

Coming Changes: the Assembly and the Millennium

Matthew 16 - 17

Another Dispensational Outline. In ch.16-17 we have another dispensational outline.

- **Ch.16, vv.1-12** Israel's Rejection of the Messiah, the Sign of the Prophet Jonas
- **Ch.16, vv.13-28** The Church to be built, the necessity of the death and resurrection of Christ
- **Ch.17, vv.1-27** A sample of the Millennial Kingdom on the Mount of Transfiguration

Another Turning Point. We get another great turning point in Matthew. The Lord had spoken of the kingdom of heaven "at hand" up through ch.10, but then He and His messengers were rejected in ch.11-12, and we have the first turning point in ch.13 with the Mystery phase of the kingdom brought in. Then in ch.14-15 we have Christ withdrawing from the Nation, while the Nation continues to reject Him. Now in ch.16 we get another turning point. Not a negative turning point like ch.13 (the manifestation phase postponed) but a positive one! Christ was going to build something brand new and unpredicted; His assembly. And then He instructs His disciples to discontinue proclaiming His Jewish title of "Messiah" or "Christ" (v.20). In ch.13 the Lord goes out of the house and takes up the position of Son of Man, as rejected by Israel. But in ch.16 He accepts the positive witness that He is Son of God!

Matthew 16 and 17 form the basis for Peter's first and second epistles, respectively. In his first epistle, Peter brings out that we are living stones built upon Christ the cornerstone into a spiritual house, as we have been "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). This directly correlates to the Lord's words in response to Peter's confession in Matt. 16. In his second epistle, Peter recounts the kingdom glory of Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17) as a proof that the outcome of prophecy is sure. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and so he is occupied in both epistles with government. In his first epistle he presents the government of God in the lives of believers, in his second epistle God's government in the world.

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The Wickedness of the Religious Leaders (16:1-12)

The Pharisees' and Sadducees' Demand for a Sign (16:1-4)

CHAPTER 16

¶ [And the Pharisees and Sadducees, coming to *him*, asked him, tempting *him*, to shew them a sign out of heaven.](#) v.1 The Lord had been travelling all over the countryside healing and feeding the multitudes, and these religious leaders had the audacity to come to Him asking for a sign! They were looking for a sign of the coming kingdom... that was exactly what Jesus had been doing in ch.8-9 and ch.14-15! Their temptation was a denial of the presence of Jehovah among His people. It was a slap in the face. This is worse than the disobedience of ch.15. This is unbelief, which is the root of disobedience. Also, this is the first time we see the Pharisees and Sadducees together. The Pharisees and Sadducees were completely opposed to one another in their doctrine, but they agreed on this: they wanted to get rid of Christ the rightful king. What greater sign could God give them than His own Son on earth in their midst? Mr. Kelly explained it this way; unbelief is like a man gazing into the sun at

noonday, then asking God to give him a candle for light. What more do you need?

2 But he answering said to them, When evening is come, ye say, Fine weather, for the sky is red; **3** and in the morning, A storm to-day, for the sky is red *and* lowering; ye know *how* to discern the face of the sky, but ye cannot the signs of the times. vv.2-3 The Lord states a common axiom of meteorology among fishing villages that they knew well, and trusted. In English it goes; “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning!” They had no problem discerning the weather for the following day, but they were totally ignorant of signs of the times. They had already had their “red sky at night”, in the miracles done by Christ which were a taste of the powers of the world to come (fine weather). But they had rejected Him! Israel’s condition of unbelief was like a “red sky at morning”... it was a sure indication the judgment was coming. Next in v.4 He gives them a sign; but it is a sign of judgment not of blessing. Here the nation was in a state of moral blindness, and they missed the signs of the times. In Isaiah 53 we have the confession of the faithful remnant in a future day of the nation’s blindness at Christ’s first coming (e.g. Isa. 53:2).

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it save the sign of Jonas. And he left them and went away. v.4 Only a wicked and wanton generation would ask for a sign with no intention of receiving it. The Son came to save, and not to judge; but He would not pander to the whims of that “*generation*”. And yet, He would give them a sign to look for - the [sign of the Prophet Jonah](#)- which was a sign of God’s judgment on Israel. It was the only sign left to give “this generation”. The Lord withdraws from them and goes away. This is now the fourth time we have seen Jesus withdrawing.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees Warned Against (16:5-12)

vv.5-12 As part of a dispensational outline, the unbelief of the leaders of Israel had been exposed in vv.1-4, and now a new thing was about to dawn (v.13). But first, the Lord warns those who would compose His Church that He didn’t want any carryover from apostate Judaism into Christianity.

¶ 5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. v.5 This was a circumstance of the wilderness; human failure. These types of failure are bound to happen as long as we are in this scene, but the Lord is sufficient to supply all our need. They had forgotten physical bread, but a much more serious danger faced them,

of a spiritual nature.

6 And Jesus said to them, See and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. v.6 In vv.1-4 we had the bold unbelief of the Pharisees and Sadducees exposed, and now we get a warning to remain separate from their evil doctrine. He had separated His disciples physically from them (v.5), but there was a need to be *spiritually separate* from them as well. The great danger facing the Jewish remnant was the insidious nature of the evil doctrine surrounding them. We too are surrounded by evil doctrine. They were to do two things: (1) “see” or identify the evil doctrine, and (2) “beware” of it or stand tenaciously on guard against it. If we only do one or the other we will be in trouble. How does this verse jive with Rom. 16:19, “I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil”? We are to be well-acquainted with what is good, and know as little as necessary about what is evil. Occupation with evil is unhealthy for a Christian, and if we rely on human wisdom concerning evil, we are sure to fall. But simplicity isn’t ignorance. We don’t need to meditate for hours on evil doctrine, but we do need to be aware of what they are and where they exist.

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, Because we have taken no bread. v.7 When a man, even a Christian, begins to reason apart from the revelation of God, his thoughts fall far short of God’s. This is what the disciples did here. They ignored the Lord, and began to reason among themselves. Their greatest concern was their unpreparedness with regard to physical food. They were totally missing the Lord’s point. This is always the outcome of human reasoning in the things of God; two things: (1) it reduces our thoughts down to what is natural and superficial (vv.7-8), and (2) it takes our eyes off of Christ (vv.9-10).

8 And Jesus knowing *it*, said, Why reason ye among yourselves, O ye of little faith, because ye have taken no bread? **9** Do ye not yet understand nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many hand-baskets ye took up? **10** nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? **11** How do ye not understand that *it was not concerning bread* I said to you, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? vv.8-11 The Lord tenderly rebukes their smallness of faith.¹ In reasoning on a human level they had lost sight of the person in their midst! The Lord graciously reminds them of His loving power in feeding the two multitudes with a few loaves, and yet how much was left over. Surely, the presence of the Lord is enough to settle every question about physical want... if we have faith and don’t get into reasoning! Had they been conscious of the greatness of the Lord’s Person they would not have jumped to that conclusion.

Practical Note. It’s always good for a teacher to make sure his audience is following along.

Asking a question is a good way to do this. It is similar to a teacher giving a quiz or test. He reviews the material, and then they understand it! The Lord exemplifies this as the Perfect Teacher in these verses.

12 Then they comprehended that he did not speak of being beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. v.12 Finally they understand His meaning. He was not referring to leaven in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense. Leaven in scripture is always a type of evil. Sometimes it is moral evil (1 Cor. 5:9) and sometimes doctrinal evil (Gal. 5:9). Here it is the doctrinal evil of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? As we saw in ch.15, the Pharisees were known for emphasizing the traditions of the elders, and they tended toward a legal attitude. They maintained a clean exterior but a filthy interior. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, the existence of angels, and the possibility of the spirit to subsist outside the body (Acts 23:8). These beliefs are in open contradiction to the Word of God. The Pharisees and Sadducees are not unique to the time period in which they lived. The class of Pharisees stood for the religious right; conservatism at the expense of truth. We can see today in Christendom a legal, ritualistic influence that adds to the Word of God. The class of Sadducees stood for the religious left; liberalism at the expense of truth. We can see a similar evil today in Christendom in the form of rationalistic theology. Both are dangerous, and we must be warned of them. The flesh in each of us is a little of the Pharisee, and a little of the Sadducee (see [encyclopedia entry](#)).

The Building of Christ's Church & the Path for Disciples (16:13-28)

Peter's Revelation and Confession of the Person of Christ (16:13-17)

¶ **13** But when Jesus was come into the parts of Caesarea-Philippi, he demanded of his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? v.13 Caesarea-Philippi is the farthest point from Jerusalem that is still in the land of Israel. It was a city within the bounds of Israel, but with a strong Pagan history. Ruins of the temple of Pan (the god of nature) can still be seen today. It is not to be confused with Caesarea-by-the-Sea, which was a Roman outpost, where families of soldiers would live. It is remarkable that the Lord chose this place

as a backdrop, in the face of Israel's rejection, to unfold the truth of the Church. He asks His disciples men's opinions concerning who He, the Son of Man, was. He refers to Himself as the "Son of Man" not the Christ, or some other title. Matthew presents the Lord as the Christ, the Son of David and Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). But at this point the testimony to His being the Messiah had been fully rendered, and He had been utterly rejected as Messiah of Israel. In rejection by Israel He takes the broader title of Son of Man, in which He is in relation to all people, Jews and Gentiles. [Read more...](#) According to Daniel 7, the Son of Man will be given the universal reign over the whole earth, just as the stone grew into a great mountain. He queries His disciples to manifest the highest of man's opinions as to who the Son of Man was.

14 And they said, Some, John the baptist; and others, Elias; and others again, Jeremias or one of the prophets. v.14 They give a number of responses, and the names include great men. John the Baptist was by the Lord's own confession the greatest born of women. Elijah was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, Jeremiah and others taking their places behind him. But these were all men. Yes, they were men with divine commissions; but still they were mere men.

15 He says to them, But "ye", who do ye say that I am? v.15 Many opinions having been put forth, the Lord now wanted to hear the confession of His own in contrast with the opinions of men. He directs the question to His own disciples.

16 And Simon Peter answering said, "Thou" art the Christ, the Son of the living God. v.16 Simon Peter answers, always forward in his disposition, and gives the beautiful response; "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". This is the response Jesus was seeking! There are two parts to Peter's confession:

1. "*Thou art the Christ*". The title 'Christ' (synonymous with Messiah) means "the Anointed." It was the title given in prophecy to the coming Deliverer of Israel. In the Old Testament, there were three offices that were anointed; prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus holds all three of those offices in perfection, and for those offices He was anointed by the Spirit of God (Acts 10:38). In His human nature, He is the Son of David, the Messiah. But He was far more than that, and so Peter goes on.
2. "*The Son of the Living God*". As a divine Person Jesus is the Son of the living God. The Sonship of our Lord is His eternal, intrinsic, ontological, intra-Trinitarian identity. He became the Christ as a man, but He never became the Son... He always was the Son of God! Moreover, He is the Son of the living God which brings out the truth that He has life in Himself, both in a past eternity as the Eternal Word (John

1:4) and as a dependent man on earth (John 5:26). It is a boundless, springing life; and it can never be held down. As the one who intrinsically had life in Himself, death could not hold Him! He arose from among the dead "...having loosed the pains of death, inasmuch as it was not possible that he should be held by its power" (Acts 2:24). Therefore it was in resurrection that "He was declared to be the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4) because that life sprouted up again in a new character that we call resurrection life. In resurrection life Jesus became the Head of a New Creation, and shared all His relationships with those in that New Creation. The resurrection proved that He was Son of the *living* God.

Both Mark and Luke record Peter saying "*Thou art the Christ of God*", which was the Jewish confession only. But here in Matthew the Christian confession is added; "*Thou art... the Son of the living God*". It was this Christian confession - Jesus is the Son of God - that would become the foundation for the Assembly, and so the assembly is mentioned here in Matthew but omitted in Mark and Luke.

17 And Jesus answering said to him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed *it* to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens. v.17 The Lord replies with the dignity of a king! He instantly confirms Peter's confession with the authority that He could only have if it were true. He addresses Peter by his natural name "Simon Bar-jona" and tells him that he is "blessed". That is, he had been given the happy and exalted privilege to utter the confession he had just made. But it didn't come from Peter, or any other human means ("flesh and blood"). No, the truth of the Person of Christ - His being the Son of God - is a secret that can only be revealed to someone by the Father, for "no man knoweth the Son, but the Father" (Matt. 11:27). Man in the flesh will never rise up to honor the Son by recognizing the truth of His Person. It must be by revelation from the Father.

The Foundation and Building of Christ's Assembly (16:18)

18a And "I" also, I say unto thee that "thou" art Peter [*'petros'*], v.18a The Lord had told Simon on the day they first met (John 1:42) that he would be called Cephas (Peter), but at that time it was stated in a future tense because it was a prophecy. Now He gives Peter his new name officially because we are getting the meaning and significance of his name. The name for Peter is petros and it means, 'a little stone' and the word for rock is petra and it means 'a large stone'. A 'petros' is just a part of a 'petra'. There Lord was saying, "I am going to make you of the same substance as the rock." This rock is not Peter as the Catholic

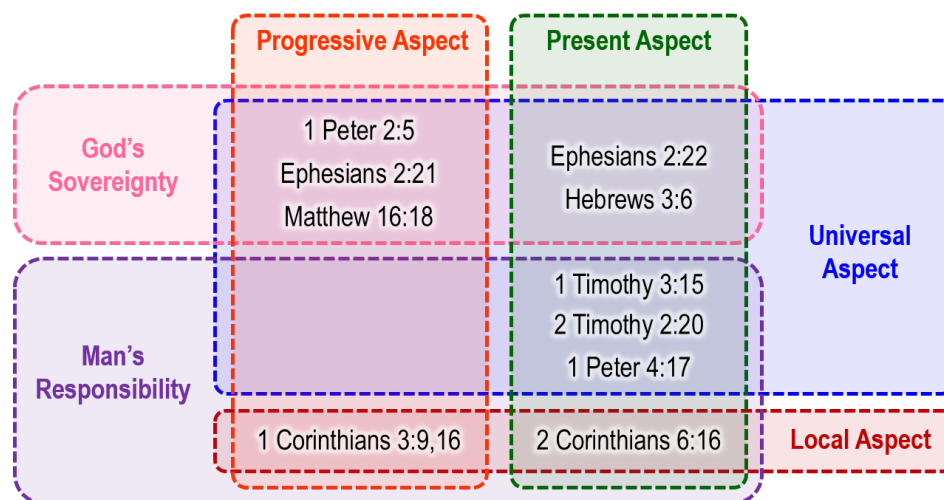
Church teaches. Peter himself says who the stone is in 1 Pet. 2:4; Christ is the living stone, and we are lively stones built up into a temple to His praise! In order to be built into Christ's assembly, Peter and all of us need to be given a new life and nature, the very same life and nature of Christ! Eve had to be "built" by God from a bone taken from Adam's side in order to be of the same substance as him (Gen. 2:22). In the same way the Church is composed of many stones that are just like the Rock. As Paul could say "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30).

18b and on this rock ['petra'] I will build my assembly, v.18b This is the first time in the book, and in the New Testament, that the Lord uses the words "my assembly". He introduces it in ch.16, then provides a few more details in ch.18, but the full declaration of the truth of the Church had to wait until the work of the cross was complete, the Holy Ghost sent down, the final offer given to and rejected by Israel, and for God to raise up a special vessel (Paul) to make it fully known. Before that time, the truth concerning the assembly was [a Mystery, hid in God](#). The Church (or, assembly) did not exist in the Old Testament, although Covenant Theology teaches that error. Sometimes they will say the New Testament "assembly" is the same as the "congregation of Israel" and use Acts 7:38 which says "the church in the wilderness", which is a reference to the congregation of Israel. Every time the word 'assembly' is used, the context must be examined to determine if it refers to "the assembly" or to some other assemblage (e.g. Psalms 22:16). The existence of the Church as totally distinct from Israel is undeniably proven in 1 Cor. 10:32. The Lord makes it clear by saying "I will build" in the future tense! It was something altogether new and different from what existed up until that time. The word "assembly" is *ekklesia* in Greek, and simply means 'called out ones'. It is composed of Christians, former Jews and Gentiles called out of the world, united together by the Holy Ghost into one new thing. The Church is built upon the rock of Peter's confession, which is the truth of the Person of Christ; that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the rock because of His strength, stability, durability, etc. before God in contrast to the weakness in inconsistency of the First Man. The Church is built upon the Rock; that order is important. Faith in the Person of Christ *precedes* a person being built into the Church of Christ. The foundation is likewise the logical target for Satan's assaults. Satan has attacked the Church, and the very earliest and boldest attacks were on the foundation; heterodox teachings about the Person of Christ!

18c and hades' gates shall not prevail against it. v.18c The "gates of hades" are symbolic of the power of death, which is the strength of Satan's kingdom. Satan, up until the cross, wielded the weapon of death ('hades' is the state of the spirit and soul separate from the body). But because the Church is founded on Christ not merely as a man, but as Son of the Living God, the Church is invincible! All of Satan's power has no jurisdiction over the

Church of Christ, who is Son of the *living* God! Christ had broken “*the power of death*” (Heb. 2:14) and now He holds the “*keys of death and hades*” (Rev. 1:18). Israel was founded on earthly covenants, and they were coming under judgment. If the Lord had founded the Church merely on covenants connected with His Messianic offices of Prophet, Priest, or King, we would very quickly forfeit the place of privilege. But no, the Lord rolls back all the layers of office, covenant, and even humanity (i.e. the topsoil) to reveal the bedrock of His Person - His eternal relationship as the Son of the Living God. He points to that foundation - more stable than any principle or substance in the universe - and says to us, “My own Person will be your foundation, and therefore, the Church can never fail!” And then in a future eternity, when all distinctions of Jew and Gentile have disappeared, the Church will remain distinct forever, as the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:1-2; Eph. 3:21)!

God’s Building, or God’s House. The Assembly is brought before us in scripture in many figures and aspects. As the Body of Christ, the saints are responsible to work out in practice the thoughts and wishes of the Head, Christ Himself. As the House (or, Building) of God, the saints are responsible to conduct themselves in behavior and doctrine that is according to the mind and character of God. The idea of a house is the idea of a public testimony. A man’s house reflects on what sort of man he is. In the same way, the House of God ought to reflect the character of God, as a witness and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Are we rendering a testimony worthy of God? The House of God is taken up in many different ways in scripture. Sometimes it is looked at as something *God* is building in His perfect sovereignty gradually over time, and it is not yet complete but will be complete one day. Other times it is looked at as something *man* is responsible to build (thus failure comes in) and it is complete at any one given time. Then again, sometimes the House of God is viewed as the universal assembly, the entire public testimony. Other times, the House of God is viewed in its local aspect, as a gathering of believers to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The context of each occurrence determines which aspect is being referred to. Here in Matthew 16 the building is viewed in the universal, progressive, and sovereign aspect.



The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven & Authority to Bind and Loose Sin (16:19-20)

19 And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatsoever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be bound in the heavens; and whatsoever thou mayest loose on the earth shall be loosed in the heavens. v.19 In addition to the privilege of confessing the truth of the Person of Christ, the Lord also promised to give Peter the control of the kingdom of heaven! Keys signify control, and especially control over access. The Lord was holding the keys to His kingdom, and He now promises to give them to Peter. There are two great administrative responsibilities in this verse. *First* of all, Peter would have the privilege of opening the door of the kingdom of heaven. It doesn't say the keys of the Church, or the key of heaven, but the keys of the [kingdom of heaven](#). The assembly and the kingdom are different. The kingdom of heaven is a new dispensation that was about to unfold on the earth, but the assembly is a heavenly parenthesis within that dispensation! Notice that the word 'keys' is plural, because there are two of them. Peter was given the privilege of opening the door of the Christian profession to the Jew (at Pentecost) and then wider to the Gentiles (at the house of Cornelius). *Secondly*, whatever binding actions Peter might take would carry the authority of heaven. He's saying, "Peter, I'm going to give you the control of my kingdom; you can open the doors to Jew and Gentile, and I will ratify whatever actions you might take... heaven is going to back you up!" This is incredible! In ch.18 this authority (to bind and loose) is extended to the local assembly gathered to the Lord's name. All of the Lord's authority in the Kingdom of Heaven is funneled through the assembly on earth! Note: the keys of the kingdom were never given to the Church, but to Peter alone, because they were only used at the very beginning. However, the authority to

bind and loose was given to the assembly. See an important [translational note](#) on this verse.

Binding and Loosing.

The local assembly has been invested with authority to "bind" or "loose" a person's sin (Matt. 18:18); which means to "retain" or "remit" their sin (John 20:23). Binding and loosing are two administrative actions that are done "*in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" and are backed by His authority (1 Cor. 5:4). The authority to "bind" and "loose" with heaven's ratification was given first to Peter (Matt. 16:19), then extended to the local assembly (Matt. 18:18).

To "bind" a person's sin upon them is to associate them with that sin in an official sense. Morally, they were associated with it the moment the sin was committed, but this is a special association of an official character. Paul does this in 1 Cor. 5:4 with the words "being such"; that is, he formally connected that man with his sin. Excommunication of the wicked person follows binding of the sin (v.5). In 1 Cor. 5 we have an example of "binding", and in 2 Cor. 2 we have the "loosing". Once a person has turned from their sin, and their repentance is manifest, the assembly ought to "loose" the sin, or formally disassociate the person from it. The whole assembly, wherever it may be found "*on earth*" is required to acknowledge an administrative action once taken, because it is bound or loosed in heaven. To continue fellowship with a person that is put away is to ignore the action taken, and to rebel against the authority of heaven. The binding or loosing would occur in a solemn meeting for judicial action; "*when ye are gathered together*" (v.4). It is only when the assembly is formally gathered together that the presence and "*power of our Lord Jesus Christ*" is there to give weight to the action.

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Summary: the Four great declarations made by our Lord.

1. The revelation of the Person of Christ from the Father to Simon;
2. The name of Peter bestowed upon Simon by Jesus;
3. The assembly to be built by Christ Himself on the foundation of His Person;
4. The keys of the kingdom promised to Peter, and authority to bind and loose.

All this was connected with Peter personally, who was elected by the Father to have these "blessed" or happy privileges. The purposes of God now having been declared, the Lord now moves to close out His formal presentation to Israel.

20 Then he enjoined on his disciples that they should say to no man that he was the Christ. v.20 Here we have a very striking change: He commands the disciples to discontinue proclaiming Him as the Messiah. Why? He had already been rejected as Messiah, and He acknowledges that rejection. He drops the Jewish title now that the truth of His assembly has come out. This is a great transitional point in our Lord's ministry.

The Cross is the Necessary Cost to Accomplish God's Purpose (16:21-23)

¶ **21** From that time Jesus began to shew to his disciples that he must go away to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised. v.21 Why does the death of Christ get mentioned after the building of the Church? It isn't chronological, because the cross came before Pentecost, but it is a moral order. The cross is the necessary cost to form the assembly, and accomplish the purpose of God. That is why it says "he must", because it was not an option. Without the cross there would be no kingdom, and there would be no Church. Furthermore, there would be no Christians, because redemption would not be accomplished. He went on to the cross out of devotion to His Father's will, and in love to those who would one day share the place He won for them. The cross is the measure of the depths of Christ's love for His church; "even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). However, primarily it is man's culpability in His death that is in view, because it says "*be killed*". Man is responsible for His death, but at the same time He laid His life down, and no man took it from Him (John 10:18).

Predictions of the Lord's Death. It says that from this point, Jesus "*began to shew to His disciples*" that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, and be raised again. This is the first of four predictions recorded in Matthew. The predictions are given as the Lord successively approaches Jerusalem, the final prediction being given in Jerusalem.

1. [Ch.16, v.21](#)..... First Prediction, in Caesarea-Philippi, concerning His death and resurrection.
2. [Ch.17, vv.22-23](#)... Second Prediction, in Galilee, concerning His death and resurrection.
3. [Ch.20, vv.17-19](#).... Third Prediction, in Perea, concerning His death and resurrection.
4. [Ch.26, vv.1-2](#)..... Fourth Prediction, in Jerusalem, concerning His death only.

22 And Peter taking him to *him* began to rebuke him, saying, *God* be favourable to thee,

Lord; this shall in no wise be unto thee. **23** But turning round, he said to Peter, Get away behind me, Satan; thou art an offence to me, for thy mind is not on the things that are of God, but on the things that are of men. vv.22-23 Peter's forwardness is shocking. There is no doubt that he loved the Lord, but here he makes a dreadful mistake. The Lord had just called Peter "blessed" in v.17, and now He has to administer to Peter the severest rebuke that He ever gave to anyone. How quickly we can have the mind of God one minute, and miss it the next. Peter, speaking out of human love said, "Spare yourself" to the Lord. But it was really Satan prompting Peter in order to hinder the Lord going to the cross. Satan had made this very same temptation to the Lord in the forty days of temptation. In Matt. 4:8-9 Satan proposed that the Lord could have the kingdom, the inheritance, without having to go to the cross, to spare Himself all the sufferings that awaited Him. The Lord responded to the Devil then as He does to the Devil now; "Get thee away, Satan" (Matt. 4:10). To suggest that God might bend the rules even a little, that He might flex His righteousness in order to spare the Son of His love, is a wicked and evil thought. How far short we fall from the thoughts of God sometimes! Peter did not have a proper estimation of man's sin, nor of God's character; the combination of which necessitated the cross. The Lord reveals the root which resulted in such a terrible blunder. Peter's mind was not on the things of God, but rather on the things of men. His heart was going out after an earthly kingdom, after earthly glory, and a place of prominence in it. Perhaps the great privileges he had just been promised had gotten to his head. In that state, Peter was an offense to the Lord. We too need to learn that the sufferings come first, and then the glory will follow.

Peter's Failure. Never once, in all Peter's sermons in Acts does he preach Jesus as the Son of God. He presents Him as the Messiah of Israel, the Son of David, or God's Holy Servant, but never as Son of God. There are a few times in Acts where some translations have Peter saying "His son Jesus" but those are inaccuracies. Even in his two epistles, never once does he present Jesus as the Son of God. The expression only appears in his writings when he is quoting the voice from heaven in the holy mount of transfiguration; but it was the Father's voice. *Peter never rose up to his confession here in Matthew 16.* The key as to why Peter failed in this is seen in vv.22-23; he savored the things of men more than the things of God. He would take the glorious vision of Christ and the church, but he was not willing to embrace the cross. Further in Acts, we have Stephen at his martyrdom using a new term. Stephen gave the final testimony to Israel, and bore witness to their final rejection of it as the stones began to fly. He looked up to heaven and said, "I see the heavens opened, and *the Son of Man* standing on the right hand of God." He knew that it was really Christ, the Son of David they were rejecting, and he sees the glorified Lord in that different character as Son of Man. A chapter later, when Saul is converted, it says "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is *the Son of God*" (Acts 9:20). He preached the same truth

Peter had confessed by divine revelation; that Jesus is the Son of God. But moreover, Paul was willing to take up the cross that Peter shrunk from. He could say of himself, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). God raised up a vessel to carry the torch that Peter was unwilling to carry, and to Paul was committed the truth of the Church of God. Peter was "a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" (1 Pet. 5:1) but Paul was a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, and a witness of the glory.

The Path for the Lord's Disciples in His Absence (16:24-28)

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, If any one desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. v.24 The Lord had just spoken of His own cross, and now we see that His followers have their own crosses as well. As disciples, we are never exhorted to bear the Lord's cross... we could never do it. But he has given each of us something to bear, each in our own measure, a share in the fellowship of His sufferings. The cross is a symbol of shame and rejection. The Lord here gives the call of [discipleship](#); "if any one desires to come after me". Earlier in the gospel the Lord gave the call "come unto me" for salvation. This is a different thing. We can get into trouble soteriologically if we confuse discipleship with the Gospel of the grace of God. This is not the Gospel call, because it is voluntary. When it comes to the Gospel, it says God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). But we are not commanded to be disciples. You do not become a disciple by default; you have to "desire" it. The Lord doesn't want robots; He wants devoted disciples. There is going to be a price to pay, and so you had better be ready. At the same time it is the only option if we want to save our lives (vv.25-26).

25 For whosoever shall desire to save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. **26** For what does a man profit, if he should gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? vv.25-26 In just a few short words our Lord puts in a nutshell the whole of practical Christian life. The path of discipleship is the only way to really "save" our life. To live for our own interests will actually result in wasting or "losing" our life. Sometimes these verses are applied the eternal salvation of the soul, and there is nothing wrong with the application. Surely, many unbelievers have been close to believing the Gospel, but then suffered the loss of their eternal soul because they valued the world, its pleasures, etc. But that it NOT what these verses are speaking about. [Salvation in the Bible](#) is much broader than forgiveness of sins in

the eternal sense. Sometimes it has to do with our being caught up to heaven at the rapture, and sometimes it has to do with being preserved as useful to the Lord in this life. Here the Lord is speaking to His own disciples, who were believers (except for Judas). He tells believers that they can lose their lives if they live for selfish interests now. A Christian might focus all his time and resources on making money or gaining political office... and it be all a waste in view of eternity! How sad. By contrast, the path of discipleship may mean suffering for Christ now, but it will yield the maximum fruit for God. It means we will have to miss out on "life", but we will find our life again at the judgment seat of Christ when He accepts and rewards us for our sacrifice. However, if we confuse the tests and terms of discipleship with the means of justification we will fall into serious error. This is called [Lordship Salvation doctrine](#). This saying (about losing or finding our life) occurs no less than six times in the gospels, twice in Matthew, twice in Luke, and once in both Mark and John. They were spoken on four different occasions. Clearly this is an important principle, central to the meaning of discipleship.

27 For the Son of man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to each according to his doings. v.27 This is not talking exactly about the judgment seat of Christ, but of the time when rewards will be manifested or "rendered to each" in proportion to the measure of our faithfulness in this life. This day is not far off; the Son of Man "is about to come". This is a word of encouragement. The day of reward is coming. Suffering is our portion now, but it won't last forever. He will come as the Son of Man, once rejected and denied the glory so rightly deserved by Him. But it will not be in weakness then, for He will come in the full glory of His Father; i.e. as the Son of God, fully attended by the angelic hosts. There will be an answering glory for every mark of shame that blessed One suffered here as Son of Man. The world will then see that scene which is going on now in heaven. Man's blind eyes cannot see it, but those of faith can.

The gates of heaven are opened wide,
At His name all the angels bow;
The Son of man who was crucified
Is the King of glory now:

He is given His rightful place now in heaven, but soon He will have it in this earth as well. And what an encouragement to the hearts of his disciples!

Worthy, O Son of man, art Thou

Of every crown that decks Thy brow;
 Worthy art Thou to be adored,
 And owned as universal Lord;
 O, hasten that long-promised day,
 When all shall own Thy rightful sway!

28 Verily I say unto you, There are some of those standing here that shall not taste of death at all until they shall have seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom. v.28 Not only did He promise them that He would return in the glory of His Father, but that some of them would have the privilege of seeing Him come in His kingdom! This would be fulfilled in ch.17 on the mount of transfiguration. What grace, to give these disciples a visible miniature replica of the kingdom! Note: it is the kingdom of the Son of Man, which is the earthly compartment of the millennial kingdom. Every time the Lord's coming is spoke of as the "coming of the Son of Man" it always refers to the appearing. Ch.17 is what follows the appearing, *the Millennial reign of the Son of Man*. Paul refers to it as the [Day of the Lord](#) and the [Day of Christ](#). The Day of the Lord is the thought of the authority of the Lord being established on the earth through judgments. The Day of Christ is more the thought of the time of the display of Christ's glory from the heavens.

Events Connected with the Millennium (Matt. 17)

vv.1-9 The Lord had just spoken of His coming in His Father's glory in His own kingdom (the kingdom of the Son of Man), and now we get a sample of that kingdom and His glory. We can be confident in this interpretation of the transfiguration scene because the Lord explicitly tells us in Matt. 16:28!

The Mount of Transfiguration: a Sketch of the Kingdom in Glory (17:1-9)

CHAPTER 17

¶ And after six days Jesus takes with *him* Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain apart. v.1 This event occurred "after six days" which reminds

us of the rest that God took after the six days of creating the heavens and earth. We think too of each day as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8), and six-thousand years have almost expired; the “day after” is the thousand-year Millennium! He takes three disciples for an abundant witness; the favored trio who were specially permitted to witness; (1) the raising of Jairus’ daughter, (2) the Lord’s transfiguration, and (3) the Lord’s agony in Gethsemane. They represent the Jewish remnant on earth at the time of the appearing. He brings them “apart” from the other nine disciples which might represent the fact that all twelve tribes will not be represented in the land at the time of the appearing. Mountains in scripture speak of long-lasting governments in the earth (Dan. 2:35; Rev. 8:8-9). Here it is the earthly compartment of the kingdom of heaven; the Millennial administration of the Son of Man. Likely this was Mt. Hermon, which stands a little north of Caesarea Philippi, and is one of the highest peaks in the region. This was the mountain Moses referred to in Deut. 3:25 as “that goodly mountain”, which for him summarized the whole land, and which he longed to see. Traditionally, the mount of transfiguration is thought to be Mt. Tabor, which is located in Lower Galilee, at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. We cannot be certain which mountain is the one spoken of here.

2 And he was transfigured before them. And his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as the light; v.2 The three disciples saw the Lord in His official glory as Son of Man in the Millennium. Entering into this world, He was the Christ, the King of the Jews. Perfect in His humanity, He did not insist on His rights as King, but accepted rejection, scorn and reproach from His people. As rejected, He took up the broader title of Son of Man. When He comes with the glory of His Father in His own kingdom He will still be the Son of Man, but His official glories will be unveiled, and all will bow the knee before Him as the Christ of God. The three witnesses here on the mountain were given a view of the official glory of Christ unveiled. His “face shone as the sun”. The sun is a figure of highest glory in administration, and speaks of the Lord “ruling” the Millennial “day” (Gen. 1:16) when “the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2). His garments became “white as the light”, speaking of the spotless purity of His Person.

3 and lo, Moses and Elias appeared to them talking with him. v.3 In conversation with the glorified Son of Man are two Old Testament saints of great renown; the law-giver and the greatest prophet of antiquity. They are with Christ in glory, so together they represent the heavenly saints who will reign with Christ for 1000 years. Moses represents the resurrected saints because he alone was buried by Jehovah, and Elijah represents the raptured saints because he alone was taken to heaven without dying! The disciples have no difficulty recognizing them, which encourages us that in the glorified state we will retain our individuality even though we will bear the image of the heavenly. In Luke 9:31 we find that

the subject of their conversation was the Lord's "decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem". In a similar way, the Law and the Prophets look forward to the cross.

4 And Peter answering said to Jesus, Lord, it is good we should be here. If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: for thee one, and for Moses one, and one for Elias. v.4 Peter had done well up to the middle of v.4. It was good for them to be there! You can sense Peter's excitement... it doesn't get any better than this; Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all glorified together and carrying on a conversation. Peter did not know what to say (read Mark 9:6) but one thing was sure, he didn't want this experience to end. He wanted to honor the Lord, but he tried to do it in a human way, and instead insulted His glory. By his suggestion "let us make three tabernacles" he brought the Lord down to the level of Moses and Elijah. He thought Jesus would make a great addition to the Jewish "hall of fame". The two Old Testament saints were great in their own place, but they were nothing to be compared to the Son of God! Peter fell into the same snare as the men of the world who answer from their own human opinions that great question; "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matt. 16:13).

5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This" is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him. v.5 In ch.16 Peter was rebuked by the the Son, but now in ch.17 he is rebuked by the Father. The Father is jealous of the honor due His Son. He insists that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"(Phil. 2:10) and that "all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father" (John 5:23). Having become a man, the Son has suffered dishonor beyond what the Father and Spirit have suffered (therefore, He is the Son of Man). Men look at Christ and see only His manhood; they deny His personal glory. God the Father will see to it that proper glory is rendered to His Son, even if it be through judgment.

Immediately, while Peter "was still speaking" the Father interrupts his insulting, though well-intended suggestion. A "bright cloud" overshadows them, so similar to the Shekinah glory cloud of Ezekiel (Ezek. 10:4). How could anything "overshadow" the brightness of the official glory of Christ? Nothing could, unless it be the declaration of the personal glory of Christ! It is not that His personal glory was given to Him, but that the Father declared it. In 2 Peter 1:16-18 Peter says with regard to this event, "He received from God the Father honour and glory". To summarize, the personal glory of Christ is all that is comprehended in the name "Son of God". Two things primarily: (1) He is God; John 1:1-3, and (2) He is in Eternal Relationship to the Father as His only-begotten Son; John 1:14, 18. We have these two elements here: Jesus is the Son of the Father (deity), and He is the Father's beloved in whom is all His delight (relationship). The Father demands that they "hear Him [the Son]". God would not have us despise Moses and Elijah, but rather recognize the true place of the

Son. Typically speaking, the Jewish remnant represented by Peter, James, and John will need to recognize this in a coming day. Jesus is not merely a great man, like one of the prophets... He is God's Son and the supreme revelation of Himself. This is really the subject of the book of Hebrews: God spoke in times past through great men, but now has spoken in the Person of His Son, and you had better hear Him! Jesus remains the sole dispenser of the knowledge and the mind of God. We need to recognize this lesson as well: never exalt a man to a place equal with the Lord Jesus.

6 And the disciples hearing *it* fell upon their faces, and were greatly terrified. **7** And Jesus coming to *them* touched them, and said, Rise up, and be not terrified. vv.6-7 We have two responses in these verses. The immediate response of the disciples is to hit the dirt in great fear. We can learn something from this. There is a holy reverence that we need to have for the Person of Christ. But also, Jesus would not leave them in that that state. He would have us "rise up" and have peace in our souls, while never forgetting who He is and the honor due to Him. Notice also the difference between the two actions. The Father spoke from a cloud, but Jesus gets up close and touches them. Thought great and glorious, He is ever the tangible One, ever willing to come down to where we are in our frailty of mind and body, to touch us and comfort us. What a precious Savior!

8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus alone. v.8 Not only was Peter rebuked by a voice from heaven, but the distracting presence of Moses and Elijah was taken away. This is the mind of God for us; that we should see "no man but Jesus only". And we can take a moral principle from this. If we get occupied with men instead of Christ, God will remove them. Peter opened his mouth in the first place because he didn't want the scene with Moses and Elijah to end; but sadly it was his blunder that caused God to remove them and end the scene. God wants our focus to be on Christ!

9 And as they descended from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of man be risen up from among *the* dead. v.9 Jesus had been manifested to them in the acquired kingdom glory (official glory) and in the essential glory of His Person (personal glory), but the disciples were not to testify of these subjects until the Son of Man was risen from among the dead. Why? Because the resurrection from among the dead is the great proof that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)!

The resurrection. There is a progression of understanding through scripture with regard to the resurrection. Old Testament saints knew of a general resurrection, that is all (John 11:24). The resurrection was spoken of in the Old Testament, but not in great detail (see 1 Samuel 2:6; Job 19:25-27; Psalm 16:9,10; Psalm 17:15; and Daniel 12:2). When Christ came

He presented something new, that there would be a "*resurrection from among the dead*" (Matt. 17:9); i.e. that not all would be raised together. Christ Himself was the one who first taught this distinction; having "*brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Tim. 1:10). He taught that the resurrection would have two parts; that those of faith would rise first, and then later those without faith would be raised for judgment (John 5:29). The "two resurrections" have several names:

- The resurrection of *life* and the resurrection of *judgment* (John 5:29)
- The resurrection of the *just* and the resurrection of the *unjust* (Acts 24:15)
- The *first* resurrection [and the *second* death] (Rev. 20:5)

Paul adds even more detail which he got [by revelation](#): Christ would rise first, and then those that are Christ's at His coming would rise (1 Cor. 15:23). Paul explained that some will rise at the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18), but he did not explain that another phase will occur at the Appearing. We learn, by joining Rev. 20:4 and Rev. 14:13, that the tribulation martyrs will form the last phase of the first resurrection. In Rev. 20:5, a detail is added as to the space of time between the end of the first resurrection and that of the wicked dead; the space would be 1000 years, or a "millennium". While details are successively added throughout scripture, the later details *do not contradict* the earlier statements. Such is the perfection of scripture!

The Question about Elijah (17:10-13)

10 And *his* disciples demanded of him saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first have come? v.10 A question had arisen in the minds of the disciples. In Malachi 4:5-6 it plainly states that Elijah the prophet would come before the kingdom was set up, but the disciples had just seen the kingdom on the mount and Elijah had not come. This was a good question.

11 And he answering said to them, Elias indeed comes first and will restore all things. **12** But I say unto you that Elias has already come, and they have not known him, but have done unto him whatever they would. Thus also the Son of man is about to suffer from them. **13** Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the baptist. vv.11-13 The Lord first confirms the true meaning of the prophecy; that Elijah would come first and "restore all things" by stirring up the hearts of the faithful remnant. The Lord explains that John the Baptist had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) according to the inspired words of Zacharias his father. The Lord says that this John was Elijah to those with faith, who was promised to come (Matt. 11:14). The expression "if ye will receive it" in Matt. 11 means that John wasn't literally Elijah, but it was the spirit and power of Elijah if you had

the faith to see the moral connection. John was doing the moral work of Elijah's mission, which was to prepare the way of the Lord. However, the nation at large rejected John, just as they were about to reject the Son of Man. Because of their rejection, John's Elijah-like work was cut short, and so he is only a partial fulfillment of Mal. 4:5-6. Notice that the Spirit of God makes John the complete fulfillment of Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1, but carefully avoids that with Mal. 4:5-6. This is because the same ministry that John began will be taken up by faithful witnesses in the tribulation who will fulfill that prophecy (Rev. 11:1-14). But Elijah will come again to the apostate nation of Israel in a manner in keeping with the time of the end. So in that sense, Elijah was not yet come. This is also the reason that John said he was not Elias (John 1:21), and never applied Malachi 4:5-6 to himself. In the wonderful dualism of prophecy, had the mystery not been unfolded, John would have been the apocalyptic Elijah. This of course was never to be, but we can see the beautiful symmetry between the circumstances just before and after the Church period. Notice also that the Jews are credited with the death of John the Baptist. Yes, the craftiness of Herodias was the occasion of his beheading, but the hatred for John really came from the leaders of the Jews. It was going to be the same with the Son of Man; He was "about to suffer of them". Just as John's work was cut short by rejection, so the Son of Man would not bring in the kingdom at His first coming; it still awaits His second coming!

The Healing of a Demon-Possessed Boy (17:14-21)

vv.14-21 The healing of the demoniac boy is a miracle repeated in all three synoptic gospels ([compare](#)). In the other accounts we have more of an emphasis on the details of the boy's condition and the father's story. In Mark 9 the *father's* portion is emphasized, in Luke 9 the *boy's* portion is emphasized, but here in Matthew 17 the *disciples'* portion is emphasized (unbelief). The lesson here is that the kingdom is not yet come, and though Satan's power is still in the earth, he is a defeated foe. To have relief from Satan's power in this time, we must have faith. In a dispensational sense, this is a picture of the world being under the power of the Devil at the time of the establishment of the kingdom. The nations will be reeling under the effects of demonic influences, and will be suffering greatly. The prophetic earth will be at an all-time low. The nations will come to Christ and fall at His feet. The Lord will bind Satan, and cast him into the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3), and along with Satan He will "*punish the host of the high ones*" (Isa. 24:21-22) which are his demons.

¶ **14** And when they came to the crowd, a man came to him, falling on his knees before him, and saying, **15** Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is lunatic, and suffers sorely; for often he falls into the fire and often into the water. **16** And I brought him to thy disciples, and they were not able to heal him. vv.14-16 When they come down off the mountain - a preview of

the kingdom glory - they immediately encounter a sad scene. It shows that the kingdom was not for that time. They had just witnessed the scene of sweet fellowship between the Father and the Son, and now they see another father and son where fellowship has been rendered impossible by an evil spirit (in Mark 9 we find that he was deaf and dumb). The symptoms now were violent attempts to harm the boy. The occasion of these attacks were complete opposites; the fire and the water. When one is held in Satan's grasp, they might go in human energy to one extreme, only to be attacked from another angle. The boy's father had come to the other nine disciples while the Lord was on the mountain, and they had not been able to heal him. But in faith he persists, and is rewarded by the Lord with an audience. As an application, when Christian parents have trouble with their children, sometimes they look to fellow believers for counsel, and it doesn't help their situation. If we really want help, don't give up. God is ordering everything to bring us like this man, on our knees before the Lord.

17 And Jesus answering said, O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to me. **18** And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon went out from him, and the boy was healed from that hour. vv.17-18 The Lord had already met the strong man (Satan) in the wilderness and bound him. The disciples had been sent out in ch.10 to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and at that time they had been able to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1). The failure of the nation of Israel ("this generation") was unbelief. Unbelief in the presence of proof that Jesus was the Messiah. That unbelief had affected the disciples as well, and they had gotten out of touch. They had access to that power in Christ, but in His absence unbelief prevented them from availing themselves of it. Thankfully for this man, the Lord was still on earth, and came down from the mountain to accomplish by sight the same miracles which would have been possible by faith, had they possessed it. Thus He warns them "how long shall I be with you, how long shall I bear you". The Lord was going away, and faith would be the only option. The best thing we can do with someone who has fallen into the hands of Satan is to "bring him here" to Jesus. The Lord rebukes the demon, and immediately the demon departs. The authority was there! And there was no delay in the cessation of symptoms; the child was healed "from that hour".

19 Then the disciples, coming to Jesus apart, said *to him*, Why were not "we" able to cast him out? **20** And he says to them, Because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard *seed*, ye shall say to this mountain, Be transported hence there, and it shall transport itself; and nothing shall be impossible to you. **21** But this kind does not go out but by prayer and fasting. vv.19-21 The disciples desired to know what was different about this situation compared to their experiences before, such as in Matthew 10. The answer is unbelief. Satan's power is efficacious in this world only because of unbelief in

man. If we have faith, be it ever so small (“a grain of mustard seed”) any obstacle, be it ever so big (“this mountain”) it can be removed because the power of Christ is at our disposal! Howbeit, faith is manifested by two things in an evil world; dependence on God (“prayer”) and separation from the world (“fasting”). Both are required to avail ourselves of the power of God. Without dependence, we will be assuming power when we try to act in Christ’s name; God cannot identify with independence. Without separation, we are defiled by the very thing we seek deliverance from, and God cannot be identified with evil. The mountain in the earlier part of the chapter represented the kingdom of Christ when viewed from above. Here the Lord employs the same mountain again (“this mountain”) viewed from below as a figure of Satan’s kingdom. In the tribulation the wise among the Jewish remnant (the Maskilim, who teach the remnant and ‘feed’ them, Dan. 12:3) will by prayer and fasting learn to wield the power of God to thwart the devices of Satan (Rev. 12:6).

The Prediction of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection (17:22-23)

¶ 22 And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of man is about to be delivered up into *the* hands of men, 23 and they shall kill him; and the third day he shall be raised up. And they were greatly grieved. vv.22-23 The Lord was about to leave Galilee for the last time, and go to Jerusalem. This is now the second of [four predictions](#) given by the Lord concerning His death and resurrection. In ch.16 He spoke of it as Christ being rejected and suffering at the hands of the Jewish leaders; the elders, chief priests, and scribes (Matt. 16:20-21). Here it is the Son of man being rejected, about to be delivered up to die at the hands of Gentiles, hence He says “men”, not specific to Jews. He came as king of the Jews, and was rejected as such. Rather than abandon His mission, He took the broader title of Son of man, reaching out to all men. Now as Son of man He would be rejected even by the Gentiles; it was a Roman cross that He would die on. It is man’s culpability in His death that is in view here, because it says “*they shall kill him*”. Man is responsible for His death, but at the same time He laid His life down, and no man took it from Him (John 10:18). In response to this, the disciples’ hearts were grieved, but they still did not fully understand what all this would mean.

Teaching on Freedom and Tribute: Money in the Fish’s Mouth (17:24-27)

vv.24-27 The coin in the fish’s mouth is only found in Matthew’s gospel ([compare](#)). In a dispensational sense, this is a picture of when the Gentile nations will pay tribute to Israel in

the Millennium, and Israel will “suck the milk of the nations” and Jerusalem’s gates “shall stand open continually: (they shall not be shut day nor night,) that the wealth of the nations may be brought unto thee” (Isa. 60:11, 16). Just as a fish was taken up from the sea and yielded a coin for Peter to bring to the temple, so the Gentiles (pictured by the sea) will yield their wealth to the restored nation of Israel.

24 And when they came to Capernaum, those who received the didrachmas came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the didrachmas? **25a** He says, Yes. **vv.24-25a** The “*didrachmas*” were coins worth a half-shekel collected for the upkeep of the Jerusalem temple. The Jews’ justification for this tax originates in Exo. 30:13, but they had turned it into a recurring tax instead of a one-time thing. It was a Jewish temple-tax, not a Roman tax. The tax-collectors came to Peter to ask if the Lord paid His taxes. The temple-tax would not have been required by any Roman law, and therefore it was more of a token that such and such a person was a “good Jew” if he paid it. Peter answers quickly without speaking to the Lord, as he was prone to do. He was anxious to have the Lord in good standing with the Jewish leaders.

25b And when he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, What dost thou think, Simon? the kings of the earth, from whom do they receive custom or tribute? from their own sons or from strangers? **26** Peter says to him, From strangers. Jesus said to him, Then are the sons free. **vv.25b-26** The Lord knew the very thoughts of Peter, and He also knew that Peter wasn’t too clear on the Lord’s position about the temple tax. Peter had answered quickly, with natural motives, and the Lord addresses him by his natural name, “Simon”. It is beautiful to see that the Lord wanted to settle Peter’s queasy mind. The Lord goes on to explain that kings do not tax their own family members, only strangers. As Jehovah’s son, the Lord was exempt from paying any taxes related to Jehovah’s temple! In fact, in a broader sense, as heir of all the kingdoms of the earth, Jesus was exempt from every kind of tax!

27 But that we may not be an offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when thou hast opened its mouth thou wilt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee. **v.27** The Lord then does something beautiful; He says “we”. He brings Peter and all the disciples into His own relationship as “sons of the kingdom”. It is only with regard to earthly relationships, not the full sense of being given the Son’s relationship to the Father (John 20:17), yet such a gracious thing. The same is true of us today. As “co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6) this earth belongs to us! We are going to reign over it, and so in that sense we should not be expected to pay our taxes. But there is a higher principle: a spirit of grace “that we might not offend”. This is the beauty of

Christ; He walked through this world with all the rights of the Son of God, and yet He never insisted on them. This is to be our character too, as Christians in this world. We are to walk with our heads held high in all the dignity of sonship, but our faces on the ground in humble grace. As the Son of God, the Lord demonstrates His absolute control over the creation by commanding the fishes of the sea. Adam was placed as the head over the old creation and given dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the heavens, and over the beast of the field (Gen. 1:26). Adam failed, and was never able to have dominion over fish. The Lord displayed in the gospels His remarkable dominion over fish on a number of occasions (Matt. 17:27; Luke 5:6; John 21:6). When Peter would cast a single hook, the first fish he brought up would have a coin in its mouth, and the value of that coin would be the exact amount required to pay temple tax for two men! A "stater" was worth two "didrachmas".

Footnotes

1. The expression "*O ye of little faith*" is a gentle rebuke, repeated four times in Matthew: first in Matt. 6:30 in regard to *care*; second in Matt. 8:23 in regard to *fear*; third in Matt. 14:31 in regard to *doubt*; and fourth in Matt. 16:7-8 in regard to *reasoning* in divine things. All four instances have to do with failure in simple faith. And yet the Lord never says to His own "*O ye of no faith*".