

## MATTHEW 17:14-27

### COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN

I left off a couple weeks ago in Matthew 17 where Jesus took three of His inner circle to what is known as the Mount of Transfiguration. It was there, on that mountain, that Jesus appeared to them in a state of glorification, along with Moses and Elijah. This appearance/ lesson came on the heels of Peter's revelation of just who Jesus was and Jesus' own declaration of His death in Jerusalem.

There is an old analogy used in preaching circles, which uses the dichotomy of the mountaintop and the valley. The mountaintop represents having conquered some sort of test, trial or just a plain old hard time. When a mountain climber reaches the summit of a mountain, he/she is jubilant, knowing they have accomplished a great feat. They can then go back down the mountain knowing they have conquered a great obstacle. But when they get back down to the bottom of the mountain, they once again find themselves in the valley. This is where "normal/ everyday" life happens.

When climbing a mountain, you eventually get up above the tree line. Once you get above this, life is sparse and hard. This is why you can't live on the mountaintop. You always have to come back down to the valley – below the tree line. It is below the tree line, down in the valley that everything grows and lives. But it is also where we eventually find another test or trial - another mountain to climb, as it were.

The transfiguration was a means to make clear to Jesus' inner circle just who He was in a way to which they had been blinded. They had been walking, talking, eating and conversing with Jesus for the better part of three years by this time. They had become so familiar with Him as a man, teacher and even friend that His greatness and glory was hidden from them. It has been said that, "Familiarity breeds contempt." But it can also breed a dulled sense of who Jesus really is. This can happen to us. As we read our Bibles, go to Bible studies and move within our own Christian communities, we can become so "used to" or "accustomed to" Jesus that we fail to see the greatness of Who He is and What He has done. So by taking some of the disciples up the mountain, Jesus is nudging them closer to a more complete and spiritually encompassing view of His identity.

And as we continue in chapter 17, we find Jesus and His inner circle having come down the mountain from a wonderful experience and revelation, only to be immediately thrown into drama, a battle between good and evil. This is a battle with many moving parts – one where lives are greatly affected by the words and actions of everyday people living life in the valley.

14 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often

falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”

17 Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”

20 So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

- This appears to be a Jewish crowd, so they have undoubtedly made their way back south the region of Galilee.
- The disciples had been given authority to do this in chapter 10, but this demon appears to be tougher than most.
- Not epilepsy. “Moonstruck.” People were familiar with epilepsy at the time. This is a modern attempt to attribute the symptoms to a disease rather than that of the spiritual realm.
- In this section of scripture Jesus issues a warning to the disciples and to us by example that there is nothing automatic about drawing on the power of God and taking it for granted. The power of God and our spiritual gifts are not just some vast reservoir, which we can tap into, willy nilly, whenever we feel the need.
- The power behind miracles lies in faith. In this case, the faith that is missing is not the faith of the one seeking help but that of the would-be miracle workers themselves. The disciples have failed to draw on the power of Jesus in faith. By faith we draw on the power of Jesus’ authority, not on a reservoir of our own faith. Our faith is to be in Jesus and His power. We aren’t to have faith in our faith.
- It doesn’t take a great deal of faith, but just a little faith in the power and authority of Jesus.
- Moving mountains: Was a rabbinic expression used by Paul in 1 Cor. 13:2, which spoke of “feats of an exceptional, extraordinary, or impossible nature.”
- This is promised not to those of great faith, but to those with even a little faith.
- Perverse generation: If the disciples were having issues of faith, then what was to be expected of the rest of that generation?
- “Faith is not a measurable commodity but a relationship, and what achieves results is not a

superior quantity of faith but the unlimited power of God on which faith, any faith can draw.”

22 Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

- The group is now in Galilee for certain. And it is at this time that Jesus reiterates His death. But, He also makes another chilling confession. Not only will He die, but it will also be due to a betrayal. That had to set them back to some degree, but they still didn’t totally understand.

- Verse 23: “And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

- It is as if they stopped hearing once Jesus got to the part about His death. The fact of the resurrection never registered to them. The prediction of His rejection, suffering and death so dominated their thinking that they could not see beyond the death to the vindication and glory.

The next section can seem trivial if we don’t connect it to the rest of the chapter. But it speaks volumes concerning who Jesus is.

24 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?”

25 He said, “Yes.”

And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”

26 Peter said to Him, “From strangers.”

Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. 27 Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.”

- The Temple tax goes back to Exodus 30 and was an annual levy on adult Jewish males, expected to be paid out of patriotic duty. But not everyone paid it. Since Jesus had already shown signs of not accepting some of what went on at the Temple, there were those who honestly didn’t know if they could expect Him to pay.

- The equivalent of what we would call a kiosk was set up in most towns and villages of Israel

where people could pay the tax. It was used to facilitate the upkeep of the Temple.

- Jesus, though a radical in many respects, elected to pay the tax. He was choosing His battles, so to speak. This wasn't a hill to die on, so in order not to offend anyone, He instructed Peter to obtain the tax, which would have been a considerable amount for an itinerant rabbi and His disciples.
- But why did not "have" to pay it? Why was He technically exempt?
- From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?"<sup>26</sup> Peter said to Him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free.
- Jesus elsewhere declared that He was greater than the Temple. He was in fact Lord of the Temple. Therefore place Him as the king in the analogy. And Peter was also exempt because he, as a believer was a son of the king.
- This is Jesus using another daily circumstance to teach Peter just how He was. He is God, Lord of the Temple! And by adoption all believers are sons of God and therefore exempt from the tax. (This is not tithing.)

The flip:

(Faith, frailty in betrayal, adoption as sons of God)

Jesus was able to cast out the demon because of who HE is. The disciples weren't able to accomplish this because in a sense, they had forgotten that. They had become complacent. Later when Jesus goes to Jerusalem and is betrayed and crucified, they, in a sense, forget again. What I mean is that the truth of His glorification and resurrection has gotten lost somewhere in their mainframe.

How quickly our view of Jesus can change when we turn our focus for even a minute. But that is what is so great about our savior.

It is His power and accomplishment that makes us who we are and guarantees our salvation as well as victory in the valley. We don't have to "maintain" our power. We only have to believe, have focus in His vast authority and power! He is the one who ultimately defeats death, Hell and the grave! He is the one who casts out the demons! He is the one who resurrected! We have to hear the whole story and not stop at the part we consider to be negative or the end. (His death – as the disciples did.)

And because of His work we have been adopted. We are no longer slaves to this world. We are

exempt from what the world would like to tax us. Our faith gives us liberty that allows us to not be stumbling blocks. He gives us the power to defer to the weak while knowing that apart from Him we are just as weak.

Jesus is the glorified Son of God who casts out evil, conquered death, which came through betrayal, and as king He has adopted which exempts us from the toll and price of sin! That is our Jesus! Do we see Him that way?