

# Matthew 17 - The Formation of the Kingdom Community

## I. Introduction

### A. In Matthew 14-17, Jesus has been progressively revealing Himself to His disciples

1. This is exactly what Jesus had promised in the Parables, though most rejected Him, He would be accepted by a few
2. Those few would see Him because "to them it had been given to know" - the disciples are starting to see who Jesus is

### B. And, like the rest of Matthew, this section is very carefully organized

1. We can see this in a phrase that is repeated three times in this section - three times Jesus is identified as the Son of God
2. In Matthew 14:33 the disciples say, "Truly you are the Son of God."
3. In Matthew 16:16 Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
4. And in Matthew 17:5 God Himself says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"
5. These confessions are the core of this section but each of these confessions builds on the other as we look at the context

### C. The first section, culminating in the first confession, might be called the Center of the Kingdom Community in 13:53-14:33

1. Right after the parables, this section is simply revealing who Jesus is, so two people ask who Jesus is, but get it wrong:
  - a. Jesus goes to Nazareth and they ask, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" - clearly they are not identifying Jesus well
  - b. And then Herod hears about Jesus and says, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." - clearly He is not identifying Jesus well
  - c. But when Jesus hears this, He takes His disciples aside and shows them two signs, feeding the five thousand and walking on water, and He helps them identify Him, so they can say "Truly you are the Son of God."
2. Who Jesus is must be central to the Kingdom Community, without knowing Jesus, the kingdom community cannot exist

### D. The second section, and the second confession, might be called the Identity of the Kingdom Community in 14:34-16:20

1. In the first section, we identified who Jesus is, now this second section identifies who Jesus' people are
2. So the section starts with a contrast that must have been very confusing to the disciples
  - a. First the Pharisees come to Jesus and Jesus rejects them saying, "You hypocrites," and "for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God." - the chief men of Israel are not Jesus' people
  - b. Then, immediately, another person comes to Jesus, a Canaanite woman, and Jesus ends up saying to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." - could a Canaanite woman be part of Jesus' people?
  - c. Everything seems turned on its head - Israel is being rejected as Jesus' people and a new people are being called
3. But how are Jesus' people identified? To help the disciples understand, Jesus again gives two signs to two sets of people
  - a. To the disciples, Jesus again feeds the crowd and shows them that He is the new Moses who is leading God's people, the One providing Manna in the wilderness
  - b. But to the Pharisees, they will have no sign but the sign of Jonah - He condemns them, they are not His people
4. And by the end the disciples understand - Jesus' people are those who know who Jesus is
  - a. So Jesus asks the disciples who He is, and Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
  - b. And Jesus says this confession is central to who His people are, it is "on this rock [that] I will build my church"
5. Jesus' people are those who understand who He is, the identity of Jesus' people comes back to the identity of Jesus

### E. Which brings us to Matthew 16:21-17:27 this morning, because we don't quite understand Jesus' people yet

1. We might call this third section the Formation of the Kingdom Community. What makes Jesus' community?
2. So Jesus turns from describing who He is to what He must do - how is Jesus going to establish a new community?
3. So in Matthew 16:21 it says - *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*
4. And the section ends similarly in Matthew 17:22-23 - *As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."*
5. But, at the center of the revelation of what Jesus has come to do is the ultimate revelation of who Jesus is
  - a. Now God Himself is going to declare, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."
  - b. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, has come to sacrifice Himself in order to redeem and establish a new people of God

### F. Read Matthew 16:21-17:27

### G. Proposition: Jesus must establish the Kingdom Community by ransoming the sons of God

1. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the gloriously perfect Son of God
2. What has Jesus come to do? Jesus has come to ransom and redeem the sons of God
3. What does Jesus require of us? Jesus demands that we follow in faith

## II. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the gloriously perfect Son of God

### A. At the center of our passage this morning is the third and greatest identification of Jesus in this section

1. Matthew 17:1-8 - *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*
2. Building on the disciples general confession that Jesus was the Son of God and Peter's more specific confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, now God Himself identifies Jesus as His beloved Son
3. And as we look at the Transfiguration, I think we can see at least four things

### B. First, the Transfiguration declares that Jesus is the Son of God

1. This is Matthew's overarching purpose in Matthew 14-17, to nail down the truth that Jesus is the Son of God
2. So, at the apex of this story, Matthew has God Himself declare that Jesus is His Son - there can be no other argument about this truth, it is not a truth merely invented by man, it isn't merely a tradition or a conjecture, God Himself Has declared that Jesus is His Son - *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*
3. But this identification adds something - not only is Jesus God's Son, not only is Jesus the Christ, but Jesus is the Beloved
4. Literally, Jesus is the *agapaed* One, Jesus is the one that God has chosen, that God has set His love upon - Jesus is not merely a son of God, Jesus is the Son of God, the chosen of God, the Beloved of God
5. And this is a reference to prophecy, God is quoting out of Isaiah 42 when He makes His identification of Jesus, Isaiah 42:1 - *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;*
6. God is saying: Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 42, He is My chosen servant and My beloved Son - this term 'chosen' or 'beloved' was used in the Old Testament of Israel's kings, especially David
7. David was God's chosen son, the anointed king; but now that position belongs to Jesus - He is the last and greatest Son, the beloved of God who has come to do God's will, the anointed of God who has come to rule God's people
8. Jesus is the Son of God *par excellence*, the Son who could do justice to God's promise to David, II Samuel 7:13-15 - *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.*
9. This is what Matthew wants us to see when He identifies Jesus as the Son of God - this is the Son, the ruler of nations, the heir of the world, the One who acts with the very authority of God Himself - here is the rightful king of Israel

### C. Second, the Transfiguration declares that Jesus is the glory of God

1. The Transfiguration is a unique event in the Gospels, a pulling back of the veil as it were - and it not only declares who Jesus is, but what Jesus is
2. So, we see a new picture of Jesus on the mountain - *And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.*
3. For a moment, the veil of human flesh was pulled back and Peter, James and John saw Jesus as He was - the Son of God
4. His face shown like the sun with the radiance of the glory of God - again, another reminder of the Old Testament
5. There had been another mountain in the Old Testament that another servant of God had climbed, Exodus 34:29-30 - *When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.*
6. Moses had spoken face-to-face with God and the glory of God was reflected in His face, the glory of God had rubbed off on Him so that, when He went down the mountain, the glory of God was reflected to the people
7. But there is a significant difference between Moses and Jesus - Moses face only shone after he had been in the cloud of God's glory, after he had gazed on God's presence - but, with Jesus, the bright cloud of God's presence came afterward
8. Jesus was not merely reflecting the glory of God, Jesus contained the glory of God - the glory of God belonged to Jesus, so, that at His command, He could radiate out the glory of God to the disciples
9. Jesus wasn't a reflection, He wasn't merely a Moses revealing the glory of God, Jesus was the glory of God, the very manifestation of God's nature and being; as Paul would later put it - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* (Colossians 1:15)

#### **D. Third, the Transfiguration declares that Jesus is the plan of God**

1. On the mountain, Jesus is transfigured and radiates out the glory of God, but then two interesting characters appear with Him - Moses and Elijah come and speak with Jesus - but why Moses and Elijah?
2. Moses and Elijah actually have a lot in common - they were both prophets and the greatest prophets of their eras bracketing the histories of the Old Testament - Moses the great prophet of the Exodus, and Elijah the great prophet of the kings - in fact, Moses and Elijah represent the whole of the Old Testament story, the Law and the Prophets
3. Not only that, but Moses and Elijah both went up the mountain and saw, in different ways, the glory of God and both despaired of their purpose and finally, both were called away by God before they saw their task completed - Moses is taken up the mountain to die in sight of the promised land, and Elijah is taken up by chariots while the worship of Ba'al is still in full force in Israel - both of them are removed from the earth by the direct hand of God Himself
4. And I think these similarities helps us see what is being communicated on the mountain - and it is being communicated two ways - there is a communication to the disciples seeing Moses and Elijah, but there is also a communication going on, I think, from Jesus to Moses and Elijah
5. God brings Moses and Elijah from their time to the mountain of transfiguration, and Jesus shows them that God's plan was going to be fulfilled - everything they had worked for was not in vain, it was actually more glorious than they had ever seen - their stories had purpose because they were foundations for this last story, the perfect plan of God
6. Moses and Elijah may not have seen the fulfillment of the story in their times, and that is because the story was never going to be fulfilled in their times - entering the promised land or destroying the worship of Ba'al was not God's end game - their stories were preparation and foreshadowing for this last great story
7. So Moses and Elijah, the great prophets of the Old Testament, get to see the final step of God's plan - and then they testify to the disciples that Jesus had always been God's plan
8. Moses and Elijah with Jesus show that Jesus was the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament story - the prophets of the history of Israel were here to usher in the final story - Jesus was what they had longed to see
9. Their presence with Jesus underscores God's command - *listen to Him!* - if the disciples had listened to the Law and the Prophets, how much more should they listen to Jesus, the fulfillment of all that had gone before

#### **E. Fourth, the Transfiguration declares that Jesus is the perfection of God**

1. The Transfiguration is full of meaning, but I believe this last truth is the Matthew's purpose for recording this third identification
2. The first identification was simply to clarify who Jesus was, the second to show that Jesus' church is built on who He is, but this third identification's purpose is to show that Jesus is the perfect Son of God, the One prepared for His task
3. Listen once more to what God says on the mountain - *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*
4. Jesus is not only the beloved Son, but with Him God is 'well pleased' - in Jesus there was no shadow of failure, no stain of sin that would evoke God's displeasure - Jesus was the very perfection of God and God was well pleased
5. In this third identification we see the glory and the purpose of God wrapped up in Jesus Christ, but the most important truth here is that Jesus was the perfect Son of God, the One without stain or blemish, perfect in every attribute
6. And since God was well pleased, Jesus deserved only good from His Father's hand - nothing in Jesus deserved wrath, nothing in Jesus deserved death - there was no reason for Jesus to go to death
7. And that is exactly the point, bracketed by three predictions of His impending death, God declares that with Jesus He is well pleased - Jesus' death had nothing to do with Him, there must be a bigger purpose in Jesus' predictions of His death
8. Like the lambs that were to be without blemish, the lambs with which God was well pleased, the lambs that became a pleasing aroma before God, another sacrifice was made ready - a sacrifice that was without blemish, a sacrifice with which God could be well pleased
9. This third identification serves to tie who Jesus is, the Son of God, to what Jesus has come to do, die as a sacrifice - with Jesus God is well pleased and thus He is worthy to be the sacrificial lamb, the redemption of Israel
10. Which leads to our second point this morning...

### III. What has Jesus come to do? Jesus has come to ransom and redeem the sons of God

#### A. Three times in this third section we see Jesus predict His coming death, which is a major new topic in Matthew

1. Until Matthew 16, there has been no mention of Jesus' death or resurrection, but in Matthew 16, this rapidly changes
2. We see Jesus tell the disciples that He must die in Matthew 16:21, in Matthew 17:12 and Matthew 17:22
3. Jesus's death is the theme of this section - but what does this have to do with the kingdom community?
4. Let's go step by step through Jesus' predictions of His death to see where they lead us...

#### B. Jesus starts by telling the disciples that His purpose was to die and rise again

1. Matthew 16:21 - *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*
2. There are two important phrases here, "from that time" and "must go"
3. When it says that 'from that time Jesus began to show his disciples', Matthew is saying that learning Jesus' identity was very important to establishing the kingdom community, but that wasn't enough - who Jesus was needed to be nailed down first, but now that the disciples are fairly clear on who Jesus is, now they must learn something more
4. They need to know who Jesus is and why Jesus came - the kingdom community cannot be formed without understanding Jesus' identity, but it also cannot be formed without knowing Jesus' purpose
5. And then Jesus says, 'He must go to Jerusalem and suffer' to tell us what His purpose was - the Christ, the Son of the Living God had come to die for His people
6. And Jesus doesn't just say this as a statement of fact, He doesn't say, "I am going" but He says, "I must go" - the kingdom community cannot be formed, a new Israel cannot be created, without the death and resurrection of the Messiah

#### C. Jesus tells the disciples that He must suffer because people cannot understand His glory apart from His suffering

1. Matthew 17:9 - *And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."*
2. Jesus commands His disciples to not tell anyone about the Transfiguration until after He is raised from the dead
3. This is an interesting prohibition and one that happens several times in Matthew - Jesus doesn't want people going around telling everyone who He is - but why? And especially in this clearest vision, why not tell everyone?
4. I think the answer comes down to misunderstanding - Jesus knew that people would misunderstand who He was if the recipients of miracles were going around the countryside telling that a great healer was here and people would misunderstand who He was if the disciples started telling everyone that the King of Glory had appeared
5. People would misunderstand Him as an earthly king - they couldn't understand who the Son of God was until they saw His death and resurrection - so Jesus actually makes a prohibition here, but also says until when
6. Matthew 17:9 - *"Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."*
7. People can't understand who the Son of God is until the Son of Man is raised from the dead
8. If the identity of Jesus is central to the kingdom community, in fact is what forms the kingdom community, then the death and resurrection of Jesus must be central to the kingdom community, because people cannot understand who He is apart from what He came to do

#### D. Jesus tells the disciples that He must suffer because Israel is in rebellion

1. Matthew 17:10-13 - *And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*
2. Immediately after Jesus prohibits them from sharing the vision, the disciples ask about Elijah, and Jesus uses the question to point toward why He will suffer
3. The disciples ask why Elijah must come and they seem to be trying to understand how Jesus fits into the prophetic history, which is a good thing, but Jesus answers a slightly different question
4. Jesus says, "He did come, but look what they did to him"
5. The Spirit of Elijah had come in the person of John the Baptist, but Israel rejected the prophet - Israel was in rebellion against her God and king
6. The kingdom community needs to be reformed because it is currently in rebellion
7. And Jesus says that His suffering must be understood against the backdrop of this rebellion - if they had rejected the message and killed John the prophet, then *"the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands."*
8. The rebellion of the kingdom community necessitated the death of the Messiah - on the one hand because the current kingdom community will reject Him just as they rejected the prophets, but Jesus is hinting at something more which He explains more at the end of chapter 17

**E. Jesus tells the disciples that the result of His suffering will be the redemption of many sons of God**

1. Jesus mentions His death and resurrection one last time in Matthew 17, Matthew 17:22-27 - *As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."*
2. As always in Matthew, the juxtaposition of these two stories are no accident - Matthew pairs Jesus' statement as they were gathering in Galilee with a story about what happened when they had gathered in Galilee
3. It starts with a third statement of Jesus' death and resurrection, similar to the first statement, but adding that Jesus' suffering will be an act of betrayal - He will be delivered into the hands of men
4. But then, in Capernaum, the humdrum of normal life seems to be reestablishing itself as the tax collector comes around - although this wasn't any ordinary tax but the temple tax that each Jew was obligated to pay
  - a. And Jesus discusses the temple tax with Peter - the temple tax is a tax that is going to God the king of Israel, but do kings tax their own sons? The answer is no.
  - b. Jesus is building on His identification, the theme of this entire section of Matthew - He is the Son of the Living God and as the Son of God He is not subject to the tax for the temple of God
  - c. But, if that were it, it wouldn't be much new information, but there is a huge new revelation in Jesus' discussion with Peter - Jesus doesn't only identify Himself as the Son of God, but He talks about the sons (plural) of God
  - d. And He identifies Peter as one of those sons, Matthew 17:26-27 - *Jesus said to him, "Then the sons (plural) are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."*
5. And this is where the two juxtaposed stories tie together - Jesus identifies Peter as one of the sons of God because Jesus' death and resurrection would redeem the sons of God
  - a. Jesus had come to suffer and die, and His death was not only because His people rejected Him - He came to accomplish a positive purpose in the midst of rejection
  - b. The people of Israel may be rejecting Him, but He came to redeem a new people, to bring them out of bondage and give them the rights of sons
  - c. In fact, this is directly out of the story of Exodus once again - in Exodus, God had chosen the sons of Israel to be His son, but He had to redeem the sons of Israel before they could enjoy the rights of a son
    - i. Exodus 4:22-23 - *Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'*
    - ii. Hosea 11:1 - *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*
    - iii. Exodus 13:13-16 - *Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."*
  - d. Now, as Israel rejects the final messenger and is rejected by Christ, a new people, a new kingdom community, a new group of sons are being called - but for them to be called, they must be redeemed
6. And this is what ties the Transfiguration to the revelation of Jesus' death - Jesus death was the death of the perfect Son of God, the One who had no need to die
  - a. A new Passover sacrifice was needed to grant a new community the rights of sons, and so a new Passover Lamb must be identified, Exodus 12:5 - *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old.*
  - b. And Jesus has just been identified as this - He is the beloved Son with whom God is well pleased, so that Peter can later say, I Peter 1:18-19 - *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*
  - c. The identity of Jesus is so important to the kingdom community, because the identity of Jesus is so central to His purpose - Jesus had to be the perfect Son of God in order to ransom the sons of God
  - d. But, having promised the ransom price in predicting His suffering and death, He can tell Peter - the sons are free, and you will be counted as a son

#### IV. What does Jesus require of us? Jesus demands we follow in faith (3 ways Jesus calls us to faith here)

##### A. Faith means resting in who Jesus is (not just seeing who He is)

1. Directly after the Transfiguration, Jesus returns to the rest of the disciples in Matthew 17:14-20 - *And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."*
2. Little faith is a minor theme of Matthew's gospel, Jesus uses the phrase five times in Matthew
  - a. For example, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says - *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?* (Matt 6:30)
  - b. Or, during the storm on the sea, Jesus says - *And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.* (Matt 8:26)
  - c. Jesus uses this word '*oligopistos*' when people have come to Him, perhaps even have seen partially who He is, but have not rested in Him - they are still distracted by things in this world instead of having confidence in who Christ is
  - d. Strong's defines '*oligo*' as meaning 'puny' or 'neutered' - so '*oligopistos*' is a 'neutered faith', a defective faith, a faith that doesn't have any power because it isn't truly resting on its object
3. This is in contrast to the faith that Jesus values in Matthew
  - a. Jesus commends several people's faith in Matthew - the centurion in Matthew 8, the paralytic and his friends, the unclean woman, and the blind man in Matthew 9, and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15
  - b. The thing that unites each of these instances is that the faithful knew that they could do nothing in themselves, but they had perfect confidence that Jesus could change the situation - they had an earnest confidence in Jesus
  - c. Jesus words to the blind man show this clearly, Matthew 9:28-29 - *When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."*
  - d. The blind man rested in who Jesus was - he couldn't do anything himself, but he trusted in Jesus
4. So Jesus tells the disciples that they could not cast out the demon because of their little faith
  - a. I think what we are supposed to see is that the disciples were trying to cast out the demon on their own power - they saw what Jesus did and merely tried to imitate it - they hadn't understood that apart from Jesus they were powerless and that any mighty works must ultimately come from Jesus and not from them
  - b. Their confidence wasn't in Jesus, they were trying to advance themselves - they saw who Jesus was, but their faith, their rest and their confidence in only Jesus was so small that it couldn't even be compared to a mustard seed, if they realized even a little bit that the power belonged to Jesus and not to them, then nothing would be impossible
  - c. It is paired with the Transfiguration, because the two situations are almost perfect contrasts - on the mountain the power of Jesus is radiantly displayed and the disciples are awed, but, returning to the crowds, the disciples are trusting in their own power instead of resting in Jesus
  - d. The disciples haven't made this connection yet - if Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, then He must be the source of their efforts, their rest from their work - power belongs to Him
5. And this is what we are called to here in Matthew 17
  - a. As we see who Jesus is - as we see the glory on the mountain and hear God's voice proclaiming, "*This is my beloved Son*" - and let's see that! We must see that! I hope you can see that ! But, we can't just see, but we must rest.
  - b. This truth must affect our life - if this is truly who Jesus is, then why would we ever attempt anything on our own, why would we worry about the future, why would our gaze be drawn back to the world, why would we ever attempt ministry without His power?
  - c. It is calling us to an attitude change at the very core of our being - an attitude that sincerely says, 'there is no way that I am equal to this situation' but that acts anyway because you are confident that Jesus is equal to the situation
  - d. And this attitude should be permeating your entire life - you aren't equal to any situation in your life, you aren't equal to getting out of bed or raising your kids or going to work or anything else you do, but Jesus is
  - e. So see who Jesus is, see that He is the gloriously powerful Son of the Living God, and then rest in who Jesus is
  - f. As Jesus Himself says, in John 15:4-5 - *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

## B. Faith means embracing what Jesus has come to do (not what we want Him to do)

1. This section of Matthew has been building on the theme of who Christ is by revealing what He came to do, and faith must embrace not only who Jesus is, but also what He came to do
2. So we'll go back to Matthew 16:21-23 - *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*
3. Immediately after Jesus' first revelation to the disciples of His coming death and resurrection, Peter rejects the notion
  - a. But Jesus, with surprising harshness, rebukes Peter - such thoughts are the work of Satan, not of God
  - b. Peter must be being pulled all over the place in these few verses - in verse 17 he had been the spokesperson of God, but now he is being the spokesperson of Satan - how could this be?
  - c. Jesus' rebuke, though, shows us that Peter cannot embrace who Jesus is without embracing what Jesus came to do - Jesus' identity is useless to Peter apart from His mission
4. Peter's thinking here is wrong
  - a. This is exactly what Jesus tells him - *you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*
  - b. Peter's mind was on worldly things - Peter wanted Jesus' victory without Jesus' suffering, He wanted Jesus to come and conquer the world, not to be sacrificed for the world
  - c. Peter's mind was on power and glory in this world - Jesus is going to be the king, let's go!
  - d. Peter's mind was not on the ultimate problem with Jesus being the king - a world in rebellion against their king
  - e. Peter was valuing the wrong thing about Jesus - he thought Jesus would come and restore Israel and bring the disciples to power in this world, he loved the thought of Jesus being the king - but he didn't value what was truly valuable in Jesus, that Jesus had come to right the wrong of this world and redeem a people to be His
  - f. Peter needed to understand what was more important - Peter didn't need power in this world, He didn't need to be the right hand man to a worldly king - Peter needed something much greater, he needed a sacrifice to make him right with God
  - g. And Peter could never truly be a part of Jesus' kingdom unless Jesus went to the cross - Peter isn't completely wrong in valuing Jesus as the king, but he's skipping over everything important
  - h. Peter needed to embrace this truth - Jesus' identity is bad news for him apart from what Jesus came to do
5. And this is what we are called to as well
  - a. I think, if we're honest with ourselves, we can be a lot like Peter here - we can start to value the power and the identity of Jesus apart from His death - we can value His reign without His sacrifice
  - b. Especially in America, I think this is a significant temptation - we live in a land where, at least until recently, Christianity has been associated with worldly power, governmental authority, a so-called 'moral majority'
  - c. But is this what we are valuing about Jesus? Perhaps we are getting to find out right now - as the worldly power associated with following Jesus is rapidly diminishing, are we grasping after the worldly power or are we rejoicing that Jesus came to die for us?
  - d. Embracing who Jesus is must mean embracing what He came to do - Jesus did not come to conquer the world, He will come to do that, but He hasn't come to do that, Jesus came to die for the world
  - e. We must truly embrace that truth, we must turn our focus from the things of man, the things of this world, to see the glory and the majesty of Christ's atoning death
  - f. We don't need power in this world, we don't need respect or authority, we don't need people to have a high view of us because we are following Jesus, these are all things that are valued by sinful men, things that detract from valuing what is truly beautiful about Jesus
  - g. What we need a sacrifice that will make us right with God - this is what God sent Jesus to do and this is what we must value, this is what we must rest in, this is what we must grasp for ourselves
  - h. Embracing Jesus means embracing who He is and what He has come to do - if we try to set Jesus up as a worldly king, we're missing the point, we should be rejoicing that Jesus came to die for us
  - i. Jesus is the Son of God who came to die - embrace that!

### C. Faith means appropriating Jesus' death for ourselves (not continuing to live in this world)

1. Immediately after rebuking Peter, Jesus turns and addresses all of the disciples in Matthew 16:24-27 - *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."*
2. Jesus is saying not only do we need to embrace His purpose in His death, but we must embrace death ourselves
  - a. We need Jesus to die for us because we need to die with Him - we need to follow Him to the cross and die there with Him; we will only be saved if we lose our life
  - b. And Jesus contrasts this with continuing to live in this world - *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*
  - c. Somehow dying means giving up all the things of this world because gaining the entire world would not do our soul any good - in fact gaining things of this world is in contrast to saving our souls
  - d. So Jesus calls His disciples to embrace His death and go with Him to death - and I think this has three facets: dying changes our reality, dying changes our perception and dying changes our actions
3. Dying changes our reality
  - a. Jesus demand that we come and die has to be the most otherworldly command possible, a command that the world cannot possibly embrace
  - b. But a true disciple of Jesus ought to see that this is the most loving thing Jesus can invite us to do
  - c. We ought to be able to look at our lives, at our sinfulness and our failure, our lack of love and our propensity to rebellion - and we ought to be able to say, "I ought to die; I need to die!"
  - d. Who we are is terrible people and if we have any sense of the reality of sin and the cosmic treason we are involved in every day, it is only a right judgment to say, "the best thing possible for me is to die"
  - e. But here is the joy of Christ's invitation or, more bluntly, His command - He knows the best thing for us to do is die, and he offers to let us die in Him - He offers to kill us at the cross
  - f. He is offering to change our reality, to change who we are, to put us to death and to live in our place - and this is the most loving and most gracious offer He could possibly make - we need to die and He has provided a way for us to die without completely destroying us
  - g. So Paul rejoices in this truth in Galatians 2:20 - *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
  - h. Christ's death was in Paul's place and so Christ's death changed Paul's reality - Paul can go to the cross and die, everything about His sinful nature could die at Christ's cross, and Christ could live in Him
    - i. We need to die, and Christ welcomes us to come and die in Him
4. Dying changes our perception
  - a. Christ's command to take up our cross is not merely an invitation to change our status, though - this is the first and necessary thing, but if we have died with Christ, then this means real change in this world
  - b. If we have died with Christ, then we ought to see that we are dead to this world - we can't desire the things of this world anymore, we can't be seeking its profits and its joys, if we are pursuing gain in this world we are ignoring the truth that we are dead - in fact we might be suggesting that we haven't died with Christ
  - c. So this is why Jesus follows up His call to take up our cross with - *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*
  - d. Dying with Christ, a death that changes our reality, must also change our perceptions and our pursuits - we can't be alive in this world if we are dead in Christ; dead people ought to look very dead
  - e. This is the same point that Paul makes in Colossians 3:1-4 - *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 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. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
    - i. Paul says we are dead with Christ, "*you have died*" - that is a present reality, you are dead.
    - ii. But if we are dead, that ought to change our pursuit - if we are dead in this world we can't pursue the things of this world, we ought to pursue things in the next world
    - iii. Our minds should be set on things that are above, not on things that are on earth; our hope should be in Christ's return, not in events in this world



5. But then Paul goes on and says that this doesn't only change our perception and pursuit - if we perceive the world differently, then we must act differently in this world - we must die to the things of this world
  - a. So the next verse in Colossians says - *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*
  - b. If we have died, this must change our reality, which must change our perception, which must change our action - we are dead, so be dead and be dying - you are dead, don't let the dead man rule you anymore
  - c. Paul says the same thing in Romans 8:12-13 - *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
  - d. If you are dead, then be being dead - if you are dead, make sure that your actions look like a dead person! Dead people don't serve their flesh anymore, they don't seek their own pleasures and their own pursuits - dead people lay in the ground dead
  - e. If you're dead, then you're base desires, your worldly motivations, your fleshly pleasures shouldn't have sway in your life, so don't let them have sway in your life - be dead!
6. If Christ has died, that is great news for us because it means we can die as well - so be dead! Appropriate His death for yourself and let Him live in you.

**D. I know our sermon this morning is getting a little long, but it is a sermon that demands to be wrapped up by joining the parts together - so I want to finish by asking, how can we do these things? How can we have this kind of faith?**

1. Like I said, the demands that Christ's makes in this passage are opposed to everything this world stands for, and I hope you can sense that
  - a. I hope you can feel how radical these commands are and how impossible it is for us to do these things
  - b. Christ is inviting us to come and die - if that doesn't cause you to pause a moment then maybe you haven't really considered it enough - it's not a euphemism, it is a reality, Christ is calling for your willing death
  - c. I hope that, as you hear these commands, your soul groans a little bit - it groans with longing for these things to be true, but also groans in your inability to do these things - how can we do this?
2. But there's great hope wrapped up in this passage - why can we do these things? Because we have seen the glory of the only begotten of the Father! We have seen the glory of the risen Son!
  - a. I am completely convinced that it is no accident that Matthew puts the Transfiguration at the heart of this passage for many reasons, but one of the biggest is that seeing the glory of the Son of God is what will allow us to obey Christ's commands - resting in Him, embracing His death, and dying with Him
  - b. Paul tells us this clearly in II Corinthians 3:18 - *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*
  - c. Paul says that as we see glory we will be transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another
  - d. How can we embrace Christ death and even truly die with Him - by seeing how glorious He is
  - e. And we've seen even greater glory than was revealed on the mountain - on the mountain Peter, James and John had a limited vision without understanding, but we have seen the risen Christ!
  - f. And as we see Him and love Him and run after Him, then we can truly die ourselves - as we can see how truly worthy He is, we will agree that we ought to die - as we see how great His life is, we will want Him to live in us!
3. So how do we do these things? We gaze at the beauty of the risen Christ!
  - a. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (II Corinthians 4:6)*
  - b. *And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*