



## Chapter 8

Have you ever marveled at someone's ability to move an audience with words? Maybe a stand-up comedian brought you to tears, a TED Talk made you informed, or a political speech (work with me here) boosted your outlook. Sadly—and all too familiarly—even the best exhibitions of public speaking can fail to make an actual difference in our lives. The comedy was great, but we still argued on the drive home. The speech was enlightening, but we're not sure how it applies. The sermon was motivating, but...

### Icebreaker:

1. Who is the best public speaker you've heard (either in person or not)? What impact did their words have on your life?

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with Matthew's comment that "the crowds were astonished" (7:28) at Jesus's teaching. His words had moved them, but now it's over. Was it just a nice sermon?

There are a series of 10 miracles in these next two chapters. You might remember that the Sermon was preceded by miracles as well. In all, Matthew seems to be hammering home that Jesus's life was an astonishing display of both good words *and* deeds.

### Verses 1-17

Matthew wastes no time narrating this abrupt transition from teaching to miracle-working. Jesus's teaching has generated serious momentum as the crowds have swelled up on the mountain. They're astonished at Jesus. Now stop reading.

2. Think about the next turn in the story *if you were writing it*. How would it go?

Maybe this would be an ideal time to take an offering. Or, perhaps Jesus should capitalize on the sermon's momentum by road-tripping it up to Jerusalem for an even bigger crowd. Forget the small stage of Galilee and take this show to the big city! But that's not what Jesus does.

Instead, Jesus's attention is directed at the unique needs of a man with leprosy, a Roman centurion, and Peter's mother-in-law. We should note that all three were outsiders in their own way. A leper was unclean ceremonially and had to be isolated from the community...and Jesus touched him! A Roman centurion was a Gentile and member of the occupying army. Finally, women were socially marginalized in this day.

3. Who are the outsiders, the rejected, or the despised in our neighborhoods and cities? What actions are we (or should we be) taking to meet their unique needs?
4. What can we learn from the leper and centurion's remarkable faith? Pray that you all would have this same belief in Jesus's ability to accomplish the miraculous.

### **Verses 18-27**

Jesus continues to demonstrate inept marketing skills(!) by seeking to get away from the crowds and by offering a thoroughly discouraging—even offensive—recruiting pitch to a couple of would-be followers. Don't miss the surprise here.

It's not uncommon for us to want to "lower the bar" as much as possible to encourage people to follow Jesus. We're so hopeful that others would come to Jesus that we end up overlooking the cost of following Jesus.

5. If you're a Christian, have you experienced a cost in following Jesus? If so, talk about that with your group.

Commentators point out how the scribe approaches Jesus with great confidence, so Jesus is sure to test that confidence with a reality-check. On the other hand, the second man—a disciple—approached Jesus with a condition already in mind! Jesus, though, sensing a hesitation, calls for a wholehearted commitment even at the cost of the man's relationship with his family.

"Costly grace...is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

6. Can you relate to either the scribe or the disciple in these verses? In other words, have you encountered a "reality-check" that you weren't expecting? Have you come to Jesus with a hesitation that needs to be addressed?

The ensuing scene is incredible. We've talked before about Jesus's similarity to Moses; now, we see a clear connection to the story of Jonah. The One who calmed the sea after sleepy-eyed Jonah was thrown overboard is now on the scene to calm these waves too. The disciples are in awe. It's one thing to heal and cast out demons. But this is a whole different category of astonishment!

7. How does this miracle help us see that the cost(s) of following Jesus just might be worth it?

### **Verses 28-34**

We're in Gentile country now and there's a certain irony where the two demon-possessed men have no doubt about the answer to the disciples' question back in verse 27. This scene is another glimpse at the full scope of the gospel—that it would encompass both Jew and Gentile (remember the Roman centurion at the beginning of the chapter as well). Jesus is continuing to demonstrate His divine authority, and this time over the spiritual realm.

8. This is a clear reminder that the devil and his demons are a part of our world. Do you find it easy or difficult to remember this? What comfort can we draw from the outcome of this story?

### **Tying the Bow**

We're mid-way through this section where Jesus is backing up His authoritative words from the *Sermon on the Mount* with spectacular deeds spanning disease, nature, and the

spiritual realm. As we end, consider again the question the disciples asked in verse 27 because it's the most important question we could ever ask. Who *is* this Jesus? Take time now to pray with your group that you would have the faith to trust and follow Jesus even in the midst of the most frightening of life's storms.