. Remember, in that boat, they are the experts when it comes to the open water, right? Some of them were fishermen.

They've been handling nets since they could walk. But they know that Jesus can do something they can't with the sea, despite their expertise. And yet, I still think this was a bit of a surprise.

[17 : 40] He replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid? Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves.

And it was completely calm. One second, they're going to drown. The next, it's the perfect day for a crossing. You know, I wonder, in the sudden silence, did these words perhaps echo through their minds?

Mightier than the thunders of the great waters. Mightier than the breakers of the sea. The Lord on high is mighty. Or perhaps the words of Psalm 107, which we heard earlier. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper.

The waves of the sea were hushed. The men were amazed. And asked, what kind of man, who is it, who can do this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.

They know from their Sabbath school, and from the Psalms that they sang in the synagogue, that the one who speaks and the sea listens is the Lord, the God who created and sustains and governs the whole world. So then who does that make this man who the wind and the waves obey?

[19 : 11] The key, I think, is that word obey. Of course, Jesus is powerful to control nature, but I think the point is how he's done that. He rebuked the wind and the waves in the way that you might tell off a naughty child or discipline a kind of reckless employee.

The boss, the parent, doesn't say, you need to respect my power, but you need to respect my authority. I don't give the orders because I'm stronger than you, that that might be true. I give the orders because of the position that I hold over you.

Jesus wants us to see the position that he holds. He doesn't grab the wheel of the boat, does he, and start kind of wrestling the boat to shore as if it was his physical strength and power that was overcoming the might of the waves. No, he speaks silence, be still, and his command is obeyed. He's showing his authority over God's world, not only the human beings in God's world and their purpose and destination in life, but even the elements, the unruly waters, the furious wind.

Only God has that authority, and Jesus has shown that he has that authority too. So who is this? They ask that his words are obeyed by the storm. The conclusion is obvious that he is the God whom their ancestors had sung those psalms to for generations. Now come to bring his good and loving rule on earth.

And friends, I hope that the point is obvious. That for us to try to kind of bargain or negotiate with him over the terms of our surrender to him, how pointless that is.

[21 : 24] I'll follow you as long as it doesn't kind of change my life too much. Or I'll follow you after I've misspent my youth, my teens and my twenties.

Or once I've kind of got the lifestyle that I want. Or when I'm retired and then I've got time, then I'll follow you. When I am ready, when I am prepared.

When I am prepared. You're seeing him still the storm with a word. Doesn't that just sound a bit silly? You're seeing his victory in the ring.

It should silence, shouldn't it? The tantruming toddler in our heart that wants to rebel against this authority. Even the wind and waves obey him.

So what hope do we have of answering him back? Have you tried rebuking the wind recently? We've had plenty of opportunity.

[22 : 25] What happened? What would happen if you tried to give the wind a telling off? Would it listen? No, friends, we cannot compete with his authority. So what else can we do but surrender control of our lives to a king who silences storms with a word?

You of little faith, why are you so afraid? As soon as the boat reaches the opposite shore, round three commences.

Verse 28. At this time we see conflict in hostile territory. When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him.

They were so violent that no one could pass that way. What do you want with us, son of God? They shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?

The region of the Gadarenes means Jesus is a long way from home. This is Gentile territory, the other side of the lake. And the hostility to him is immediate and overwhelming, isn't it?

[23 : 35] Two demon-possessed guys emerge from tombs and begin to shout at him. So there's all God's enemies kind of rolled into one great opponent.

Demons, death, sin, in a world with its back turned to God. And like the storm, these demon-possessed men come out, don't they, to challenge Jesus on sight.

Notice it's them doing all the talking. Jesus doesn't answer their questions, does he, about who he is, what he wants with them. I take it as the demons speaking rather than the men, because verse 29, they're talking about the end-time judgment of the devil and his angels.

They know there is to be a torture or a torment for them, but they beg to be given at least until the time God said he would do that. That's not today, they say, is it?

But they know that Jesus could do that if he wanted. See that? They beg Jesus, verse 31, to let them off with a warning for now, send them into the pigs.

[24 : 51] You understand, these demons are in a panic. They are groveling before him, pleading with him not to hurt them. And Jesus says only one word in response, doesn't he go?

And as if they waited for his permission to do what they did, then they go into the pigs. The whole herd run down the steep bank into the lake and die in the water.

Again, Jesus says hardly anything, does he, but shows us with simply a word that he is the supreme authority, not now only over God's world, but over God's great enemies, the darkness and demons and death that met him on the other side of the lake.

Where we started back in verse 18 was the home fixture. Here, Jesus is sort of playing the away fixture. This is meant to be the tough match.

There's nothing going for him. He's in hostile territory. His opponent is a compound of everything that stands against him and his kingdom. Yet again, there is no contest, is there?

[26 : 08] There is no real battle. With one word, he crushes his opponents, go and they are gone. Because like the disciples in the boat, the demons know where his authority comes from.

The disciples asked, Who is this man? The demons give the answer. Verse 29. He is the son of God. That is the promised king from God, who is God himself.

Now, the pigs' owners go to sell the story to the papers. Verse 33. They went into the town and reported all of this, including what happened to the demon-possessed men.

So, at last we think, Jesus is going to get the recognition and the following that he deserves. The townspeople will hear of what he has done and throng to him, because he has shown surely by now beyond dispute that he is God's king, bringing God's kingdom.

Well, if that's what we thought this fight would achieve, prepare to be surprised. Look at verse 34. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

[27 : 30] Jesus has shown beyond doubt that he is properly in charge. He has lifted the trophy. He's got the heavyweight belt, but human beings still refuse to bow to him.

Notice the irony that because he has told a deal, demons to go, and they went. So, now the people of the town tell Jesus, he has to go. How crazy is that?

It foreshadows this accusation later on in chapter 9, that he must be driving out demons by the power of the devil. See, these folks, they have tripped up on his identity, haven't they?

They have seen his authority, but unlike the disciples and the demons, they still do not recognize who he truly is, and so respond rightly to him as king.

And perhaps this morning, if you're honest, you too want Jesus out of the picture. You've heard what he has to say, you've seen what he's done, and you don't really want him involved in your life because of what it would change for him to speak, to follow him.

[28 : 51] In a sense, in a sense, you've got him right. In a sense, we are right to fear him. You're a person with such great authority as we have seen he is.

He is not to be taken lightly. But let me ask, what is the alternative? What's the alternative? If he is the Messiah, you will have to answer to him sooner or later.

So why not sooner? Why not come to terms with his supremacy and admit his authority and surrender to his control over all of life, seen and unseen?

Why not receive his command, bow to him as king? Why not get behind him and start following? Because if he is who we've seen that he is, well, you have everything to gain by doing that, and you have everything to lose by not doing that.

So don't run for it after the service. Stay. Speak to some people. Consider. Consider what it would mean to have him as your Lord and Savior.

[30 : 16] Perhaps you do want that or you think you want that. But maybe like the guys back home, you don't really know what you're signing up for.

You haven't quite grasped, maybe, fully who this is. Well, that's more of a kind of polite and respectful response than these guys in a way.

But Jesus is clear that that misses the point just as much as the people on that other side of the lake who told him to get lost. Maybe you're positive towards him, but you still don't really want to have him on his terms.

But friends, Jesus is so clear that there is no halfway within. We're either ready to follow wherever he goes or we're not ready to follow at all.

The guys back home should have known better than that. They'd spent their lives getting ready for the Messiah to come. Surely they understood that when Messiah came, he wouldn't be someone to be kept waiting or to negotiate with, but someone to fall before and put their trust in and follow with all their hearts.

[31 : 35] Some of you have sat in church for years and years and heard all about Jesus. If I can say this, some of you should know better than to think that you can keep Jesus at arm's length instead of having your life set behind him and going where he leads, whatever you have to leave behind to have him as your savior and king.

He is crystal clear about that, and so we have to be crystal clear about what it is really to respond rightly to him as our king, bringing God's kingdom into the world.

And so, friends, here is the invitation, here is the offer. Let us lay down our weapons. Let us quit tantruming.

Let us not tell Jesus to wait, and let us not tell him on what terms we will come. Let us surrender to his supreme authority over life and bow to him as the son of God and put our trust in him as our savior and follow him as our king.

What else can we do with a man like this? Let's come to him now as we pray. Let's pray together.

[33 : 10] Let us pray together. Let us pray together. Our Lord and our God, we come in awe of ye.

Lord, like the disciples in the boat, we fear ye. Lord, we tremble before ye because we recognize and we have heard that you are a God of great power, authority, and majesty.

Lord, your voice commands and it happens. And Lord, you have shown us that in Jesus, your son, the son of God, that he is Lord and king.

And so, Lord, we simply pray by your Holy Spirit that you would soften and humble our hearts before him, that you would bring us to our knees before his authority.

Lord, we thank you that he is not only authoritative and powerful, but he is good, just, and kind. That he came, Lord, not to condemn, but to save.

[34 : 19] That you sent him not in fury, but in love. And so, our Father, we pray, please gather us to him. And please, Lord, let those whose hearts resist him fall before him today.

And Lord, let those of us who do follow him recognize all the more clearly how right we are to do so and how closely we should follow.

Lord, take away, we pray, the remaining resistance and rebellion in us. Let us love him and serve him and follow him all of our days, for we pray in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.