



WISDOM & WONDER

MATTHEW 17:1 - 18:6



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Contributors

Brayden Jones, Brent Wilson, Ed Huff, Christopher D'Souza,
Courtney Cobbs, Michael Musselman, Cohen Raney, Josh Mehling,
Olivia D'Souza, Cean Henley



WORD TO LIFE

— WEEK 17 —

- ☐ NOV 17
- ☐ NOV 18
- ☐ NOV 19
- ☐ NOV 20
- ☐ NOV 21

— WEEK 18 —

- ☐ NOV 24
- ☐ NOV 25
- ☐ NOV 26
- ☐ NOV 27
- ☐ NOV 28

— WEEK 19 —

- ☐ DEC 01
- ☐ DEC 02
- ☐ DEC 03
- ☐ DEC 04
- ☐ DEC 05

— WEEK 20 —

- ☐ DEC 08
- ☐ DEC 09
- ☐ DEC 10
- ☐ DEC 11
- ☐ DEC 12

Week 17: Matthew 17:1-13

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 17:1-13

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Why do you think that Peter, James, and John were chosen by Jesus to see the transfiguration?

- **Question:** What do you think the term transfigure means?

- **Questions:** Why do you think Moses and Elijah were the ones talking with Jesus on top of the mountain? What do you think of Peter's response?

- **Activity:** Read 1 Kings 17-18 and make at least five observations about Elijah and how he compares to John the Baptist.
- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples to tell no one about the vision they see?
- **Question:** Why do you think that the scribes could not see that Elijah had already come through John the Baptist?

Week 17: Matthew 17:1-13

Day 2: The Three Fishermen

READ: Mark 5:37-42; Matthew 26:37-38; 2 Peter 1:16-17

EXPLORE:

What's the most significant event that you have ever seen? Chances are that it would take you a while to come up with an answer to that question. Many people might talk about the tragedy of 9/11 or a political event or maybe something profoundly personal. Most of the time when people think of a significant event there are a ton of other people watching. It's an event that changes the way things are and so a lot of people watch to see what happens. The transfiguration is one of the most significant events that happened in human history and yet only three people were there to witness the event: Peter, James, and John. Why was it that this monumental event was only witnessed by three people? Why only three people and why these three people?

If you study the life of Jesus and His disciples, you notice that while He has twelve disciples there were some that were closer and farther from Him. Three of His disciples stood out among the rest as the closest to Jesus: Peter, James, and John. These three disciples were around since the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. They were three simple fishermen. They were not particularly impressive in any distinct way, but they seemed to love Jesus and bet their lives on Him. They loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. Peter, James, and John did not just witness the transfiguration, but they also were unique witnesses to other events. In the book of Mark it says that they were one of the only ones to see Jesus raise the synagogue leader's daughter from death (Mark 5:37-42). When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He

was betrayed, He told Peter, James, and John that His soul was grieved and that they should stay awake and pray (Matthew 26:37-38). Why were they chosen by Jesus to experience these things? In a sense it cannot fully be known why God chose them specifically, but a few observations can be made.

One possible reason that Peter, James, and John were chosen is because they would take what they saw to the whole world. During the early church period Peter says in his second epistle that nothing they spoke about was a myth because they were “eyewitnesses of His majesty...and we ourselves heard this utterance from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18). The transfiguration was a huge point of confirmation to those men who were going to bring the gospel to the world. Another possible reason is because they were Jesus’ closest friends. Jesus was of course their teacher, Lord, and God but He was also their friend (John 15:15). He identified them as friends though, because they kept His commands to love (John 15:14). They were His closest friends but only because they were walking with Him. This should be our blueprint for friendship. We need to surround ourselves with friends who push us towards the things of God, who keeps God’s commands, and who will pray for us.

BIG IDEA: Jesus’ closest company should cause us to evaluate who we keep as company.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you have friends that consistently pray for you and point you to God?

Week 17: Matthew 17:1-13

Day 3: Is Your View of God Too Small?

READ: Matthew 17:1-13

EXPLORE:

Peter, James, and John were on their way up a mountain, trailing behind their rabbi who had invited them to pray. They had no idea that they were about to witness one of the most profound and awe-inspiring moments in human history. They would soon behold the divine glory of Jesus.

This was not the first time God would reveal His glory on a mountain. Nearly 1,500 years earlier on Mount Sinai, Moses had encountered the same holy radiance. On that occasion, when Moses descended the mountain and returned to the Israelites, his face shone with a reflected glory that caused fear in the people. During this new mountaintop experience Peter, James, and John would not see simply a reflected glory like Israel saw on Moses' face. These disciples were with Jesus - the One who had temporarily set aside the glory He had eternally possessed and would soon reclaim.

His is the glory of The One True God. He is infinite in his being and perfection. He is almighty, able to do anything that can be done. He created the universe from... nothing. Astronomers estimate the universe contains around a septillion stars — a number greater than all the grains of sand on the earth's beaches. He only had to speak to bring them into existence. He is fully present in every part of His universe, yet He rises infinitely above it. He never learns anything; He already knows everything that was, is, will be, or could be. He is the source and sustainer of all life. He is complete in and of Himself, lacking nothing and needing nothing from angels, men, or any other creature. His love, kindness, mercy, and grace are not measured against any standard - they are the standard, perfect and complete in Him. His character is

perfect - not blemished in any way. He has no rivals. All of our songs, poetry, and masterpiece artworks fall short when portraying His glory. He is the only one who is worthy of the worship, love, sacrifice, and surrender of every human heart. When God briefly removed the veil that hid the deity of Jesus on that mountain, *this* is the glory they saw. A glory that wasn't reflecting off the face of Jesus like when the moon reflects the light of the sun, but a glory that radiated from within Jesus like the sun itself.

How must Peter, James, and John have felt when they saw the Lord's unveiled glory bursting forth from the face of their rabbi? Overwhelmed by the radiance before them, they fell to the ground in fear— hearts pounding, eyes blinded by the glory of the One they thought they knew. Peter must have remembered his recent confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

God gave us an incredible privilege when he tore the veil to the holy of holies. We must not take this lightly. Our prayers, Bible reading, and worship should be serious, reverent, and humble. While physical representations of our attitude towards God such as lifting our hands, bowing our heads, or falling to our knees are important, our heart's posture is paramount.

Those in Jesus can find hope and joy that one day we will all see the same unveiled glory the disciples saw on the mountaintop.

BIG IDEA: God is due whatever worship, service, and obedience he is pleased to require from angels, people, and every other creature.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Spend time meditating on the majesty, beauty, and infinite greatness of God.

Week 17: Matthew 17:1-13

Day 4: The Miracle of the Transfiguration

READ: Luke 9:28-36; Deuteronomy 8:15-22; Malachi 4:4-5

EXPLORE:

The transfiguration is the *temporary* unveiling of the glory of the King. From his birth Jesus has been clothed in the humble garb of humanity. But now these disciples are going to get a glimpse of the royal robes of His deity. They are going to see His glory. One scholar says it this way: *‘The real miracle was that Jesus most of the time could keep from displaying his glory.’* For a moment, the veil was lifted, and his glory was made visible to human eyes. But why Moses and Elijah? Well, both had experiences with God on Horeb (Mt. Sinai). There is only one place in Scripture where both are mentioned: Malachi 4:4-5, the last verses in our Old Testament. Of course, both had supernatural ends: Moses buried by God himself on Mt Nebo and Elijah transported to heaven on chariots of fire. Yet, both are still alive – a reminder of the conscious existence of human beings after this life, including our loved ones who have died in Christ and are still alive today. Their appearance could represent several things, most clearly the Old Testament Law and the Prophets, all of which pointed forward to Jesus the Messiah who has now come and fulfilled their very words. They may also present a picture of all those who will be with Christ in His coming kingdom. Wouldn’t you love to have heard this conversation among Moses, Elijah and Jesus? What do you suppose they talked about? Well, Luke gives us the minutes of the meeting. He says they ‘spoke of his departure.’ The word ‘departure’ is the Greek word for ‘exodus.’ They spoke of His departure, His exit, His death. Luke continues, ‘which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.’

So, we have the great deliverer speaking with Moses talking about His own Exodus. Whereas Moses led God’s first-born son, Israel, out of Egypt to Sinai to establish a covenant, this only begotten

Son, the first-born of all creation, will lead His new covenant people to deliverance from slavery. Whereas the Exodus was THE central event in the life of the nation of Israel, that made it into a nation, this new Exodus is not merely THE central event in the life of the new Israel, the church, but in all of history. How Moses must have rejoiced to see the arrival of this ultimate exodus, the one toward which the earlier one had pointed! Finally, the time had come for the exodus through which God would bring deliverance to Adam's helpless race. Peter's suggestion to build three tabernacles to honor this event belies his false assumption that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were on equal footing. In his mind, Jesus is on par with the biggies of the Jewish religion. But Jesus was not a 'walk-on' in the divine economy but the fulfillment of God's historical purpose for Israel, and for the world. The witness of Moses and Elijah does not rival Jesus but points and culminates in Him. All Scripture points to Jesus: He is the greater Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah; He is the ultimate prophet, priest and king. All the Old Testament points to and is fulfilled in Him. As Christians, we are called to search the Scriptures to grasp how Jesus fulfills it all. We are called to understand and proclaim the mystery that has now been revealed to us in the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospels: that the long-promised Messiah came in the person of Jesus who lived a perfect life and died on behalf of his covenant people, to lead them into the ultimate Promised Land – the new Heavens and the new Earth!

BIG IDEA: The transfiguration is a glimpse of the glory of Jesus to which the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms testify.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Steep yourself in all the Scriptures to grasp and glimpse the glory of Jesus.

Week 17: Matthew 17:1-13

Day 5: God's Timing

READ: Matthew 17:9-13

EXPLORE:

Imagine you are a nine year old kid and you are looking up into the night sky. You are on a camping trip with you and your family and you can see the massive expanse of space and the beautiful stars. Then imagine that you see a huge object in the sky that looks like some sort of massive spaceship get close to touching down on earth but then taking back off all of sudden. What's the first thing you are going to do after that spaceship leaves? Definitely go yell at your family what you just saw! But then imagine you are commanded to not tell anyone what you saw. In our reading for today we see that Jesus commands His disciples to not tell anyone what they saw until He has risen from the dead. What an incredibly hard thing to do! That would include even the other disciples. They have just witnessed the most incredible thing anyone has ever seen, and they must postpone telling anyone, WHY?

Have you ever heard the expression "all in God's timing?" It basically means that whenever we really want something to take place we are at the mercy of God's moving. Maybe we really want a new job, a spouse, a child, to move, etc. We are all tempted to be unsatisfied in our current situation and be upset about the things we lack rather than be content with the things we have. The disciples had to wait to reveal the glory of Jesus because the people were not ready to see that He was truly God in the flesh. The Pharisees would have tried to kill Him even earlier which would have been outside of God's timing and Jesus needed to fulfill all the necessary Old Testament prophecies. Now, it seems pretty obvious that Jesus' life and fulfillment of all things was not contingent on the disciples keeping their mouth shut, but He chose to include the disciples in how He would fulfill all things. In

the same way God has things that He is going to get done regardless of what we decide, but He gives us the option to join Him in His will. What a gracious and amazing God that we serve. In verse 10 of our passage the disciples ask Jesus to explain to them why the scribes say Elijah must come first. Jesus essentially says that God does not work on their timetable or interpretation of events. Jesus says Elijah must come like it says in Malachi 4:5, but that John the Baptist is who fulfills that prophecy. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and was a solitary, righteous voice in the midst of a rebellious and stubborn people just like Elijah before him.

God often does not do things the way we would expect or want but that is why He is God, and we are not. God's will and timing is superior to ours. Our job as believers is to submit our wills to His and trust that He's got everything taken care of.

BIG IDEA: Trust in God's Will and Not Your Own.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what area of your life do you find it most difficult to trust God's timing?
- **Activity:** Pray and surrender your wants and desires to God.

Week 18: Matthew 17:14-21

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 17:14-21

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Why do you think the man's first response was to kneel before Jesus and what can we learn from him?

- **Question:** In the Gospels we often see a parent seeking help for their child. Why do you think that these events specifically were recorded out of the many amazing wonders that Jesus did?

- **Questions:** How come the disciples could not heal the boy? What implications does that have for Christians today?

- **Activity:** Find out where Jesus also uses the mustard seed as an analogy. Compare that usage to this one. Write about the similarities and differences between how Jesus uses the mustard seed.
- **Activity/Question:** Describe how you think Jesus is feeling in this passage. Why do you think Jesus is asking those specific questions?
- **Question:** Do you believe that Jesus is saying that if His disciples have enough faith, they will literally be able to do whatever they want? Why or why not?

Week 18: Matthew 17:14-21

Day 2: God Is a Father, Too

READ: Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 5:21-43, Matthew 15:21-28

EXPLORE:

This passage likely draws your attention to the disciple's inability to heal the boy or what can happen when faith is simply the size of a mustard seed. These are important pieces to understand and dissect and we will do so in the remainder of this week. But if you are a parent (or even someone with a loved one who suffers), you may have found yourself drawn to a different part of this passage: the agony that parents endure when their children suffer. The afflictions that children go through cannot help but impact their parents as children are pieces of their parents and parents want nothing but the absolute best for them. My (Courtney) parents have three children, out of their four, who have various degrees of suffering. One with Down Syndrome and comorbid conditions, one with chronic pain and health issues for almost two decades, and one with incomplete quadriplegia (paralysis from the chest down with minimal functioning in the arms) due to a severe car accident. There is nothing a parent can do to fix these issues. The pain parents feel watching their children suffer is a deep, confusing, and frustrating feeling.

This passage shows a desperate father who has likely done everything in his power to heal his son and free him from this affliction. He even goes to the disciples, who he knows can cast out demons (Matt. 10:1), but they are unable to liberate his son. This passage reminds me of Mark 5:21-43. Jairus approaches Jesus, also in deep distress, when his daughter is dying. Jesus is interrupted on His way to heal the little girl and during the interruption, she dies, but Jesus raises her back to life. In addition, not long ago we studied Matthew 15:21-28 where a sobbing, despairing, Canaanite mother cries out after Jesus to heal her daughter. We learned in that passage that God is sometimes

silent to test the genuineness and persistence of our faith. The woman withstood the test, and her daughter was healed, though it must have felt delayed and hurtful.

These passages offer both encouragement and conviction to parents and to all of us who long for the sufferings around us to end. These passages reveal God's loving heart and compassion for the sufferings of children and their parents but, also, how His responses are not always what we hope for. God does not always provide full healing in this life. As I stated earlier, my parents may never see miraculous, supernatural healing for their children in this life, but they have learned that God cares more about their holiness and the holiness of their children than He does about our earthly happiness and physical health. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 reminds us that Jesus's grace is sufficient (complete, enough, satisfying) even when He does not take away our burdens. Jesus is deeply moved with compassion towards your suffering. It matters to Him, He notices it, and He is stirred by it. Nevertheless, He desires your heart to trust Him and love Him no matter what because even a state of painful dependence, desperate faith, and silent praise is richer, greater, and fuller than an empty life of physical health, wealth, and prosperity without Jesus. You who are weary of praying and crying for healing, hold on. One day He will make all things right and suffering will be no more (Rev. 21:4). Trust that He is doing something *better* than what you want. Jesus will always be there to help you (Isaiah 41:10).

BIG IDEA: Jesus' compassion towards you and your suffering is not represented by His healing or lack of it. God is a Father, too. He wants what is truly best for you.

APPLY: Read Psalm 40. Are you weary of the sufferings of this life but still able to trust Him, tell of His mighty works, and be glad in Him? Confess of areas where you allow the pain to diminish your praise and spend time surrendering your ways for God's.

Week 18: Matthew 17:14-21

Day 3: Confidence and Faith

READ: Matthew 17:14-21

EXPLORE:

Put yourselves in the disciples' sandals. In Matthew 10, they were sent out by Jesus and given the authority to cast out evil spirits and heal. Up until that point, they had witnessed Jesus conducting these miracles, and now it was their turn. It had to be a stretch for them to think they had the power to cast out demons on their own. Their faith in their ability simply to survive in their travel was entirely placed in Jesus, much less their miraculous ability to heal people.

Jump forward in time to Matthew 17:19, probably less than a year has passed, and now the disciples were surprised that **they** could not cast out the demon. They didn't pull Jesus off to the side and ask him why He didn't cast out the demon. They asked, "Why could **we** not cast it out?" Their deficiency was not for a lack of confidence in themselves or Jesus. Over time you can imagine that their confidence in their ability to cast out demons had grown. Even though they were still fully aware that this power and authority was given by Jesus, they were the ones going from place to place, their hands placed on the sick, not Jesus's. Those grateful tears filled mothers' eyes staring at them after their sons were healed upon their words. If it were the 1980s, they probably would have been wearing big sunglasses, popping their Izod shirt collars, and casting out demons with finger guns (Pew pew!). It would have been hard for them to not start to feel like they were gifted in some way. Ultimately when their confidence was likely at its highest, that's when they failed.

We are susceptible to the same struggles with confidence versus faith. Confidence is a trait that is valued in our society. When you are the guy at work everyone comes to for all the answers and big decisions, it can be hard not to get a big head. Perhaps it sounds a little counterintuitive, but it is also difficult when we are serving successfully in our ministries to continue to serve **faithfully** and not place our confidence in our own abilities. Whether you are belting out epic harmonies from the stage or delivering the mac and cheese that gets finished first at the potluck, you have to be very intentional to let God receive the glory. Relying on your faith, even an amount as small as a mustard seed, is way more effective than a big fat head full of confidence. Self-reliance leads to things like jealousy, unmet expectations, and the inflated egos that are poison within ministries. Faith leads to things like listening, waiting, and prayer that cause ministries to thrive.

BIG IDEA: Faith and confidence are not the same thing.

APPLY:

- **Challenge:** Conduct a self-examination on your service at LifePoint. Are you serving with a faithful, humble, joy-filled heart? If not, that doesn't mean it's time to stop serving in that ministry. Jesus didn't tell the disciples to stop casting out demons in our passage today. It means that it is time to reorient and rely on your faith in the Lord as the source of your service to the church.

Week 18: Matthew 17:14-21

Day 4: The Faith of the Self

READ: Matthew 7:14-21; Colossians 3:1-11

EXPLORE:

Jesus says that 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." Where would you say your faith is at consistently? Mustard seed? Apple seed? Acorn? Bean stalk? Christmas cactus? Magnolia tree? Redwood tree? It's a peculiar analogy that Jesus makes. I can easily imagine Jesus picking up a mustard seed and telling His disciples that all it would have taken would be faith this size for God to move. Jesus sounds significantly frustrated in this passage with His disciples. It might be hard to believe that Jesus has that reaction but His statement about the mustard seed infers that they had no faith. Their faith was smaller than a mustard seed if not absent entirely. The disciples tried to heal the boy with basically zero faith. Why does God call us to have faith?

Faith is difficult for most of us, especially in today's culture. We live in a very cynical time and place. We have been influenced by satirical TV shows, politicians that are not who they claim to be, worldviews that say nothing matters, families that have been broken up, and most people are just generally skeptical. There is one kind of faith that our culture does celebrate and promote. It is the faith in oneself. How many times have you heard the phrase, "You just have to believe in yourself, and all your dreams can come true." People apply this idea to finding a career, becoming a movie star, becoming a famous musician, becoming a professional athlete, starting a business, discovering one's own "true self," etc. As it is with most ideas, there is at least a kernel of truth in

believing in yourself. If you believe that you do have what it takes to be a famous musician, *and* you actually are a very talented musician, than your belief in yourself will take you further than if you have no belief in yourself. The problem with the idea of believing in yourself is that you will always be disappointed and because in a sense it takes God out of the equation. If you are a Christian, you should want to enact God's will not push your own. Yet, many of us who claim the name of Christ oftentimes put more faith in ourselves than God. We have a tree sized faith when it comes to ourselves and our own abilities and a seed sized faith in God. How do we flip those around?

The answer is that we seek humility. A humble person does not believe in themselves but recognizes that if they put their faith in God, He will take care of them in all things. Paul tells us what our mindset should be in the book of Colossians: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **For you have died**, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." We can develop more faith in God when we focus not on the earthly things but the heavenly ones. When we focus not on our own glory but God's.

BIG IDEA: Faith Begins with Humility

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you believe that faith begins with humility? If so, how can you be humble today?
- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus uses a mustard seed to show His point in the passage?

Week 18: Matthew 17:14-21

Day 5: What is Impossible?

READ: Matthew 17:14-21

EXPLORE:

There are many things in life that are just messed up. There are people who put ketchup on steak, people who put mayonnaise on tomatoes, people who mix chocolate chip cookies with orange juice. You might be one of those people reading this WTL. All I can say to that is: that's messed up. On a more serious note what is really messed up is when mankind gets a lot of power. When people develop vast amounts of power it never turns out good. In World War 2 alone we have: Hitler abusing his power by conquering and killing those around him, Stalin using his power to manipulate and throw all of his enemies into prison camps, Mao Zedong creating mandatory policies that led to one of the most mass starvations in human history. Giving people power does not generally work out. America has been more successful than any other country (at least in terms of liberty and economics) because of the balance of powers the Founding Fathers initiated. What does Scripture have to say on the subject?

If you look back all the way to the book of Genesis, there is a famous event known as the Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel informs us about why there are so many different languages in the world. Humanity became so obsessed with concentrated power that God had to separate us. Right before God separated mankind, He said something that is hard to explain. He said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they purpose to do will now **be impossible for them.**" This is clearly to be understood as a negative thing, but the passage we have in Matthew says the same thing but in a positive sense. Jesus says if you have faith, "**nothing will be impossible for you.**" How

did this phrase go from being something negative to something positive and what exactly does it mean?

In the book of Genesis the phrase seems to refer to the amount of potential harm humanity could cause to the world and to itself. It is almost as if there is nothing that humanity won't do. Whereas Jesus is referring to what humanity has the capability of doing. The big difference is who has the power. The people have the power in Genesis, but God has the power in Matthew. When God has the power then it cannot be corrupted. When Jesus says nothing is impossible for those with faith, He is not saying that the faith causes the action. Rather, He is saying that God chooses to move through the faith of His people. It does not mean that we can speak things to existence like some have suggested...

The Apostles have prayed for things that did not happen and believe it or not Jesus has as well. Jesus prayed, "let this cup pass from me," when speaking of His death on the cross, yet the cup did not pass. Jesus surrendered to the Father's will like we are always supposed to. All things are possible for us with God, but those things are overseen by the one who sees everything. We can indeed do the impossible right now, but only through a genuine faith that recognizes God has a will that He is enacting on earth that is more important than what we want.

BIG IDEA: We Can Only Do the Impossible if God Allows.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you find it difficult to pray for things that are humanly impossible?
- **Challenge:** Pray for something specific that you have never prayed for before and that an atheist would think is impossible.

Week 19: Matthew 17:22-27

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 17:22-27

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Why do you think that Jesus tells them about His death and resurrection again?

- **Question:** What made the disciples so distressed at Jesus' declaration of death and resurrection?

- **Questions:** Why do you think that Matthew included this brief story about the temple tax in his Gospel account? Do you think it primarily is supposed to inform us about taxes or something greater?

- **Activity:** Jesus tells Peter to pay the tax in order to not give offense. Write down similar ways in which you can avoid bringing offense to people while maintaining fidelity to God and His Word.

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus makes the statement: "Then the sons are free." What is He conveying through that statement?

- **Question:** Why do you think that Jesus pays the tax in this unique way as opposed to a non-miraculous way?

Week 19: Matthew 17:22-27

Day 2: A Hopeful and Needed Reminder

READ: Matthew 17:22-23

EXPLORE:

No one likes a downer. We've all come across someone that seems quite keen to point out the negative side of things and when I (Cohen) first read this passage, I wondered why Jesus felt the need to remind His disciples of His upcoming death. His disciples were grieved at the news, and it could not have been an easy thing to be reminded of their close friend's death. Why would Jesus seemingly make them despair off the back of miracles and even the transfiguration?

We would be tempted to skip these verses and focus in on the "good parts." However, despite it being just a reminder, Jesus repeating the news of His death is needed. He's reminding the disciples of the gospel itself! If it merely stopped at Jesus being delivered into the hands of men, they would be justified in their grief, but it does not end there. The Son of Man will be raised on the third day, and that is a reason to rejoice! There is beauty in the repetition, and this moment is a chance to sit and remember that Christ is in control.

When we are in circumstances that overwhelm us, we can find ourselves looking at the familiar and popular verses in the Bible, but there is so much to be learned in small but beautiful verses like these. The disciples were greatly distressed, yet Jesus was in control. Even in His death He held authority, but out of love for us He endured the cross. We should not be afraid to repeat the gospel to ourselves, because in it we find hope. The entirety of scripture, even those lengthy genealogies, is useful for us. Within these short verses, the gospel that saves us and makes relationship with God possible is displayed.

Jesus tells His disciples multiple times of His death, because they needed to hear it. We are forgetful humans, sometimes it is hard to remind ourselves of what we need to remember the most. Passages like this one in Matthew are a hopeful, not a despairing, reminder of Jesus' work on the cross. The entirety of scripture is profitable for teaching and correction. In these verses we see the beauty of the gospel displayed, and there is no greater reminder of God's faithfulness than the work and life of Jesus Christ!

BIG IDEA: We should not skip over any passage in scripture, no matter how repetitive or meaningless it may seem. This repetition is what we as forgetful humans need!

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Sit in prayer over these verses. Reflect on God's goodness to remind us of His truths.
- **Question:** Do you tend to glaze over passages like these? Why or why not?

Week 19: Matthew 17:22-27

Day 3: Religion and Politics

READ: Matthew 17:22-27; Romans 13:1-7

EXPLORE:

An expression that many in today's society subscribe to is: "Don't talk religion or politics." Christians who seek to live out their lives in accordance with scripture oftentimes don't like to talk about politics and faith. This WTL is going to talk about both, but it will seek to be faithful to God's Word and not speak beyond it.

In our passage today Jesus is asked to pay a tax. The tax is called the two-drachma tax. This tax was for the temple in Jerusalem prescribed in Exodus 30:13. In Moses' time everyone was required to pay a half shekel to those who collected the tax for the temple. 1 Shekel=4 Drachmas, so 2 Drachmas= $\frac{1}{2}$ Shekel. One drachma was the standard wage for a day laborer. There were notable exemptions for certain people in regard to this tax. Those exempted would be priests, teachers/rabbis, Gentiles, and slaves. By no indication was Jesus recognized as a legitimized, ordained teacher by the Jewish religious elite so technically they would have cause to ask Him for His tax. Judging by the way in which they asked Peter, it is safe to assume that there was a question on if Jesus would pay it. Jesus has a decision to make here. Should He pay the temple tax or claim an exemption as a rabbi?

Instead of answering directly, Jesus uses the opportunity as a teaching moment. Jesus asks Peter about two groups of people in regard to the governing authorities. He asks if taxes are collected from sons or strangers. Peter answers how anyone would: sons. Jesus affirms that sons are exempt. That statement by Jesus seems to provide a clear answer then. As the Son of God, Jesus

has no obligation to pay the tax. Peter just saw in the transfiguration the Father declaring Jesus as His Son, so case closed. Not so fast. Jesus says pay the tax. How many of us would pay taxes if we didn't have to? That's heresy to Americans! Yet, Jesus' example constantly shows us that love supersedes rights. As the Son of God Jesus had a right to everything on earth, but He chose the path of servanthood. He died a humiliating death to show us the ultimate giving up of His rights.

How then does love relate to government? Scripture would call us to pay our taxes, submit to our authorities, and pray for them. Is it because the government is good or deserves it? That can't be right! No, it is because God calls us to be more concerned with our love than our rights. Does that mean there is never a time to go against the government? It means that a Christian only goes against their government with the fear of God in them. Only if the government bans the gospel (Acts 4:19-20) do we know for sure that it is okay to go against it. Anything other than that and it gets complicated and as sinners we love when it gets complicated.

We tend to operate in our flesh when it gets complicated rather than the Spirit. Therefore, we recognize our sinful tendencies and seek to love God and our neighbor as our highest priority and have God work out the rest.

BIG IDEA: Love Supersedes Rights

APPLY:

- **Questions:** In what area of your life do you tend to operate from a place of what you deserve rather than a place of love for God and neighbor? How can you fix that?

Week 19: Matthew 17:22-27

Day 4: Our Freedom as Christians

READ: Exodus 30:11-16, Matthew 17:22-27

EXPLORE:

Unlike when the Pharisees try to corner Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar in Matthew 22:15-22, the tax in view in this week's passage is of Jewish origin, specifically targeting support of the temple, and it has its roots in the command Moses received from the Lord in Exodus 30:11-16 — a half-shekel tax for all adult Israelites, given *“for the service of the tent of meeting . . . so as to make atonement for your lives.”* Rather than a civil tax, the subject here is one of worship obligation, and this context is important for understanding the exchange between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 17:25-27.

After fielding a question from the tax collectors, Peter is then questioned by Jesus as to his thoughts on who should pay the temple tax. The analogy Jesus uses involving a king's tax, his sons, and others under the king's reign is interesting because it begs a number of questions: Who are the sons in this analogy? Who are the others? And how are the sons *free* as Jesus concludes? Because payment of the temple tax is specifically in service of God's kingdom on earth, supporting the operation of temple services as the focal point of the Old Testament sacrificial system, it is easy to equate God with the earthly king in Jesus' analogy. It is equally straightforward in the analogy to see Jesus once again reinforcing His messianic sonship. Especially so, given that this exchange with Peter comes just a few verses after Matthew's account of the transfiguration where a voice from heaven declared, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 17:5, emphasis added). Jesus is the king's son, exempt from paying the tax. Interestingly though, Jesus says that the *sons*, plural, are free in verse 26. And in verse 27 he provides not just for His own payment of the tax, but also Peter's. It's here we see

Jesus provide a glimpse of what Paul will eventually teach more plainly concerning our union with Christ. *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”* (Romans 8:16-17). Through Christ’s sonship, we as believers, His disciples, are also *sons*, and therefore *free*. But free from what? Pointing back to Exodus 30 and God’s original intent behind the half-shekel tax, we are free from the obligation *“to make atonement for [our] lives”* — our sinful lives — a burden that *others*, who have not placed their faith in Jesus, are sadly still under.

In Matthew 12:6 Jesus declared that *“something greater than the temple is here.”* And this exchange with Peter concerning the temple tax is an extension of that lesson. Those who place their faith in Jesus, the true and better meeting place with God, are free from the obligations associated with the sacrificial system and the penalty that hangs over our heads due to sin. Jesus miraculously provides for Peter’s tax payment in verse 27, but even more fittingly, this entire exchange is prefaced by Jesus’ prophetic announcement of His coming death and resurrection in verses 22-23. When we place our faith in Jesus, the one who died a criminal’s death on our behalf, who bore the just wrath of God that we deserved, we are free from an eternal striving to earn our salvation — a feat we could never accomplish. Certainly a desire to do good works should flow out of hearts grateful to God for His grace. But there is no tax burden. Jesus has paid the price.

BIG IDEA: In Christ we are children of God, free from the law’s burden and sin’s condemnation, bought by the blood of Christ.

APPLY:

- **Questions:** Are there acts of worship you currently view as obligations? How does freedom in Christ encourage you to look on these as gifts and gracious opportunities instead?

Week 19: Matthew 17:22-27

Day 5: Help and Tyranny

READ: Matthew 17:27; Matthew 18:7-10

EXPLORE:

There's a biblical principle that is expressed well in the phrase, "Wrong place, wrong time." It is not the time nor place for someone to make the case that suicide is a sin at a funeral in which someone has committed suicide. It is not the time nor place to drink alcohol at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. It is not the time nor the place to eat fettuccine alfredo around someone who is cutting out carbs and trying to lose weight. If you have any social awareness at all you realize that there are perfectly acceptable things to do and say that you should not do or say in certain contexts. As Christians, there are many different ways in which this can apply to our relationships with other people. Jesus shows this principle when He chooses to pay the temple tax rather than claiming a legitimate exemption as the Son of God.

This relates to a principle that is often dubbed "helping the weaker brother." Someone who is identified as a "weaker brother" or "weaker sister" is someone who struggles to fight sin and takes provisions that others do not in order to fight that struggle. For instance, a man might abstain from going to the beach because they know they will be tempted to lust and instead of putting themselves in that situation they refrain from the beach all together. Another example might be a woman refraining from going to a bar because she knows she will be tempted towards drunkenness. This brother and sister would be practicing Jesus' principle of "cutting off" the thing that is tempting them to do evil (Matthew 18:8). This is a good and proper thing to do as a Christian, but as Christians we also must help those around us

with their cutting so to be speak. We must help those around us cut off the activities that lead them to sin and avoid our activities that could lead them to sin. That being said if you are the weaker brother or sister, you also have a responsibility towards those that are helping you.

There is also a phrase called “the tyranny of the weaker brother” that can also happen amongst believers. This happens when the weaker brother demands others to accommodate them. If a weaker brother told all women in the church that they had to wear dresses so that they would not be tempting to him, then that would be rightly labeled tyranny. The guiding principle for trying to help others and trying not to cause tyranny to others is the same: love one another as Jesus has loved us. Do not be unreasonable and be discerning with the relationships that God has given to you.

BIG IDEA: Help the Weaker Brother and Sister but Do Not Be Tyrannical.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways can you help those around you cut out the sin and temptation towards sin in their lives?
- **Question:** In what ways can you be a burden to people around you rather than being a blessing?

Week 20: Matthew 18:1-6

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 18:1-6

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Why do you think the disciples were concerned with who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

- **Question:** Why do you think that Jesus uses a child to prove His point?

- **Question:** Do you believe that there is more than one way in which Christ's disciples are called to be like children? If so, how?

- **Activity:** List ways in which humility could be considered great by God.
- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus emphasizes helping those who come in His name?
- **Questions:** What are ways in which people can cause others to sin? Why do you think Jesus is so harsh with those who cause others to sin?

Week 20: Matthew 18:1-6

Day 2: A Child's Humility

READ: Matthew 18:1-6; Psalm 149:4

EXPLORE:

Every job in the entire world requires base level qualifications as well as expectations while working. The better the worker is at showing that they are qualified and meeting or exceeding the expectations, the more they will excel at what they are doing and the more pleased the boss will be. If you work in sales, you will be expected to have a certain level of people skills, an ability to recall stats, and the gift of persuasion. If you are fantastic at sales, it means that you excel at those three things. Did you know that the kingdom of heaven is the same way?

In our passage for today Jesus says that there is a requirement for getting into the kingdom of heaven. He says that there is a qualification that if you do not meet, you will not get in. Jesus says you must turn and become like a child to enter into the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean? In verse 4, Jesus clarifies that He is talking about humility.

If you are like me (Brayden), you might be thinking that there are a lot of children out there that are anything but humble. This is where we must consider the cultural context of Jesus' time and place. We are in a time and place that has been influenced by a Christian worldview where everyone is treated with dignity and value because of the concept that every human being has been made in the image of God. Back in Jesus' day most people were considered dispensable. Children were viewed by many as insignificant. Children fell in line and respected their elders, or they were punished severely. In that climate children were quiet,

overlooked, and had no rights. So, when Jesus sees a child and calls them to Himself, they are happy to even be seen by someone. They go before Jesus and sit at His feet waiting for their instruction. They aren't really interested in asking questions, challenging what Jesus is saying, and/or trying to put themselves above anyone else. They just enjoy being with Jesus and listening to Him.

In order to enter the kingdom of heaven we must humble ourselves. That's the only qualification. We must bow to the king and surrender ourselves to Him completely . Just like a job though, that's not where it ends. We are not just called to humble ourselves in order to be saved, but we are called to humble ourselves as Christians. Jesus says that those who humble themselves like a child will be the greatest in the kingdom. So, we humble ourselves before God but also before each other. We do not feel the need to compete or to compare ourselves to others in terms of stature or importance. We simply sit in awe before Jesus and learn from His every word. We enjoy being in His presence and resting there, hoping to bring others closer to Him.

BIG IDEA: Humility is required for salvation but also an expectation for those who have been saved.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you think the disciples would have thought about Jesus using a child as an example of what they should be like?
- **Question:** What does it look like to practice humility?

Week 20: Matthew 18:1-6

Day 3: Follow Like a Child

READ: Matthew 18:1-6; Isaiah 11

EXPLORE:

Jesus often used children as an example of what following Him should look like. Children often embodied characteristics of humility, openness, and innocence which enabled them to approach Jesus without hesitation. In Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus calls a child to Him to continue teaching His disciples what discipleship ought to look like, but to also illustrate that their treatment of one another should model the faith of a child. Matthew 18:1-6, opens with the disciples coming to Jesus and asking who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven would be. There are several places in the Gospels where the disciples questioned Jesus about who would be the greatest among them or who would have higher status in the kingdom of heaven. However, this time the question was more serious because the disciples had just heard Jesus speak about His death, which could have meant one of them selected to be a leader after Jesus died. In response to their question, Jesus calls a child to Him and begins to teach, using the child as an example of who will enter the kingdom. Jesus picks up on a theme of 'child' that occurs repeatedly in the prophet Isaiah. In one of the famous messianic passages, Isaiah 11, we find that the Messiah would come from the 'stump' (line) of Jesse. As Isaiah 11 continues, he prophesies the Spirit of the LORD would rest on upon him and that the kingdom the Messiah would bring would be an upside-down kingdom that would see "wolves dwelling with lambs, leopards lying down with young goats, the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together." As if that was not remarkable enough, Isaiah says a little child would lead them all. In a time of political turmoil, the child serves as a sign that God is with His

people and will lead them, with those who are humble and gentle in heart. This is the kingdom that Jesus is bringing. In verse 3, before answering the disciples' question, Jesus issues a clear warning to those wanting to enter the kingdom of heaven. The warning states that anyone who does not change their ways and become like children would not enter the kingdom of heaven. In verse 4, Jesus shifts to addressing the disciples by saying whoever demonstrates humility like the child is considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus then makes a bold statement in the following verse identifying directly with the child. He challenges the disciples with the reality that whoever receives a child in His name would not only be receiving the child but would be receiving Jesus himself. This illustrated to the disciples how they ought to treat one another and other followers of Jesus. To conclude the illustration of the child, Jesus states that whoever causes those who believe in Him to stumble in their faith deserve death. From the beginning of the passage, it is evident Jesus is concerned with the disciples understanding what faith looks like, how they should treat one another, and the impact it ultimately has on entering the kingdom of heaven. It should convict us as Christians that everyone who believes in Jesus should be treated as sons and daughters of God because our actions towards one another are a reflection of our hearts and our faith in Jesus.

BIG IDEA: The Kingdom of Jesus consists of humble, child-like followers who want to follow in the footsteps of their master.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does this passage challenge you to evaluate your own status in the kingdom of God?

Week 20: Matthew 18:1-6

Day 4: A Stricter Judgment

READ: Matthew 18:1-6; James 3:1-3

EXPLORE:

Most people think of Jesus as a super nice guy that got along with everyone. It is true that Jesus was compassionate, but He was compassionate towards very specific people. He was compassionate towards the broken, the outcast, the humble, and the desperate. However, there was one group of people to whom Jesus was harsh. That harshness was from a place of love because He wanted them to repent and believe in Him, but it was harsh, nonetheless. He was harsh towards the religious elite and the proud. Since Jesus represents the Father perfectly, we know that much of God's wrath is reserved for proud religious leaders. Why is that the case?

In our passage in Matthew, Jesus says that for anyone who causes those who believe in Him to stumble, it would be better for them to be drowned with a millstone around their neck. That might be Jesus' most intense warning recorded in all of the Gospels. Who is Jesus referring to? Broadly speaking, He is referring to anyone who causes a believer to sin, but who is that usually? If we look at the Christian Church in the United States especially, the biggest threat to it are the preachers. The ones that are supposed to shepherd those who are Christ's are the ones causing many of them to stumble. I shudder to think about God's wrath towards the egregious abuses that church leaders have committed in His name. Jesus has many warnings in scripture about false teachers. Jesus constantly rebukes the Pharisees and scribes for a variety of reasons. It is worth looking at those reasons and understanding how they affect genuine believers in God. Reasons why the

Pharisees are rebuked: They did not show repentance but required others to, they refused to hang around tax collectors and “sinners,” they used God’s law to their advantage at the expense of others, they committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, they demanded signs, and they held to manmade traditions. All of these wicked acts were an offense to God not just because they are a sin against Him and His character but also because the acts caused true believers to stumble. When a Pharisee was proud, the people believed God wanted them to copy that behavior. When a Pharisee looked down on sinners, the people believed they should as well. Fast forward to today and we see similar things happening.

We have pastors who mishandle God’s Word, so the congregants do the same. Pastors who care about having a lot of money and possessions, so the congregants do the same. The Apostle James would say this, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” God offers grace and forgiveness to all, but Galatians would tell us that God is not mocked and what a man sows he also will reap. Let us all have a healthy fear of God!

BIG IDEA: God cares for His sheep and has a harsher judgment for those who claim to be His shepherds.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do you think that pastors today have abused the authority that they have been given?
- **Activity:** Spend some time today praying for your pastors and spiritual leaders.

Week 20: Matthew 18:1-6

Day 5: God's Wrath

READ: Rom 1:18, 2:5, 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Jn 2:2; Lk 19:10, Jn 3:36

EXPLORE:

“Or what?!” my older brother would taunt as I yelled at him to stop picking on me. Try as I might, I could not take down my taller and stronger brother with my measly muscles or my verbal threats. He knew I had no power over him. I am sure many of you have experienced or witnessed something similar in your lifetime as well. A wrong that needed to be righted or an injustice that needed retribution. Yet, sadly, due to the lack of power or authority, a remedy never came and the unrighteous prevailed. Our story this week paints a different picture from those we have experienced. As we have been reading, Jesus clearly hates sin and injustice. He emphatically says it will not be tolerated, and He does this by using a vivid word picture. Speaking of causing someone to sin, He says, “it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Wowser! When Jesus says not to corrupt one of God’s children, there is no “or what” needed; He tells us! However, an implicit question is posed: what could possibly make swimmin’ with the fishes in a mob-style like death the better option?! The answer is the wrath of God.

Most people don’t want to talk about the wrath of God, or they think it is preserved for the very worst of humanity, but we are doing a disservice to people when we only speak about the love of God and not His wrath because the two go hand-in-hand. Jesus came to seek and SAVE the lost, so it begs the question, what are they saved from? Sin? Brokenness? Bondage? Sure, but these are secondary causal effects. Primarily and most importantly, people are saved from the wrath of God. Each of us has been storing up wrath since we were tiny little sinners which will be poured out on judgement day in its entirety. The holy God of heaven and earth

must right all wrongs and punish all wicked people because He is a just judge. Here is the catch though, we look around and the wicked seem to prosper. Greed, hatred, perversion, darkness, and deceit are the norm. It is not surprising that people have been crying out for justice throughout all of human history. Yet, most of us look right past ourselves to point at someone else. When we plead with God to stop evil, we are pleading with Him to stop humanity. Although you may not be a serial killer (we hope), hating someone is killing them in your heart and is likewise a sin in God's eyes that needs to be punished. You see, we want God to judge the wicked, but we don't want God to judge our wickedness. Even on our best day, our righteous deeds will never negate our sin or erase the wrath of God that is due to us.

So, what hope do we have? You guessed it, Jesus. If you are in Christ, praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ that through Him we have propitiation for our sins. He stepped in as our substitute to receive the wrath of the Father that was meant for us. In His infinite love, He has spared no expense to redeem and restore us to a right relationship with Him again. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us! God's impending judgment will fall one day, and His righteous wrath will be poured out against sinners. The only safe place to be is in Jesus.

BIG IDEA: We will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you think the wrath of God is a positive or negative thing?
- **Activity:** If you are in Christ, thank Him for taking the penalty for all your sins, past, present and future. If you aren't in Christ, reflect on your sins and ask the Father to forgive you and trust in Jesus as your Lord and SAVIOR.



GOLPC.ORG