

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Twenty
Matthew 16:24-17:27

Day One

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life[h] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

v. 24 – Immediately after He rebuked Peter for his misguided advice, Jesus taught one of the principles most commonly identified with Christianity. Followers of Jesus must pick up their individual cross and follow Him. Thus Jesus was saying that He was not the only One who would die and be raised again; it was to be a common experience shared by *all* His disciples.

v. 25 – **Was Peter’s admonishment of Jesus really a self-protective act? Did Peter not want to die, knowing that if they killed Jesus, His followers would also be in danger?** It seems that this may have been the case based on Jesus’ response. First, He rebuked Satan, then He told His followers that they would have to deny themselves and follow Him. There must have been some self-preserving motivation in what Peter said or Jesus would not have spoken as He did.

Here we have one of the best-known tenets of Christianity that if one wants to save his life he must lose it first for Christ. While the context here is the physical death that Jesus was to face, the implication of losing one’s life has always been more than purely physical. It has always applied to one’s self-life focusing on the will. While martyrs have existed and do exist, the death process is more widely applied to a surrender of one’s personal to the will of God. **Have you denied yourself, picked up your cross and followed Him? What proof is there that you have done so?**

v. 26 – Jesus asked two questions that put what He was saying in perspective. There is no price too costly for a man to save his soul. If a person gains everything the world has to offer, it pales in comparison to a right relationship with God through Jesus. This certainly flies in the face of the success that so many pursue as a means of personal fulfillment and “salvation.” Following Jesus is the only way to eternal life.

v. 27 – Jesus will return to judge all people and will reward them according to their deeds. The “deeds” here are deny self, take up a cross and follow Jesus. Jesus will not come to add up all the good and bad things that someone has done and then send them to

heaven or hell based on the tally. He will judge them according to what they did in regards to following Him after denying self.

v. 28 – This is a misunderstood statement, which many have interpreted to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus. That cannot be possible! **To what was Jesus referring?** He had to be referring to His death and resurrection, since that was the context in which the whole discussion had begun, prior to Peter rebuking Jesus for talking about that topic.

Day Two

17: 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. 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."

v. 1 – I am not sure why Matthew reported how many days it was after this discussion that Jesus went up on the mountain. It could be to indicate that Jesus continued to keep His distance from Galilee. If that's the case, Matthew wanted to establish that these significant events were in no way tied to the religious culture or venues of Judaism. They did not happen in the holy places or among Israel's holy men. They happened where Jesus was. This showed that He was to be the new center of worship, spiritual experience and learning for Israel and the world.

Jesus took only a few of His trusted men with Him up a mountain. **What other significant things happened on a mountain in Jewish history?** The most notable was when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. Now the new Moses was going up another mountain to receive something else from the hand of God. Moses went up the mountain alone, but Jesus went up with others, signifying a new access to God for mankind through Jesus.

v. 2 – Jesus was changed before them all. His face was like the sun and His clothes were white as light. That must have been some sight to see. This reminds me also of Moses, whose face had to be veiled when he came down the mountain. There was and is no veil or shroud around Jesus. His glory and majesty are available for all to see.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord (Exodus 34:33-35).

v. 3 – As if that scene wasn't spectacular enough, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked to Jesus! The epitome of the Old Testament priesthood and prophetic offices came to have a conversation with Son of God. **I wonder what they talked about?** They came to

encourage Jesus on His mission! The disciples beheld two of their Jewish “saints” and “heroes” talking with Jesus, and it was clear from Jesus’ radiance that He was the superior of the three. The disciples saw clear evidence that all Jesus had said was true and also beheld Him being endorsed by heaven and the Old Testament scriptures, as represented by the two emissaries from heaven.

v. 4 – **How did Peter know that the two visitors were Moses and Elijah?** I doubt if they had nametags on and if there were any existing pictures of the two. There was something, however, that made it evident to the disciples that these two before them were the religious icons of Israel! Once again it was Peter who spoke and once again he spoke inappropriate things. Peter’s idea was to erect three shelters, one for each of the three men on the mountain. Peter assumed that Moses and Elijah were staying or that the three would hold a conference on the mountain. **Was Peter still making these three men equal instead of seeing Jesus as supreme? Was Peter trying to hold on to the heavenly visitors by offering them earthly shelter? Was Peter talking when he should simply have been observing?** I think the answer to all three is probably, “yes,” and the real lesson of this transfiguration must wait until the next lesson tomorrow.

Day Three

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" 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. 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."

v. 5 – The words were barely out of Peter’s mouth when the Father spoke from heaven. He endorsed Jesus’ ministry and made it clear that Jesus was and is superior to Moses and Elijah. These Jewish men heard from heaven itself that Jesus was and is the One, the Son of God. **He** is the One to whom the world is to listen and obey.

I picked up the paper this morning and there was a front-page article discussing the fact that many Americans believe there are many ways to God. I think there may be “many ways” to find God but all roads lead to one place and person, and that place or person is Jesus. It is inconceivable that the Father would speak to these men that Jesus is His Son, and then speak to another group outlining another way to Him.

v. 6 – I always chuckle when I hear people seeking the presence of God and then read the reaction of some in the Bible who found His presence – they were terrified! I am not saying you should not seek God’s presence; I am saying you need to realize that it is a serious and awesome thing to find it!

v. 7 – Jesus touched them in their fear and told them not to be afraid. I heard a pastor say once that when God tells you not to fear, it’s already too late! **Of what are you afraid in**

your life? Are you afraid of poverty? Cancer? The future? For your children's safety? If you are afraid, you can get up and move on with your life. God is in control! What happens, happens with His forethought and approval. You can trust Him.

v. 8 – When they obeyed Jesus and got up off the ground, they only saw Jesus. The experience on the mountaintop was over, and they could get on with their lives. No mountaintop experience lasts forever. When it does happen, it happens for a reason. Here it happened so that the disciples would know that Jesus was superior, as He had already indicated, to the Old Testament heroes and system. He was not an equal or someone who could be accepted or ignored. He was heaven's emissary!

v. 9 – Jesus is the Lord of your revelation and Lord of how and to whom you share that revelation. Jesus brought them up to the mountain and then gave them instructions going down the mountain. He is Lord of your ups and downs. The disciples were told not to tell anyone about their experience until after He was raised from the dead. Jesus spoke openly about His death, yet the disciples later acted like His death was news to them. **Have you done the same thing? Have you not heard something because you were afraid or didn't want to know? Has God told you something that you have ignored?** To know that, you will have to ask Him and He must show it to you. But are you ready to hear?

Day Four

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.

v. 10 – This doctrine involving Elijah must have been a critical issue in Israel. I say this because this is the fourth reference to Elijah in Matthew's gospel through 17 chapters. They were asking about the reference to Elijah coming in Malachi 4:5:

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes."

This seems like an odd question at this point in time, except for the fact that they had just seen Elijah on the mountaintop with Moses. That must have created the need to ask once more about Elijah coming immediately before the Messiah.

vs. 11&12 – Jesus assured the disciples that Elijah would come and had already come. Perhaps the disciples were interpreting the teaching to mean that the original Elijah would be resurrected and come before the Messiah was to come. The reference in Malachi, however, did not refer to a literal return of the original Elijah but one equal in impact and effect. The disciples perhaps were expecting a return of the man they had just

seen on the mountaintop with Jesus and Moses. Furthermore, since Elijah's body was taken into heaven at his death (see 2 Kings 2), it would make some sense that the teachers of the law and disciples assumed that Elijah would return in bodily form.

Jesus had already alluded to the fact that John the Baptist was the Elijah-like prophet referenced in Malachi (see Matthew 11:14). **I wonder why the disciples didn't understand that the first time He told them?** Perhaps they were still confused, assuming that the real Elijah was going to come as they had just seen him appear on the mountain.

Jesus used the question as a means to return to their discussion that had started in the previous chapter. Then He was telling them that He would die and come back to life, but interrupted His teaching to take them up on the mountain. Now He returned to the death and resurrection teaching to remind them of what He had been saying before they had gone mountain climbing.

v. 13 – The disciples then understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist. They were finally clear on that teaching, but **were they clear on the death and resurrection teaching?** Obviously they were not or else they would have acted and reacted differently when those events eventually took place.

It took the time from the first mention of the Elijah connection to John the Baptist in Matthew 11 until now to understand what Jesus meant, and that only came after more explanation and their mountaintop experience. This is why we need continually to seek the Lord, for some things only make sense after time and experience allow us to see more clearly. **What questions are you asking the Lord to help you understand what He has already said?**

The beauty of the disciples' question about Elijah and John is that Jesus had already taught on the subject. Yet they were humble enough to ask a question, admitting that they didn't know. Perhaps they should have known but they did not. It is also beautiful to see Jesus' patience as He handled their questions. It seems that Jesus had great patience for everything except when the disciples exhibited lack of faith. Then He rebuked them, but at this point He patiently answered all their questions. So again I ask: **What questions are you asking the Lord? What do you want to know or clarify? Do you have a journal to record your questions and His answers?**

Day Five

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 "O 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 from that moment.

v. 14 -- Jesus had left the crowd to go have His mountaintop experience with the Father, Moses and Elijah. **How diligent are you to leave the busy-ness of your day or world to go have your own time with God in a place where He can be found?** As soon as Jesus came down, however, He was face-to-face again with the needs of people. A man approached Jesus and knelt down, just as the Canaanite woman had done in Matthew 15. This man assumed the proper posture before Jesus, which is more than the Pharisees or leaders ever did.

He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34).

Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor (Proverbs 18:12).

Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

vs. 15&16 – This man had a son who suffered seizures that violently threw him into fire and water. Here we see a father making intercession for his son. **For whom are you interceding?** The father had brought the boy to Jesus' disciples while He was on the mountain but the disciples could not help the man or his son. **How often have people come to the Church of Jesus' disciples and received no help?** Too often, however, they become discouraged or disillusioned and don't press through to find the Lord for themselves. While it is tragic that they cannot find help in the Church, we must encourage people not to give up when we fail them, because Jesus will never fail them!

v. 17 – Jesus had exhibited great patience when the disciples questioned Him about John and Elijah, but now He sounded downright aggravated! It seems like He expected His disciples to be able to do something that they would or could not. **Why was Jesus so provoked?** It was because of unbelief! Jesus could deal with ignorance, but He did not accept unbelief. **What would Jesus say to the Church today? What would He say to you and me? Do we have faith that produces results?**

Yet Jesus addressed not just His disciples, but rather the entire generation of His contemporaries. It seems that none had faith – not the father, the crowds or the disciples. This boy had suffered not just on that day but rather for his entire young life and there was no one to help him! Jesus was not happy with that situation. **Once again I ask, what would He say to the Church today? What would He say to you?**

Yet Jesus did not abandon the boy or his father. He directed that the boy be brought to Him. That is a good thing! **Who do you know that you can take to Jesus today?**

v. 18 – The boy had a demon, which Jesus rebuked and the boy was healed! Some have drawn the conclusion from this that all epileptic seizures are demonically inspired. Others have concluded that this was an isolated case and that epilepsy can only be treated medically. I think both groups are wrong. I can see that some brain damage could

necessitate medical and drug treatments. I can also see that some epilepsy is a demon and needs to be cast out. **What do you think?**

Day Six

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. I tell you the truth, 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." 22 When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed 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.

v. 19 – I admire the disciples’ response. Too often spiritual people put a spin on their failures, including me. We have attitudes like, “If only one person was helped, it was all worth it!” If only one person was helped, then it was probably an ill-conceived program in the first place. The disciples acknowledged their failure. Oh how I wish that everyone, especially our leaders, could do the same. **Is there any failure of which you need to take ownership? Do you need to ask the Lord, “Why couldn’t I?” or “Why couldn’t we?”**

v. 20 – The disciples were included in Jesus’ sweeping condemnation for a general lack of faith in their generation. The answer to why they failed was in their lack of faith. They had faith smaller than a mustard seed, which is the size of a pencil-point mark on a piece of paper. Faith that small can move mountains, figuratively speaking. In other words, even small faith can do great things.

Jesus said these words, “Nothing will be impossible for you” with mustard-seed-sized faith. No wonder Jesus was upset. They had access to the most powerful force available to man – faith in God – and they were not using it! Let’s look at those words; “nothing will be impossible.” That is a fantastic statement! More than that, it’s a stupendous reality! Yet that faith isn’t exercised to do spectacular things that will draw the attention of a crowd (remember that Jesus had rejected the temptation to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple). This faith was rather to be used to heal a young boy who had epilepsy.

What have you done with your mustard-seed faith? How and where have you applied it? What results do you have to show for it?

v. 21 – The NIV version does not include this verse, which states in other translations, “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” Consequently, we will skip this verse, except to say that it would require some additional spiritual discernment to know that this epilepsy was demonic and not medical. Fasting and prayer can give you that kind of insight.

vs. 22&23 – Jesus moved on from there physically and moved back to a topic He had raised in Caesarea Philippi: He was going to die at the hands of sinful men. So Jesus told them when they were on their retreat, He mentioned it to the three as they were coming down the Mount of Transfiguration and now He taught them about His death one more time. I had never considered how often Jesus told them about this, which made their unbelief all the more remarkable when the event finally occurred. That generation really did have little faith! The disciples were products of their Jewish culture and that particular generation had a culture of works but not faith.

You and I are the product of our culture as well. It is a difficult thing to step back, observe your culture objectively and then adjust your behavior to the new culture of the kingdom of God. **Where is your culture in conflict or working against the culture of God's kingdom?** The disciples were filled with grief at Jesus' words about His death. They were sad to hear it and had little faith that would enable them to deal with it appropriately or expect a positive outcome.

Day Seven

24 After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma 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 sons or from others?" 26 "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. 27 "But so that we may not offend them, 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."

v. 24 – This tax was a two-drachma assessment (about two days wages) on every Jew to help maintain the Temple in Jerusalem as commanded by Lord through Moses:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord (Exodus 30:12-14).

The tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid the tax, which was actually redemption money for every person over 20 years of age. Remember, Matthew was writing to Jews, so this question and the answer would be of interest to everyone who was reading.

v. 25 – Peter answered that Jesus did pay this tax and his answer made sense, since Jesus had given every indication that He did uphold all the Law as a good Jew. Yet when Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. He asked Peter a question about whether or not sons of royalty paid the taxes that the king established.

v. 26 – Peter correctly answered that the sons of royalty did not pay taxes. Jesus implied that He was such a Son, a Prince in fact, and that He was exempt from such a tax. Jesus had no need to pay any redemption; He had come to redeem man from the need for such a tax.

v. 27 – Jesus was not going to press the point beyond the lesson to Peter. So then He instructed Peter to go throw in a line, take out a fish, look in its mouth, find a four-drachma coin and take it pay the tax for both Jesus and Peter. Wow! There is so much to see in this story and all of it indicted that Jesus was and is the Son of God.

1. Jesus knew what Peter had been talking about before Peter told Him.
2. Jesus knew that He was a Son exempt from the tax.
3. Jesus was gracious and did not want to offend the tax collectors by refusing to pay.
4. Jesus had mastery over the fish in the sea.
5. Jesus was generous and paid the tax for both Peter and Himself.

Can you see any other lessons to be learned from this story?