

Lesson #18- Matthew Chapter 17 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. Read and discuss the story of the transfiguration in the first thirteen verses of this chapter. What do you think was the greatest lesson Peter, James, and John learned?

Help for Teachers:

These three apostles saw Jesus transfigured so that the description of His appearance is like what John will one day soon see in his Patmos vision (Rev 1:12-16). To add to the intensity of their experience, suddenly two of their most revered (and no longer living among men for hundreds of years) prophets, Moses and Elijah, appear and begin discussing Jesus' imminent death in the city of Jerusalem (see Mark 9 and Luke 9 for parallel records). Remember also that these three were exhausted and had fallen asleep; this was the scene to which they awoke.

Peter goes into a rant about how good it was for them to be there (contrast this with what Jesus was discussing with Moses and Elijah). Peter thinks they should build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

Think about what the tabernacle (from the wilderness experience of the Israelites) represented. The word "tabernacle" means dwelling place. In the exodus experience, God had commanded that the tabernacle be constructed precisely as He directed. In that tabernacle would be the most holy place, where would be the ark of the covenant. God would meet with His people there in a cloud. Now Jesus, who is God, became a man and "tabernacled" (dwelt) among us. There was only one tabernacle in the wilderness, for obvious reasons. There is only one God, and one Savior, Jesus Christ. When the presence of God came into the wilderness tabernacle, a cloud descended and covered it. As Peter began talking, God the Father spoke out of a bright cloud that overshadowed them.

The preeminence of Jesus Christ jumps out from the words of this story. God the Father literally cuts Peter off as he is speaking and commands, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." There are not to be three tabernacles. These heroes of Jewish history are not even to be compared with the majesty of Jesus Christ. Think about what they were discussing before Peter woke up, the death that Jesus was soon to accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses and Elijah were fixated on Jesus and the work that He was about to complete as He sealed their eternity by His blood as He died on the cross. What for them had been a mystery was now becoming evident in Jesus' work (Col 1:26, 1 Tim 3:16, Eph 3:1-9). Jesus was bringing to completion the words of the prophets (Deut. 18:15-19, Mal 4:4-6). Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, was the obvious center of attention for even the Old Testament saints.

Peter came out of the experience with a clear understanding of the preeminence of Jesus Christ. In 2 Peter 1:16-21 he records what he has learned. *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*

Peter, James, and John are eyewitnesses of the excellent glory of Jesus Christ, and Peter testifies that to us. Not even Moses and Elijah are to be compared to God’s beloved Son. Jesus is the “day star” that rises in our hearts. He declared that “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”. Jesus tabernacles with us even now! Moses and Elijah were prophets of the coming King and Savior Jesus Christ. Peter reminds us that they were nothing of themselves, *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”*.

Paul speaks of the preeminence of Christ in Colossians 1:12-23.

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;”

2. In verses 14 through 21 we find the story of another miracle of Jesus where he heals a young man that is demon possessed, and lunatic. Please read the parallel passage in Mark 9:9-29 for greater understanding.
- a. What is the commotion that Jesus and the three disciples encounter when they arrive back down from the mountain?
 - b. The nine disciples involved were chosen by Jesus and had experienced great successes in ministry before this episode. What do you think the conversation these disciples were having with the scribes sounded like and what do you think was going through their mind?
 - c. The father of the demon possessed young man approaches Jesus and explains that he had brought his son for help from Jesus. Jesus obviously was up on the mountain, so the remaining nine apostles had attempted to cast out the demon, unsuccessfully. Jesus tells the man that the answer to his request is tied to his ability to believe, to which the man replies with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." What do you think this means and how does it apply to us?
 - d. When the disciples get Jesus alone, they want to know "Why could not we cast him out?" Discuss Jesus' answer. What does this have to do with a mustard seed and with prayer and fasting?
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- a. Mark records details that Matthew doesn't include. When Jesus and the three disciples return from the mountain, the remaining nine are surrounded by a multitude of people watching as they are being questioned by the scribes. It seems that in the inability of Jesus' disciples to rid the lunatic young man of the devil, the scribes have found occasion to challenge Jesus' followers.
 - b. The scribes seem to be in close alignment with the position of the Pharisees and are continually hostile toward Jesus and intent on discrediting Him. With the Master not in their midst and the disciples incapable of casting the devil out of the young man, they seize a perceived opportunity. No doubt the scribes are even more ecstatic that there is a crowd to witness their victory. The disciples are likely confused and conflicted, unable to produce a good argument to refute the scribe's assault. Some observations: (1) While we are in this world and the Master is "away", it is easy to lose focus. Luke 10:17-20 records the disciple's exuberance over their successes, having been sent out on a mission adventure by Jesus. (2) Not only does Jesus rescue the struggling disciples, but he lovingly and graciously supplies the needs of the father and his demon possessed son (3) The timing of Jesus' return is by no means an accident. God's greatest purpose is His own glory (Isa. 48:9-11 shows the reason for His patience with His stiff-necked people, others:

Ephesians 1:4-6, Isa. 43:6-7, Ps. 106:7-8, Rom. 9:17, Matt 5:16, 1 Pet 2:12, 1 Cor. 10:31, many others). In returning as He did, it was made perfectly evident to all that were present (that thought the scribes were going to prevail) that the power of the disciples was in Jesus Christ alone. His appearance at the critical moment gave them credibility as His witnesses that would otherwise have not been nearly so apparent. Because of Jesus' perfect timing, it is made clear that belief (faith) in Jesus Christ brings glory to God, and the source of faith is God Himself (see below).

- c. The fall of Adam came about when he listened to the lies of Satan and disbelieved God, who had told him that he would surely die the day he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan told him that God was not being honest, and knew that if man ate from that tree, he would become "like God". Adam was not deceived but chose to reject revealed truth. Because we have inherited Adam's nature, we are inherently against God and will not come to faith in God unless God supernaturally changes our nature. It is important to understand that when presented with the gospel, all people make a legitimate choice about faith in Christ and are responsible for the consequences of that choice. Their decision will be based on their nature. So, Paul reminds the Roman believers that salvation is one hundred percent because of the grace of God and His sovereign election. Completely able, and justified if he did, to destroy all humanity, He instead mercifully enables some to respond to the gospel in saving faith which He provides through a new birth (*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according **as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.**"* Rom 12:1-3) Paul establishes this point also with the Ephesian believers (***"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*** Eph 2:8-10) In John chapter three Jesus makes it clear to the learned and religious Nicodemus that without a new birth, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. The father of the demon possessed son was helpless. The disciples were helpless. Even if all that was required was faith, this man became painfully aware that outside of the grace of God, he didn't even have the capacity for that, he was wholly dependent on a merciful Savior. We are also. First for salvation, and thereafter for Godly

living. In Romans chapter 7, Paul expresses frustration over a turmoil that he constantly suffers. Being born again and having a new nature of faith in Jesus Christ, he fights with the nature of the “body of this death” that he is trapped in, a faithless nature of the flesh. As he finishes his discourse, he expresses joy that he will one day be freed from the struggle by the deliverance that Jesus will provide, when this body of death is no more, and we are resurrected with Christ in a changed body, “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil 3:21). *“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”* are the final words of this chapter (although the subject continues in the next chapter). Remember what we just looked at in Romans 12, we are to be transformed *“by the renewing of your mind”*. In Philippians 4:8 Paul writes, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”* The law of sin that resides in our flesh fights against what pleases God (Heb 11:6). Romans 14:23 says, *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: **for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**”*

- d. *“Because of your unbelief:”* is Jesus’ straightforward answer to the disciple’s question of why they could not cast out the devil. God receives glory when we trust Him. We accomplish great things only when we trust Him. Trusting Him excludes any reliance on self. Mixing trust in God with trust in self (or anything else) is asking God to share His glory with another... He will not do it (Isa. 42:8). The heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 did mighty things, greater maybe than the casting out of a devil, but they only were empowered by faith in Jesus Christ. God-given faith was all they had to offer, and God did the impossible through them, to the glory of His name.

3. In verses 22-23 Jesus continues preparing His followers for what is soon to happen. Why does this make them “exceeding sorry”?

Help for Teachers:

The disciples obviously believed that Jesus was the Messiah of promise, *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”*, as Peter declared. What they lacked was understanding of how He would accomplish their salvation. Not until after Jesus’ resurrection did they get, and then because Jesus Himself *“...opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and*

remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45-47). The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was the purpose and mission for which He had come. *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:"* (1 Pet 3:18). Peter (probably vocalizing the position of the group) was determined that he would protect Jesus to the end, even if he had to die in the process (Matt 16:21-23). We should be "exceeding sorry" that our vile actions made it necessary that Jesus should suffer and die, but so thankful, as we also understand that *"with his stripes we are healed"* (Isa 53:5) and *"without shedding of blood is no remission"* (Heb 9:22). Jesus' death is so vital to our life that we are commanded that in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, we are to *"shew the Lord's death till he come"* (1 Cor 11:23-26).

4. The remainder of this chapter tells of a tax official challenging Peter about if Jesus was paying His taxes. Discuss how Jesus responds and His question and reply to Peter.

Help for Teachers:

All commentaries that I looked at agreed that the tribute in question was a voluntary temple tax as established in Exodus 30:13-14, for the purchase of salt and miscellaneous items required in tabernacle service. The amount was to be the same for all Jewish male heads of families above the age of twenty, rich or poor.

When challenged concerning if Jesus, head of this group of disciples, was going to pay the tribute, Peter responded in the affirmative. As Peter entered the house, possibly to speak with Jesus about this very matter, Jesus asked Peter a question, *"of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?"* Peter correctly answered that earthly kings tax strangers, not their own children, to which Jesus responded, *"Then are the children free."* I like the perspective given in Benson Commentary: *"Jesus saith, Then are the children free — From any such demand. The sense is, This tribute is paid for the use of the house of God. But I am the Son of God. Therefore I am free from any obligation of paying this to my own Father. Lest we should offend them — That is, give them occasion to say that I despise the temple and its service, and teach my disciples so to do; go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, &c. — He sends Peter to the lake with a line and a hook, telling him, that in the mouth of the first fish that came up, he should find a stater, (στατηρα) a Grecian piece of money so called, equal to two didrachma, or one shekel of Jewish money, the sum required for himself and Peter; Peter having a family of his own, and the other apostles being the family of Jesus. How illustrious a degree of knowledge and power did our Lord here discover!*

Knowledge penetrating into this animal, though beneath the waters; and power, in directing this very fish to Peter's hook, though he himself was at a distance! How must this have encouraged both Peter and his brethren in a firm dependance on Divine Providence! "Jesus chose to provide this tribute-money by a miracle, either because the disciple who carried the bag was absent, or because he had not as much money as was necessary. Further, he chose to provide it by this particular miracle, rather than any other, because it was of such a kind as to demonstrate that he was the Son of the Great Monarch worshipped in the temple, who rules the universe. Wherefore, in the very manner of his paying this tax, he showed Peter that he was free from all taxes; and at the same time gave his followers this useful lesson, that, in matters which affect their property in a smaller degree, it is better to recede somewhat from their just rights, than, by stubbornly insisting on them, to offend their brethren, or disturb the state."