



Matthew 17

Matthew 17
Tape #8016
By Chuck Smith

Actually the seventeenth chapter begins with verse twenty-eight of chapter sixteen, where Jesus declared, “Verily, I say unto you, there will be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man come in his kingdom.” (16:28)

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, (17:1)

And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. (17:2)

Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. (17:3)

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if you will, let’s make here three tabernacles; one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. (17:4)

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. (17:5)

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. (17:6)

And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. (17:7)

And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. (17:8)

As He had promised, there were some of them there who would not taste of death until they had seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. And then He chose three of them, Peter, James and John, who seemed to be distinguished by the Lord for special privileges, they seemed to be the natural leaders that were singled out by the Lord for special honor. When Jesus was transfigured, these were the three. When He went into the house of Jairus to bring the daughter of Jairus back to life, it was these three that He allowed with Him in the room. When in the garden of Gethsemane, He had set the disciples down with the encouragement to pray and He took Peter, James and John a little further into the garden with Him, and placed them closer to Him. And so it was these three that were singled out by Jesus for special honor and special occasions.

And He took them up into a high mountain apart, they had been in the area of Caesarea, Philippi. Caesarea, Philippi is right at the base of mount Herman, the highest mountain in that whole area, goes up over 9,000 feet. There is a traditional site for the mount of transfiguration, which is mount Tabor, right in the middle of the country, but that is more traditional than factual. Every indication would point to mount Herman as the place for the transfiguration. But again, the place isn’t that important. These are the things that theologians argue over, but what difference does it really make? The fact is that Jesus was transfigured before them. They saw this transformation—they saw Him as His face began to glow like the sun. And as you read the description of this transfiguration of Jesus, you’re immediately reminded of the vision that Daniel had of the Lord in His glory, and also that John had in chapter one of the book of Revelation, when he also saw Jesus in His glorified body, the glory of the kingdom. He was transfigured, face that shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light and glistening, sort of an effervescent or florescent kind of a glistening light from His garments.

“And then there appeared Moses and Elijah talking with Him.” Now in Mark’s gospel, we are told that they were talking with Him of His death in Jerusalem. Luke tells us that Jesus went into the mountain and while He was praying, He was transfigured. And Moses and Elijah appeared to Him and they were talking together of His exodus, His decease, the Greek word is “exodus”, His death that would be accomplished in Jerusalem.

It would have been interesting to have been privy to this conversation of Moses and Elijah with Jesus, they were very familiar with Him, they had... Moses especially had written of Him, and Moses had declared there shall arise a prophet like unto myself, to Him shall you give heed, and Moses stands for the law. His name is just associated with the law, you cannot think of the Torah or the law without thinking of Moses. You

cannot think of Moses without thinking of the Torah, the law. He is the representative figure, he is the one that was taken into a mountain and given the law by God and as the result of his close encounter with God, his face did shine. And so here the representative of the law, Moses.

Then the rest of the Old Testament is in the area of the prophets, of which Elijah stands at the head of the prophets. So whenever you talk about Old Testament prophets, you think of this prophet Elijah who stands more or less as the titular head of the prophets. So you have the law represented, you have the prophets represented--the prophets who talked of Jesus, who talked of His death, His being despised and rejected. And here these two representatives, God's law, God's prophets. They meet together with Jesus and are talking to Him about His decease when He comes to Jerusalem.

"Then answered Peter, and said, Lord, it's good for us to be here: if you will, let's build three tabernacles; one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (17:4) Peter, the man of action. Good, let's do something. We are told that he didn't really know what to say, and a good practice when you don't know what to say is to keep quiet. Say nothing. And so often we find them saying, I should say something, so he is saying, Let's build the three... It's good to be here. There are those experiences that we have with the Lord that are good. And we like to linger in that place. When there has been a special moving of God, when there has been a manifestation of God's presence and God's love among His people, on those special occasions when we have seen the Spirit of God just move over the congregation, and over our hearts. There is a reluctance, a hesitancy to leave. Just good to be here, Lord, let's just remain here. I like this. I like this peace, this serenity, this manifestation of Your power, of Your glory, Lord, let's just stay here.

And we would like to stay on the mountaintop, if possible. We like to stay in that state of spiritual ecstasy where we feel so close to the Lord. But there is a world out there that needs to be touched with His love. I am always, in my mind, seeking to escape from this corrupt world. The more I read and understand the things that are happening in the world in which we live, the more in my heart I feel like I would like to escape from this world. The more I read of pending legislation, the more I feel like I don't belong here, I'm a stranger to what's going on. I like to escape. And of course, I always think of some island out in the South Pacific somewhere. Good surf, of course, abounding in coconuts and bananas, and just have an all-Christian community. Don't allow anybody on the island that doesn't love the Lord. There would be no police departments, no jails, we would all just be there and spending our time just loving the Lord, worshipping Him, doing what is necessary to provide the food for the inhabitants, but just spending so much time in just worshipping the Lord. But when you go there, you think, Oh man, this is paradise. Don't want to leave.

But there is a world out there that is in darkness, it is lost. And God didn't call us to go to cloistered areas, protected areas, but He called us to live in this corrupt world that is dominated by evil, and though these mountaintop experiences are wonderful, yet it's necessary that we come down into the world to face the powers of darkness that have the world in its grip. He wanted to build three tabernacles, stay right there. One for Moses, one for Elijah, one for Jesus.

"Now while he was speaking, there came this bright cloud that overshadowed them: and behold there was a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (17:5) This is the second time that God audibly spoke from heaven acknowledging and confirming that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. When Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended and lighted upon Him, the voice of God spoke from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Here again, God acknowledging this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Notice that in both cases there was an obedience of the Son to the will of the Father. In the case of the baptism, when John was more or less objecting saying, I really am not worthy to baptize You, You should be baptizing me. Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now for it becomes Me to fulfill all righteousness." It was obedience and the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now He's talking with Moses and Elijah concerning His death in Jerusalem. His submitting again to the will of the Father and in giving His life as a ransom for sin. And as they are talking about this death, again, the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." But in this point, He adds, "Hear ye Him."

God spoke to man through the law. God then spoke to man through the prophets. Moses was the medium that brought to man the law of God. They heard Moses. After Moses and the law was given, then God sent the

prophets to encourage the people to obedience to the law. And they prophesied of the coming judgments of God upon the nation for their forsaking of the law, but they prophesied of the future when God would provide the redemption for man. They heard Moses, they heard the prophets, but now God is speaking more clearly than ever before, in and through His Son, and God is saying, "Hear ye Him." Not just the law anymore, not just the prophets but hear ye Him. And thus, as we are told in Hebrews chapter one, "God who at sundry times and in diverse ways spake to our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His own dear Son." (Hebrews 1:1) If you want to know the truth of God, if you want to know what God is really like, listen to Jesus. He is God's final revelation of Himself to man. From the beginning, God was revealing Himself in progressive revelation. But the final revelation is in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Hear ye Him. And what did Jesus say concerning the law and the prophets?

When He was asked what is the greatest commandment? He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself, and in these two are all the law and the prophets." So loving God, loving each other, that's what it's all about. That's what God's will is for your life. That you love God and that you love one another. Now what is so odious or horrible about that? Why is it the people get all uptight over these things? You talk about Christianity and they get all uptight. Talk about Jesus, they get all uptight. They get upset. Why? What He said isn't... I have no problem with that. Love God with all my heart, love my neighbor as myself, that sounds ideal to me. I don't find myself getting all upset and yelling and ranting and raving over that command. Jesus said this is what it's all about. So the law and the prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah, they're all fulfilled in Jesus; and in our loving God and loving one another.

"When the disciples heard this voice, they fell on their faces for fear," (17:6) "And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, don't be afraid." (17:7) "And when they lifted up their eyes," Moses was gone, Elijah was gone, only Jesus was left." (17:8)

And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man is risen again from the dead. (17:9)

Keep this a secret. Don't tell anybody what you've just observed until I am risen from the dead. Now Peter when he wrote his second epistle, there in chapter one, speaks of it. He said that verse sixteen, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The power and the coming, He came in His kingdom, they saw it. We "were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (2 Peter 1:16-18) So Peter now is testifying that I was an eyewitness. I heard the voice.

His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? (17:10)

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. (17:11)

But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. (17:12)

And then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist. (17:13)

A mystery. In Malachi chapter four, beginning with verse five, the last prophecy of the Old Testament, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." So the promise of the coming of Elijah before the great, notable day of the Lord. So when they saw Jesus coming in His kingdom there at the transfiguration, they were a little confused because of this prophecy that Elijah would first come. The Jews were expecting Elijah. During the feast of the passover, they always left an empty place at the table in anticipation for Elijah. It was a place that was set for Elijah. The door was open, they would go to the door to see if Elijah had shown up. It was a part of the traditional celebration of the passover. And so that was a prophecy that was very familiar to all of them and now we've seen You coming in Your kingdom, how is it that the scriptures said that Elijah must first come? "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things." (17:11) Notice, this is future. Indeed, Elijah shall first come. In other words, there will be yet a coming of Elijah. He shall first

come and restore all things. But I say unto you that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they would and they understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist.” (17:13) And thus, a look at John the Baptist in the light of the prophecy of Elijah coming first.

Before the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zacharias, was ministering in the temple. When they would come to minister in the temple, it was usually a two-week kind of a commitment in service to God and they would cast lots as to what duty the priest would have. And it was his lot, that is, when they cast the lots, the lot fell on Zacharias that he was to offer the incense before the altar of incense. In the holy place, there was the altar of incense that stood before the Holy of Holies. And the priest would go in with these little golden censers that had hot coals from the altar and incense put on them, and the smoke, the sweet smelling smoke arising from this incense, they would go in before the altar of incense which was just outside of the Holy of Holies, and they would offer this incense. They would wave it and the smoke of the incense was representative of the prayers of the people that were ascending to God and God looked upon the prayers of the people as just a sweet savour.

Your prayers, as they rise to God, ascend to God as a sweet savour and this was a picture of how our prayers ascend to God, as a sweet savour unto God. And as He was there offering the incense, they on the right side of the altar which would have been his left, there appeared the angel Gabriel. Zacharias was very afraid at the appearance of the angel. And He said, “Fear not, for I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God. And your wife, Elizabeth, in her old age, is going to bear a son. And he shall go before the Lord in the spirit and in the power of Elijah.” Thus the angel is declaring to Zacharias concerning the birth of John the Baptist, He will go in the spirit and the power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the children unto their fathers.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, there was a question as to whom he was claiming to be. He was baptizing down at the Jordan river and hundreds of people were coming to be baptized and to hear him. And the Pharisees came out from Jerusalem to inquire, Who are you? By what authority are you doing these things? And they said, Are you the Messiah? He said no. They said, Are you Elijah? He said no. Then who are you? I’m the voice of one crying in the wilderness. But he denied being Elijah. Now the angels said he would go in the spirit and in the power of Elijah. When they said, Are you Elijah? He said no; no in the sense that he isn’t the complete fulfillment of that prophecy of Micah. And Jesus is here affirming Elijah shall first come. However, He has really already come but they did to him what they would, they put him to death even as they’re going to put Me to death. So even as Jesus is coming again to establish God’s kingdom upon the earth, before He comes again, Elijah will appear. This Old Testament prophet will appear and will minister to turn the hearts of the people back to God.

This is spoken of in Revelation chapter eleven for, no doubt, the two witnesses that come will be Elijah and one of the other of the Old Testament saints and very possibly, Moses, because they appeared together on the mount of transfiguration and they do represent the law and the prophets. And their ministry will be to the Jews during this period of time. So Moses and Elijah, but this issue of Elijah, even as there were two comings of Jesus and John the Baptist in the spirit and in the power of Elijah, preceded Him to prepare the way of the Lord, to turn the hearts of the people unto God. So he was put to death and so Jesus said, I will be put to death but he will come again. Elijah shall first come. And so even as there were the two aspects of the coming of Jesus, so there will be the two aspects of the coming of Elijah preceding Jesus. So that is yet to be fulfilled. John the Baptist wasn’t the complete fulfillment and thus the denial, no, I’m not Elijah; yet Jesus said, he was in that... but yet he’s going to come first and turn the hearts of the people unto the Father. The disciples understood that He was talking to them of John the Baptist.

So when they were come to the multitude,

[Now Lord, it’s good to be here, let’s just stay, build three tabernacles and stay here. But the necessity to come down and what happened when they came down? No sooner did they descend from the mountain and were come to the multitude,]

there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, (17:14)

Lord, have mercy on my son: he is a lunatic, he is sore vexed: and oftentimes he falls into the fire, and often into the water. (17:15)

And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him. (17:16)

No sooner did they come down from the mountaintop experience than Satan meets them really at the bottom of the hill. It seems like Satan is waiting at the bottom of every mountaintop experience to attack you and to take away the joy and the blessing that God has bestowed. Those times of great spiritual elation and blessing are also times of danger because that's often the time when Satan comes to attack. When God has done a special work in your heart and life, Satan seeks to destroy it, to take it away from you. And I have discovered that he's waiting at the bottom of every mountain, every mountaintop experience. Thus was the case, they no sooner get down than this father is coming, kneeling before Jesus and asking mercy, for his son that is a lunatic, possessed by an evil spirit that is seeking to destroy him. Sometimes throwing him into the fire. Sometimes throwing him into the water, trying to drown him. And he said, I brought him to your disciples and they could not cure him.

And Jesus, I believe, groaning in spirit, I don't think that this is said in anger but I think it's said in just a groaning in the spirit, just...

O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?

How long will Satan reign over the earth? We see the results of men whose hearts are given over to evil. We see in our society the breakdown, the deterioration. We see things that are out of control, we observe the chaos, and we wonder how long can this go on? Many times, groaning in the spirit, we wonder, Lord, just how long before You take control and establish your kingdom. Jesus groaning, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you? And then to the father He said,

bring him to me. (17:17)

And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. (17:18)

The forces of evil, the powers of evil are subject unto our Lord. Satan has limited power, it is great but it is limited. And he only can do what God has allowed him to do. But God sets the parameters. You remember he was complaining to God concerning Job, that God had set certain parameters. God had put a hedge around Job. Satan couldn't do to him what he was desiring to do because God had placed the hedge around him and Satan was asking God to remove that hedge, to let him at Job in order to prove that Job would curse God if the opportunity really arose, if God wasn't blessing him and protecting him. Satan works only within those limitations that God allows. And the powers of darkness are subject unto Jesus Christ and to the authority of Jesus Christ.

It is important for us to know that Jesus gave to us the authority over these powers of darkness. They are still subject to the authority of Jesus, but to the authority of the Name of Jesus when exorcised by the life of a believer. Jesus said that He would give to Peter the keys to the kingdom and whatsoever he would bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and He has given us that authority over the powers of darkness. And they are still subject unto Jesus.

The disciples were unable to deal effectively with this demon that was in this young boy. It would seem from the scriptures and the teaching of the scriptures that the powers of evil, the demon powers or forces are ranked in various authorities, some of them stronger than others. And they are called principalities and powers many times. And this seems to be the ranking of orders, it's sort of like saying generals and colonels and majors and captains and lieutenants and sergeants and privates. And there would be an indication that there are some that are higher in ranking spiritually, and are thus more resistant to the authority of the believer.

The disciples took Jesus apart from the crowd, from the multitude, and they said, Lord, How come we couldn't do it? (17:19)

They had known what it was to cast out demons. They had been given an authority and power to do that and this time, it didn't work. Why weren't we able to do that ourselves? Why could we not cast him out?

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief:

Mark's gospel gives us a little extra insight into this story. When the father said, Help my son, he's a lunatic; he confessed that he was possessed of this devil, he was trying to destroy him, oftentimes he throws him into the fire, throws him into the water and so forth, and I brought him to your disciples, they couldn't cure him, and Jesus said, Bring him to me. And as they were bringing the young boy to Jesus, this demon threw him on the ground and he began to writhe on the ground and then lay there as though he were dead.

And all of the people came running up, what's going on, what's happening? ...as this kid is thrown on the ground and writhing there on the ground. The demon was manifesting his power over the physical aspects of this young boy's life. It was no doubt quite a dramatic spectacle. And I believe that that's probably what happened when the disciples went to cast the demon out, I believe that the demon probably reacted in the physical way, taking the boy, throwing him down, going into these fits, so that the disciples were so awed by the power of the demon to control a person's life, that they got their eyes off of the Lord and the greater power that they had in the Lord, and thus, seeing the power of Satan manifested, it created an awe of Satan's power and an unbelief in the power that they had. So when they said, Lord, how come we couldn't do this? Jesus said, because of your unbelief.

I think that many times as we see Satan's power manifested in our world today, that we feel a sense of helplessness. We feel overwhelmed, we see the greatness of Satan's power, the hold that he has on the media, upon the public education system, upon the legislature, and we think, Oh no! And we are so overawed with Satan's power that we forget that "Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world." I think that Satan likes to sometimes go, Hoooo! ..at you. And we react in fear, which is the opposite of faith and is a destroyer of faith. So Jesus said, it's because of your unbelief, and then He talks to them concerning the potential of faith,

Verily I say unto you, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, [it doesn't take much faith, faith as a grain of mustard seed] you shall say unto this mountain, Remove to the yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. (17:20)

God has given to us that power to move mountains. Faith just as a grain of a mustard seed, you can move mountains. Here they could not move the demon out of this young man. They were helpless. Lack of faith, unbelief. Faith just like a grain of mustard seed can move mountains. Whether or not Jesus was talking about physical mountains or spiritual mountains is a matter of conjecture among the theologians. I like to think He's talking physically, that in reality, faith has the capacity of moving actual mountains.

The interesting thing is that in Luke's gospel, Jesus declares you could uproot a sycamore tree by the roots and transplant it if you had enough faith. And so this thing of saying, mountains of difficulty or mountains of problems and spiritualizing doesn't really cross over to sycamore trees. But I never read this but what I wonder, Lord, how little my faith must indeed be. And realizing that lack of faith. If I just had faith as a grain of mustard seed, I could move mountains. And my prayer is, God, help me, increase my faith, Lord. Faith isn't really something that you can conjure up. It comes really as a gift from God. You can't just sit there and say, I'm going to have greater faith, I'm going to have more faith, I'm going to really trust this time, not going to fail it, I'm really going to do it this time, you don't psyche yourself into it. I think many times we're trying to do that.

It's wonderful, it's glorious how that in that hour of real trial, in the hour of real need, so often God comes in with supernatural faith in our heart and gives us that confidence and that assurance that He is working, He is in control. And with that faith, there comes such a peace, there comes such a rest. All of that pressure is taken away because it isn't up to me, it's up to Him. I'm pressured because I feel I have to do something. And I feel that pressure of doing something, but I don't know what. But when I realize it's God who is at work, it's God who can do it, then it takes the pressure off of me and I can rest. I don't know what the outcome is going to be. That really doesn't matter. The outcome will be God's will and that's what does matter. That God works out His perfect will in every circumstance of my life. I may not like the will of God. My flesh may rebel against what God is doing, but if I have that kind of confidence that it is indeed God working His perfect purpose and plan in my life, then I can yield to it, I can accept it and in so doing, I rest. The real peace and the real rest comes from that complete commitment of ourselves to the Lord.

On one occasion, our younger daughter when she was about three years old, who was the joy and the delight of our life... All of our children have been special blessings of God to us, I look at my older daughter and what a gift from God. And I look at my boys and what blessings of the Lord! And then my younger daughter, we called her sunshine because she just brought sunshine into our older years. When she was about three, she had an exceeding high fever. I sat up all night holding her. She was so lively, so full of energy and vitality, her eyes constantly sparkling, that little brain constantly at work, a delight to be around. But now the

eyes were dull, the lifelessness, just limp, hot, miserable. And I was rocking her trying to be close and be comfort and strength, all night long I sat there holding her, praying for her. Towards morning, she went into a convulsion, I thought I was losing her. And the thought of losing her was just more than I could bear. But the Lord brought me to a point where I said, Lord, you know that I love this little thing more than I love my own life. And I would gladly give my life for her, Lord. I would do anything to spare her this suffering. But Lord, as much as I love her, I know that You love her and I surrender her to You. And if You want to take her to be with You, I will still serve You, I will still love You, it won't alter our relationship one iota, I will know that You have a plan in even taking her. And when God brought me to that place of full commitment, Lord, she's Yours, and if You want her I surrender to you, there came such a deep peace in my heart. I almost idolized this little gal. But when I surrendered her to the Lord, I can't describe the peace that I had. Whereas it really doesn't matter if the Lord wants her, she's His, and I'll say, the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the Name of the Lord. And having brought me to that place of full commitment, I discovered what real rest was. I was no longer wrestling with the issue, I was no longer in torment, in torture looking at her little body being racked with fever and suffering. I was resting. The beautiful thing is God then healed her instantly. She's still a joy and a delight with her four children to us.

Faith as a grain of mustard seed. That faith to say, Not my will, Your will be done; I know that you do all things well. But Jesus said,

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (17:21)

When He said, this kind, was He referring to the demon, this kind of demon, this powerful demon that had control of this young man; or was He referring to the kind of faith that can move mountains? I don't know. But I do know that to have that kind of faith takes prayer and fasting, faith either to remove the mountains or to remove the powers of darkness. And I think it's important that we as a church begin to spend more time in prayer and in fasting to move some of these mountains and obstacles that Satan is seeking to put in the path.

When we first started Calvary Chapel, twenty-seven and a-half years ago, the first Sunday we told the people, every time you ask God's blessing upon your meal, put a little postscript on that prayer and say, And Lord, bless Calvary Chapel. And I like to encourage you to do that. Include that in your prayer for your meal. Just a blessing, Lord, upon the ministry of Calvary Chapel. And maybe even skip a meal and just pray for God's blessing upon Calvary.

While they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: (17:22)

They will kill him, the third day he will be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry. (17:23)

Again, Jesus affirms to them. They have seen now His glorified body and transfiguration, but He again affirms to them the fact that He's going to be betrayed, He'll be killed, but the third day He'll rise again. Now it's an interesting thing, the moment Jesus said they're going to kill me, their brains shut off. They never seem to hear Him say I'm going to rise again. Or they had a different concept of that. You remember when Martha said, Lord, if You'd only been here, my brother would not have died. Jesus said, Your brother will live again. Oh yes, Lord, I know at the last day, the great resurrection. And it could be that this is what they were thinking when Jesus said I'll rise again. And so they didn't have that consciousness, that awareness that in three days, He would rise again. They didn't hear that. So shocked and so opposite to their concepts of the Messiah, the death and the suffering that they just couldn't pick up and it wasn't until after He rose from the dead, that they began to... Oh yeah, He did say, remember? But it just wasn't sinking in. But He's on His way now to Jerusalem really. This is the final, as we're in this portion of Matthew, He's going to be moving on down to Jerusalem and we're not far away from the crucifixion at this point. He's moving towards it. And so He's trying to prepare them.

When they were come to Capernaum,

[this is the home city where Jesus established His headquarters for His ministry]

those that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Does your master pay tribute? (17:24)

The word "tribute" here is the word that indicates the temple tax. Every adult Jewish male had to pay a half shekel tax for the temple a year. It was to maintain the temple. It was a required kind of an offering, it was looked upon as a temple tax, half shekel, every adult Jewish male over twenty years of age. And so they

came to Peter and they said to Him, Does your master pay His temple tax?

And Peter said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What do you think, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? (17:25)

The kings who sought to conquer over other nations would always put the other nations to tribute. They would lay heavy taxes upon them. And if a king could conquer over other nations, his own nation could be relieved of the tax burden, they would tax the foreigners and those within the kingdom would be freed from taxation. And so Jesus is asking Peter about this custom, do they collect taxes of foreigners or of their own people?

And Peter said, Of strangers. Jesus said unto him, Then are the children free. (17:26)

It was the taxes for His Father's house. He had said, You have made My Father's house a den of thieves. They were collecting taxes for His Father's house. He was the child. He wasn't really obligated to pay taxes as the Son of God, collecting taxes for My Father's house. Then are the children free, children don't have to pay the taxes. They collect them from strangers.

Notwithstanding, [Jesus said] lest we should offend them,

The word "offend" there is "scandalizo", a stumbling block.

go to the sea, cast in the hook, take up the fish that first comes up; and when you have opened his mouth, you will find a piece of money: take, and give it to them for you and for me. (17:27)

It had a shekel in its mouth, not just a half shekel. Jesus said, Take care of you too, Peter. So pay both of our taxes. Find a shekel in the mouth. Notice that Jesus did that which is not really required of Him to do, in order not to stumble them. As a child of God, we need to be careful about stumbling people. Paul the apostle gives some lessons in Romans concerning these things. It may be that as a child of God, you feel a certain liberty to do certain things.

In the days of the early church there was a real issue over eating meat. And it had developed into a spiritual issue so that there were some people that spiritually felt that it was wrong to eat meat. They felt it was a sin to eat meat. Paul the apostle did not feel that it was a sin to eat meat. But because there were those who did have a queasy conscience towards eating meat, Paul said he would not eat meat as long as the world stood if it would cause a stumbling block of an offense to a weaker brother. If my liberty is going to destroy someone who is weak in the faith, then I'll not exercise that liberty, lest I be a stumbling block to them. That's the law of love and walking in love. And thus, in the law of love, I live really a stricter life than even my own conscience. There may be things that I could do and not really feel that I am hurting or harming myself or my relationship with the Lord. But there may be others who have convictions or compunctions against doing those things. I am not to flaunt my liberty in Christ before them. I'm not to just go out and to do those things and lay before them a stumbling block. And Paul was careful about this and Jesus was careful. He said, We don't want to stumble them. We don't want to offend them. There are some things in which offenses are going to come and you can't help it, the fact that you got out of bed this morning is going to offend somebody. So you can't be free from all offenses. But yet, we need to walk carefully, walking in love and not doing things that would bring a weaker brother a real problem and an offense to him. And Jesus was concerned about that and we should be also.

Let's pray:

Father, we thank You for our blessed Lord. And Lord, we don't want to be a grief to You. But we want to be a joy to your heart. And so help us, Lord. Give us that faith that we need to rest in Your will, in Your sovereign purposes for our lives, committing our ways unto You, allowing You, Lord, to bring to pass Your will and Your purpose. Lord, may we not fret or worry or be filled with anxieties, and may we walk Lord in perfect trust and faith, knowing that You're on the throne, knowing that You are watching over us and that You love us. Knowing that nothing can happen to us but what You have allowed it to happen, and that if You have allowed it, You have a purpose, a good purpose for it. Bring us Lord to that place of resting in the full commitment of our ways to You. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.