

## Matthew 17

**This chapter brings out some of the confusion in following Christ.**

- Each of these stories presents a challenge to the expectations of the disciples.
- Just when they thought that the Kingdom could be understood and managed they are confronted with their need to trust Jesus and not the patterns of thought and behavior that they had developed and used.

### **1. Sometimes the promises seem confusing. (17:1-8)**

“<sup>1</sup> And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” <sup>6</sup> And when the disciples heard {this,} they fell on their faces and were much afraid. <sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to {them} and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” <sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.

- The word “transformed “ comes from the Greek word translated into the English “metamorphosis”. It means that his appearance is changed.
- The transfiguration was before “them”, the disciples. They were seeing him in a way that they had not before. His authority could not be questioned.
- I Peter 1:16-18 refers back to this experience as a sign of Jesus’ authority.
- Jesus gives the 12 a glimpse of His true glory as He postures Himself for the final chapter of His life work.
- The encouragement to listen to Jesus words is most significant. The 12 were still blind to a lot of what Jesus had to say. They were convinced that this glorious vision was the fulfillment of their dreams. This is probably why they wanted to stay there.
- This incident illustrates the contrasting visions of Jesus and the 12 at this point.
- The challenge for us is to broaden our perspective so that we see the whole picture and not settle for temporal blessings.

9 And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”<sup>10</sup> And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”<sup>11</sup> And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”<sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

- Elijah was expected to restore all things—to bring about a state of justice and true worship. If that were so, how could it be that Messiah would be killed in such a restored environment. This interpretation makes sense both of Matthew’s (“therefore”) and of Mark 9:10. If Jesus as Messiah whose messiahship the disciples do not now doubt) must *suffer*, then how could it be said that Elijah must first come *to restore all things*?
- Jesus tells them that Elijah has already come in the person of John but he was not recognized as the Elijah who would open the door for Jesus as Messiah.
- Jesus also suggests that Elijah will come again (presumably before the second advent).
- The disciples were not putting the picture together so as to see the Messianic age fulfilled in Jesus.
- Jesus saw his own fate in the death of John the Baptist.
- The challenge for us is to put all the pieces together to get the true big picture.

## **2. Sometimes the means of ministry seems confusing. (17:14-18)**

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the multitude, a man came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying, <sup>15</sup> “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said, “O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” <sup>20</sup> And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be

impossible to you. <sup>21</sup> “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

- The point of this story seems not to center on Jesus’ power to heal as it does on the disciples’ failure to heal. The disciples’ failures are a recurring theme throughout this section (14:16-21, 26-27, 28-31; 15:16, 23, 33; 16:5, 22; 17:4, 10-11). This failure in their healing ministry at first seems strange, since Jesus had clearly given them power to heal and exorcise demons (10:1, 8). Yet it is part of the pattern of the disciples’ advance and failure. In other situations they had shown lack of faith (14:26-27, 31; 15:5, 8)—a reminder that their power to do kingdom miracles was not their own but, unlike magic, was entirely derivative and related to their own walk of faith.
- Why the disciples failed is not revealed although Jesus suggests that they were not exercising faith.
- The call for prayer and fasting is applied to the 12 not Jesus. This would be a sign of their faith.
- The fact that their faith was little (vs.20) is hard to harmonize with Jesus’ remark that even a “little “ faith can move a mountain.
- This is obviously a figure of speech in that no one has actually moved a mountain into the sea by faith.
- The challenge for us is when we seem to be following orders but nothing works.

### **3. Sometimes our expectations seem confusing. (17:22-23)**

<sup>22</sup> And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; <sup>23</sup> and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved.

- The crisis of visions is dramatic at this point.
- In this chapter, Jesus taunts the Pharisees and forces their true colors to show. The essence of the chapter is in verse 30 “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”
- The challenge for us is how do we respond to the realization that God’s plans and ours are going in different directions?

### **4. Sometimes the allegiances seem confusing. (17:24-27)**

<sup>24</sup> And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, “Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?” <sup>25</sup> He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their

sons or from strangers?”<sup>26</sup> And upon his saying, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Consequently the sons are exempt.<sup>27</sup> But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for you and Me.”

- The point is that, just as royal sons are exempt from the taxes imposed by their fathers, so too Jesus is exempt from the “temple tax” imposed by his Father.
- In other words Jesus acknowledges the temple tax to be an obligation to God; but since he is uniquely God’s Son, therefore he is exempt (v.26).
- The focus of the story is about who Christ is and, unlike 22:15-22 it says nothing about responsibilities to Caesar.
- The challenge for us is - how far do we go in not giving offense to others?

#### **INSIGHTS AND LESSONS FROM THIS CHAPTER**

- 1. IN THIS LIFE WE WILL NOT SEE EVERYTHING CLEARLY, EVEN WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THIS MEANS THAT WE MUST BE COMFORTABLE WITH NOT HAVING ALL THE ANSWERS TO LIFE’S MANY QUESTIONS.**
- 2. REMAINING TEACHABLE IS VERY IMPORTANT IN FOLLOWING CHRIST. A DISCIPLE IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A STUDENT WHO IS LEARNING.**
- 3. PRIDE OF LIFE COMES FROM FOCUSING ATTENTION ON MANAGING LIFE APART FROM DYNAMIC “FELLOWSHIP” WITH CHRIST.**