

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
10-11-23

Matthew 17

The Transfiguration – Verses 1-3

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

17:1-3 The Transfiguration was a vision, a brief glimpse of the true glory of the King (16:27-28). This was a special revelation of Jesus' divinity to three of the disciples, and it was God's divine affirmation of everything Jesus had done and was about to do.

17:3 The Transfiguration was a foretaste of heaven; the participants were doing something worth noting—talking together. In God's world, interactions count highly. People are individuals, with minds, hearts, and opinions. People are also part of a wider whole, connected by relationships built on sharing between whole persons. Friendship is the key. Make time and opportunities to talk with others. Good conversations act as training for eternity.

Peter Equates Jesus With Moses And Elijah And Is Rebuked – Verses 4-5

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

17:3-5 Moses and Elijah were the two greatest prophets in the Old Testament. Moses represents the law, or the old covenant. He wrote the Pentateuch, and he predicted the coming of a great prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Elijah represents the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6). Moses' and Elijah's presence with Jesus confirmed Jesus' messianic mission: to fulfill God's law and the words of God's prophets. Just as God's voice in the cloud over Mount Sinai gave authority to his law (Exodus 19:9), God's voice at the Transfiguration gave authority to Jesus' words.

17:4 Peter wanted to build three shelters for these three great men. Peter had the right idea about Christ, but his timing was wrong. Peter wanted to act, but this was a time for worship and adoration. He wanted to memorialize the moment, but he was supposed to learn and move on.

17:5 Jesus is more than just a great leader, a good example, a good influence, or a great prophet. He is the Son of God. When you understand this profound truth, the only adequate response is worship. When you have a correct understanding of Christ, you will obey him.

The Disciples React With A Holy Fear – Verses 6-8

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came

and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

17:6 They fell on their faces and were greatly afraid: They didn’t fall on their faces when they saw Jesus transfigured; not when His face shone like the sun; not when His clothes became as white as the light; not when Moses and Elijah appeared with Him; not when Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus; and not even when the cloud of glory appeared and overshadowed them. But when the disciples heard the voice from heaven, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. “They were in the immediate presence of God and listening to their Father’s voice.

17:8 Arise, and do not be afraid: The disciples were once again uniquely in awe of Jesus. This helps explain the purpose of the Transfiguration: to reassure the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, even if He would indeed be crucified as He had so surprisingly revealed.

The Problem Of Elijah Coming First – Verses 9-13

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”¹⁰ The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”¹¹ Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

17:9 Jesus told Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone what they had seen until after his resurrection because Jesus knew that they didn’t fully understand it and could not explain what they didn’t understand. Their question (17:10-27) revealed their misunderstandings. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but they had much more to learn about the significance of his death and resurrection.

17:10-12 Based on Malachi 4:5-6, the teachers of the Old Testament law believed that Elijah must appear before the Messiah would appear. Jesus referred to John the Baptist, not to the Old Testament prophet Elijah. John the Baptist took on Elijah’s prophetic role, boldly confronting sin and pointing people to God. Malachi had prophesied that a prophet like Elijah would come (Malachi 4:5).

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy – Verses 14-16

¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.¹⁵ “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.¹⁶ I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

17:14-15 Have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic: This particular boy’s epileptic symptoms were demonic in origin (Matthew 17:18), though this certainly could not be said about every case of epileptic symptoms, either then or today. The narrative in Mark 9:14-29 tells us that the boy was made deaf and dumb by this demon.

17:16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him: Sometimes Jesus’ followers fail, but Jesus never does. The man was wise for going straight to Jesus when His followers failed.

Jesus Easily Casts The Demon Out – Verses 17-21

¹⁷ “You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” ¹⁸ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁰ He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” ²¹ Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

17:17-20 The disciples had been unable to drive out this demon, and they asked Jesus why. He said their faith was too small. It is the power of God, plus our faith, that moves mountains. The mustard seed was the smallest particle imaginable. Jesus said that even faith as small or undeveloped as a mustard seed would have been sufficient. Perhaps the disciples had tried to drive out the demon with their own ability rather than God’s. There is great potential in even a little faith when we trust in God’s power to act. If we feel weak or powerless as Christians, we should examine our faith, making sure we are trusting God’s power, not our own ability to produce results.

17:20 Jesus wasn’t condemning the disciples for substandard faith; he was trying to show how important faith would be in their future ministry. If you are facing a problem that seems as big and immovable as a mountain, turn your eyes from the mountain and look to Christ for more faith. Only then will you be able to overcome the obstacles that may stand in your way.

Jesus Predicts His Death A Second Time – Verses 22-23

²² When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. ²³ They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.

17:22-23 Once again Jesus predicted his death (see also 16:21); but more important, he told of his resurrection. Unfortunately, the disciples heard only the first part of Jesus’ words and became discouraged. They couldn’t understand why Jesus wanted to go back to Jerusalem, where he would walk right into trouble.

17:22-23 The disciples didn’t fully comprehend the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection until Pentecost (Acts 2). They didn’t know that Jesus’ death and resurrection would make his kingdom possible. We shouldn’t get upset at ourselves for being unable to understand everything about Jesus. After all, the disciples spent three years with him, saw his miracles, heard his words, and still had difficulty understanding. Despite their questions and doubts, however, they believed. We should do no less.

The Temple Tax – Verses 24-27

²⁴ After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?” ²⁵ “Yes, he does,” he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?” ²⁶ “From others,” Peter answered. “Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. ²⁷ “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the

lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

17:24 All Jewish males had to pay a temple tax to support temple upkeep (Exodus 30:11-16). Tax collectors set up booths to collect these taxes. Only Matthew records this incident—perhaps because he had been a tax collector himself.

17:24-27 Peter answered a question without really knowing the answer, putting Jesus and the disciples in an awkward position. Jesus used this situation, however, to emphasize his kingly role. Just as kings pay no taxes and collect none from their family, Jesus, the King, owed no taxes. But Jesus supplied the tax payment for both himself and Peter rather than offend those who didn't understand his kingship. Although Jesus supplied the tax money, Peter had to go and get it. Ultimately all that we have comes to us from God's supply, but he may want us to be active in the process.

17:24-27 As God's people, we are foreigners on earth because our loyalty is always to our real King—Jesus. Still we have to cooperate with the authorities and be responsible citizens. An ambassador to another country keeps the local laws in order to represent well the one who sent him. We are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). Are you being a good foreign ambassador for him to this world?