

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Matthew
(Lesson SB-MT17B)

A Boy is Healed (17:14-21)

Mark's parallel account in 9:14-29 provides more detail. When Jesus, Peter, James and John returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, a crowd had evidently gathered around the other nine apostles. A man with a demon possessed son had sought healing help from the nine. They had not been able to cast out the demon. Note the following points of observation:

- The Greek word for "knelt" is used only four times in the NT (Matt 17:14; 27:29; Mk 1:40; 10:17) and has no overtones of worship. It simply suggests humility and entreaty.
- It is presumed that the disciples who were unable to heal him were the nine who were left behind when Jesus took Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration.
- The disciple's failure is a recurring theme throughout this section (14:16-21, 26-27, 28-31; 15:16, 23, 33; 16:5, 22; 17:4, 10-11).
 - 14:16-21 – the feeding of the five thousand and the disciples failure to trust the Lord to provide (i.e. the five loaves and the two fishes)
 - 14:26-27 – Jesus walks on the water and the disciples fear a ghost
 - 14:28-31 – Peter tries to walk on the water
 - 15:16 – Jesus is forced to explain His statement that it isn't what goes into the mouth, but what proceeds from the mouth that defiles a man to his disciples because of the disciples lack of understanding
 - 15:23 – the disciples urge Jesus to send the Canaanite woman away instead of dealing with the situation as they had been commissioned in Matthew 10
 - 15:33 – the disciples fail to recognize Jesus as the source of the provision of the needs of the four thousand after the feeding of the five thousand had already occurred
 - 16:5 – the disciples forget to adequately prepare with food
 - 16:22 – Peter thinks he can prevent the Lord's Own prophecy regarding his manner of death from being fulfilled
 - 17:4 – Peter desires to construct a tabernacle in order to perpetuate the Transfiguration event
 - 17:10-11 – Jesus must explain the coming of Elijah that will precede His Coming in response to the disciples failure to understand the OT prophets
- Jesus had clearly given the disciples (apostles to Israel) the power to heal and cast out demons (10:1, 8)
- The failure of the disciples to exercise this authority and perform kingdom miracles was related to their own walk of faith.
- Jesus reinforces this principle in verse 20.
- Jesus' comments were directed to His disciples (not the Church Age believer) and must be understood in view of His commissioning of them in Matthew 10
- One of Matthew's themes: The contrast between the glory of the Transfiguration and Jesus' disciples' unbelief is part of the mounting tension that magnifies Jesus' uniqueness as he moves closer to his passion and resurrection.
- This theme of Matthew is emphasized by his omission of the statement made by the father of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9:23-24.

In verse 17, the juxtaposition of "perverse" with "faithless" or "unbelieving" implies that the failure to believe stems from failure to recognize the truth, not from a lack of evidence, but from a willful neglect of the evidence. The Greek word for "generation" is *genea* and in this context it refers to the "sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time." [See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 154]. Therefore, this word refers to the Jews first as the recipients of the

offer of the kingdom and then to the Gentiles who also had the opportunity to accept Jesus as the Messiah of Israel (e.g. the Canaanite woman in 15:21-28 and the Roman centurion in 8:8-12).

In verse 20, Jesus says that it is because of the disciples' unbelief (actually – "little faith" in terms of quality in contrast to faith as a grain of mustard seed) that they were not able to cast out the demon. The disciples did have some faith for they had expected to be able to exorcise the demon, but they were unsuccessful. However, they were treating the authority that had been given to them like a gift of magic. In contrast to their understanding, Jesus tells them that a life bathed in prayer (even fasting to give time for more prayer) was needed (see verse 21).

Removal of mountains was proverbial for overcoming great difficulties (e.g. Is 40:4; 49:11; 54:10). In this context, Jesus is referring to the accomplishment of the works of the kingdom for which they had been given authority (Matt 10). There is a similarity between the power available to the Church Age believer (e.g. Phil 4:13) and that which was available to the apostles to Israel; however, the focus of that power is different, i.e. witnessing to Gentile and Jew alike for the former verses to the Jew first for the latter. Jesus is in effect telling his disciples that what they need is not giant faith, but a faith derived from personal trust.

Question for personal application: In your own personal ministry to others, can you say with Paul that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you? Or do you find yourself discouraged by adversity, distracted by self-centered thinking, and without focus in your spiritual life? God has given each CA believer a spiritual gift and places the *yielded* believer in a ministry with that gift. Have you learned to tap into the spiritual power that is available to you as a Church Age believer? (See 1 Cor 1:4-9; 2 Cor 1:3-7; Eph 1:3-23; Phil 1:3-11; Col 1:9-14; cf. 1 Cor 9:3-14; 2 Cor 10:4-5; 11:22-28; 1 Tim 1:18-20; and Phil 1:27-29 as examples of Paul's prayers for CA believers and his personal example of enduring in the midst of adversity because of a spiritual vision).

Principle: Without a spiritual vision for one's life that is built upon the truths pertinent to this dispensation of the Church and the concomitant appreciation and motivation derived therefrom, the believer will remain a slave to his/her own selfish interests and in a perpetual state of spiritual babyhood. This believer will be forever relegated to a system of thinking that focuses only upon his own self-interest much like the undisciplined child who never learns to set aside self in the interest of others or a greater cause.

This is the blindness that characterizes the world and is similar to the blindness from which the disciples who were apostles to Israel (Matt 10) had to escape. At this point, these disciples had not given proper attention to their spiritual lives (i.e. neglect of the truth presented to them and prayer), therefore they had no power to push through the spiritual adversity pertinent to their ministry to Israel, i.e. a demon possessed boy.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (17:22-23)

This is Jesus' second actual prediction of His death and resurrection (cf. 16:21-24) even though there have been earlier allusions to His death (9:15 – bridegroom to be taken away; 10:38 – those who do not take up their cross are not worthy of me; 12:40 – comparison to Jonah being three days and nights in the belly of the fish; 17:12 – the Son of Man is about to suffer at the hands of the religious leaders). Jesus is about to end His ministry in the area of Galilee and begin His journey south to Jerusalem.

Both of the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke state that the disciples do not understand Jesus. Matthew alludes to this when he notes the disciples' grief. The disciples have begun to understand that He will die, but they still do not understand the resurrection.

The Temple Tax (17:24-27)

This tax was not a civil tax levied by Rome, but a Jewish tax that was levied on every male Jew between the ages of twenty and fifty in support of the temple and its services. It was a two drachma (half shekel) tax collected annually (Ex 30:13-15; Neh 10:32) and is well attested by Josephus and the Mishnah (the first section of the Talmud, a collection of the early oral interpretations of scriptures compiled by 200 A.D.).

Jesus acknowledges the temple tax to be an obligation to God; but since He is God's Son, He is exempt (v. 26). This passage has nothing to do with their obligation to Caesar. Jesus was teaching Peter that in the same manner that kings do not collect taxes from family members neither should Jesus as King nor the disciples as true sons of the Kingdom be required to pay the tax. They had a privileged position as true sons of the Kingdom; however the Lord did not desire to make an issue (offend them, v. 27) over such a point regarding the Law and its fulfillment.

This is the only place in the NT where a fish is caught with a hook. Normally, nets were used.