

**Matthew 17:1 ¶ And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
Matthew 17:2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.**

Matthew 17:3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Matthew 17:4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

This chapter opens with a time marker; these events occur six day after Jesus declared that some of the disciples would see Him in His glory; the divine glory He laid aside to become human. JFB notes that Luke says “about eight days after,” and rectifies that he includes the day the statement was made and the day of the event.

The disciples referenced we refer to as the inner circle—Peter, James and John. Jesus took these disciples with Him up a high mountain. At some point He was transfigured before them; His face shone bright like the sun and His clothing like a bright white light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Obviously, they must have heard Jesus call them by name for the disciples to be able to identify them.

Luke provides some additional information.

Luke 9:30–33 “And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.”

Luke informs us that the discussion among the three men concerned the upcoming death of Jesus in Jerusalem. It was interesting to me that Luke referred to it as something that Jesus would accomplish. That is what many fail to see. God has foreordained His plan to work within the confines of man’s free will. It was His plan that Jesus be killed on that cross. He didn’t make those religious leaders turn on Jesus; He used their jealousy and hatred of Jesus to accomplish the sacrifice necessary to redeem man from sin. It really blows my mind when I think of how He could look down in omniscience through the ages and formulate a precise plan to accomplish His purposes through the choices of billions of men.

We also learn that the disciples weren’t able to stay awake and some posit that this indicates that the transfiguration took place at night. After Moses and Elijah departed, Peter suggested that they make three memorial tabernacles on the spot. “Not knowing what he said” I believe is a reference to the fact that he was unwittingly putting Moses and Elijah on the same level as Jesus; and I believe the

voice of the Father affirms that thought. Jesus is the divine Son of God in flesh; Moses and Elijah are merely human.

Why Moses and Elijah? One can only speculate. I've heard it taught that they represent the Law and the Prophets respectively. I've also read that they represent those who must experience physical death and those who are translated to new life without experiencing physical death. We know that Elijah is prophesied to return and prophesy once again before Jesus returns as King of kings, and I think it likely that Moses returns with him as the two witnesses identified in Revelation in light of this appearance with Jesus.

Matthew 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

While Peter was still speaking, the voice of the Father in heaven spoke from within a cloud declaring, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." The Father was emphasizing that Jesus was His Son; He was preeminent over any other man as the divine Son of God. No other man would be able to please the Father to the same extent because no other man lived a life of perfection in accordance with God's will. He admonished the disciples to pay attention to what Jesus told them.

Matthew 17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

Matthew 17:7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

Matthew 17:8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Matthew 17:9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

The sound of God's voice so frightened the disciples that they fell on their faces to the ground. Not surprising in light of scriptures that describe the voice of God.

Job 40:9 "Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?"

Psalms 29:3-8 "The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth....The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars....The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness...."

Jesus proceeded to touch the disciples telling them to get up and explained that they should not be afraid. When they lifted up their eyes, Moses and Elijah were gone; and it seems that Jesus was once again of normal appearance. As they came down the mountain, the Lord commanded them not to tell anyone else (including the other disciples) about what they had seen until after His resurrection from the dead.

Matthew 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Matthew 17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

Matthew 17:12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Matthew 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Having just seen Elijah, the disciples question Jesus as to why the scribes declare that Elijah will come before Messiah is revealed. This teaching was rooted in the prophecy of Malachi.

Malachi 4:5–6 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

They had evidently expected Elijah to stay and fulfill that prophecy at that time. Jesus explained that Elijah will come and “restore” all things. After looking at the Greek, I think this is a reference to restoring true faith among the Jewish people in God and His Messiah before He establishes His kingdom. Jesus also declared that Elijah had already come and had not been recognized, and the ruling authorities (both religious and governmental) had killed him. Yes, Herod was the instrument of John’s death; but the religious authorities were certainly not sad to see him eliminated.

Luke 7:30–33 “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said.....For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.”

Jesus, the Son of man, would also suffer death at the hands of these same ruling authorities. “Then” (Greek = at that time in the future), when that happens, the disciples would understand that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist. This was as prophesied by the angel to Zacharias before John was born.

Luke 1:17 “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

This was not the first time that Jesus had made note of this truth.

Matthew 11:12–14 “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.”

With these words, Jesus declared that the reason the kingdom would not be

established at that time was due to the fact that the Jews refused to believe the truth John declared about Jesus as the Messiah.

**Matthew 17:14 ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a *certain* man, kneeling down to him, and saying,
Matthew 17:15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.
Matthew 17:16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.
Matthew 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.
Matthew 17:18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.**

The next day...

*Luke 9:37 "And it came to pass, that on **the next day**, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him."*

...Jesus and His disciples once again encountered a multitude, and a man approached Jesus asking for healing for his son who was not of right mind. Luke also tells us that this was the man's only son.

*Luke 9:38 "And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: **for he is mine only child.**"*

Mark informs us that the boy was possessed with a spirit that made him mute and deaf and was dangerous to him.

*Mark 9:17–18 & 25 "And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, **which hath a dumb spirit**; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away....When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, **Thou dumb and deaf spirit....**"*

The man informed Jesus that he had already taken his son to His disciples, but they could not help him. Jesus answered with uncharacteristically apparent exasperation. Was this directed toward His disciples since He had empowered them to perform such miracles?

Matthew 10:1 "And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."

David Guzik makes a pertinent observation concerning the disciples: "Their failure was in fact good for them. Their failure taught them.

- It taught them not to get into a rut of mechanical ministry.
- It taught them the great superiority of Jesus.

- It taught them to wish for the presence of Jesus.
- It taught them to come to Jesus with the problem.”

To be faithless is not to believe. The Greek for perverse means to distort, and the NIV Commentary attributes this description as “willful neglect or distortion of the evidence.” Jesus wondered how long He would have to endure their unbelief, and then told the man to bring his son to Him. Maybe the disciples were the primary target of His remarks, but I think they were also directed to the greater multitude.

Again, Mark provides further information.

Mark 9:20–27 “And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.”

The boy was brought before Jesus, and it was as if the devil recognized Jesus and determined to cause as much damage as he could before being cast out. Jesus asked the father how long the boy had suffered this possession. The father informed Him that it had been with him since childhood and often tried to destroy him. The father begged for Jesus to show compassion on them if he could (implying doubt mingled with hope). Jesus responds by telling the father that “all things are possible” if he would but have faith. The father then piteously cries from his heart words that I have often echoed—“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” Jesus rebuked the devil and commanded him to leave the boy and never return. The spirit cried out causing a great epileptic fit and departed the boy leaving him so still that many thought he was dead. Jesus then reached out and took him by the hand and lifted him up showing that he was healed.

Note that the “devil” is recognized as a being with supernatural ability. Again, I think this is a truth not given much thought—at least in America today. Not everything evil that occurs can be attributed to devils/demons, but I personally believe that are behind much more disease and wickedness than we are willing to consider. Why? Because it involves crediting the supernatural and the truth about Satan and the evil powers that are in league with him.

Matthew 17:19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

Matthew 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I

say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Matthew 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

The disciples seemed genuinely confused as to why they could not exorcise the demon from the boy; and once with Jesus alone, they asked Him to explain. Jesus clearly stated that it was due to their lack of faith. He explained that if one would but have faith the size of a mustard seed—just the tiniest bit—he would be able to move a mountain (a word picture of doing what seems impossible). In fact, nothing would be impossible to them. He did qualify, however, that the type of demon that possessed the boy could not be cast out except by prayer and fasting. Prayer entails intimate communication with the Father and fasting declares one's sincerity and commitment to the objective sought through the willingness to deny self.

These are hard words to understand. I'm sure the disciples reasoned like I do that their faith in Jesus was at least comparable to a mustard seed. The greater truth is that pure faith, no matter how small, leaves no room for any doubt. What prompted their lack of faith, I don't know. Maybe they had begun to take their ability for granted and were not really focusing on the fact that they were acting "in the name of Jesus." I know the main thing that prompts my doubt is being unsure of God's will concerning what I am praying about. I know that many times it is God's will for one to experience suffering or go without or _____ in light of greater spiritual benefit—to self and/or others. I have no doubt that "God can," but I am ever unsure of "God will." I assume that if God wants to work a miracle through me, He will also give me the strength of faith to do it.

Matthew 17:22 ¶ And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:

Matthew 17:23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

Once again Jesus took the opportunity to tell the disciples that He would be betrayed into the hands of men that would kill Him, but that He would be resurrected from the grave on the third day. This made them all very sad.

Matthew 17:24 ¶ And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

Matthew 17:25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?

Matthew 17:26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

Matthew 17:27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Once they arrived in Capernaum, the temple officers approached Peter and asked if Jesus was going to comply with paying the temple tax. Without hesitation, Peter answered, "Yes." Once Peter arrived at home, Jesus anticipated his disclosure of what had occurred and asked him a question. My paraphrase—Peter, Do earthly kings require taxes from their children or strangers? Peter promptly answered, "Strangers." Jesus finished the thought by noting that the children were exempt.

The obvious point being made is that Jesus is the Son of God, the One the temple was established to honor. As His Son, He was not obligated to pay that tax. However, to avoid offending the religious authorities further (since they did not recognize Him as the Son of God), He was going to pay the tax. Actually, we will see that He is going to pay the tax with a gift from the Father. Jesus instructed Peter to go down to the sea with his fishing line and cast the hook. He is to open the mouth of the first fish he catches and remove the piece of money that he finds there. He is then to take that money and pay the tax for both Jesus and Peter.

What must this seasoned fisherman have thought! How amazed he must have been when he took that money out of the mouth of that fish—one among thousands in the sea! Such a great miracle that only Peter got to see! How great is our God!!!!

I liked Spurgeon's comment: "Thus the great Son pays the tax levied for his Father's house; but he exercises his royal prerogative in the act, and takes the shekel out of the royal treasury. As man he pays, but first as God he causes the fish to bring him the shekel in its mouth."

Historical note: The tax was one half-shekel per person and was equivalent to one or two days' wages for an average worker.