

Matthew 17-18 Chapter Study

INTRO

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II. JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY 3-18

The break between chs. 16 & 17 is a tough one because all of what Matthew writes here goes together.

Ch. 16 ends with Jesus telling the disciples He is not long for this world, but will be betrayed, arrested, condemned and executed.

But He tells them that isn't the end of the story – He will rise again from the dead and come back in great glory.

Ch. 16 then ends with these words -

28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Was Jesus mistaken? No . . .

MATTHEW 17

S. The Transfiguration • 17:1-13

¹Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;

Just to the north of where they were there in Caesarea Philippi was Mt. Hermon, the only high mountain in the area.

Jesus took PJ&J with Him. This is the same 3 He took with Him into Jairus' house to raise his daughter from the dead; & the 3 He called to His side as He went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Why *these* 3? [\[click\]](#)

Peter was to be the leader of the apostles.

James was the first to be martyred.

And John was the last of the Apostles to die.

There's a model for discipleship & spiritual growth here that's crucial we grasp.

Jesus knew from the start that His mission would only last for a few years.

So from the beginning, He set about to install people who would carry on after He was gone.

The 12 disciples were hand-picked and selected as His official students from the many hundreds who were following Him at that time He selected them.

Besides being a prophetic number, this dozen was really the largest number of men Jesus could *effectively* work with and do the *right* job of training with.

But 12 is still a lot of people, and any group of that size needs someone to take

the lead among them.

This is why Jesus narrowed the focus of further training to PJ&J.

Once He was gone, the 12 would need a leadership core, and PJ&J were it. Even among the 3, Peter was the leader, and James & John understood they were called to support him and assist in the leadership of the 12.

This provides a great model for discipleship as we follow and seek to grow in our discipleship under Christ.

And this is why we so strongly urge people to get plugged in to a small group. Most homes can comfortably accommodate a dozen people and this really does provide the ideal level of interaction.

Once a group sees a consistent attendance of more than a dozen, then it probably ought to split and form 2 new groups.

Along with this group of a dozen, each of us needs *a closer inner circle* of just a few to whom we can really open up and share the deeper things that we can't with the larger group.

It's my experience that 3 or 4 friends can develop a level of spiritual intimacy that is perfect. [Men's Accountability groups]

Back to our text - Jesus has led PJ&J up onto Mt. Hermon –

2and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. **3**And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

While they watched, Jesus' appearance was changed & the glory that had attended Him *prior* to the incarnation was restored.

Why this took place isn't said, but Luke 9 tells us Moses & Elijah talked to Jesus about His *coming death* at Jerusalem.

This may have been a kind of "re-filling of Jesus' tanks" if you will, a *resurfacing* into the atmosphere of heaven so He could take a big gulp of glory & be strengthened for the arduous task ahead.

Why were Moses & Elijah the ones to come to Him? Why not some super powerful angel?

Simple – Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets.

Both the law & the prophets had *pointed to Christ*; their whole lives and ministry were aimed at directing people to Jesus and how He was set on a course that would lead to the cross.

They come here in the Transfiguration to tell Him that all *they* have lived for *He* is about to accomplish!

4Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Have you ever met someone who thought no matter what, they needed to make some kind of comment, to add their 2 cents?

I fear that all too often I do that, so I appreciate Peter here because that's him too.

Notice what He said - "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Uh--Yeah! Duh! He probably ought to have kept quiet. Especially when he suggested they make 3 memorials, one for each of them.

Interesting that Peter *recognized* Moses & Elijah. [Expand – we won't be *dumber* in heaven]

5 While he was still speaking, [proof he was speaking **presumptuously**] behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Peter had suggested 3 memorials, as though Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were *equals!*
The voice made it clear that Jesus is the One Whose voice *supersedes* all others.

The revelation of God is complete in **HIM** and no other!

Not Muhammad, not Buddha, Mahares Mahesh Yogi, Carl Sagan, & not Osama bin Laden.

6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. **7** But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

Interesting – the *voice* of God *terrified* them while the *Word* of God *restored* them.

8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." **10** And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" **11** Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. **12** But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." **13** Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

The prophet Malachi had foretold that before the Messiah came, Elijah would come again & prepare the people for the Messiah's coming.

The disciples had just seen Elijah, which prompted them to think that Jesus would *now* reveal Himself in His glory to the nation, but He just said He was going to go to Jerusalem & die!

In their confusion they asked what was going on; the timing of end time events was confusing to them, just as it so often is for us.

Jesus then says some things that are a tad difficult to sort out – but the upshot is this . . . Elijah *will come* before He returns in glory to set up the Kingdom.

This is why we think that one of the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation will be Elijah.

But Jesus says *here* & the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to *John the Baptist* when He said in v. 12 – "But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished."

John the Baptist wasn't a *reincarnation* of Elijah, but he came in the same *anointing* and *office* as Elijah.

He *would have been* the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's coming **IF** the

nation had received Jesus as their Messiah.
But because the nation's leaders *rejected* Him, & would arrest & condemn Him to death, they missed out on the Kingdom.
To those who *received* Jesus as the Messiah-Savior, John the Baptist ended up fulfilling Elijah's role because he *did* prepare the way for Him.

T. The Disciples' Failure • 17:14-21

14 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. 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."

Since we covered these verses in depth 2 Sundays ago, I'll make no further comment tonight, other than this . . .

In v. 21 Jesus said that this kind of demon is *only* dealt with by prayer and fasting – to which the disciples could say, "How were we supposed to know that so we could have prayed & fasted?"

But Jesus didn't mean that they should see such encounters as *moments* for prayer & fasting – He meant that a *LIFE cultivated by prayer & fasting* is the only way to deal with this kind of spiritual opposition.

There are going to be moments of intense spiritual opposition and attack in our lives.

They're rarely announced but come as a surprise.

It has long been the tactic of battle to surprise your enemy, and the demonic realm will use long seasons of relative peace in our lives as a way to soften us up and get us ready for a major offensive.

This is why Paul says in Ephesians 6 we must keep the combat boots of a readiness to do the work of the gospel ever on our spiritual feet.

What's the first thing to come off when you get home from work – your shoes. You kick off your shoes because it's the first step in kicking back and taking it easy.

Paul says we need to keep our gospel combat boots on because the battle never, ever ends as long as we are in these bodies.

Prayer & Fasting are necessary tools to keep our spiritual focus and discernment sharp so we won't get sucker-punched by the devil and will be able to discern quickly what needs to be done and how to do it when we're facing a spiritual

challenge.

I'm appalled at many of the calls I hear made to secular call-in radio programs.

One person after another asks questions, the answers to which seem as obvious as the nose on your face – but they are without a clue!

Even on some Christian call-in counseling programs, the questions are often crazy-simple; and I'm forced to wonder, do these people own a Bible? Do they go to church? If so, what are they doing there?

What are these people going to do when they aren't near a phone and have no one to call and a decision needs to be made NOW?

God would have each of us be in the place where we know the Word and have our spiritual senses honed to the place where we can see what's going on in the spiritual realm and know what the right course of action is.

Okay, 2 Sundays ago, when we were looking at these vs., I said we'd deal with why v. 21 isn't included in some Bibles or why it's bracketed and footnoted as not in the oldest & most reliable manuscripts. Let's deal with that now.

V. 21 is not in – English Standard Version, The Message, New Century Version, New Living Translation, New Revised Standard, Wuest's Expanded Translation, Good News Bible.

In the NIV it's a footnote at bottom of page. [V. 20, v. 22 – no v. 21!]

NASB – In, but bracketed and footnoted as not reliable.

Why? Why *in* Authorized KJV & the NKJV [even there footnoted as omitted in the NU, Nestle-Aland/ United Bible Society's text]?

We need to begin here; with a discussion of what is known as textual families (text types.) [This is a complex subject, and for time's sake, I am going to abbreviate immensely.]

Until the printing press, people hand-copied the manuscripts of the Bible.

For the OT – not really an issue because the Jews had precise methods for copying; the text not in dispute.

But for the NT, a completely different state of affairs!

Christians, including the hundreds of thousands of Gentiles who were being converted, wanted the gospels and the letters of the Apostles!!!

Autographs (originals) → First copies (done by professional scribes) → Copies of copies [Persecution; smaller portions]

During copying, errors crept in. In a region, this led to a "family" of texts that all contained a similar 'reading.'

Over time, 4 Main textual families/types developed but only 2 are of interest to us, The Byzantine (Majority) text & the Alexandrian. [Western, Neutral]

The King James Translators used what was considered at that time to be the most accurate Textual type; the Byzantine text.

Predominant copies in regions of the Old Roman Empire [Byzantium]. Many copies – but late in date.

Then, some *older* manuscripts came to light called 'codexes.' Codex was a **book**, as opposed to a scroll.

The main manuscripts discovered were the *Codexes Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus*. [There were numerous other smaller portions]

Not just portions as much of the Byzantine/Majority material is, but several

books all together.

While early, all came from the region of North Africa where the influence of **Gnosticism** was heavy on the Church.

Called the **Alexandrian Text type**.

The reason why these manuscripts are older is because the climate is exceedingly dry and facilitated their reservation.

But the Gnostics **edited** the text at many points to excise those portions that defied their unique views.

They held that anything material was unalterably evil, so they cut out passages which spoke of the influence of the spiritual life onto & into the material world.

Many references to Jesus' physical body or physical activities are missing because the Gnostics said the Christ was just a phantom – or at best just a spirit that descended on the man Jesus.

Most **modern translations** are drawn from the Alexandrian textual tradition because at the turn of the century, many scholars were of a more liberal bent & claimed that the older text is **automatically** the better text.

They also made **A RULE** – that when a passage is presented differently in two text types, the **shorter** version is **always** the preferred.

Their premise is that copyists will always **add to**, but not **subtract from** the text. Since the Alexandrian text is **shorter**, because it was cut-up by the Gnostics, the modern rule has been to go with it **over** the Majority text.

And this is why v. 21 is not found in so many of the modern versions.

It speaks of dealing with spiritual beings via fasting. This idea was utterly absurd and unthinkable to Gnostics so they cut it out of their manuscripts.

Does this mean the NIV or NASB is an evil or wicked version of the Scriptures?

No! It's just something to be aware of and on the look out for when studying the Bible.

Actually, the current trend in Bible translations is to not go with just one textual family but to take an **eclectic approach** and go with that text that finds the greatest historical support.

This is not difficult to do when you consider that almost the entire NT text is quoted in the early church Fathers!

U. The Coming Trial • 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.

And sorrowful, **why?** Because He was going to rise from the dead?

It's like they didn't hear **that** part of it. All they heard was the hard stuff – that He would be betrayed & executed.

There could be no resurrection without a prior death but they didn't grasp what He was saying.

They took His words about death **literally**, but then **spiritualized** what He said about the resurrection.

Because resurrection was outside of their experience & expectation, they could

not accept it.

Twice now, Jesus has told them what was coming & how he would rise.

In light of how closely the coming events followed the pattern He foretold, it's surprising they didn't realize He would rise again, just as He said He would.

V. The Temple Tax • 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."

In Exodus 30:13 an annual tax to support the temple service was laid down.

In Jesus' day, the tax was equivalent to 2 days' wages and was collected at the end of March. The authorities used this tax as a way to try to trap Jesus.

They were sure He wouldn't pay because on an earlier trip to Jerusalem He'd shown His displeasure for the way the priests were abusing the temple grounds.

Jesus' refusal to pay the tax would become a legitimate cause to have Him arrested.

But when they asked Peter, knowing what they were up to, he said, "Sure, Jesus pays the tax!" Then he went to Jesus wondering if he was right.

Jesus knew what was on his mind and as soon as he came in, gave a little parable.

Do kings collect taxes & customs from their own family members or from others? From *others* – a king does not tax his own family.

The temple was the House of God, and *because* Jesus was God, really, the temple was the place where worship was rendered to *Him*! So technically, He didn't need to pay the tax. But because He was also man, He *would* pay it.

Now – how to pay it – since they've not been working & have no income – how are they going to pay the tax?

Jesus knows the need – and He tells Peter to renew His old occupation for a time so that the provision can be made.

Peter goes fishing, catches a fish with a coin in its mouth and paid the tax.

What's the lesson here? Following Jesus does not exempt us from the normal duties of living in this world.

We still have taxes to pay, debts to settle, business to conduct.

God wants us to be faithful in all our obligations; whether to family, friends, work, & even the government.

While we trust *God* to provide for us – the coin in the fish's mouth; we must

also be faithful to work – Peter throwing out the line.

Matthew 18

W. The Greatest In The Kingdom • 18:1-5

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Luke adds a little color to the story – he says that as they traveled along, the disciples had started arguing about which among them would be the greatest. They thought that Jesus would soon declare Himself publicly, would take the throne of Israel and bring in the Kingdom of God. Then He would hand out positions in His royal court. As the disciples, they would be the first in line to get cushy appointments.

But here they were arguing over who among *them* would get the choicest position.

Jesus used this dispute among His followers to teach an important truth.

2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, ³ and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

There’s enough in these words to occupy our attention for many hours. And Gayle Erwin has drawn some wonderful insights from this that have deeply impacted many lives.

Tonight, we’ll be far more brief and simply see them in contrast to the dispute of the disciples over who would be greatest.

Jesus confronts their ideas on greatness, drawn from the world, with the idea that greatness is not about *position* but *person*.

In the world, greatness is defined by power, by force, however that force is attained; physical, financial, influence; in the world, greatness equals power.

But Jesus takes a child and set him in their midst and says, “Guys, you want to know what Kingdom-greatness looks like? Here it is!”

In a circle of disciples, in a world of grown-ups, what power does a child have?

None! Whose intimidated by a child? No one.

Children know that in the world of grown ups, they are virtually powerless & unable and depend on their parents for everything.

Everything in the world cries out to encourage us to self-sufficiency and independence.

A child is *totally dependent* on his/her mommy & daddy.

What constitutes kingdom greatness is not personal position & power but a dependence on God that results in a person repudiating self-sufficiency in favor of Christ-sufficiency.

Then Jesus says this –

⁵ Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

One of the evidences we've repudiated worldly ideas of success, power, & greatness is that we won't angle and maneuver to sidle up to those the world esteems as successful, powerful, & great.

Instead, we'll be on the lookout for those who are near & dear to the heart of God – the very ones the world overlooks & despises – like little children. Before we go on – this would be a great time to put a plug in for the children's ministry & nursery.

X. Dealing With Offenses • 18:6-35

1. Offenses that lead others to sin • 18:6-7

6 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

By “these little ones” Jesus doesn't mean literal children but those who have adopted the child-like greatness He's just commended.

It's bad when a person sins, but when he/she entices those who are innocent to *join* in that sin, they earn for them a place of special wrath & judgment.

Jesus said it would be far better if that person slipped n to some cement slippers and was thrown overboard at sea.

A millstone was a massive round stone that was used to crush grain. Weighed hundreds of lbs.

This verse makes the recent charges against priests who abused young children all the more terrifying. Anyone who abuses children will have a lot to answer for at the bar of God's judgment.

But this verse also applies to those liberal theologians, pastors, and Bible teachers who twist & distort God's Word, making it a license to sin.

7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

The word “offense” here mean an enticement to evil.

The evil may be an *outright temptation to sin* – or it may be an act of abuse that would desire to spark a sinful *reaction* on our part.

Because we live in a fallen world system ruled by the devil, it's inevitable that offenses are going to come – and Jesus sets over it the pronouncement of doom – “Woe to the world!”

But there's a *special* pronouncement of woe on those who are the agents by which the offenses come.

When Joseph's brother appeared before him in Egypt, and he finally revealed himself to them, he calmed their fears of retribution by saying that what they had intended for evil, God had turned to good.

How very wrong it would have been for the brothers at that point to say, “Hey, yeah – cool. So we're really glad we threw you in that nasty pit then sold you into slavery!”

What they did was still wrong, though God did turn it to good.

As we live in this fallen, offense-filled world, there are times when *we* are going to bear the brunt of those offenses.

Just as He did for Joseph, He can & will turn them to good. But this does not excuse the one who brings the offense!

2. Dealing with internal offenses • 18:8-9

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire . ⁹ And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Sometimes we don't need any external influences acting as enticements to sin.

Often times our own flesh is the offender & here, through the use of *hyperbole*, Jesus says we have to be radical in the way we deal with temptation and that within our own flesh that would make it easy to sin.

Jesus does not mean us to take this literally – although there have been people in history who have done this literally! You can sin with one eye as easily as two. Jesus point is that as far as the pursuit of holiness is concerned, reject anything, take any measures, that will limit your exposure to the things of this world that would encourage sin.

Some of God's people have decided a certain level of movie rating is as far as they will go.

Some have unplugged their TV altogether.

Others have gone through their closet and tossed out any clothing that would in their conscience would be immodest.

And when they take these steps of obedience to the voice of the Spirit speaking to them they will sometimes have their Christian friends say something like, "Oh, aren't you going a little overboard here?"

"Don't be so old-fashioned."

"oh come on - this isn't the middle ages."

"Everybody's doing it – what's the problem?"

"Don't be a prude."

"Aren't you being a legalist?"

It's not legalism if it's a response to a Spirit-inspired conscience and doesn't pass sentence on others because they don't follow the same rule.

Look at what Jesus says here & tell me He isn't calling for a radical commitment to holiness and a careful walk that sets the boundary from sin well back from the realm of danger.

3. Don't become an offense-bringer • 18:10-14

10 "Take heed [be careful] that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

In this entire section on offenses is the underlying theme of *impending judgment*, and Jesus turns up the heat even more here.

Besides God's omniscience which knows who's bringing offenses, the angels are keeping watch and recording the affairs of earth.

When judgment comes, there will be plenty of evidence from eye-witnesses whose testimony is unimpeachable.

In light of this, Jesus says each of us needs to take *extra care* so as not to cause those who are walking with the Lord to stumble.

Then Jesus connects this kind of tender carefulness with His own mission -

11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. ¹² “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? ¹³ And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴ Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

The point of this illustration is God’s care for the individual who is in danger.

His heart is to after the one who is lost and return him/her to the fold.

4. Dealing with an erring brother/sister • 18:15-20

We covered these verses in depth several weeks ago in a study entitled, “Dealing With An Erring Brother.”

5. The forgiveness imperative • 18:21-35

We covered these vs. last Sunday.