

Matthew Lesson 17

Matthew Chapter 17

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Memory verses for this week: *Isa 65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.*

Introduction: In last week's lesson, Christ rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for seeking after a sign. Later on, we studied how the church would be built on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, and that even hell itself could not prevail against it.

In this chapter, there are four notable elements: the transfiguration and its related teaching; the healing of the lunatic with its associated lesson of faith and prayer; Jesus again foretelling his death and resurrection; and Jesus regarding taxes.

I. The Transfiguration of Christ

Mat 17:1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart,

When we closed our study last week in Chapter 16, the last verse was:

Mat 16:28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

This had to do with what happened six days later as recorded here in Chapter 17. Christ chose Peter, James, and John to witness this glorious sight. These men truly got to witness a glimpse of the kingdom in its future form and see Christ in His glorified body. It was in a mountain it says in verse 1. We have a record of several important things that happened on a mountain.

- a. Moses received the law (10 commandments) on a mountain.
- b. Moses died on the mountain and was buried by God.
- c. Christ prayed all night on a mountain before organizing his church.
- d. Abraham brought Isaac up to offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain. We know God provided a ram to substitute for Isaac.

Contextually, Matthew 16:28 is directly related to chapter 17. Jesus told his disciples they would not taste of death till they saw "the Son of man coming in his

kingdom.” Quite evidently, Jesus was alluding to that in six days; several of the disciples would be allowed to witness His glory in His transfiguration. This would be a preview of the coming kingdom.

Mount Hermon is the likely location of the mount of transfiguration ‘Tradition’ (the Catholic/ Orthodox Church) claims that the mount of transfiguration was Mount Tabor in south-central Galilee. However, in Jesus’ day, Mount Tabor was occupied by a town and a fortress.

Six days earlier, Jesus had been at Caesarea Philippi which is actually in Syria. Though it is conceivable that Jesus and His disciples could have marched down through Galilee to Mount Tabor in six days, they would have spent all their time in transit. The greater text does not suggest this.

Mount Hermon is just north of Caesarea Philippi and certainly is a ‘high’ mountain whereas Tabor really is not. At 10,000 feet, Hermon can be seen throughout much of northern Galilee. In any event, it is likely that Hermon was the mount of transfiguration. Again, it is outside of the land and therefore suggests that the revelation of the kingdom, albeit brief, bypassed Israel, being unveiled in gentile country.

It would appear the inner circle of disciples were Peter, John, and James. These seemingly were most spiritually perceptive and dedicated to their Lord. By implication, we might therefore derive the idea that those who are closest to the Lord will be allowed the greatest privileges someday in His kingdom.

Mat 17:2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Jesus was transfigured before them. This means he literally underwent a change of form.

Rev 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Rev 1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

Rev 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Rev 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Rev 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Rev 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Matthew notes that Jesus was "transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." The thought is that Jesus was transformed or changed before their very eyes.

(1) The word translated as transfigured (metamorphow *metamorphoo*) also has the sense to be 'transformed.' The difference in usage of the word is based solely on whether it applies to Deity or not.

(2) Recall other references to the glorified Christ in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus or in Revelation 1 on the Isle of Patmos. Notice the emphasis on *light* and *whiteness* which undoubtedly is related to His infinite holiness and light to His glory.

These three disciples in effect were allowed to see the glory of the coming kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. Before their very eyes, He was transformed into the glory He now has in His resurrected body and will be apparent in the Millennium.

Mat 17:3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Mat 17:4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

Mat 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Two, noted Old Testament saints appeared with Him. "*And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*"

There is much significance to these. Moses, the giver of the Law, had likewise been visited by the Lord on a mountain top. Elijah had been translated to heaven without death. These two maybe the two witnesses described in Revelation 11.

It is significant that this encounter took place *after* the announcement six days earlier in Matthew 16:21. Though the offer of the kingdom by Jesus Christ to Israel had not yet been officially rejected, for all intents and purposes it had been. Jesus was now on the road to Calvary. The kingdom would remain invisible until His return.

If they are the two witnesses, their ministry prior to the advent of the kingdom would not be until that time when it would be fulfilled as described in Revelation 11.

Peter brashly, naively, and foolishly suggested: *"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."*

God responded immediately by invoking His favor upon Jesus. This is the same statement made by the Father at Jesus' baptism. In effect, God said, 'Stop talking and listen to Jesus.' It is similar to the statement in Psalms, *"Be still and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10).

Peter naively and foolishly had equated Moses and Elijah with Jesus. He had foolishly equated mortal men, albeit redeemed, with the Son of God. He had placed the creature on the same plane as the Creator. God instantly put a stop to Peter's impulsive folly

Matthew Henry made these notes about Peter.

Yet in this zeal he betrayed a great deal of weakness and ignorance. What need had Moses and Elias of tabernacles? They belonged to that blessed world, *where they hunger no more, nor doth the sun light upon them*. Christ had lately foretold his sufferings, and bidden his disciples expect the like; Peter forgets this, or, to prevent it, will needs be building tabernacles in the mount of glory, out of the way of trouble. Still he harps upon, *Master, spare thyself*, though he had been so lately checked for it. Note, There is a proneness in good men to expect the crown without the cross. Peter was for laying hold of this as the prize, though he had not yet fought his fight, nor finished his course, as those other disciples, ch. 20:21. We are out in our aim, if we look for a heaven here upon earth. It is not for strangers and pilgrims (such as we are in our best circumstances in this world), to talk of building, or to expect a continuing city. Yet it is some excuse for the incongruity of Peter's proposal, not only that he knew not what he said (Lu. 9:33), but also that he submitted the proposal to the wisdom of Christ; *If thou wilt, let us make tabernacles*. Note, Whatever tabernacles we propose to make to ourselves in this world, we must always remember to ask Christ's leave .

Mat 17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

Mat 17:7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

God speaks out of the cloud and declares that Jesus is the one whom He has

chosen to be heard. Two things are said about Jesus.. “He is my beloved Son” and “In whom I am well pleased.” The disciples fall on their faces when they heard this, and were very fearful. But Jesus tells them to “Arise, and be not afraid.” How many times does the Lord help and encourage us when we are down and think we can’t go on.

Suddenly, the three disciples realized they were on holy ground and immediately fell on their faces. To paraphrase in contemporary vernacular, they were scared to death.

Once again, Jesus uttered the oft repeated phrase reserved for His people, “*be not afraid.*”

Mat 17:8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Mat 17:9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

Though Moses and Elijah were notable Old Testament saints, they were mortals. God set Jesus high above them. No longer were they even visible.

It says when they looked up, that they saw on one except Jesus Christ. That is what you and I need to see. Jesus and Jesus alone. So many times, we let others or self get in the way to the point that we can’t see our Savior. Our desire should be to grow more like Jesus every day. Christ tells them when they come down from the mountain to not tell vision to any man until He had risen from the grave.

Mat 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Mat 17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

The appearance of Elijah caused the disciples to ask questions concerning the coming of Elijah before the messiah. Christ declares that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, and that he would certainly come before that great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

Mal 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Mat 17:12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist came in the power and spirit of Elijah and the Jews knew him not. The prophecy we just read in Malachi 4:5 had a partial fulfillment in the coming of John. By the treatment of Christ's forerunner, Jesus foreknew what he would endure as the predicted King.

The disciples in referring to the appearance of the kingdom asked why the scribes (referring to Malachi 4:5) said Elijah must come first.

Elijah for all practical purposes had already come in the person of John the Baptist. Though John was not an incarnation of Elijah, he had come in the spirit and ministry of Elijah. John, of course, had been executed for righteousness' sake. Jesus would suffer a similar fate. Again, there is further foreboding of His coming passion and humiliation. The disciples finally began to understand.

II. The Powerless Disciples

Mat 17:14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

Mat 17:15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

Mat 17:16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

This man comes and kneels before Christ and asks for mercy at the feet of Jesus. He is concerned about his son, who was like a crazy man falling into the fire and running into the water. The man says he has brought the boy to the disciples and they could not cure him. After coming to them and having no success, he comes to the right one. When we have a need, we need to come to Jesus. He and He alone can hear our petitions and heal us if we are sick, or deliver us if we are in trouble.

Mat 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

Mat 17:18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

Matthew now shifts to the account of a man whose son was afflicted by a demon. Jesus and His disciples had evidently walked southward back into upper Galilee. The word translated as lunatic (*selhniazomai eleniazomai*) derives from the

idea of being 'moonstruck.' In ancient times, it was thought that degrees of what is now called epilepsy were induced by the phases of the moon.

The disciples had attempted to heal him, but could not. Therefore, the distraught father brought the boy to Jesus. The allusion to the "faithless and perverse generation" by Jesus may refer to His exasperation at the lack of faith on the part of His disciples. He was wearied with their lack of spiritual power.

Notice also that Jesus "rebuked the devil" and he departed out of him. Not only did Jesus heal an obviously troubled boy by casting out a demon, it is noteworthy the infirmity parallels modern mental disorders. The implication is that some of what is diagnosed as psychiatric disorders may in fact be demonic in origin.

The cause of Jesus' healing once again was the implicit faith on the part of the distressed father. As in most of Jesus' miracles of healing, the key thereto was faith on the part of either the afflicted or one close to him.

We see the problem was that the boy had been possessed of a devil. Jesus rebukes the devil and it flees from him. The boy is totally healed. That is one thing about those who came to Jesus. He healed them wholly and totally.

Mat 17:19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

Mat 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Mat 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Our Lord used this occasion to teach an even greater truth. The reason for the impotency of the disciples was their lack of faith. He went on to describe that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could do anything.

It is not faith which moves mountains. Rather, it is God who moves mountains. However, God is motivated to act as we trust Him. When God gets into the picture, nothing is impossible. Consider the crossing of the Red Sea, David and Goliath, the slaying of the 185,000 Syrian soldiers, or Elisha at Dothan.

Prayer is an exercise of faith. Fasting is a means of spiritually humbling oneself and focusing on the matter at hand. It is a means of demonstrating repentance and contrition. Fasting coupled with prayer magnifies and amplifies the faith inherent in the prayer while weakening the flesh which often comes between God and man.

It is ironic that the critical text where most modern Bible translations derive eliminates this verse. (It certainly is a part of the traditional Received Text—the preserved Word of God.) Proponents of the critical text claim that no great truth is diminished by their condensed versions. Well, here is one profound truth they leave out.

But to have this kind of faith to remove demons takes a lot of prayer and fasting. I know I fall short in my prayer life. We need to be men and women who pattern our lives after those great men of the bible like Daniel who would pray multiple times each day. And when they prayed, they were serious in those prayers with the Lord.

III. Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Mat 17:22 And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:

Mat 17:23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

Again, Jesus foretells His disciples what is ahead. This is the first direct reference of the return to Galilee from Caesarea Philippi and the mount of transfiguration. The cross is clearly before Jesus. He once again foretells His disciples of what was ahead. His resurrection is clearly foretold. This is the fourth time in Matthew's gospel.

Jesus now was on the road to Calvary. For the first time, the disciples seemed to hear the truth of what was coming. Yet, they soon would forget what their Lord had foretold them.

Jesus did not hide what was about to happen to him from the disciples. For some reason, they seemed to not comprehend it, or just did not want to believe it. They just seemed to not grasp the depths of his doctrine. It says that the news of his death and resurrection caused them to be exceeding sorry. But later, after it really happened, it caused them to rejoice.

There was a song written a few years ago by Don Francisco named "He's Alive." It tells the story about what happened when Jesus died on the cross and how the disciples thought things were totally lost. But when they came to that grave early on Sunday morning, they realized, that he had risen. With tremendous power in the song, he comes into that part "HE'S ALIVE... HE'S ALIVE." And because he lives, we all can have that hope of being resurrected also.

Some of the greatest words of comfort we have in the word of God are recorded in John Chapter 14.

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

John 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

John 14:4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

John 14:5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 14:7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

IV. The Miracle of the Tribute Money

Mat 17:24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

The tribute money was a temple tax paid voluntarily by all 20 years of age and older to maintain the temple. Certainly, Jesus was under no obligation to pay this tax, but he does so to not offend the Jews who received it.

Mat 17:25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

Mat 17:26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

Mat 17:27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Having returned to Capernaum, Peter was approached by collectors of the Temple tax, wanting to know why Jesus had not paid up. In Capernaum was the regional office of the Roman department of revenue. However, this incident apparently did not involve Roman taxes.

The fact that the *tribute* in question was voluntary precludes Roman taxes. Theirs was mandatory. Rather, what is at hand was the Temple tax which was payable each March (the month Adar) by all Jewish men twenty years and older.

The Temple tax was not levied by the Romans, but rather by the Jews for the maintenance of the Temple. It was the proper thing for a Jewish man to do, though it was not legally required. In as much as Jesus had been out of Galilee for some months, His tax was overdue. The Jewish tax authorities evidently pulled Peter aside and wanted to know why Jesus had not paid His tax.

If He was a great religious teacher, why did He not set the example and pay the prescribed Temple tax of a half shekel? To that Peter replied, Yes, Jesus did customarily pay the Temple tax. However, Jesus was omnisciently aware of this confrontation.

Upon entering their house, Jesus, anticipating Peter's question, preempted Him and brought up the subject Himself. He asked the rhetorical question, "of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?"

The answer is obvious. Kings of that day didn't require taxes of their children, but of their conquered subjects. Peter answered rightly. Jesus pointed out that children of the king are not taxed implying the God of the Temple was in fact His Father. In an obvious miracle, Jesus directed Peter to find the money in a fish's mouth. Jesus paid the tax so as not to offend (literally 'scandalize') them.

Taxes are always burdensome. Yet to avoid needless offense to His ministry, Jesus paid the tax through a unique miracle. Out of the mouth of the fish came the exact amount necessary for both of their taxes. According to Romans 13, God's people are to pay their taxes, even if offensive. There also is a simple lesson in how God provides the needs of His own as they trust Him.

I think there is a real lesson here for us. In order that we might all get along, sometimes we may have to do things that are really going out of our way to keep all people happy. But in doing that, we honor and glorify the Lord. We know that Paul knew that to eat meat offered to idols was not in itself sin. But it might cause his brother to sin, and he would not eat if that would be the case.

1 Cor 8:7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

1 Cor 8:8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

1 Cor 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1 Cor 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be

emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

1 Cor 8:11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

1 Cor 8:12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

1 Cor 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

1 Cor 9:18 What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

1 Cor 9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

1 Cor 9:20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

1 Cor 9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

1 Cor 9:22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1 Cor 9:23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Paul did everything in his power to reach the lost. He came to the Jews as a Jew... to those under the law he came under the law. Whatever it took, he tried his best to reach others for Jesus Christ by preaching the Gospel to them after he found that common ground that others could love and trust him.

Note the command Jesus gave to Peter. I'm sure as an old fisherman, Simon Peter found the Lord's method of obtaining the money appealing. No one but Jesus could tell you to go and open up a fish's mouth and find money. Notice the words... take the money and "Give unto them for thee and me." Why did he not just say us? Peter was paying the tax on a different ground. He was responsible to pay. Jesus was the only Begotten Son of God. Peter needed a ransom for his soul.

J. Vernon McGee has this to say about the money in the fish's mouth.

His method of getting the tax money was certainly novel, to say the least. Now our Lord demonstrates that He has recovered all that Adam lost. The

creatures were obedient to Him. The fish as well as Peter followed His command. I believe that God had given to Adam the same dominion over all creation, but he lost it at the Fall. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). In the Transfiguration we see man restored to his original *purpose*. In the episode of the tribute money we see man restored to his original *performance*.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.