

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 11

Matthew 17:1 – Matthew 18:35

The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36

Matthew 17: ¹And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. ²And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" ⁶And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid. ⁷And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." ⁸And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.

Six days after Peter is rebuked by the Lord, Jesus takes him, James and John up on a high mountain. Jesus begins to radiate and His garments become pure white. Matthew uses the word "transfigured" to describe the Lord's appearance. It is a pagan Greek word translated in other literature as "metamorphosis." The Lord's appearance is transformed into a brilliant raiment that cannot be achieved by human effort. Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the mount. The original demise of both Moses and Elijah is shrouded in mystery. Moses had said goodbye to his family and followers on the bank of the Jordan River and then made his way up Mount Nebo to be buried by God. Elijah had stepped into a chariot and was taken into the heavens, dropping his mantle for Elisha to use. Jewish prophesy states that both Moses and Elijah will one day return to this earth, and it comes true at this moment on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses represents Jewish Law and Elijah represents Jewish prophecy, but Jesus represents the grace of God which would fulfill all the expectation of the Law and the prophets.

The feast of Tabernacles will be soon be upon them and Peter impetuously asks if they should prepare a tabernacle for each of them. Reacting impetuously is normal for Peter and will repeated in the events of the next few weeks. The whole scene is covered by a cloud, and Peter, James and John hear the voice of God the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son, ... listen to Him." It is possible that this is the second time they audibly hear His voice. Disciples of John the Baptist, they could have been present at Jesus' baptism. If they were there, the sound of the Father's voice was not unfamiliar to them. When the cloud lifts, the metamorphosis departs and the Lord returns to His normal appearance.

Elijah Discussed While Descending

Matthew 17:9-13; Mark 9:9-13

Matthew 17: ⁹And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." ¹⁰And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must

come first?" ¹¹And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; ¹²but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." ¹³Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

On the way down the mountain, Jesus tells the men not to say anything about what they have seen until after His resurrection. The apostles ask why the scribes say Elijah must come before the Messiah. Jesus tells them that it is true that Elijah must come first, but he already came and the King Herod killed him.

Later, the transfiguration will be useful for the knowledge of all future believers, but for now it is a special event only in the hearts and minds of Peter, James and John. The Lord asks them not to reveal what they have seen until His resurrection. They seize that moment to discuss what He means by His resurrection. We can only wonder if they had completely missed the Lord's words to them six days before.

Mark 8:31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

The second topic they seize upon is the prophecy concerning the return of Elijah in Malachi.

Malachi 4: ⁴"Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ⁵"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ⁶"And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

Several problems arise if Elijah's appearance at the transfiguration is considered the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy. First, he appeared on the mount after the appearance of Jesus and not before. Second, Elijah was with the Lord and Moses for only a few minutes. And third, he did not have time to fulfill the prophecy of restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children. Perhaps the Matthew testimony of this event can shed further light about when Elijah will appear to fulfill the Scripture.

Verse 13 of the Matthew passage reveals that John the Baptist fulfilled the Malachi prophecy concerning Elijah's return. First, He came and began his ministry six months before Jesus began His. Second, his ministry continued for several years. Third, his message to repent and believe restores the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, fulfilling the prophecy. In reference to John the Baptist, Jesus' words "they did to him whatever they wished" were also fulfilled. They beheaded him on the whim of a scornful wife by the trickery of a seducing young step-daughter.

Demon is Cast Out of Boy

Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 9:14-27; Luke 9:37-43

Matthew 17: ¹⁴And when they came to the multitude, a man came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying, ¹⁵"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. ¹⁶"And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." ¹⁷And Jesus answered and said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put

up with you? Bring him here to Me." ¹⁸And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

Only Peter, James and John are on the mountain with Jesus. The rest of the apostles are with the crowd below. As they approach the foot of the mountain, the nine rush to Jesus to explain a problem.

Summarizing this story from the accounts of all three Gospels, we see a fuller picture of the story.⁸⁶ A demon-possessed boy has been brought to the nine for healing but the demons will not respond and leave. The nine apostles are perplexed because the demons obeyed them when Jesus sent the twelve on their missionary journey through Galilee. Jesus asks the father how long he has been like this? The father tells him that it has been since childhood. Jesus says to the Father that all things are possible to those who believe. The father tells Jesus that he believes and asks the Lord to help his unbelief. Jesus heals the boy and gives him to his father.

The tactics of the Sanhedrin have changed. They no longer attack just the Lord; they are also attacking His followers. After coming down from Mount Hermon, a full crowd is engaged in a theological argument which centers on the problem that the disciples cannot cast a demon from the body of a boy.

Disciples Ask About the Miracle

Matthew 17:19-21; Mark 9:28-29

Matthew 17: ¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you. ²¹~~["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]~~

"Why could we not cast [the demon] out?" the apostles ask the Lord. The Lord replies that it is because they did not pray about it.

It seems that the professional scribes and Pharisees have seized the opportunity to rail at the failure of the nine apostles to remove the demon from the boy. We can only speculate about why the two groups are spurring on this argument. Jesus' appearance brings an end to the argument and the crowd runs to Him when they see Him coming. Jesus notices the countenance of the nine disciples and questions them. The father of the boy steps forward to explain the situation. He had asked the nine apostles to cast the demon out of his son, but they did not have the power to do so. Jesus sees the pitiful state that the boy is living in and asks that he be brought to Him. The crowd rushes toward the Lord to see the miracle that is about to take place. The Lord does not disappoint them. He releases the boy's body from the power of the demon forever.

At the house where Jesus and the apostles are staying, the apostles ask Him why they did not have the power to remove the demon. They had cast out demons many times in the past. The Lord has appointed them as apostles for that reason and they are stunned that the demon does not respond to their combined efforts. Jesus' words reveal the problem; they have forgotten to pray. They have tried to remove the demons under their own power.

⁸⁶ Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 9:14-27; Luke 9:37-43

Along the way, they begin to believe that they some magical power that will always be at their fingertips has been bestowed upon them. They fail to realize that God is the one who removes the demons, not man. Conversation with God is needed to accomplish the task of demon removal. They need to pray. They have become powerless because they have failed to pray.

Jesus Discusses His Death, Back in Galilee

Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:44-45

Matthew 17: ²²And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; ²³and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.

On the way back to Galilee, Jesus teaches His men how He will be delivered into the hands of others and killed. He also tells them how He will rise three days later, but the apostles do not understand.

The training of the apostles becomes the focus of Jesus' ministry because His public ministry in Galilee is over. His men need to completely understand the details of the next few weeks. He again instructs them plainly about His death and resurrection, but they cannot comprehend the magnitude of His words.

Jesus Pays Temple tax With a Miracle

Matthew 17:24-27

Matthew 17: ²⁴And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" ²⁵He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" ²⁶And upon his saying, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Consequently the sons are exempt. ²⁷"But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

Back in Capernaum, a tax collector asks Peter if they are going to pay their taxes. Peter says, "Yes." Jesus asks Peter if the tax collectors collect money from their own children or strangers? "From strangers," Peter says and Jesus replies, "Consequently the sons are exempt" from the taxes. So as not to offend the tax collectors, Jesus tells Peter to go down to the water and get a fish. In its mouth there will be a stater, which is enough money to pay their taxes.

Disciples Argue About Who Is the Greatest

Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48

Matthew 18: ¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ²And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, ³and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he

is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; ⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

At Peter's home, the twelve begin discussing greatness, wondering which one of them will be the greatest in the kingdom. No doubt, the apostles are ashamed when they realize that Jesus has overheard their petty dispute. They are expecting a political kingdom to be established by the Lord and they are arguing over their respective positions of power in this new government. Jesus rebukes the twelve in a most interesting way; He picks up a child, perhaps Peter's, and uses him as an example. Mark's Gospel says that Jesus breaks up the conversation by telling them that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.⁸⁷ Jesus then takes one of their children in His arms and says, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me" and the Father. His point is clear. To have a place in the His government, they will have to become servants to all the children of God.

Warnings About Stumbling Blocks, Final Lessons at Peter's Home

Matthew 18:7-11; Mark 9:43-50

Matthew 18: ⁷"Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! ⁸"And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹"And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell. ¹⁰"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹~~["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.]"~~

The Gospel of Mark gives an in-depth understanding of the scene with Jesus.⁸⁸ John is in the crosshairs of Jesus' rebuke because it centers on him and his brother James. Embarrassed, John attempts to change the subject, seeking approval of the Lord by pointing out the heresy of others casting out demons in the name of Jesus without His approval. John has seen a stranger attempting to cast out demons and he wants to know if he should stop him. The tactic backfires on John. The wording in the Mark passage is interesting in this passage. John says he saw a man casting out a "demon" rather than an "unclean spirit," the term used throughout the gospel of Mark. Why did John use the word "demon" instead of the words "unclean spirit?" Perhaps the story was not true; perhaps it was only hypothetical in John's mind. Calling them demons or unclean spirit makes no difference at all; neither of them can be removed by the works of man. They can be removed only by God, and that is the precise point Jesus is making in His reply to John. If a man can pray for the removal of a demon and God answers that prayer, then the man is clearly a child of God. Jesus says because no one can perform a miracle in His name and also speak evil of Him, those who are not against the Lord are for the Lord. Jesus tells the twelve to beware of those who cause people to stumble. For them it would have been better if they had been cast into the sea. He reminds them that salt is good until it loses its flavor. He tells them to have salt in their lives and live at peace with one another.

⁸⁷Mark 9:42

⁸⁸Mark 9:38-49

Parable About the Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:12-14

Matthew 18: ¹²"What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³"And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴"Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Jesus compares Himself and His followers to a shepherd and his flock. Just as the shepherd goes to find the lost sheep and return it to the flock, so does Jesus rescue His follower who has stumbled or gone astray. Jesus does not want any of His followers to perish.

Instructions on Church Discipline

Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 18: ¹⁵"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷"And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. ¹⁸"Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

Some followers will stumble by sinning against other people. Upon seeing followers sinning, the leadership is to point out that sin and ask them to stop. If they refuse to stop, the leadership is to approach them with one or two other witnesses. If they still refuse, they are to be brought before the council of the church. If they refuse again, they are to be put out of the church. It is in this setting that Jesus gives the apostles the authority to bind and loose the things on earth which will be in heaven.

Peter's Question About Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Matthew 18: ²¹Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Peter understands that Jesus is telling them what to do when they see others sinning, but he is confused about what he should do when someone sins against him personally. Jesus tells Peter to forgive him "seventy times seven."

Parable of the King's Account

Matthew 18: ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴"And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵"But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶"The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' ²⁹"So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰"He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³²"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ³³'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴"And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

The Lord tells the story of the king whose servant owed 10,000 talents which he could not pay. The king forgave the servant of his debt. But another man owed the servant a hundred pence and the servant would not forgive him and even cast him into prison. A friend discovers the situation and tells the king who then calls the servant in and chastises him for his lack of forgiveness. The king then throws the servant into prison until all that is owed is paid. The heavenly Father will do the same to those who do not forgive others.