

Episode #829 Matthew 17 Part 3-Failure of the Disciples

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord and His disciples were talking as they came down the mountain from the transfiguration. He ordered them not to tell anyone about the transfiguration, and explained to them truth about John the Baptizer and Elijah. Today, they arrive back at the crowd.

III. The Disciples Fail to Cast Out a Demon. Matthew 17:14-21.

- A. Verse 14. “Came to Him” is again *proserchomai*, approached, as a King. He kneels, and interestingly, this word is twice in Matthew and twice in Mark!
- B. Verse 15. “Epileptic” is literally moon-struck, supposed to cause lunacy. The Greeks had no concept of epilepsy. This was more than a coincidence. Epilepsy does not strike only when one is near fire and water! This shows the Lord was clearly correct when He identified the problem as a demon.
- C. Verse 16. When he says “could not” he says they did not have the inherent power to, *dunamai*. This is not easy to explain in light of the power He gave them in Matthew 10:1. Remember that all the miracles had a goal: the confirmation of a testimony that was being given; 10:7-8. Already He has charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He is Jesus the Christ. Why then were they trying to perform a miracle?
- D. Verse 17. “Perverse” could also be corrupt. “Generation” is the Greek *genea*, from the “to generate” family of words. This means more than just all people living on earth at the same time, but rather a group generated by their culture, traditions, etc. Which was the Lord referring to here: the man or the disciples? Mark tells us that the man later questioned whether the Lord was able to do anything, Mark 9:22, for which the Lord rebuked him, verse 23. Perhaps the failure of the disciples made him doubt, or maybe he doubted even before that. But the disciples also failed to have faith, and the Lord clearly tells them so in verse 20. He has elsewhere called them men of little faith. If even the disciples struggled in faith, how much more others in Israel? “How long” is “until” *eos* “what indefinite time” *pote*. “Bear with you” is endure you, in other words, put up with you or support you.
- E. Verse 18. The Lord rebuked demons most of all. He rebuked the storm when He calmed it. At times He rebuked His disciples as well when they did the wrong thing. Of course “from that very hour” means from that very moment, but this was as closely as they calculated time.
- F. Verse 19. “Came” is approached again, as to a King. They did this when He was by Himself, separate from the crowd.
- G. Verse 20. The answer.
 1. Unbelief or lack of faith, since faith and belief are both the Greek *pistis*, and this is the Greek *apistis*. If they took Him at His word and responded accordingly they would not even have tried this. He had given them power to do these things in connection with a witness He gave them to make. Now, however, they have returned to Him, and no further witness is required, and yet they are still trying to execute this power. There is no faith in this. In the same way there is no faith when people whom the Lord never gave power to do such miracles try to do them.

2. “Assuredly” is amen, truly.
3. In Matthew 13:32, the Lord pointed out that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds that men sowed in Israel at the time.
4. If God told you to move a mountain, then if you have a grain of mustard-seed-sized faith you can do so. Yet without a word from God, you cannot have any faith whatsoever. When God gives a command, He gives the power to fulfill it. But without a command there is no power. God never told us what He told the disciples in Matthew 10:8, so we cannot have faith to do it. He never told us to move a mountain, so we cannot do that either.

IV. Conclusion: The disciples failed to cast a demon out of a boy when they tried to do it without the Lord’s authority. He rebuked them for their lack of faith, and we ought to learn a lesson. They had never failed to do this when they had the Lord’s word to do it. This is necessary for faith. There is no faith without a word from God, and those who seek to perform healing without a word from God will seek in vain. Let us learn the lesson that only with a word from God can there ever be faith.