

# Matthew 17:14-27

October 27

## “A Matter of Faith”

### INTRODUCTION

After the experience and event of the Transfiguration, Jesus and the disciples had an interesting event awaiting for them.

They go from this mountain top experience, to a challenging situation.

From being at this extraordinary event of witnessing Christ’s glory, now to a testing of faith.

How many of us have ever dealt with something like this before?

In the common experience, often times what directly follows a mountain top experience is a valley low experience.

I thought this quote by R.T. France does a great job at bridging these two sections of Chapter 17: “When Moses came down from the mountain he was confronted by Israel’s apostasy (Exodus 32); so on Jesus’ return from the mountain he enters a scene of spiritual conflict and unbelief.” (R.T. France)

It often feels like that doesn’t it? We experience a very encouraging thing that gets us fired up in our faith. Really encourages us in our walks with the Lord. We think “this is amazing! I don’t want to leave Lord!”

That’s a mountain top experience.

If you’ve gone through that before, doesn’t it almost feel like at times that the devil is waiting for you at the bottom of that mountain?

Ready to jump out and attack you spiritually, to try and take that experience away from you?

If there’s one lesson we can understand from our passage today, it’s this: **It’s a matter of faith.**

There will be highs and lows in our faith, but we must trust God through it all.

Despite what experiences we’ve gone through, or how we feel in a moment, or how mature we are, Trust in the Lord.

Let’s all stand to read the first part of our passage.

### **Problem of Unbelief - Matthew 17:14-18**

“And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.” 17 Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

Now in this passage we have an interesting issue that Jesus and the disciples faced.

It tells us **they had come to the multitude** and **a man came to [Jesus]** asking for his son to be healed. He says in verse 15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.”

There is interesting contention about the translation of that word 'epileptic' as it reads here in my New King James Bible.

If you read a King James Bible, the word used there is Lunatic. "Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic" (KJV)

**\*\*Some of you fathers may find that translation to be more relatable, I don't know\*\***

This one time, my son Hezy was about three months old, and that's the age where a baby can't really control their eyes too well so Hezy had these big eyes wide open a lot of the time and he would just stare at you, looking all surprised.

Anyway at Young Adults one night, we were changing Hezy on the floor of the parents room, door was open, we were chatting with friends and one guy who was newer to the group, had not seen or met my son or wife, walks up to the room, takes a look at Hezy and says "That kid looks like a lunatic."

The greek word being translated is *selēniazomai* which could also be translated "moonstruck"  
You may already notice a connection there with the words moonstruck and lunatic - luna - lunar

The belief in these ancient times was that the moon could make someone crazy. If they spent enough time staring at it, they would go mad.

A superstition really, but it seems to have been believed by this father. This was His diagnoses of his sons issues.

Essentially, this man is coming to Jesus saying "Help me Lord, my son stared at the moon too long, and is now moonstruck, and because of it he falls into the water and fire often."

The diagnoses may be off, but the issue is very real.

In verse 18 we learn that this boy is really possessed by a demon, and it's this demon that is causing his epilepsy and seizures.

Verse 15b-16 - "...he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

Interestingly, despite their efforts, the disciples could not deal with the man's son on their own.

By this point they had already been given authority by Jesus to "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." in Matthew 10:8, and by Luke 10:17 they did just that testifying "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

They've experienced demons cast out by their hands before, but they failed in this encounter.

I think there is a good lesson here, because sometimes the followers of Jesus will fail, we may deal with that in our own lives, but Jesus does not fail.

When we are faced with the failures of supposed followers of Jesus, we should respond in the same way this man responded when the disciples could not help his son, by going to Jesus Himself.

Verse 17-21 - "Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"

20 So Jesus said to them, “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. 21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

We see Jesus initially responding frustratedly at the disciples calling them a “**faithless and perverse generation**” for not having the faith to cast the demon out stating “**how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?**” He knows His time to bear the cross is coming and approaching quickly, He knows He won’t be physically with them for too much longer.

He calls the boy to be brought to Him and rebuked the demon from the boy, curing him.

I’ll tell you what we don’t see here in that verse:

We don’t see this big ordeal made when Christ exercised the demon.

We don’t see this strenuous battle or fight between Jesus and the demon.

We don’t see a dramatic scene unfolding where the disciples are biting their nails at what the outcome would be.

In fact, Matthew wrote all he needed to write about the situation. Basically that Jesus rebuked the demon and the demon was rebuked, the boy was cured. Simple words for a straight forward result to the issue.

What does that tell us?

As we looked at before...

The disciples had cast out demons previously (**Luke 10:17**), but they couldn’t cast this one out.

Jesus gave them authority over the demons already (**Matthew 10:8**), but they found difficulty with this one.

When Jesus dealt with this demon, did He experience difficulty? No

When Jesus rebuked the demon, was there any doubt He would not succeed? No

It was instantly that the demon left the boy after Jesus rebuked it.

**This task may have been too difficult for the disciples, but it wasn’t too difficult for Jesus.**

Directly following this, it’s an obvious thing for the disciples to wonder where their failure lied.

“**Why could we not cast it out?**” They asked.

Jesus informs them it was because of their unbelief.

He then gives them another lesson involving a mustard seed.

(Not to be confused with parable of mustard seed in **Matthew 13:31-32**)

**Verse 20b - “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.”**

The example of a mustard seed, being very tiny, is meant to imply that even a tiny amount of real faith in an almighty God can accomplish great things.

Mustard Seed faith has more to do with the kind of faith rather than the quantity of the faith.

The lesson Jesus is giving here is that human difficulties can be overcome by even a small amount of genuine faith in Jesus.

God has complete authority over His creation, and that includes the devil and his demons. To have success over these spiritual foes means to trust in God completely.

**Remember this simply lesson when it comes to applying faith in your own life, IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU! It genuinely needs to be about God.**

Now it's worth asking, why couldn't the disciples cast out this demon, when they had cast out other demons before?

Where did their fault lie?

What caused their unbelief?

Didn't they have to have some faith in order to cast out other demons?

What was different with this demon?

You begin asking those questions and then come the theories.

Did they start to get too confident in themselves after experiencing success with other demons?

Did their faith in God weaken because their faith in themselves grew?

When they attempted to cure the boy, did the demon manifest himself in a dramatic way, shocking the disciples and diminishing their faith?

I think Jesus leads us to the possible answer in **Verse 21**. He adds **"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."**

If the subject of this verse Jesus refers to by saying "this kind" is the demon, what would that tell us?

This kind? Is Jesus saying that not all demons are the same?

This kind of demon won't go out except by prayer and fasting?

**Ephesians 6:12** seems to imply ranks of demonic powers, **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

Rankings of demons would imply some be stronger and more resistant than others.

However, they are all still subject to Christ.

Why is prayer and fasting necessary?

Because they are a type of reliance on God. What a great exercise of faith to spend a prolonged time with God in Prayer and Fasting.

This can greatly benefit our faith and reliance on Him.

### **Foretelling His Death - Matthew 17:22-23**

**22** Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, **"The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up."** And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Jesus and the disciples will soon begin their final journey to Jerusalem together.

Knowing this time is near, Jesus begins to warn His disciples here and there about what will happen to Him so they can be prepared for it.

He foretells His death AND resurrection. He rarely warned about His death without also mentioning the resurrection that would follow, but the disciples seem to struggle at grasping this.

Jesus' reminders of His soon to come suffering, death and resurrection were often forgotten by the disciples.  
Perhaps because they didn't fully grasp the reality of the statements, or simply didn't want to believe it to be true.

Just look at the last chapter, [Matthew 16:21-23](#) where Jesus warns of His death and suffering probably for the first time clearly.

Peter responds to this news by passionately declaring "No Lord! [This shall not happen to you!](#)" (16:22)  
How did Jesus respond to that? "[Get behind me, Satan!](#)" (16:23)

Even though the news of Jesus' death should create a reaction of sorrow, knowing that He would rise from death soon after, just as He says here, should have created hope for the disciples, but they were held up on the death and were [exceedingly sorrowful](#).

If only they trusted by faith in the words of Jesus here.  
Maybe they would have received the news better.  
Maybe they would have been comforted when He went to the tomb.  
Maybe they would have actually been looking for His resurrection on the third day.

**Jesus doesn't expect us to have it all figured out. He wants us to have faith in Him.**

You don't understand? Have faith.

It's a mystery to you? Have faith.

**Be confident in the One who knows all things so you don't have to.**

[Hebrews 11:1](#) - "[Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.](#)"

Here's a little bit of sympathy toward the disciples. As they were exceedingly sorrowful to learn Jesus would suffer and die, to an extent that's understandable.

Death creates sorrow.

Losing someone you love makes you sorrowful.

Here's the extent of understanding I'll give them,

you can have your sorrow,

just don't allow it to be exceeding sorrow. "Sorrow on sorrow"

Us Christians, who have our eternal hope in Christ, can be confident and assured where our loved ones who die in faith end up.

And if we're being honest, it's far better than here. We're talking about the presence of the Lord!

When we go through the loss of someone we love, mourning and sorrowing is completely reasonable and biblical but it looks different for the Christian as opposed to those that have no hope.

There's hopeful mourning, and there's hopeless mourning.

When we mourn the loss of a brother or sister in the Lord, we do so hopefully. We are saddened because we will miss them, but we are absolutely ecstatic for them, that they are now in the presence of Christ.

The disciples had the opportunity to be hopeful when they received this news, but they missed the opportunity.

### **Paying The Tax - Matthew 17:24-27**

24 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?"

25 He said, "Yes."

And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?"

26 Peter said to Him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. 27 Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

Here we have an interesting event of miraculous provision.

A temple tax collector is doing his rounds in Capernaum, and asks Peter if Jesus does not pay the temple tax.

The temple tax was paid annually by every adult Jewish male over 20 years old for the purpose of maintaining the temple.

This was a normal thing for Jewish men in Israel to pay.

Although, for the sake of adding some context, it may be worth saying that there was some controversy around this tax. The Sadducees disapproved of it, and the men of the region of Qumran only paid it once in their lifetime instead of once a year.

But what is the reason for controversy with Jesus and the tax here?

The fact that this collector asked the question implies that Jesus has not paid the tax, but to maintain Jesus' reputation, Peter replies "Yes (He does pay the tax, of course)" making an assumption that seemed best in his mind. He probably answers with the mindset that the reputation of His master was on the line.

Jesus, being all knowing, brought the matter up first before Peter even said anything to Him.

He asks Peter "From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" (verse 25)

26 Peter said to Him, "From strangers."

It seems from the context of the passage, "sons" would refer to the imperial family, and "strangers" refers to the common people.

Makes sense that a king would tax common people rather than his own royal family, right?

Jesus is explaining that as the Son of God, He was exempt from paying the temple tax.

To put it further, the Temple of God in Jerusalem was His (as Malachi 3:1 tells us)

There you have it. That's enough reasoning for me. Jesus has proved that He doesn't have to pay the tax. He isn't obligated to.

It's His house.

But, He still chooses to pay it...

Verse 27 - "Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

Jesus already explained to Peter how He is not obligated to pay the tax, but still opts to pay it in order to not offend them.

Jesus recognized this as a needless controversy, not worth rebuking, combating, or even offending over. Because of that He was willing to pay it.

So he pays the tax, and pays it by miraculous provision too.

He sends Peter to fish.

I wonder if Peter ever sang a tune as he fished. Probably something catchy...  
(Why do you think fish swim in schools? Because they can't walk)

I like to imagine this situation playing out.

After Peter hears these instructions from Jesus, how do you think he would have received it?

Keep in mind that Peter was a professional fisherman. Could even classify him as a commercial fisherman in the Galilee Region.

He didn't fish with a Hook and line, but with nets, to catch multiple fish at once.

Using nets to fish is more efficient than a line and a hook.

You're looking at catching many fish at once versus catching one fish at a time.

This could've been a humbling way to fish for Peter, but Jesus instructed Him to do it this way.

Could this have been a test of faith?

Even the circumstance of how the tax money would be provided is quite unbelievable

We don't know how the coin got into the fishes mouth, but it's not for us to know.

We can trust in who allowed the coin to end up into the fishes mouth, and who allowed for that same fish to be the first one to catch Peter's hook, because this situation is all God.

This is clearly an act of God, no real point in speculating the specifics.

Don't get caught up in the minor details when the point is to increase faith in God.

I would hope that Peter's faith was increased as a result of witnessing this miracle.

This passage today is littered with Faith Lessons!

Jesus used that coin to pay the tax for Himself, and for Peter as well.

Isn't that a great way to wrap today's passage up?

On top of paying His own temple tax, Jesus also paid the price for Peter as well.

He paid the price that someone else owed.

Where have I heard that before?

## **CONCLUSION**

Oh yeah, that's what He did for me. That's what Jesus has done for each and every one of us.

We had a major dept that we were unable to pay. Our dept of sin, our transgressions against God. Every single person has this debt

*"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," - Romans 3:23*

There was no possible way in ourselves to pay it, but that's the reason why Jesus came.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” - John 3:17

He saved us by paying our debt on our behalf.

What was the price we owed?

Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death.” That’s what it cost, the consequence of sin is death. Jesus took our debt upon Himself all the way to the point of His death on the cross. He made Himself the sacrifice for our sins.

Took our place to pay our fine.

And by putting our faith in Jesus, we inherit the gift of eternal life He offers, just as the rest of Romans 6:23 says “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus has saved us from our sin. By paying our penalty He has restored us to the father. This is a gift He freely offers, but we need to accept it.

Have you accepted the eternal gift of life Jesus has offered?

Have you put your faith in Him making Him Savior and Lord of your life?

If you have, then you are born again, rejoice in what He’s done for you and walk in Him.

If you have not, know this, above anything else from this message. Jesus loves you, He died on the cross to save you, and He wants a relationship with you.

You must receive Him.

That’s as simple as

1. Admitting you’re a sinner, going to Him in prayer acknowledging the work He did to save you from sin.
2. Believe in Him, put your faith in Him and invite Him into your life
3. Confess Jesus as Lord of your life, and receive the eternal gift of salvation He gives.

If you would like to receive Jesus today, we have prayer teams available at the front following the service, and they would love to lead you into that relationship. Please come forward and receive Him.

It’s the greatest decision you can make in this life. Don’t wait to make it.