

The Transfiguration: A Glimpse of Glory (Matthew 17:1-8)

Jesus had just spoken about His coming suffering and death, but He also promised that some of His disciples would see Him in His kingdom before they died (Matthew 16:28). This statement found its partial fulfillment six days later when He took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain, most likely Mount Hermon, and was transfigured before them.

His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became dazzling white. This was not just a bright light—it was Jesus revealing His divine glory, the radiance of His kingdom. Moses and Elijah appeared, talking with Him. Moses represented the Law, and Elijah represented the prophets, both testifying to Jesus as their fulfillment. They were discussing His impending death in Jerusalem, highlighting that His suffering was part of God's redemptive plan (Luke 9:31).

Peter, overwhelmed by the moment, blurted out, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Matthew 17:4). He wanted to prolong the experience, but he misunderstood the significance of what was happening. This moment was not about preserving the past but about moving forward toward the cross.

Then, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from heaven declared, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* (Matthew 17:5). When the disciples fell on their faces in fear, Jesus gently touched them and said, *“Arise, and do not be afraid”* (Matthew 17:7). When they looked up, they saw only Jesus.

Personal Application

- Like Peter, we sometimes try to hold onto spiritual mountaintop experiences instead of allowing them to prepare us for the challenges ahead.
- God’s voice commands us to listen to Jesus above all else. There is wisdom in the Law and prophets, but Jesus is the final revelation of God.
- Fear can paralyze us, but Jesus invites us to rise and follow Him with confidence.

Elijah Has Already Come (Matthew 17:9-13)

As they descended the mountain, Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until after His resurrection. The disciples, still struggling to understand, asked about the prophecy that Elijah must come before the Messiah. Jesus confirmed that Elijah would indeed come in the future to restore all things (Malachi 4:5-6), but He also pointed out that Elijah had already come in the form of John the Baptist. However, just as John was rejected and executed, Jesus Himself would also suffer.

Personal Application

- We often struggle to understand God's plans when they don't unfold the way we expect. The disciples expected Elijah in a literal sense but missed the fulfillment in John the Baptist.
- Jesus reminds us that suffering is part of the journey. If John suffered for proclaiming the kingdom and Jesus Himself would suffer, we should not be surprised when we face opposition.

Healing the Demon-Possessed Boy (Matthew 17:14-21)

When Jesus and the three disciples returned to the crowd, they were met by a desperate father whose son was suffering from severe demonic oppression. The demon often caused the boy to convulse, throwing him into fire or water. The father had already asked the other disciples to help, but they were unable to cast out the demon.

Jesus expressed frustration at their lack of faith, saying, *"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?"* (Matthew 17:17). He rebuked the demon, and the boy was instantly healed.

Later, the disciples asked why they were unable to cast out the demon. Jesus replied, *"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. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"* (Matthew 17:20-21).

Personal Application

- Even as followers of Christ, we sometimes lack faith. We must nurture our trust in God through the reading of God's Word, prayer and fasting, and deepening our reliance on Him.
- The father's plea, *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief"* (Mark 9:24), is a prayer we should adopt when our faith wavers.
- Spiritual battles require spiritual preparation. Some victories only come through dedicated prayer and fasting.

Jesus Foretells His Death Again (Matthew 17:22-23)

While they were in Galilee, Jesus again warned the disciples that He would be betrayed and killed, but on the third day, He would rise again. The disciples were deeply distressed, struggling to comprehend that their Messiah would suffer and die.

Personal Application

- Even when Jesus clearly reveals His plans, we can struggle to accept them, especially if they involve suffering.
- We should not allow sorrow to overshadow the hope of resurrection. Jesus' death was not the end—His resurrection changed everything.

The Temple Tax and God's Provision (Matthew 17:24-27)

When they arrived in Capernaum, tax collectors asked Peter whether Jesus paid the temple tax. Peter said yes, but before he could even mention it to Jesus, Jesus brought it up. He asked Peter, "From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter answered, "From strangers." Jesus replied, "Then the sons are free" (Matthew 17:26).

Jesus, as the Son of God, was not obligated to pay the temple tax, yet He chose to do so "lest we offend them." He instructed Peter to go fishing, and the first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth, enough to pay for both of them.

Personal Application

- Even though Jesus was exempt, He willingly paid the tax to avoid unnecessary conflict. We, too, should be willing to humble ourselves rather than insist on our rights.
- God provides in unexpected ways. Just as Peter found a coin in a fish's mouth, we can trust God to supply our needs in ways we may not anticipate.
- As followers of Christ, we are children of the King. While we live in this world, we should act with wisdom and grace, maintaining a testimony that does not hinder others from coming to Jesus.

Conclusion: Learning from the Mountain and the Valley

Matthew 17 is a powerful reminder that following Jesus involves both mountaintop experiences and valley struggles. The disciples saw His divine glory, but they also witnessed their own weaknesses. Jesus pointed them to the cross, but they struggled to understand. He reminded them that faith, even the size of a mustard seed, can move mountains, but it must be cultivated through prayer and fasting.

Key Takeaways:

1. Keep your eyes on Jesus. The Father's command was, "Hear Him!" We must listen to Christ above all voices.
2. Don't let fear silence your faith. When the disciples were terrified, Jesus reassured them: "Arise, and do not be afraid."
3. Faith must be nurtured. Some breakthroughs require deeper commitment to prayer and fasting.
4. Live humbly and wisely. Like Jesus paying the temple tax, sometimes it's better to yield than to create unnecessary division.
5. Trust in God's provision. He supplied the temple tax through a fish—He will supply your needs in His own way and time.

Following Jesus means embracing both the glory of His presence and the challenges of the journey. Through it all, He walks with us, calling us to deeper faith and obedience.