

Notes for Matthew -Chapter 17 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction - "Misconceptions about Jesus Part II" - Jesus isn't done yet. ☺

1. Remember why Matthew wrote this Gospel: To prove Jesus is the promised Messiah.
 - a. Matthew also has to deal with misconceptions about Jesus and his purpose.
 - b. Jews of that day wanted a ruling a Messiah, not one who would suffer for their sins.
 - c. Further, many thought the Messiah would "just" be a man, say, on the same level as Moses or one of the prophets. Matthew emphasizes Jesus superiority over all men.
2. With all of that in mind let me summarize Chapter 17. It contains three stories:
 - a. First is Jesus being "transfigured" before 3 of the 12 disciples.
 - i. His physical appearance changes to brilliant white.
 - ii. All of a sudden Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus.
 - iii. The voice of God the Father then says to Peter in effect, "Listen to Jesus, not them".
 - iv. Then, Moses and Elijah disappear.
 - b. The second story in Chapter 17 is about Jesus healing a boy of a demon.
 - i. Further, it talks about the disciples failure to do the same and why.
 - c. The third story is about some tax collectors asking the disciples if Jesus pays a certain tax.
 - i. Jesus told Peter, of all things, to go fish. Jesus said that in the mouth of a fish would be a coin that would pay the tax for Jesus and Peter.
3. What I want you to think about now is why these three stories in this order?
 - a. First we have Jesus physically-changing into more of a "Godly-appearance".
 - b. Second, we have the story of Jesus healing a boy of a demon.
 - i. Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack-of-faith in not being able to heal this boy themselves. Jesus is teaching "don't give up so easily in prayer" (i.e., persistence).
 - c. Finally Jesus told Peter to go fish to get a coin out of the fish's mouth to pay a tax.
 - i. The application is about "being a good witness to the unbelieving world".
 - d. In summary we have:
 - i. 1) A story of Jesus showing his deity;
 - ii. 2) A story of how the disciples are suppose to minister to others;
 - iii. 3) A story of how the disciples are to be witnesses to the world (i.e., non-believers).
 - iv. That is a good summary of the Christian life! We draw upon God for our strength, we serve God by serving others, and we are to be a witness to the outside world.

Last Verse of Chapter 16 AND Chapter 17, Verses 1-3: ^{16:28} "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (And) ^{17:1} After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

1. In Verse 28, Jesus told the disciples that some of them would not taste death until they see Jesus coming into his kingdom. The best explanation is that the term "kingdom" refers to the kingdom of believers, that is, life here-on-earth as Christians. It does not refer to life-in-heaven.
2. Six days after Jesus makes this "some of you" statement, three of the 12 disciples are lead up unto the mountain to see Jesus transfigured.
3. OK, why these three guys? Why not take all 12 or a whole multitude for that matter?
 - a. The most logical explanation is that Jesus wanted to keep his Messiahship a secret until the time of the cross. He has stated that many times.
 - b. If a large multitude of people saw Jesus like this, they would try to force him to be King of Israel there on the spot, like the promises made for Jesus 2nd coming.
 - c. Jesus "showed off his power" in order to validate to the disciples who He was.
 - d. It showed these 3 that Jesus is greater than Moses, Elijah, and all the great bible figures.

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Discussion of Verses 1-3 (cont.) Jesus being "transfigured" before Peter, James and John

4. But why Peter, James and John? Here is something to think about:
 - a. Other than Paul, who came later, Peter & John wrote most of the New Testament.
 - i. Maybe Jesus picked these two for that reason.
 - b. The James who is mentioned here, became the first church martyr. (Reference: Acts 12:2)
 - c. Therefore, maybe the reason Jesus picked these three guys is that one served as an example of being a martyr for Christ, while the other two were used mightily in the early church growth and in writing epistles.
5. The word "transfigured" describes a change from within.
 - a. The Greek word for transfigured is similar to the term "metamorphosis".
 - b. Jesus did not have a bright spotlight on him; it was a major physical change in his being.
 - c. Remember that Matthew himself was not up there. He got his information second-hand from one of the three disciples.
 - d. These two verses are full of questions and speculations about the future.
 - i. If Jesus was that "bright", how was it that the disciples could still look at him?
 - ii. How did the disciples know this was Moses and Elijah? Were there nametags? 😊
 - iii. There is speculation based on this event that when we get to heaven, we just "know" who people are. We won't need nametags.
 - iv. Further, I think we are all going to "transfigure" somehow, like Jesus in our new manifested body in heaven.
 - v. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1st John 3:2, NIV)
6. OK, why Moses and Elijah? Why not Abraham, or Noah, or King David?
 - a. Elijah never died. He was "raptured" to use a modern Christian term.
 - i. In 2nd Kings 2:11, it says that Elijah being "taken into heaven". He never "died".
 - b. Moses death is just as strange. The book of Deuteronomy states that Moses went up to a mountain by himself to die, and God himself buried him and no one "to this day" knows where Moses body is. (Ref.: Deut. 34:5).
 - i. There is this strange reference that Satan and the Archangel Michael fought over the body of Moses! (Reference Jude 1:9)
 - c. More than anyone else, Moses represents "The Law". He wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, which to Jews, is honored more than the other books of the bible.
 - d. Elijah is considered the greatest of the prophets. A Jewish ritual, which is part of the Passover meal, is to leave an empty plate for Elijah in case he shows up. The door is left open or unlocked for the same reason.
 - e. Therefore, Moses and Elijah represent "The Law and The Prophets".
 - i. Mathew wants to show that Jesus is not equal to the "Law and the Prophets", but Jesus is greater than the "Law and the Prophets".

Verses 4-5: Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

1. Let me try to paraphrase what Peter is saying, "Wow Lord, it is an honor that you picked me, and John and James for this great mountaintop experience. Tell you what, to honor all three of you, let us three guys build three equal-size shrines, one for each of you".
2. When Peter said "shelter's", he was referring to a portable tabernacle, which is a place of honor.

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Verses 4-5: (cont.)

3. Peter's mistake was to put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah.
4. For God the Father to call Jesus "his son" implies equality with God the Father.
 - a. A reason for this statement was to correct Peter. It was to help the three disciples understand Jesus superiority in rank to Moses and Elijah.
 - b. This verse is very similar to God the Father's statement when the dove descending upon Jesus back in Chapter 3.
5. The verse also mentions a "bright cloud" and a voice from the cloud.
 - a. When God spoke to Moses at Mt. Sinai, there was a thick cloud surrounding the mountain. (Reference Exodus 19:9)
 - b. The voice of God is often associated with clouds. The word picture for us is that we can't fully comprehend God and his power. Just as clouds make things "fuzzy" for us to see, so it is with direct communication from God.

Vs. 6-8: When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

1. Notice that the voice of God scared the disciples. The "white-Jesus" didn't invoke any fear.
2. When the disciples heard the voice of God the Father, now they were scared. The presence of a perfect God stuck fear. You can read of many bible characters having fear in God's presence.
3. It is ok for us to honor and respect great Jewish and Christian leaders, but our primary focus needs to be on Jesus. To quote God the Father, "Hear Him!"

Verse 9: As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

1. This had to be tough for the disciples. Imagine seeing this and not being able to tell anyone about it! I also suspect that their egos went up a notch that "they" were chosen and not the others. Jesus will deal with that in the next section of the text.

Verse 10: The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

1. In the last book of the Old Testament, in the last chapter, in the second to last verse, it does say that Elijah comes prior to the Messiah coming.
 - a. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes." (Malachi 4:5, NIV)
2. Because the Old Testament says Elijah must come prior before the Messiah, maybe the disciples had some doubts about Jesus since Elijah had not come yet.

Verses 11-13: Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

1. Jesus is saying there is a double-fulfillment of Malachi's prediction about Elijah.
2. Jesus says in Verse 12 that Elijah has already come. That is John the Baptist as stated in Verse 13.
3. Jesus also says in Verse 11 that Elijah will come. Remember that Jesus made this statement after the appearance of Elijah and Moses up on the mountaintop.
4. Jesus never bluntly said Elijah "is" John the Baptist, the disciples understood it was about John.
5. Remember the Jewish religious leaders once asked John the Baptist directly if he is Elijah. He said "no". (Reference John 1:21)
6. Before John the Baptist was born, an angel appeared to John the Baptist's father and said, "He (John) will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:15, NIV).

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Verses 11-13 (cont.): A discussion of “Elijah did come” (John the Baptist) and “Elijah to come” (future):

7. Tying John 1:21 and Luke 1:15 together, John was not the literal fulfillment of Elijah as promised in Malachi, but he is the spiritual fulfillment (a “type” or “word-picture”) of Elijah.
8. Let’s talk about the future appearance of “Elijah”. This has not happened yet.
 - a. Look at Malachi 4:5 again. It says that Elijah will come “before that great and dreadful day of the LORD”. Jesus death and resurrection is not a “dreadful day”. Not to me at least. ☺
 - b. It is referring to Jesus Second Coming. If you’ve read Revelation, it is pretty dreadful. ☹
9. Revelation 11:3: And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. ⁶ These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want." (Revelation 11:3-6 NIV)
 - a. In Revelation, Chapter 11, it speaks of “my (God’s) two witnesses” in Verse 3.
 - b. Elijah is not mentioned by name in Revelation Chapter 11, but it is logical speculation because Jesus said Elijah would come and restore all things.
 - c. Personally, I believe the other guy in Revelation 11 is Moses. I can’t prove it, but the fact that Moses and Elijah appear in Matthew as 2 witness’s ties very well to Revelation 11.
 - d. The two guys in Revelation 11 have the power to turn water to blood and strike the earth with plagues (ref: Rev. 11:6). That sounds very Moses-like to me. ☺
 - e. The other powers given to these two guys is to “shut the sky so that it does not rain”. (Ref.: Rev. 11:6). That miracle is associated with Elijah (Ref. Luke 4:24 and 1st Kings 17:1).

Verses 14-15: When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ¹⁵ "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water.

1. Jesus and those three disciples are now down from the mountaintop. They are now joined by the rest of the disciples and a large multitude.
2. The man claims his son is possessed by a demon. The symptoms sound like epilepsy. Yet somehow, the man thinks or knows it is demon(s) that are controlling his son.

Verses 16-17: I (the boy’s father) brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." ¹⁷ "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me."

1. Jesus response amazes me here. Notice Jesus does not just say, “Of course I’ll cure him, I love all people, bring him to me!” Jesus does cure him. The point is not Jesus lack of compassion
 - a. Jesus first uses this opportunity to address the crowd and teach his disciples a lesson about their faith and His power.
2. When Jesus said, “O unbelieving and perverse generation” was Jesus talking to his disciples or the whole multitude?
 - a. Jesus is responding to the fact that the man brought his son to the other disciples, but they were not able to heal the boy. Most likely, Jesus is just addressing the disciples. Jesus did give the disciples the power to exorcise demons back in Chapter 10, Verse 1.
 - b. If Jesus was addressing the whole multitude, then Jesus is addressing the fact that the multitude was interested in Jesus-the-miracle-worker, not Jesus the Messiah.

Verse 18: Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

1. Matthew mentions the exorcism shows that Jesus did have compassion on the boy and his father.

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Verses 19-20: Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

²⁰ He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. "

1. The disciples were aware that Jesus gave them the authority (back in Chapter 10) to drive out demons. Yet, they failed here to drive them out. Jesus rebuked them by saying in effect, "You couldn't do it because you didn't have enough faith".
2. What did Jesus mean by that? Did it mean the disciples didn't "pray hard enough"?
 - a. Prayer is not about getting your will accomplished, it is about getting God's will accomplished. Prayer is God getting us involved in the process.
 - b. There is a classical Christian expression that goes "Without God, we can't and without us, God won't." The first part of that expression means we can't accomplish anything spiritually without asking God for help. The second part of that expression means that God desires to work through people. This is why He encourages and asks for prayer. It is God's way of keeping us close to Him.
 - c. Jesus then gives an illustration that if you have the faith of a mustard seed, which is enough faith to move a mountain. Jesus is not saying, "OK, Mount Everest, move three feet to the left as I pray it in Jesus name". ☺ Jesus is saying that if you pray something that is God's will, it will happen on God's timing.
 - d. What I believe (along with many commentators) is that the disciples gave up too easily in trying to cure the boy of demon possession.
 - e. Sometimes God requires we pray consistently and often. It is not a matter of "I need to pray 17 times for this before God will act"; it is a matter of attitude. If it is God's will for the boy to be healed, God will accomplish it through our prayers on God's timing.
 - i. In this case, God delayed answering the prayer of the disciples in order to teach them not to give up so easily.

Verse 21: "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (NKJV)

1. The NIV translation does not have Verse 21, except in your footnotes. Some of the early bible manuscripts include Verse 21 in Matthew and others do not.
 - a. If you read Mark's account of this same story, Mark ends with this statement: "He (Jesus) replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:29, NIV)
 - b. All the major translations agree that this verse does exist in Mark's Gospel.
 - c. The debate is whether or not "some well-intentioned copyist" also snuck that same line in Matthew's Gospel to try to make it consistent.
2. Jesus said "this" kind of demon could only be removed by prayer (and possibly fasting).
 - a. My thought is, "What do you mean "this" kind of demon? You mean there is more than one kind? How are we supposed to know what "kind" of demon this is?
 - b. The bible implies there are "ranks" of angels, both good and bad kinds.
 - c. In Daniel 10:20, the archangel Gabriel (higher rank than a "regular" angel) has to go fight against the (demon) "prince" of Greece. This implies a head-demon in charge of Greece.
 - d. In order to fight against such a "high-ranking" demon, a regular basis of prayer (and possible fasting) is needed to exorcise that demon.
3. Tying Verse 21 to the previous verses, Jesus main point is for us to have persistence.
 - a. Jesus rebuked the disciples for not praying enough to deal with this demon.
 - b. In Verse 21, Jesus is teaching we need to consistently pray to deal with this demon.

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Verses 22-23: When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. ²³ They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief.

1. Jesus explains his "fundamental purpose" of dying and being resurrected on the third day.
2. My question is why did Jesus make that statement here and now?
 - a. I'm speculating in that this is a moment where the disciples felt remorseful.
 - b. Jesus rebuked 9 of the 12 disciples and God the Father rebuked Peter on the mountaintop.
 - c. When people realize they made a mistake, is when they are most willing to listen to correction. Maybe that's why Jesus used this opportunity to explain the three-day purpose so that it will sink in.

Verses 24-25a: After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" ²⁵ "Yes, he does," he replied.

1. The "two-drachma tax" was roughly 2-days wages. This tax was used to maintain the Temple.
2. Peter's ego responded in Verse 25 with "Of course he does." Peter then probably thought, now that I've committed Jesus to paying this, I better go talk to Jesus about that subject. ☺

Verses 25b-26: When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?" ²⁶ "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him.

1. Jesus does address actually paying the tax in Verse 27. First, Jesus wants to make a point.
2. It is important to understand that this is a "Temple Tax". It is used to maintain the Temple.
 - a. This is about maintaining "God's temple" in Peter's mind.
 - b. Peter forgot that Jesus said, (in Chapter 12) "that something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6b, NIV).
3. Jesus asked Peter, "Do kings collect taxes from their own children, or from other people?" Peter gave the correct answer. Then Jesus gave the obvious conclusion, "the sons are exempt."
4. So what is Jesus talking about? Here's a clue:
 - a. "In love, he (God the Father) predestined us (believers) to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:5, NIV)
 - b. We as "sons" are exempt from the King's taxes. So does that mean we can tell the IRS about Ephesians 1:5 and not pay our taxes? Unfortunately, no. ☺
 - c. Jesus must be talking about something else. In the next verse, Jesus tells Peter how to pay this particular Temple Tax. Therefore, Jesus is talking about something else in this verse.
 - d. I believe (but can't prove) that Jesus is talking about the "tax" of our souls.
 - i. With that said, we are all "taxed" to get into heaven. The payment is Jesus himself. Failure to make that payment is eternal hell.
 - ii. We as believers are exempt from that tax because we are adopted as "sons" of the king. That king is God himself.

Verse 27: "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

1. Peter just "happens" to catch a fish that has a four-drachma coin inside of it.
2. Why did Jesus make Peter go fish to get this coin? Jesus could "snap his fingers" for the money.
3. Some speculate that Jesus was teaching Peter to "keep your day job" while preaching the Gospel.
 - a. The counter-argument is, "If Jesus still wanted Peter to fish, why didn't Jesus say, "Go catch a bunch of fish, sell some at the market and then pay for taxes"?"
4. The important lesson is Peter obeyed. It would take faith to follow an illogical order like that.