



# PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

MATTHEW 8-12



# Fear and Freedom



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# **Fear and Freedom**

**MATTHEW 8-12**

**BY PETER COLLIER**



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*Fear and Freedom*

*Pathway Bible Guides: Matthew 8-12*

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd. ACN 067 558 365)

PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265

Email: [info@matthiasmedia.com.au](mailto:info@matthiasmedia.com.au)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com.au](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au)

Matthias Media (USA)

Telephone: 724 964 8152; international: +1-724-964-8152

Facsimile: 724 964 8166; international: +1-724-964-8166

Email: [sales@matthiasmedia.com](mailto:sales@matthiasmedia.com)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com](http://www.matthiasmedia.com)

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# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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A good way to get to know the true character of someone famous is to find out more about their early years. Seeing what people were like before they became famous reveals a great deal about their true identity. It is exciting, too, going back to where everything began for them. You are transported back to the early days, recognizing the greatness that one day others will also see.

This is true in the case of Jesus.

Looking at the early days of Jesus' ministry gives us a sense of what lies ahead for him, and gives us a powerful insight into his character and appeal. This early glimpse is what we find in Matthew 8-12. These chapters provide us with an authentic opportunity to get to know Jesus and to understand who he is, what he did and what he demands of his followers. In these chapters, we see Jesus' fearsome authority and his tender compassion. We see him living up to the extraordinary Old Testament expectations, all based on God's promises about the coming Messiah. We see opposition beginning and hardening against him, and we witness his courageous response. We see his faultless integrity and hear him teaching his disciples. In short: we meet the real Jesus in his early ministry in a biography he authorized.

The other thing we find in Matthew 8-12 is a vast array of different responses to Jesus. He is loved, hated, feared, labelled, pleaded with,

questioned. People leave their jobs because of him; people stake their reputations on opposing him. No-one can sit on the fence. This examination of Jesus' early years is confronting for us too, for Jesus always demands a response. A right fear of Jesus' power and authority will lead, paradoxically, to true freedom.

It is my prayer that your examination of Jesus in these chapters will be genuine, and that your response to Jesus will be worthy of him.

*Peter Collier*

October 2008

# 1. JESUS: BEFORE HE WAS FAMOUS

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Matthew 7:28-8:27



## Getting started

When someone says of a celebrity, “I knew them before they were famous”, it immediately arouses our curiosity. Why do we like to know what famous people were like before they achieved their fame?





- b. What reason is given in the passage for why Jesus is acting in this way? (Note especially 8:17. If you have time, you may like to compare Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which is where this quote comes from.)
  
- 3. The disciples marvel at Jesus in 8:27.
  - a. Why did Jesus marvel (8:10)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Why does Jesus seem surprised (8:26)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. "... but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (8:20).
  - a. Why is this surprising?

- b. What attitude, then, should Jesus' disciples have to where they 'lay their heads' (that is, where they live)?
- 
- 5. "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" (8:22).
    - a. What does this command tell us about Jesus?
- 
- 
- b. What relationships do you have that may challenge Jesus for 'top spot'? What should you do about this?
- 
- 
- 6. What else do we learn in the rest of this section about what it means to follow Jesus? (See, for example, 8:8-13 and 8:26.)



## To finish

The disciples ask the question in 8:27, “What sort of man is this ...?”

- How would your workmates or friends answer this question?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What sort of man would you say Jesus was before he was famous?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Given your answer, how should you act?



## Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks for the fact that Jesus’ authority is matched by his compassion.
- Pray that you would have faith in Jesus and be prepared to give priority to following him ahead of anyone else.
- Pray that our fear of what we might lose, in worldly terms, will not stop us from embracing the freedom Jesus offers.

**LEADER'S NOTES**

# 1. JESUS: BEFORE HE WAS FAMOUS

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## Matthew 7:28-8:27

► Remember: 60/40/20



### Getting started

From unknown beginnings, Jesus quickly became ‘newsworthy’ and famous. As reports spread, large crowds began to follow him to see what kind of man he was. The chapters we are now turning to record Jesus’ initial ministry. When we go back to these early days, we get to see the initial spark that set the flame of his renown spreading. Hence the starter question.

One helpful clue in reading Matthew’s Gospel is to realize that there are a number of summary statements sprinkled throughout. For example, Matthew 4:23 gives a summary that anticipates what Jesus will be doing in the early part of his ministry: “teaching ... and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (which we see especially in Matthew 5-7; the Sermon on the Mount) and “healing every disease and every affliction among the people” (which we see in the subsequent chapters, Matthew 8-9).

Then when we reach Matthew 9:35, we find that the summary from 4:23 is repeated almost word for word. This repetition indicates to an attentive reader that we have reached the end of a major section within Matthew’s Gospel (that is, 4:23-9:35). As study leader, you may like to draw your group’s attention to these summary statements. They help highlight the key features of Jesus’ ministry (note also how 4:24-25 draws our attention to the people’s response to Jesus).

## Studying the passage

Matthew 8-9 (or, strictly, 7:28-9:36) is a section of the Gospel that describes

Jesus' initial ministry 'on the road' in Galilee, preaching and teaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. The section begins with a statement about the *authority* of Jesus' teaching (7:29) and ends with a statement about his heartfelt *compassion* for the people of Israel (9:36). Throughout this section, both aspects of his ministry are displayed. It is a perfect combination for a man who is both 'good shepherd' and ruler.

We see Jesus' authority in various ways (question 1). A man with leprosy is healed the moment Jesus commands him to be clean (8:3). A centurion's paralysed servant is healed the very hour Jesus says it will be done, even though Jesus is not even in the area (8:5-7, 13)! Jesus heals the sick "with a word" (8:16), and drives out many demons as well. Even the wind and the waves are obedient to his rebuke (8:26-27). No part of creation is beyond Jesus' authority.

The authority of Jesus' *teaching* is also evident in this section. He commands a man to follow him as an even more urgent priority than burying his own father! Yet even as he gives commands to people we realize that there *is* one area of creation that may be resistant to Jesus' authority: the human will. We are not told if the man with leprosy did as Jesus asked, nor whether the next man obeyed Jesus and let others bury his father. Yet the possibility arises that Jesus' authority will be resisted. Jesus even comments, after his encounter with the centurion, that the sons of the kingdom "will be thrown into the outer darkness" (8:12)!

Jesus also shows remarkable compassion (question 2). While the leper may have been uncertain about Jesus' willingness to cleanse him, Jesus' touch and declaration make his willingness plain. His compassion for the centurion is striking: here is a Gentile commander of a foreign army, currently ruling over and oppressing Israel. Yet Jesus responds to even his plea. His compassion reaches not only those close to him (8:14-15) but also the multitudes. The passage gives the impression that though it was late at night, he turned no-one away (8:16).

This healing activity of Jesus in Galilee is explained in verse 17 (question 2b). This verse contains what is known as a 'fulfilment formula' ("This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet ...") and it is common in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

In a 'fulfilment formula', an event in Jesus' life is not just reported as a bald fact. Rather, the event is linked to an important Old Testament prophecy or promise. Very often we find that the verses quoted are just one small line from a well-known and significant part of the Old Testament. Matthew 8:17 is no exception, for here Matthew quotes a snippet from the prophet Isaiah (find the original passage—Isaiah 52:13-53:12—and ask someone to read it out to the group).

When we dig into this quote from Isaiah, we discover that it is an extremely important prophecy about God's anointed servant. Indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Matthew has quoted one of the most important prophecies in the entire Old Testament. The servant in the Isaiah 52-53 prophecy comes to serve his people and to suffer for their sake. He not only suffers, but he also takes their sin, pain and uncleanness upon himself.

In other words, these verses in Isaiah are no less than a promise about what is going to happen when Jesus dies on the cross. By using the Old Testament in this way, Matthew is actually preaching the cross of Christ!

Questions 3-4 pick up on the way various people respond to events. In particular, and twice in this passage, we read about *Jesus'* response to people's responses. Jesus marvels at the centurion because he, more than anyone, has grasped Jesus' authority. This is indeed a marvel, as the centurion is not an Israelite and knows nothing of Israel's God. As a powerful army commander, he could even have tried lording it over Jesus. But he does nothing of the sort. Instead, he humbly recognizes his standing before Jesus (8:8). Jesus also expresses surprise (at the very least) at his own disciples. In contrast to the centurion's faith, these disciples—who had seen more evidence of Jesus' authority—only had "little faith" (8:26). The study ends, then, with questions focusing on how we ought to respond to Jesus' authority and compassion (questions 5-6).

Jesus' statement that "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" is surprising. It is clear that Jesus has authority over all of creation—and yet even foxes have a more permanent home than he does! If the quotation from Isaiah 53 is properly understood, it is not as surprising, however. As Jesus himself will explain, the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom. Since no servant is above their master, then Jesus' disciples ought not have any expectations of permanent dwellings in this world. Jesus' words here challenge our views about the priority of property and housing. Question 4b provides an opportunity for groups to feel the weight of Jesus' challenge.

Jesus' statement, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" is equally challenging and arresting. In the Old Testament, the chief priest was not to leave the sanctuary to bury his parents (see Lev 21:10-15). Jesus is implying that being with him is as important as meeting with God himself in the sanctuary; nothing is to take priority over it. This again challenges our tendency to give our family our first allegiance. Question 5b is aimed at provoking your group members to consider how they might rightly give their first allegiance to Jesus before family.

There are other indications in this passage about what it means to follow Jesus, most notably in Jesus' dealings with the centurion. Following Jesus clearly means having faith in him and acknowledging his authority. The incident during the storm suggests this, and also suggests that his disciples ought not to fear those things over which Jesus has authority.



## To finish

After Jesus calms the storm, his disciples ask one another, “What sort of man is this ...?” The disciples presumably included at least the four fishermen mentioned in Matthew 4:18-22. The question was therefore one asked between workmates, which is why part of the final question asks people to consider how their own workmates would answer this question. The second question aims to get people to summarize what they think this passage teaches about “what sort of man” this is. It is clear that Jesus is God’s promised king, indeed God himself, whose great authority is matched only by his compassion. The final question is aimed at challenging your group members to match their lives to their assessment of Jesus.

.....  
1. See 1:22, 2:17, 2:23 and 4:13-16 for other examples from earlier in Matthew.



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How can we know Jesus? The best way is by checking eyewitness accounts. This simple guide to chapters 8-12 of Matthew's Gospel does just that, introducing us to the early years of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus is revealed as a man of authority and compassion—yet not just a man, for he speaks and acts with the power of God. Follow Jesus from fear to freedom.

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