



## Group Discussion Guide

*For group meetings from October 25 afternoon through November 1 morning*

*Note: the gospels of Mark and Luke record additional events that occurred during this time in the ministry of Jesus. Also, the order of events in Matthew is somewhat different; his goal was more thematic than chronological. Matthew's focus seems to be on demonstrating the authority of Jesus through his supernatural power, just after he recorded the authority of Jesus in his teaching through the Sermon on the Mount.*

### **Matthew 8:1-13**

Crowds of people continued to follow Jesus after he came down from preaching the Sermon on the Mount. They had heard Jesus teach with authority, and here Matthew records their witness of his supernatural power. It is significant that the first person Jesus helps after preaching the sermon is a man who has leprosy. The term "leprosy" referred to a variety of skin diseases that were easily visible. Anyone who suffered from leprosy was to be quarantined and considered unclean according to the Old Testament law (Leviticus 13-14). A person with leprosy (known as a "leper") became an outcast in the Jewish culture. People refused to associate with such a person. It was a lonely plight as the sick individual suffered in isolation or with others who had the same disease.

The leper who approached Jesus knelt before him, indicating he acknowledged the power and authority of Jesus. And his statement demonstrated he believed that Jesus could indeed heal him if he desired to do so. It is also significant that in healing this man, Jesus touched him. To touch a person with leprosy was unthinkable, as it would expose one to the skin disease and would cause the person who did so to be considered unclean. Jesus crossed over this barrier, touched the man, and healed (cleansed) him. He then told the man to simply do what the law required of him, and go to the priest and give an offering as proof of his healing (Leviticus 14). That Jesus told this man not to tell anyone else seems to align with his desire not to draw too much attention to himself for the appointed time that he would be revealed to and persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders.

If there was any question about Jesus' willingness to defy Jewish tradition to help others, he clearly answered that when he chose to aid a Roman officer in Capernaum. This officer came to Jesus and asked him to heal his servant, who was paralyzed. The cultural barrier Jesus crossed in this case was that of Jew and Gentile. Romans were of course viewed as part of the Gentile pagan world, and their occupation of Judea was certainly not welcomed by Jews. As an officer in the Roman army, this man would be considered a nuisance and perhaps even an enemy. And yet, his faith in Jesus was strong enough to lead him to declare that Jesus would not even need to enter his home to heal his servant; he could do so right where he stood. In fact, the centurion acknowledged the holiness of Jesus by stating he was not worthy to have him visit his

home. After seeing the faith of this officer, Jesus declared he had not seen that kind of faith from the Jewish people. He also proclaimed unbelieving Jews would experience judgment while Gentiles who believed would be welcomed into the kingdom of God. He then healed the man's servant from right where he stood, just as the officer had believed.

### **Matthew 8:14-22**

Still at Capernaum, Jesus made his way to Peter's house where Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from a fever. This fever was debilitating; Matthew describes her as "lying sick with a fever." The power of Jesus was again on display as he healed this woman the instant he touched her hand, and she was restored so quickly that she was able to immediately get out of bed and serve Jesus. He then spent the evening casting demons out of those who were oppressed by them and healing those who were sick. Matthew records this was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:4, which connects Jesus to the rest of this prophecy regarding his persecution and sacrificial execution for the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus then left Capernaum and took his closest disciples with him as he sailed across the Sea of Galilee. Matthew records that as they were on their way to the boat, Jesus was stopped by two different men who both declared their desire to follow him. The first, a scribe, received from Jesus the instruction that following him meant leaving behind the basic comforts of life. The second, a man who had been following him ("disciple") was met with a sharper rebuke. This man told Jesus he needed to bury his father before continuing to follow him. Jesus' response is somewhat shocking: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." This seemingly harsh response has been analyzed by countless Bible scholars. Some believe this man's father was older but had not yet died and thus the man was simply delaying his commitment to Jesus. Others have noted this interpretation is not supported by the construction of the original Greek phrasing used. Whether or not this man's father had died, Jesus' response still seems harsh in the eyes of the modern reader. Family is thought to be of the highest priority. Later in Matthew, the author records words of Jesus that take issue with this idea (Matthew 10:37). Based on the truth that Jesus knew the hearts of people (Matthew 9:4, Mark 2:8, Luke 5:22, John 2:25), it must be noted that Jesus detected in this man something less than complete commitment to him and responded in a way that would challenge this.

### **Matthew 8:23-34**

After Jesus and his disciples took the boat out onto the sea, a storm arose that was powerful enough to threaten the safety of those on board. Matthew records that Jesus was asleep during this storm, and the disciples chose to wake him up so that he could take action. They had witnessed his authority in teaching and in healing, and now understood that he was their only hope of escaping certain death. He responded to them with a rebuke, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Jesus then rebuked the winds and water and the sea was immediately calmed. His disciples were amazed by his control over nature.

The group arrived on the eastern side of the sea in region that Matthew states as “the country of the Gadarenes.” They were met by two men who were possessed by demons (Mark and Luke record only one man; apparently Matthew had direct knowledge of the second man). The demons in these men were many, and they acknowledged Jesus as “Son of God” and asked him if he had arrived to punish them before the appointed time. They seemed to grasp both his identity and his authority. They had no power to do battle with Jesus, so instead they “begged” him to cast them into a nearby herd of pigs. After entering into the pigs, the demons caused the large herd (Mark 5:13 numbers them at 2,000) to run down a steep embankment and into the water, where they drowned. The men who were responsible for the pigs ran into the city and shared what had happened. As a result, a crowd of people from the city walked out to find Jesus and pleaded with him to leave. It is implied that they did so because they were afraid of something they did not understand and they did not want any further damage to property. They seemed to focus on this rather than the miracle that the men who were previously possessed were now healed of their affliction and able to live normal lives (Luke 8:35-39).

## Discussion Questions

1. Who are you most hesitant to reach out to, because of cultural barriers or fear? How do the actions of Jesus in Matthew 8:1-13 inspire you to overcome this?
2. What do we learn about the kingdom of God from Jesus' statements in Matthew 8:10-12?
3. Throughout the gospel records, we see Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons. Do you believe this still happens in our world today? Why or why not?
4. Based on Matthew 8:18-22, what should we expect as we follow Jesus in this life? How does this match up with your understanding of the modern American view of following Jesus?
5. How does Jesus' question in Matthew 8:26 challenge you right now in your life? How does his power over nature encourage you?
6. What can we learn from the way the demons respond to Jesus in Matthew 8:29? What about the response of the people of Gadara in verse 34?