

# Matthew 17:14-21

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Date: 24 July 2022

[0:00] Let's go into the book of Matthew, Matthew chapter 17. Matthew chapter 17, just continuing to make our way through the book of Matthew. Matthew 17 this morning will be in verses 14 through 21.

Matthew 17, verses 14 through 21. We will read our text and then we will get it in its proper context and hopefully we'll come to a greater understanding of it.

If you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm asking if you'll join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God. Record it for us in Matthew 17, starting in verse 14, reading down to verse 21 and then we will pray.

When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before him and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic or epileptic and is very ill, for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

I brought him to your disciples and they could not cure him. And Jesus answered and said, You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?

[1:01] Bring him here to me. And Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not drive it out?

And he said to them, Because of the littleness of your faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible to you.

But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this day which you have given us. We thank you for the opportunity which we have had to worship you in song.

Lord, we thank you for the opportunity we have had of fellowship. And now, Lord, we rejoice in the reading of your word. We pray as we have come to the time of the reading and study of your word, Lord, that you would speak to our hearts.

We pray that your word would penetrate our distractions, that it would captivate us to the very depth of our being and it would show us who you are. Lord, may the revelation of who you are be a greater revelation of who we are in light of you.

[2:07] We ask that you would have your way among us and we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Matthew 17, verses 14 through 21 naturally follows the events which are recorded in the very first 13 verses of this chapter.

If you were here last Sunday or maybe you went back and listened to it or maybe you just know your scripture well enough and this is all good, you would know that the events which transpired in Matthew 17, verses 1 through 13 are often referred to as the Mount of Transfiguration.

It is when Jesus calls with him Peter, James, and John and they go up onto a very high mountain. We really don't know which mountain it was and it really doesn't matter. They went up onto the mountain and upon that mountain Jesus was transfigured or changed from the inside out in front of them.

His glory began to radiate from within him and they began to see him as he truly is and Moses and Elijah appeared there and Peter began to say, well, let's build three tabernacles and God interrupted him with the glory of the cloud that overshadowed them and they were speaking to him about the departure he was about to accomplish.

We've looked at all these things and it's this wonderful event of how God is strengthening the faith of Peter, James, and John. Last week when we gathered together we saw how instrumental these three were in the establishment of the early church and how Jesus wasn't showing favoritism but Jesus was intentionally doing something to a small group of them so that it would be the benefit for

the large body of them, right?

[ 3 : 40 ] That these three needed to be strengthened. James would be the first of the apostles to die, being beheaded, not to be martyred. We don't want to say die because Judas Iscariot died first but he died of his own hands and in his own sin.

James would be the first of the apostles. We know Stephen is the first martyr but James is the first of the apostles. Peter is the key that literally unlocks the door to the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Samaritans and all around the world.

John writes more of the New Testament than any other author. We see these things and Jesus is encouraging their faith on the mount in which he has transfigured before them.

We were really in a mountaintop experience last week seeing the glory of Christ resonate from within him but as is often the case mountaintop experiences are always followed with valley trouble. And I want you to see this morning the discoveries in the valley of need because we don't stay on the mountaintops long. Someone once said and I wish that I could remember who it was so that I could give them credit that God whispers to us on the mountaintop.

[ 4 : 54 ] He speaks to us in our joys but he shouts to us in our pain. That the mountaintops are great but it is not in the mountaintops that we see the greatest of who he is.

It is in the valley quite often that we see the greatest revelations. The mountaintops strengthen our faith for sure. They embolden us to move forward.

They encourage us to face what lies ahead in the valley but we don't spend much time on the mountaintops. The majority of man's time is spent in the valley and it is there where there is a place of need and it is there that we discover things not only about Christ we discover much about him on the mountaintops but we discover much about ourselves in the valley.

And some of the gracious acts of God one of the most merciful things that he could ever do is to meet us in the valley and show us who we are so that in showing us who we are we understand what we need.

And in understanding what we need we know that he is the only one we can turn to. One great expositor of scripture was asked said if you were given an hour to share the gospel with one individual how would you share that gospel?

[ 6 : 15 ] He said I would take 50 minutes expounding the law that is the Old Testament and for 50 minutes I would talk of the law and the commandments of God and the requirements of God and the holiness of God and then in the last 10 minutes I would point to the cross.

Someone asked him why would you do that? He said because until man knows who he is in light of who God is and he never knows the wonder of the cross until he knows the price that was paid met every requirement which God stated see those things are there the valley of the law is there to show us the glory of Mount Calvary and we see these things in these verses the discoveries in the valley of need.

Number one we see that there is a diminished faith. There is a diminished faith. As is often the case with the events recorded for us in Matthew it is very becoming of us to go to Mark and Luke and read the other synoptic gospels to get a fuller picture of these things and Mark is one of the most concise book of scripture that you will ever read.

Mark is a very quick and to the point gospel. Mark his favorite word is immediately or straight way or right away or straight forth depending on which translation you read New American Standard uses immediately and he uses the word immediately over and over and over and over again and Mark does that intentionally because Mark is writing to a people of you know just very short short attention spans.

He's writing to Greeks who are used to action right the Greek gods and all the stories of the Greek gods so Mark writes to them of a god of action who is constantly moving and immediately doing something but it's amazing in this account Mark spends more time describing what happens here in the valley than any other gospel author.

[ 8 : 05 ] It's recorded for us in Mark chapter 9. We're not going to turn there but that will be your reference so we understand this. Matthew tells us in the 14th verse that when they came down they came up to a crowd.

Now our mind ought to be piqued here because we need to understand exactly which crowd were they coming to. Jesus had three of the apostles with him. Now there are 12 apostles.

You understand that. So if he took three he left behind nine. Now we don't call nine a crowd unless we're really wanting to call it a crowd, right? So we know that he left nine behind but Matthew tells us that when he comes down from the mountain with the three they come up to a crowd. So we all of a sudden want to know exactly who this crowd is. Mark tells us who this crowd is. Mark says that the nine disciples the nine apostles were gathered together and a man came up and a crowd started forming around him and all of a sudden the scribes were arguing with him. That's Mark 9 verse 14. Jesus comes down and he walks up to the crowd and we'll kind of recapitulate the whole story here and kind of get a view of it and it helps us to understand this diminished faith.

[ 9 : 11 ] We gather from the synoptics that what happened is the nine were waiting on Jesus. Now we can't imagine what it would be like to be one of the three but can you imagine what it would be like to be one of the nine? What if you were one who were left behind?

Now Peter, James and John are in that inner circle and while we understand that Jesus doesn't show favoritism I'm sure if I'm one of the nine in my mind what is going on is I bet there's some cool stuff going on up there.

Because anytime you get an opportunity to get closer to Christ amazing things happen. Now we're not told and we don't want to put them in a disparaging light that they were grumbling and complaining but we are told this that when the nine were waiting a man showed up and the man showed up with a problem and the problem was his child the problem was his boy you say well I got one of those no he had a problem with a boy who was an epileptic or in the New American standards referred to as a lunatic in which this condition is attributed to demon possession right? Demonic possession and this boy had a problem so the father shows up evidently he had heard where Christ was at which by the way is a very common occurrence all throughout the gospels anytime Jesus tries to withdraw the crowd's always here and they always go so the nine are left behind the three and Jesus are up on the mountaintop and they're up there in this meeting for a few days and the nine are there and the father shows up with the son and he has a request make him better now you need to understand in reading this account that in Matthew chapter 10 Matthew chapter 10 verse 1 this is why this is important because in reading it we would say well of course they couldn't help but the problem is no of course they could help because in Matthew chapter 10 the Bible tells us that Jesus called his apostles to himself the twelve which included the nine that are still down in the valley right?

He called the twelve to them and he empowered them to cast out demons pay attention to that Jesus called the twelve to him and he gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick and he sent them out as the commissioning of the twelve and they became very popular for this people began to hear about it this is why the rumor began it was John the Baptist resurrected as he come back to life because everywhere they went they were doing these miraculous things and when you read the account in Matthew 10 it says everywhere they went people kept hearing about Jesus where they were hearing about Jesus based on what his apostles were doing in his name and part of that was casting out demons and healing the sick so they had been given the authority and the power to do it and now a man with a need shows up and look at it my friend they can't do it they can't do it all of a sudden when the world shows up with a need that the people of God should be able to meet they're helpless because the reality is

[ 12 : 23 ] Christ had entrusted his people with the authority and the power to do this very thing yet when someone needed them to do it they were unable to do it they could not cast it out and this is why we see one of the first things we find in the valley is diminished faith this is not the faith of the world this is diminished faith of the people of God because they were probably so concerned about where they were not as opposed to where they were while God had not called them onto the mountain with Jesus he had left them in the valley for a father while he had not called them up here to have a meeting with Jesus Moses and Elijah he had left them in the valley where a father would show up with a desperate need friends sometimes we get so bent out of shape about where Jesus isn't leading us we forget where he's left us and we get so bent out of shape about where he's left us the longer we sit there and sulk in the reality of where he's left us when somebody shows up to us where he has left us and he knows all things by the way and he has left us there for those people who are coming to us while we are there we are unable to help the people he brings to us where he's left us to be his people because we wish we were somewhere else that's just one of the realities and what happened is faith in the people of God begins to diminish to the point that they

are of no use to the people that God brings before them it's hard to hear and it's hard to swallow but it's a reality that we see in the text those nine apostles were of no benefit whatsoever to the father but he desperately needed them to be and they should have been able to do it you say well how do I remedy that how do I fix that well the good news is scripture is clear not only is it clear in the weaknesses of man it is also clear in the questions that man asks we must be very thankful for the reality that all throughout scripture we have man asking questions and God giving answers

I love Thomas by the way while I do not have the spirit of the apostle Thomas I have more of the spirit of the apostle Peter right I'd rather walk on water and sink and cut Malchus' ear off and mess up and say things when I shouldn't say things and that's just who I am but I love the apostle Thomas and the reason I love the apostle Thomas is because if doubting Thomas had not asked the questions he had not asked we would not have had the answers he got if doubting Thomas had not said Lord we don't know the way then we would not have ever had the answer I am the way the truth and the life don't ever forget the reality that some of the great biblical truths that we hold on to are a result of someone else's doubt someone else's struggle but here we have the apostles and it says and when they had got to a quiet place or place away they asked the question why could we not cast it out and that's what we're all wanting to know because they should have been able to do it why could we not cast it out and Jesus says because of the littleness of your faith littleness of your faith now listen friend you don't have to have mega faith because then he goes on to say if you had had faith as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain be moved and it would be moved because nothing would be impossible for you you say well then I'm going to have this small mustard seed faith and that mountain is going to move well that is while it could literally happen it's also just a physical illustration of the impossibilities which God can overcome as a result of very small faith so they didn't even have mustard seed faith at this time and yet they're walking around with Christ literally now Matthew 17 verse 21 now I don't want you to get bent out of shape with me on this so don't get bent out of shape with me on this but Matthew 17 verse 21 is probably in all likelihood a scribal addition to the original text in the oldest manuscripts that verse is not recorded there some of you have translations in which it is there and it is bracketed in some of you may have a translation that verse 21 is not even there it goes from 20 to 22 and you're scratching your head going I don't have that verse well more than likely it is a scribal addition and the reason it's more than likely a scribal addition is scribes being used of God over the years to copy and copy and copy wanting to make sure that the gospels are the same and you say well wait a minute I thought the word of God was authoritative friend listen to me God's in control of even the scribes right so just stay with me in this and they were trying to not necessarily fill in the gaps but just cohere it again with Mark's version now Mark says this kind only comes out through prayer more than likely this is added a little bit later in translation and the word fasting is added to that this is why I'm just going to stop and get real deep with you here so you don't get mad at me and get upset at me this is why we study the word of God okay I believe that the word of God is accurate infallible it is truest of true it is real of real it is perfect in its original language that's just what

I believe when the Bible was originally written it was written in Hebrew in the Old Testament in Greek in the New Testament throughout the years man's hand has been on it translating it for us to give us the best interpretation and translation of that and sometimes throughout history scribes have sought to add to it does that mean that God is not preserving his word no that's not what that means at all God is preserving his word because there is nothing that contradicts itself in scripture nothing scripture is not in any way wrong or false or anything as I'm saying all this for this purpose listen Matthew as the word prayer and fasting Mark in its original which is in the original says through prayer because we can't base a theology upon that one word fasting there and this is the danger in that if we read Matthew 17 verse 21 we say well if I fast then that fast becomes a key to me casting out demons now that's scary because that means I can do something which gives me authority and I'm basing upon this fasting and I'm fasting for it listen

Christ calls us to fast for our own personal benefit right the key to increasing faith is prayer the key to the whole subject of how do we guard from diminishing faith is prayer fasting is a work which he may lead us to do and at times we lay aside the necessities of the body such as food and we focus more on him but prayer is a requirement for our own benefit it is communion with God it is not a work it is communion with the father it's constantly how do we seek and guard ourselves from diminishing faith which renders us useless disciplined prayer disciplined prayer we understand that number two by the way the next three will be very quick because the striking thing we find in the

valley of need is the diminished faith of the apostles and it's really as a result of a lack of prayer by the way that's a theme we see in the garden of

[ 19 : 48 ] Gethsemane they tell them to watch and pray lest they fall and they fall asleep right prayer prayer prayer prayer prayer prayer number two we see a doubting multitude these things connect by the way the diminished faith of the apostles the nine apostles leads to the doubts of the multitude again Mark tells us that the scribes are arguing with the apostles and the reason the scribes are arguing with the apostles is because they claim to have such authority yet they cannot back up that claim by actually putting it on display they should have been able to do it and yet they are not able to do it so now the scribes which all are already opposing Christ and his teaching now have a little bit more ammunition to argue with the apostles about because if they are unable to do it it means that the one they are following is unable to entrust them with the power and the authority to do it and it undercuts the authority of Christ now all of a sudden the crowds have a reason to doubt so we put this together the diminished faith of the people of God leads to a growing doubt among the multitudes of his opponents when the people of God cannot do what God has commanded them to do and empowered them to do where he has left them to do it then the multitudes all of a sudden are emboldened in their doubts and in their arguments much of the arguments against the reality of Christ and the reality of God is based upon the inefficiency of the people of God much agnosticism and even atheism is based upon the realities of what people see present in us not what they see present anywhere else because let's face it we are the only display of his authority and power we are the only billboard that the world has to read as to the truthfulness of scripture and if these things cannot make us love the unlovable care for the needy provide for the the helpless and homeless and hopeless if these things cannot change the way we live our life by committing to them once a week twice a week three times a week adhering to them and professing them if as self-proclaimed people of God it makes no difference in our life then it gives them more fuel for their arguments the only testimony we have to the reality of these events is the very life which we live and if they come to us in their greatest moment of need and we are useless to them and we are of no benefit whatsoever even though we are present among them all of a sudden their doubts begin to arise much harm has been done to the multitudes because of the ineffectiveness of the church throughout the ages not because of the inability of God sometime many many many years ago again I can't remember

I'm so terrible with names even names before me let alone names in the past one of the great saints of God was traveling abroad and he came to this great ornate church and this church was built and constructed in the most impoverished area this church was beautiful in construction decorated beautifully inside and out this church was really a masterpiece of display of the craftsmanship and surely the congregation wanted this church and the parishioners and even the pastor was longing to this church to be a representative of God in that place of poverty and hopelessness and this great saint of God walked up to the church and the pastor of that church showed him around the building and he looked at the pastor looked at that man and said no longer can the church say silver and gold we have not remember

Peter and John heading up to the temple and the man was begging alms he said silver and gold we have not so the pastor said no longer can the church say silver and gold we have not and the great saint of God looked at the pastor and said yes but no longer can the church also say in the name of Jesus get up and walk that while you may be able to put your silver and gold on display you're not putting his authority on display see the world really doesn't care how good we look the world only cares what we can do and we see the doubts that arise when the church looks good but is powerless we see the doubting multitude third in this valley of need we see a desperate father we've already met him he comes to people who should help because he's got a problem his son is really in a dire condition it tells us in Matthew that as soon as Jesus comes down he runs up to Jesus and falls at his feet in desperation he brought his need to the people of God and now he's going to bring it to God in the flesh himself this desperate father who could not find his need met here runs to the one that he hopes can meet it he says Lord help me he's really in a place of desperation as a matter of fact again Mark records for us he says if you can and Jesus kind of rebukes him he says if you can anything is possible to those who believe and the father in his desperation cries out and says I do believe Lord help my unbelief so he acknowledges his own little faith and says I need more faith so Lord help my little faith and he comes to him in desperation he says I don't know what else to do there's nothing else that I can do there's no other place that I

