

Lesson 28: Review of Matthew 17:14-27: "By Faith Alone in Christ Alone"

Faith's Foundation—The Person of Christ (17:14-21)

If we had the actual privilege of "walking and talking" with Jesus through His earthly ministry would we be more faithful to *do* successfully all that we were challenged to *do* as His followers. One case in point, which should challenge us occurs in Matthew 17:14-27. Having come down the mountain Jesus is met by a broken hearted man whose son has not been healed by Jesus' disciples. No doubt the man and the crowd expected more. Mark's gospel (9:14-18) indicates that the failure had resulted in an argument between Jesus' nine disciples who didn't go up the mountain and the teachers of the law. As Jesus came upon the scene and asked what the ruckus was all about a quivering voice from the crowd laments that the disciples failed to heal his demon possessed son. Why could the disciples not successfully heal the boy?

Before we look for the answer to that let's make an observation: Ministry is hard. Those disciples who accompanied Jesus up the mountain enjoyed something extremely important but also something which is very rare, a literal *mountain top experience!* And as good as that was for Peter, James and John it was, like for most Christians, very precious and very rare! The point is most of the Christian life occurs at the *foot* of the mountain. There life and ministry is hard, fraught with trials, testing, limited feelings of success and often times a sense of failure.

So, to answer the question as to why they could not successfully drive out the demon and send the boy home healed... The problem with the crowd and with the religious leaders, according to Jesus in 17:17 was *unbelief* and general *perversity* of mind. They had a wrong foundation. They did not build on God's solid and eternal foundation revealed in the person of Jesus Christ! The problem with the disciples was, as Jesus said in 17:20, "Little faith". Do you see two distinct groups identified by Jesus? There are those who do not believe and are perverse in their thinking and those who do believe but have little faith. His *disciples* are **His** disciples but they have a defective faith. The object of their faith is NOT Christ Jesus but perhaps confidence in their own faith or faith in their ministerial activities or faith and confidence in some hocus-pocus formula or prayer ritual that would secure the miracle for them in order to heal the boy.

But Jesus directs their attention to Him in a surprising way. He urges them to apply their "small faith", that is that aspect of their confidence that is good, rooted in Him! If they would jettison all other foundations and plant their *small faith* in Christ they could do "impossible" things!

Where is your confidence? What is your foundation? If it is on any but Christ alone will you repent now?

Faith's Focalization—The Power of Christ (17:22-23)

We could have included 17:21 (KJV, not NIV) in this section because fasting and prayer (and Word) are gifts of God's grace which help bring Christ into clearer focus. But, in this section we see *faith's focus* is turned to the cross. Now in Galilee, after some time elapsed, Jesus draws them closer to His cross. He announces a betrayal into the hands of men, His murder and His resurrection!

The disciples, however, apparently could not comprehend the promise of a resurrection because the news of His being killed. The thought of the death of a loved one can cause us to forget that through faith in Christ's death and resurrection we have hope of a resurrection of our own on the day when Christ comes again (for more on this subject go to our website, click resources/sermons/Sovereignty Series/ "The Sovereignty of God and the Death of The Christian" (www.sovereignchristbiblefellowship.com)).

Faith's focus must be the Christ and His cross. Without the cross we have no hope of future *crowns*. Jesus could provide them with no better help than when He focused their attention on His coming cross. Why? Because they, like us, were attracted by a theology of victory and glory and repulsed by a theology of suffering. But without the cross there would be not crown! Not for them and not for us.

Faith's Fortification—The Provision of Christ (17:24-27)

Finally, faith is fortified the faith of Peter and the disciples as Jesus proves His provision of all their needs even that of taxes. Simple as the issue seemed to be Jesus made a huge point to Peter and the others, namely that He Himself, and His disciples could claim exemption from taxes because Jesus is the great King. But, so as not to offend the collectors, He ordered Peter to pay. The miracle is amazing (17:27)!!

Our faith is fortified as we learn of the faithfulness of our Lord to provide all we need to faithfully follow Him. As He is our foundation and our focus, so will He be received as our provision!

Questions for Matthew 18:1-14: “The Core Value of Greatness”

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain “A”.

Introduction to Matthew 18:1-14: We will take a short excursion over the next few weeks and concentrate on how Jesus began describing the kind of life that would mark them as disciples of Christ. This kind of life, as we will see, expounds on what Jesus means by bearing one’s cross. This short miniseries of lessons in Matthew is intended to show us what “The Church Under The Cross” lives like, loves like and looks like. Our first lesson will allow us to see the “Core Value of Greatness”. I hope you enjoy these lessons!

2. Read Matthew 18:1-4. “Love’s Humility: **A)** Read Mark 9:33-34 and Luke 22:24-28. What do you think is the motive behind the disciples question in 18:1? **B)** Glean from each passage different aspects of kingdom greatness according to Jesus. **C)** What is significant about Jesus calling a little child to illustrate what He is going to tell them? **D)** What does Jesus mean by saying, “Unless you **change** become like little children” you will never enter the kingdom of heaven? Is this change humanly possible? Why are why not? **E)** What key point is Jesus communicating to us in 18:4? **F)** How is this meaningful or challenging to you?

3. Read Matthew 18:5-9: “Love’s Sensitivity” **A)** Assume that the “little child” of 18:5 is a grown up believer. What makes welcoming grown ups so difficult? **B)** Even it difficult to welcome a “believer”, and if we are welcoming Jesus when we do, then what are some ways we can demonstrate sensitivity to them when we welcome them? **C)** What do “welcoming” people tend to do? **D)** Sensitivity also includes being sensitive to those things around us that negatively influence us and other believers. Why is this important? **E)** What then to you think Jesus is saying in verses 8-9? **F)** What quality, then, should you ask the Lord to cultivate in your life?

4. Read Matthew 18:10-14: “Love’s Security” **A)** Security is a safeguard for believers. How could you use Philippians 2:1-8 and James 2:2-8 to explain “how” to avoid “looking down” on other believers? **B)** What is at the heart of a person who “looks down” on other believers? What attribute needs to be cultivated in order to avoid that sinful attitude? **C)** How does the parable Jesus speaks in vv.11-14 effectively illustrate the importance of each struggling believer? **D)** Why do Christian believers struggle with sin and wander? **E)** If you understand this (answer to “D”) then what will you do to help in a *humble, sensitive* way to love a wandering sheep?