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The Gospel According to Matthew

Faith that Moves Mountains

July 21, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 17:9-20

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 3

Before we move ahead here in Matthew 17, we need to look at the last half of the section we considered last time – the transfiguration of Christ. We saw that Christ's glory manifested on that mountain and Moses and Elijah appearing there with Him told us that the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, Scripture in its entirety – Moses, the Prophets, and the New Covenant in Christ, are all one.

We also saw that the blinding, shining glory of Christ was His divine nature blazing past the veil of His human flesh. It was not like the shining face

of Moses which shone because Moses had been in the presence of God and which glory eventually faded away, just as the Old Covenant faded away. No, Christ's glory is His own glory. If Moses was the moon reflecting the Sun, Christ is the Sun itself.

Heb 1:3-4 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (4) having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

And all of that means that the glory of the New Covenant – our salvation in Christ and the New Creation – is eternal. It does not fade away.

2Co 3:7-11 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought

to an end, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? (9) For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. (10) Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. (11) For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Moses and Elijah both, the Law and the Prophets, testify that they point to Christ, that they themselves were temporary to lead us to Christ, that Christ and the New Covenant are in no way contrary to the Old Covenant, and therefore we must be careful that we interpret the Bible in this way. We must not try to use the Old Covenant as a supposed means of becoming righteous before God, which of course was the error of the Jews. It is also the same error that so many "religious" people are making today. They think that they can be justified by works of the Law.

Now, here is this matter of Elijah and the disciples' question:

Mat 17:9-20 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." (10) And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" (11) He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. (12) But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." (13) Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

2Co 4:3-6 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of

The disciples were referring to the scribes teaching on this Scripture, the very last words of the Old Testament:

You see their blindness here:

Mal 4:5-6 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

We have already considered the parallels between Elijah and John the Baptist.

Mat 11:11-14 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, (14) and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

So John was the promised Elijah. John was the last of the OT prophets whose privilege it was to announce the arrival of the Messiah. John heralded in the new age of the New Covenant. The scribes and other teachers of Israel were looking for Elijah but didn't recognize him when he arrived.

Joh 1:19-23 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” (20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” (21) And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” (22) So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” (23) He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

So, no, John was not Elijah incarnated brought back from the dead. But John did know that he was the one promised by Isaiah. The one who would announce the arrival of the Christ.

Elijah had indeed arrived. John was the promised Elijah and Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Faith as a Mustard Seed and Our Unbelief

(14) And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, (15) said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has

seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. (16) And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” (17) And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” (18) And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. (19) Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” (20) He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Remember now that the Gospel of Matthew is about the King and His Kingdom. The New Era has arrived, though not yet in its culminated fullness. Jesus continues to give us glimpses into His authority as King and to the blessings of His new creation. That is what is happening here.

Every single one of us struggles with unbelief. We will do so as long as we are in this present body and world. Our faith really has to be a gift from God, else we would remain blind to the glory of Christ. It is only when the

Lord Himself declares “Let there be light,” that the blinders are taken off of us and we can say “now I see.”

So here we have the disciples stumbling in their faith. Who were the disciples? Were they some other group of followers? The context seems to indicate that they were the same close band following Christ.

Here then we have kingdoms in conflict. The kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of Christ. Luke also gives the account (checking for parallels in the Gospels is a good Bible study method by the way) –

Luk 9:37-42 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. (38) And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, **for he is my only child.** (39) **And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.** (40) And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” (41) Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” (42) **While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him.** But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed

the boy, and gave him back to his father.

So we have a bit of additional information from Luke. It is the man's only son. He foams at the mouth in these seizures. He is thrown to the ground.

Now of course in our modern age, people will be quick to attribute this case to a purely physical malady. Epilepsy, for instance. An ignorant age of long ago in which people attribute these things to demons.

Of course the thing is still a miracle – Jesus instantly heals him!! But I suspect that anyone who is an expert on epilepsy would see some atypical symptoms here:

- He often falls into fire and/or water. Sometimes, perhaps. But *often*?
- It “shatters” him. Mistreats him, wears him out, bruises him. This poor boy is literally beat up constantly.
- The thing is set off when the boy is brought close to Jesus. Demons know who Christ is and they fear him. We have seen this in the account of the Gadarene demoniac earlier.

We need to make a note at this point – a point of application. This is what

Satan always does. In this particular case the abuse is more evident and visible. You actually see the boy being beat up and the enemy even trying to kill him.

But nevertheless this is the very same intent the devil has for anyone who is in bondage to him. If you are listening this morning and you do not know Christ, if you have not been born again, then this young boy is YOU. The devil is the destroyer. He is a murderer. That is what he does to all who are enslaved in his kingdom. He is a liar and the father of lies. By his deceit he keeps people blinded to the glory of Christ and he abuses them in many, many ways.

Is it not quite probably that the increase of visible evil and suffering in our world and nation is due to this very thing? How many of the people around us are beaten up by the devil constantly – he has many, many weapons. Drugs. Alcohol. A dominating spirit of the sluggard. How many people are self-destructing around us? And yet if you try to show them Christ and call them to repent, is there faith in them? Nope. Little wonder that Jesus said:

Luk 18:7-8 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? (8) I tell you, he will give

justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Let's take note of some interesting points here:

- The father had faith. He knelt down before Jesus and called Him Lord. He believed Jesus could heal his son.
- And I would go so far as to say that the son had faith as well. He wanted to be healed. We aren't told this for certain.
- But interestingly, the healing was short-circuited *by the unbelief of the disciples*.

Now, not only does Luke include this account in his Gospel along with Matthew, but Mark actually gives the fullest detail of it. Follow here as I read it and you will see some more light shed – and some more questions arise too!

Mar 9:14-29 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. (15) And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. (16) And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"

(17) And someone from the crowd

answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. (18) And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."

(19) And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

(20) And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. (21) And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. (22) And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

(23) And Jesus said to him, "'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." (24) Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

(25) And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute

and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

(26) And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” (27) But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

(28) And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” (29) And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

Let’s add these clarifying points to what we have already seen:

- It appears that the disciples who lacked faith and who had been trying to heal the boy were the remainder of the disciples who had not gone up on the mountain with Jesus and Peter, James, and John.
- They are arguing and debating with the scribes. The scribes were probably opposed to Jesus. What was the topic of their argument? Perhaps that Jesus could heal this boy, but then the disciples had failed at it??
- The oppressed boy could not speak, he was mute and deaf.
- The boy had been suffering all this “from childhood.” We

cannot imagine his suffering or the suffering of his parents.

- Then notice that here we have a clear statement of the father’s faith. “I believe, help my unbelief.”

This really is the thing that Jesus spoke to His disciples about after healing the boy:

(Matt 17:19) Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” (20) He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of 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 KJV adds this verse:

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

And in Mark’s account we have these renderings:

KJV Mar 9:29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

NASB ESV Mar 9:29 And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

Verse 21 in Matthew is not present at all in the earlier manuscripts, so in the NASB you will find it in brackets with a note to that effect. No doubt along the way as copyists can tend to do, someone added “and fasting” and in fact apparently borrowed from Mark and added prayer and fasting back into Matthew’s account.

Prayer fits the context. It is the language of faith. The disciples must have been trusting in themselves as disciples of Jesus somehow rather than praying in genuine faith. The mustard seed imagery indicates that they didn’t even have that much faith when they were trying to heal the boy.

But here is the point. It is Christ who is king. Not us. It is Christ who rules even over the kingdom of darkness – over Satan and his minions. Not us. The disciples had not got that right yet.

One final point. Faith has as its object the Lord and HIS will. Not us and OUR desires. Faith is not about us “making it happen.” Faith is believing what God has revealed to us. And so much of what we pray, even when we have real faith, is not the immediate

will of God. This is what Paul meant when he wrote this:

Rom 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

This should be very, very encouraging to us. Every time we pray in faith, that prayer is heard and answered. It may not be answered in the specific manner we had in mind, but the Lord does indeed answer such prayer.

Jas 5:15-16 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.