

Matthew 17:14-33

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn to Matthew chapter 17, if you've got a black church Bible. It's on page 822.

! Who Jesus really was. It's like a trailer for how we'll one day see Jesus. And Moses and Elijah from the Old Testament were there. And they're on the mountain of transfiguration. That's how we know it, isn't it? But here today they go back down to the real world, as we often call it. And in the real world, you will know, as I know, you encounter the most dark and appalling despair. Not all the time, but some of the time. What you have here is the kind of awesome sense of a young life being ruined. The helplessness of the world contrasting with the glory and the fullness of the transfiguration scene. There's a deliberate contrast. You've got a helpless father and a helpless boy. A boy causing himself, apparently, considerable physical damage, as well as other kinds. And then you've got the helpless disciples, these followers of Jesus, that the father brings his son to, but they can't help him. He goes to the representatives of Jesus in the world, and they come to it. They can't fix it. And then he comes to Jesus, and you'll see, you see, he kneels down in anguish, and he says,

I brought him to your disciples, but they could not help him either. They could not heal him. These worlds, the mountain of transfiguration, and the world we're looking at this moment, they are contemporary. There's a world where Jesus reigns in glory, and he shines in all the brightness of his divinity. And there's also the world that you and I live in. A world of darkness, and need, and pain, and anguish, and unfulfilled hopes, and helplessness. And that's what just is that I'm kind of out there in the world this morning. That's in here, in this building, in the Church of Jesus Christ. And this man found it so.

And I think Matthew's account here of the ineffectiveness of the disciples is where he focuses.

[2 : 51] And we'll also see this unusual outburst where Jesus kind of opens his heart, and we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus. And then the author of the Gospel presents to us Jesus leading his disciples, and his disciples, and his disciples understand what has made them join the helpless in relation to this young man. So these three significant elements all begin with G.

First we see the devastation that's in the heart of the Father. That appears in verse 14. And then we'll see in the passage the distress that's in the heart of Jesus from verses 17 to 18.

Jesus answers them, 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. There's an extraordinary outcry from the heart of Jesus. And then at the end of the passage he focuses on the diagnosis Jesus gives for the ineffectiveness of the disciples.

Your disciples could not restore him. So let's look first of all at the devastation of the heart of the Father. I don't think there's another way of describing what's going on in this family, in this poor man's heart and spirit.

He's devastated by the particular problems of his son. He's devastated by the damage being seen that's being done to him. He's distraught by a world that seems to be able to offer him and his son no help.

[4 : 19] I think he's devastated. He's particularly devastated when he takes them to people that he think will find be able to finally be able to make the difference. The representative of Jesus Christ. And they find there's very little difference between what the disciples offer him and what the world around him offers him.

And the natures of the boy's problem are seizures. Literally, the word is moonstruck. The lad is suffering from fits or seizures that made him fall.

And in verse 15 it tells us that he often fell into fire or water. Now I noticed that the version of the ESV, the Blackfish Bible, that is a translation of the original Greek.

And in the word it says, it says that the boy suffered from epilepsy. That is a really bad translation. The word should be seizures.

There's no justification for saying that this boy suffered from epilepsy. The symptoms might look the same. He has the phenomenon of seizures as part of his condition.

[5 : 33] But Jesus deals with the problem on a completely different level altogether. The boy is not mad. He's not a lunatic.

He's not merely sick with some kind of disease that we might recognize. Can you see how Jesus diagnoses it? He says he's possessed by a demon. Verse 18. And Jesus rebuked the demon. And it came out of him. And the boy was healed instantly. There's lots of business here this morning, which is great. I don't know how you feel about this. About a boy like this being possessed by the power of darkness.

Indwelt by one of their representatives. I wonder what your explanation of evil is. Maybe you're a regular teacher going. You have a bit of a problem with it. But do you have a problem with someone being indwelt and possessed by God's Holy Spirit?

And if you do well, you'll have problems with the supernatural dwelling of the demon's power. But here Jesus immediately dismisses. And so, as you recognize that it's possible, isn't it, by the messages, for someone to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and the living God.

[6 : 49] That is what a Christian is. You must learn that it's also possible for someone to be indwelt by a demonic power. And clearly, Jesus' diagnosis of his condition, he had seizures.

As people who may suffer from epilepsy may have. But that is not the basic problem for which this boy is suffering. Let me point out to you what this means as Jesus rebukes and dismisses the demon.

First of all, Jesus is not an exorcist. Jesus doesn't have a super technique that he's learned for this kind of ministry. There's been an enormous amount of damage done by the exaltation of some sort of technique.

That people may learn if they say the right words or the right actions. That they may even dismiss the demonic spirit as Jesus here did.

It's not obvious then. Can you see? It's his powerful word of command. That's what we read. He speaks and the demon obeys. He speaks as the living God.

[7 : 57] Do you remember what we saw last week? God the Father says, this is my son with whom I'm well pleased. And Jesus speaks with all the authority and power that had just been demonstrated on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The one from whom heaven had been opened up. And God says, this is my son, my love, and I'm well pleased with him. And he comes down from that heavenly glory into this world's ultimate darkness.

And he commands the demons to depart from him. And he does so by a word of his power. And it's the power of God overcoming the power of Satan which is downstairs here.

It's not a technique. The second thing that we need to say is it's not true that the New Testament mistook illnesses for demonic possession.

That's often said to me. They were just naive. They just didn't know what these illnesses were. They mistook illnesses in general for demon possession.

[9 : 01] They were just simple folk. So people patronisingly say, they look at the Gospel and they'll say, well we have superior knowledge, we have more scientific knowledge, medicine has advanced.

And we know that this particular disease, as a matter of fact, is not demon possession. But actually, if you're willing to read the Gospels, Matthew, Martha, Luke or John, we'd love you to take Matthew's Gospel away from you today and read it.

If you're willing to read it carefully, you will discover that the Gospels are very, very particular and very careful. And they divide between demonic possession and ordinary illness.

And so you'll find a refrain that says that they brought to Jesus many who were sick and those who were oppressed by demons. There is always a distinction made between the two.

And it's very, very important for you and I to grasp that. And it shows us also that the spiritual weakness and poverty of the disciples is exposed.

[10:06] They are helpless in the face of demonic powers. And these are the powers that they're confronting at this point. They are waging war against, not against flesh and blood.

But they are waging war against principalities and powers, against the spiritual wickednesses in the heavenly places. And it's here that the Church of Jesus, in every age, is dealing with the real enemy.

It's really easy for us as a Church to think on a purely superficial, material and worldly level. To think that you can deal with things just by organisation and by recruitment.

You can deal with these things by the exercise of human skills. But when you're dealing with a life that's in the hands of the powers of darkness.

The Bible teaches us you don't meet such spiritual forces just with organisation. Or with recruitment. Or with the exercise of human skills. With worldly armour.

[11:21] These disciples were helpless in the face of that kind of opposition. They cannot deal with this boy. And that leads me to the second thing.

The second thing is the distress in the heart of Jesus. The desperation of the Father. The distress in the heart of Jesus. And again, I think as we read through the Gospels, we find something unusual here.

It's an expression of Jesus' high emotion. He's expressing pain and anguish in spirit. He's uncovering that frustration that's right at the core of his being.

It's a famous theologian. It's a really brilliant essay called *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. And it's a fascinating thing. If you can get hold of it, you can read it.

Because what he's saying here is that Jesus had an emotional life. And here's one of these examples. He is distressed. And you see this in so many ways
By the boy's conditions
Wherever Jesus sees needs
That call for human compassion
There is none so compassionate
As the Lord Jesus
I hope that you've learned that truth
I hope that you will learn that truth
There is none more
compassionate
Than the Lord Jesus Christ
None who feel so deeply
None whose heart aches so
much
In the presence of pain and of sorrow
And this kind of overwhelming
Personal family disaster
But his true distress
Is that the spiritual paralysis
That has affected the disciples
Do you know how
that comes out?

[13:09] The father is kneeling in his presence
With the boy in the background
Clearly suffering so
profoundly
But Jesus' greatest distress
Is caused by the disciples
Who the father says in verse 16
I brought him to your disciples
But they could not heal him
And now listen to this distress
In Jesus' voice
Look what he says
Jesus answered
O faithless and twisted generation
O unbelieving
generation
How long am I to be with you?

It means to be without faith
On a perverse and a twisted generation
And Jesus says
How long shall I stay with you?
How long shall I put up with you?

Do you ever imagine Jesus saying something like that?
How long will I put up with you?
How long am I to bear with you?
Can I put up with this any longer?

What is it that he's having to put up with?
It is unbelieving
It is the unbelieving
And perverse
generation
It is those without faith
Those who are turned
In the wrong direction
And the sheer
sense of frustration
And isolation
That Jesus is experiencing
I sometimes wonder
Whether that is
one of the reasons
Why the transfiguration happened
Why it was almost necessary
For our Lord
In the world
That Jesus knew
As he walked the streets of this earth
An appalling sense of isolation
He knew what it was to be lonely
Even amongst his disciples
Think about that
Those like Judas
Who betrayed him
Those like Peter
Who denied him
James and John
Were only interested
In their own
position
One after another
After another
After another
Leaves him
Until they all forsake him
And fled
But there is

In this middle stage
Of his ministry
In the midst of this
Isolation and pain
That Jesus is experiencing
He hears the voice
Of his father
Saying this is my son
Would you like me?

[15:18] I will please
To have those moments
On the transfiguration
How much it would have
meant him
To speak with
The Old Testament giants
Of the faith
Moses and Elijah
And they speak
to him
About his death
About his exodus
That he has this moment
Of sweet fellowship
And communion
With his father
And then he goes down
Back into the valley
And he says
How long
How long
Must I put up with this?

And I wonder
Are those there
They caught
The solemnity
Of what he said
How long?

How long? I think you can project That into the contemporary church In the west today The Lord Jesus Christ Saying to those Who fragrantly Disregard his word How long Should I stay with you? How long Should I put up with you? Here's the third thing There's the devastation Of the heart of the father There's the genuine Deep seated distress Of the heart Of the Lord Jesus And then thirdly And lastly There's the diagnosis Of the ineffectiveness Of his disciples A diagnosis Of the ineffectiveness Of his disciples In verses 19-21 They see the power Of Jesus To heal this boy And then they come To him in private And they ask him Why couldn't we Drive him out? And Jesus gives them An immediate diagnosis Of the problem Because you have So little faith I don't think so I don't think I'll tell you why In a moment I don't think Jesus is speaking About the quantity Of their faith And for this reason Because immediately He goes on to say Do you see what he said?

[17 : 08] If you've got faith Like a grain of mustard seed If you've got A tiny, tiny, tiny Little bit of faith In me You can't have anything Smaller than a grain Of mustard seed And earlier on Jesus When he turns To his disciples And whoever else He was speaking to In verse 17 He's called them Unbelieving Faithless And twisted Unbelieving Means without faith The words Made up Of unbelieving The absence of faith And Matthew Cleary wants to Convey to us That this is what Jesus is saying to him He's not saying That you have a tiny Little amount of faith You have such a small Faith Very little faith Because later He would have Contradicted himself Wouldn't he?

And said Well if you've got A tiny little bit Of faith You would have Been able to Say To this mountain Be moved And it would have Moved him to sea What's he speaking About then? He's speaking about Their spiritual poverty That's what he's Speaking about And their spiritual Poverty takes this Form They are Unbelieving And twisted Someone's twisted And perverse We might say That they're just They're just plain Difficult People like that Difficult people Awkward people We all are friends Like that Don't we?

Don't we? And they are friends Like that That's probably us Angler Tears But that's That's not what Jesus is saying here When he talks About being twisted He's talking about Being twisted In the wrong direction Let me tell you What I think Jesus is speaking about He's speaking about Lives that are Twisted around In the wrong direction Because they're Turned To be self Centered In their thinking Self Centered In their thinking Not God Centered In their thinking What did the Mountain of Transfiguration Speak about?

It spoke about God It spoke about God at the Centre With all his Glory And all his Honour Crowded around him The Lord Jesus Christ Burning With glory So that they Could scarcely Look at him But they couldn't Look at anything Else Because he Drew them I said It is this That Jesus Diagnoses As the Great Problem Of the Disciples Because what Is faith?

Faith is not Some kind of Condition That you Work at And you Try to Make yourself Believe Please don't Think I'm Trying to Say that This Morning That you Kind of Crank It up And you Try to Feel That you Can Do it It's like The high Jump People Through the High Jump And you Visualise It And then You Work it Up On yourself I can Do it I will Do it I must Do it And off You run And you Try And do it That's Not Faith It's not Believing In yourself More and More and More No Faith Focuses All its Attention On an Object And its Object The Bible Says Is God Should be God And Jesus Is the Supreme Example Of a God Centred Life That he Lives Here In the Flesh And the Disciples Learned That And Peter Learned That If you read Through his Epistles Of the New Testament You find that Peter learned That lesson Too He learned It late But he Didn't Learn it And so Many of The followers

[20 : 55] Of Jesus And the Disciples Of Jesus When they Began This is What became Central to Them You see That in The book Of Acts God At the Center And that Is Jesus Diagnosis You know If you've Read the Bible There is Nothing That's Impossible For God Jesus Says If you Had faith As small As a Mustard Seed You Would Be A This Mountain Move From Here To There It's A Rabbinical Expression It's Saying That Simple Truth Nothing Is Impossible For God And Nothing Would Be Impossible For You For The Simple Reason That Nothing Is Impossible For God And They Give A Final Shape To Their Unbelief Look About The last Of Paragraph In Verses 22 To 23 Jesus Begins To Tell Them About His Plan And The Purpose Of His Father That The Son of Man Is Going To Be Betrayed Into!

The Hands Of Men And They Will Kill Him And On The Third Day He Will Be Raised To Life At The End Of Verse 23 They Were Greatly Distressed Greatly Distressed And So What Is This Passage Calling For It Is Calling For You And I To Re-Oriented Our Lives From A Man Centred Life To A

God Centred Life What Was That Look Like In 1546 A Polish Astronomer Named Nicholas Copernicus Published A book In Latin And He Challenged The World In That Book He Shows That The Earth Was Not The Central Planet

In The System As People At The Time Thought But In Fact The Sun Was The Central Planet And The Sun Did Not Go Round The Earth But The Sun Is Called The Copernicus Revolution And All The textbooks Of Europe Had to Be Changed And All The University Lectures Had to Scrap Their Notes And Start Again And All The Poets And Theologians Had to Think Differently And All The Maps Needed To Be Redrawn Because Copernicus By That One Discovery!

The Way People Saw Reality! Around Me And My Wants And What I Want Like Those People Who Thought The Earth Was The Centre Of Everything And We Naturally Don't We Think That We're The Centre Of Everything But What This Path Shows Is That God And The Lord Jesus Christ He Is The Centre Of Everything And When You Discover That You Find That Your Life And My Life Has Be!

And We Have To Think Differently And Our Ambitions Need To Be Redrawn Because To Live A God Centred Life Means To Put Our Faith In A God Who Says Nothing Will Be Impossible To You Let's Pray