

Faith in the Right Thing

Good morning. If you have your Bible, would you turn with me to Matthew 17. You can find it on page 772 of the Bible in the chairs. You can also follow along with the sermon notes in our church app.

Last week, we saw this mountaintop moment, right? The transfiguration of Jesus. We beheld the glory of Christ in his true radiance. Peter loved it so much, he wanted to stay there forever. As Pastor Nathan warned us, we cannot live our Christian life through only the mountaintop experiences. Most of the Christian life is in the day-to-day down in the valley. And it's here, in the mundane parts of life, where our faith is challenged. When life comes at us from all sides, when calamity strikes, when frustrations abound, what we are really placing our faith in is exposed.

Here in our text this morning, we see Jesus and those disciples who were with him plunged right back into the messiness of life in the valley. And in this encounter at the bottom of the mountain, we see many different displays of faith. As we walk through a narrative passage like this, a story, one of the things the author is inviting us to do is to examine the characters of the story. What is to be commended? What is to be avoided? Where do we find ourselves in the story? With that in mind, would you follow along as I read Matthew 17:14-23?

READ Matthew 17:14-23

Would you pray with me?...

INTRODUCTION

[ILLUSTRATION]

Well, just a little over a week ago now on April 10th, 2026, mankind witnessed a historic moment as the four astronauts from the Artemis II [\[Picture\]](#) successfully landed in the ocean from their trip around the moon. Something that has not been accomplished in more than 50 years. These astronauts traveled 252,756 miles from earth, breaking the previous record held by the Apollo 13 mission in 1970.

Many of you probably remember when Apollo 13 happened, something I'm sure you will never forget. For those of us who happen to not have been born yet, we remember it through history books and, of course, the Apollo 13 movie with Tom Hanks. This three-man crew [\[Picture\]](#) was set to journey to the moon and become the third Moon landing. After the success of both the Apollo 11 and Apollo 12 missions, flights to the moon were beginning to become somewhat routine. In fact, 46 hours into Apollo 13's flight, the commander at Mission Control radioed the crew and said, "The spacecraft is in real good shape as far as we are concerned. We're bored to tears down here." This was just another routine trip. These astronauts had faith that their spacecraft would be able to get them to the moon and back without any issues.

All of this changed, around 56 hours into their flight and about 200,000 miles from earth, the astronauts heard a dull BANG. This prompted the infamous line to Mission Control, "Houston, we've had a problem." One of the three oxygen tanks exploded, damaging another tank, causing it to leak oxygen into space. From this moment on, faith in this spacecraft to carry out its mission was gone. The only question on everyone's mind was "how do we get these astronauts home?" With a damaged vessel, losing oxygen and power, these astronauts could no longer place their faith in the spacecraft as they once did. Instead, they had to place their faith in those at Mission Control [\[Picture\]](#) who would help them navigate a safe flight home, providing step by step instructions.

In just a matter of a few moments, all of their confidence was gone. What they trusted in had failed them, and now everything depended on finding something

that wouldn't. This is true for all of us. We all place our faith in something. In a moment of crisis, or a moment of failure, the object of our faith is revealed. And we find out if our faith was in the right object to begin with. You see the question is not "Do I have faith?" but rather "What am I placing my faith in?" That leads to our main idea for today: that it's not good enough to just have faith. **It matters what your faith is in.**

We are going to examine the faith of the characters in this story. Who or what are they placing their faith in? We will consider 1) The Father's Faith, 2) The Disciples' Faith, and 3) Jesus' Faith.

THE FATHER'S FAITH

Let's begin by looking at **The Father's Faith.**

Jesus and those three disciples who were with him on the mountain have made their way down and have come across a crowd. And it's in this crowd that the reality of the messiness of life rears its head as a father comes seeking Jesus.

Look again at verses 14-16:

Matthew 17:14-16

¹⁴ And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, ¹⁵ said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. ¹⁶ And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him."

Here is a father seeking help for his son. As a parent, there is nothing scarier than something horrible happening to your kids. You would rather 1000 terrible things to happen to you rather than one bad thing to them. From this brief interaction we learn that this man's son has seizures. These are not normal seizures,

however. There is a demonic force at play here that is also causing him to suffer terribly. These seizures have caused him to fall into open flames and into water (possibly open wells), threatening his very life. This father does what any good parent would do, he seeks help.

He says that he brought his son to Jesus' disciples first. It could have been because Jesus was up on the mountain and unavailable at the time. But he came to his disciples believing that they would be able to help him as well. However, they were unsuccessful in dealing with the problem. They could not bring healing. In this encounter, we get a glimpse into this father's faith. When the disciples were unable to bring healing, he did not discount God's saving power. He didn't say, "Well, if they can't do it, then there is no hope." Or even, "I guess God's not able to help me." He didn't go into despair but rather sought the source. He sought after Jesus.

How quickly do you seek Jesus in times of crisis? What about when things don't go as planned? This father had a plan, take the kid to these disciples, that should fix it. And yet, the plan doesn't work. Rather than abandon faith, or even misplace his faith, he sets his faith on Jesus. What is your response in those moments? When life throws curveballs at you, do you seek Jesus? Or do seek something else to bring the answer? Or do you give up hope altogether?

When this father comes to Jesus, Matthew says he kneels before him. Matthew is the only one of the Gospels to record this specific detail. For all the details that Matthew does not include that the others do, this specific detail he felt important enough to mention. He wants to highlight the attitude this father had towards Jesus. That he came and fell before his feet. This is an attitude of respect, of humility. This was not a normal custom. People were not just kneeling down to everyone as a greeting. You only knelt to someone if you considered them to have more honor, respect, or authority over you. In the Old Testament, people would kneel before prophets, kings, and before the Lord.¹

¹ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Lexham Academic: Bellingham, WA) 2022, 439.

How does he address Jesus? As Lord. He recognizes that Jesus is the one with authority. What is his request? For this Lord, to have mercy on his son. This is a cry of desperation, of complete and total dependence on him, seeking his favor. In his request, we see the boldness of this father's faith. A confidence or assurance that Jesus could solve the problem. Sure, those disciples may not have been able to help, but Jesus certainly could.

This kind of request, this expression "Lord, have mercy," is exclusively used in the Old Testament in prayers to Yahweh.² This is a prayer, a request, that would typically only be made to God himself. But here, this father recognizes Jesus' authority and makes this request that he would show mercy. That he would spare his son from this misery. All of this points to the faith he placed in Jesus. That Jesus could do what no one else could do. That Jesus had authority over sickness and demonic possession. That Jesus could grant mercy to his son the same as Yahweh.

And his faith in Jesus was not in vain. Verse 18 tells us:

Matthew 17:18

¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.

Jesus really was who he believed him to be. He really did have authority over demons. He really was the Lord who could show mercy to his son. At the word of Jesus, this demon came out of the boy instantly, as Matthew explicitly mentions.

What does your faith in Jesus look like? Do you have faith that he is who he says he is? That he can, in fact, show mercy to you in your situation? I don't know about you, but I can sometimes find it hard to have a confident faith when things don't go according to my plan. When the trial or hardship I'm walking through isn't resolved instantly. When my attempts to fix it fail. It can be easy to then

² Quarles, *Matthew*, 440.

believe that God must not really be a merciful God since he has not put an end to my suffering.

What is your posture or your response towards God? Are you humbly bringing your requests to him? Is it a confidence in the person and power of Jesus? Do you seek him in faith? Are we boldly asking for him to show mercy? To act within his character, a God who is merciful and gracious abounding in steadfast love?

I think it's important to note here that this father did not allow a poor experience with Jesus' disciples to turn him away from seeking after Jesus. I've heard so many stories over the years about people who walk away from God or the church because they had a bad experience with the church or with a particular Christian in their life. If that's you, can I encourage you to look at this father's response? When the disciples failed him, he went to the source. He went to Jesus himself. While Christians are to be faithful disciples of Christ, we are to be like him, we are not him. We are still sinners saved by grace who sometimes say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. We need Jesus as much as you. Don't discount the grace and mercy of Jesus because of a bad encounter with his disciples.

THE DISCIPLES' FAITH

Not only do we need to consider the faith of the father, but there are other characters in this story as well, the disciples. Let's look at **The Disciples' Faith.**

Look again at verses 17-²⁰~~18~~:

Matthew 17:17-²⁰~~18~~

¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ 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.”

After Jesus is told by the father of this child that his disciples could not heal the boy, we get a glimpse into the humanity of Jesus. The frustration he must have felt living among sinful people. Who is Jesus addressing here? Possibly the crowd at large, but most likely this is directed towards his disciples as he responds to their inability to heal the boy. Jesus had just revealed himself on the mountain in all his brilliance and glory to Peter, James, and John. The glory he had with the Father in heaven before ever taking on human flesh. But now, it’s back to the present reality. Back in the lives of sinful and faithless people.

[ILLUSTRATION]

If you have worked any amount of time in a customer service job, you know how difficult it can be to deal with people. My first job was in high school working at Cold Stone Creamery. I thought to myself, “What could possibly be more joyful than coming to get ice cream?” “Who in the world would be in a bad mood getting a delicious ‘Chocolate Devotion?’” Apparently, a lot of people. It didn’t take long for that fantasy bubble to pop. People are just plain difficult.

We are messy. Sinful. Faithless. And Jesus, being the perfect Son of God, righteous and holy, humbly walks among his creation, dealing with our faithlessness and sinfulness. Jesus is not grumbling and complaining in a sinful way like I would in the back room after dealing with a customer. No, he is expressing his heart for these people, especially for his disciples who should know better, right? They walked with him, lived with him, have been a part of his ministry this whole time. And should they be able to heal this boy and cast out the demon? Yes!

Jesus gave these disciples authority to do so back in Matthew chapter 10:

Matthew 10:1

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

These disciples are probably confused. Maybe they have had successful experiences of healing and casting out demons up to this point. Maybe they have not had any experiences yet but remembered that Jesus gave them authority to do this. Either way, they are a little confused. This prompts them to privately ask Jesus, “Hey....um...why couldn’t we cast out the demon?”

And what does Jesus point to as the issue? He says, “Because of your little faith.” Okay, wait a second. Didn’t he say they were faithless in verse 17? Which is it? Are they faithless or do they have a little faith? And to complicate it even further, Jesus says that if they had a tiny amount of faith (like a mustard seed) they could move mountains, meaning they could do what seemed impossible. What in the world is going on here? Do they have faith or not? If they do have a little faith, why can’t they do what seems impossible if it only takes faith like a mustard seed?

Jesus is pointing out that the object of their faith is more important than the size of their faith. Faith in the wrong thing might as well be no faith at all, or as he calls them “faithless.” What is it that you are placing your faith in? Or maybe a better question would be, where does your lack of faith show up in your life? Is it in dealing with your kids, trying to discipline and instruct them and parent them well, but it seems like nothing you do works? Is it in a sickness or disease, whether it’s a chronic condition or terminal diagnosis, when doctors or medicine don’t have an answer? Is it in your finances, when it seems like you won’t make it to the next paycheck and giving to God seems like out of the question? You can try to muster up all the faith you possibly can in the wrong thing, whether it be in yourself or in your abilities or in your status or in your career. But all that faith will amount to nothing. Faith in anything other than Jesus Christ is ultimately faithlessness, no matter the size.

However, the smallest amount of faith in the right thing can accomplish impossible things. Jesus has already used the image of a mustard seed in describing the kingdom of God. The mustard seed was a proverbial way of talking about the smallest thing. Something almost invisible. The comparison being made here is where that faith is placed. These disciples were apparently not placing their faith in Jesus at this moment.

We aren't told explicitly what they were trusting in, but it's clear that it was not in the Lord. It could have been faith in their own ability. It could have been faith in their status or position with Jesus, being one of his close disciples, the inner Twelve. We are also not given any indication that these disciples sought the Lord after their failure to heal this boy. It was the father who sought Jesus. In fact, the disciples come to Jesus privately to ask him why they could not perform this miracle. Maybe out of shame or embarrassment or just plain confusion.

Jesus makes a remarkable statement about faith here. He says, "Nothing will be impossible for you." What a statement, right?! I have to be honest; I really wrestled with this statement this week. What exactly is Jesus saying here? While he is specifically talking to his disciples here in this text, does this mean there is no relevance to us today? I believe there is. I believe this is here for us as well. Jesus could have added all sorts of qualifying statements or set limitations around his statement, but he does nothing of the sort. We've seen Jesus do this throughout the Gospel, just state something plainly and move on.

Jesus is calling his disciples to faith in him that will enable them to live out what he has called them to do, and do seemingly impossible things. Jesus had already given the disciples authority to do these things in chapter 10. Now he is rebuking them for their lack of faith to be able to do what he has called them to. I think our response to this should be to analyze our own view of faith. What limitations are we setting on God? Do we believe that God can do the impossible? When our faith is in the true and living God, who has all power and authority, there is an endless supply of resources available to us.

I can tell you from first-hand experience this is true. The countless times I've seen God work miracles in my own life and my family's life. When there is no explanation other than this was a work of God. \$100,000 hospital bill being completely covered by insurance "by accident." This doesn't mean that everything we think about or ask for will happen. But are we even exercising a kind of faith that believes that they can happen? As Jesus emphasizes, it's not about the size of your faith but what your faith is in that's important. These disciples lacked faith in Jesus, and because of this, they missed out on getting to participate in the miraculous work of God. They needed to place their faith in him.

JESUS' FAITH

We've looked at the father's faith in Jesus and the disciples' faith in themselves. But we have an even greater example of faith given to us in the final two verses. Lastly, let's consider **Jesus' Faith**.

Look again at verses 22-23:

Matthew 17:22-23

²²As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, ²³and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.

This is the third time that Jesus explains to his disciples what is soon going to happen to him. The first mention of this was after Peter's confession of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The second time was coming down the mount of transfiguration. And now, we get him saying it again. However, this time a new detail is given. He says in verse 22 that he is about to "be delivered into the hands of men." We've already learned that Jesus must suffer by Israel's leadership and that he would be killed. But this time, Jesus says he will be delivered into this. Who is doing the delivering?

In the Greek text, this type of verb is often described as a divine passive, meaning that this is an act of God. God would be the one to deliver Jesus into the hands of men. This would later be confirmed by Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2 and Paul in Romans 8. Jesus was pointing to the fact that though he would suffer at the hands of men, this was part of God's definite plan. These men were not the ones in power, God was.

Even while Jesus declares and believes this, his confidence and faith in God's sovereign plan did not waiver. He follows his statement about being delivered into the hands of men by stating that he "will be raised on the third day." Who is doing the raising? Jesus is not saying "I will raise" but that "I will be raised." He's pointing again to the action of God the Father. That not only would God deliver Jesus into the hands of men, but God would certainly raise him from the dead. This is where we see a beautiful example of what true faith in God looks like. Jesus' confidence in the purposes and plans of God the Father. As Jesus says in John's Gospel that he came to do the will of the Father.

Jesus told the disciples that a tiny faith in the right thing, meaning in God, could do the impossible. What could be a greater example of the impossible than being raised from the dead? This confidence and faith Jesus displays in God's plan of redemption is the same faith we are called to. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9,

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Salvation is by grace through faith. Faith in what? Faith in Jesus. In the gospel. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It's a faith that God can in fact do the impossible, raise the dead to life. First, with Jesus. And then with us. Bringing us out of our death in sin into life in Christ. If God can't do that, then as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, we are most of all to be pitied. We are all wasting our time and we are without hope. But God did in fact raise Jesus from the dead. And because of

this, those who place their faith in the person and work of Jesus will also be raised from death to life. An abundant life now and an eternal life to come.

What's even more incredible in this passage is that even after Jesus declares these people to be a faithless and twisted generation, he did not deviate from the plan to save us. **The disciples' lack of faith did not deter Jesus from the cross, it led him there.** When we are faithless, he remains faithful. And it was because of the faithlessness and twisted nature of mankind that he went to the cross and purchased our redemption. That he blazed the path ahead from death to life. Those who follow him, who deny themselves and take up their cross, will find the same resurrection for their own lives.

If you've never placed your faith in Jesus for your salvation, let me encourage you to do that today. Respond to this good news of the gospel, of what Jesus has done for people like you, by calling out to the Lord. Confess your sins to him, that you have broken his commandments. Believe in Jesus' perfect life, his death on the cross for your sins, and his resurrection from the dead. You can be saved if your faith is Jesus. As the old hymn says, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name."

For believers, we must remind ourselves of this truth every day. That even when we find ourselves to be faithless, when we place our faith in things that will surely fail us, Jesus remained faithful to the end. Our confidence is not in our ability to save ourselves by mustering up enough faith, but by the faith that was given to us as a gift and by the faithfulness of Jesus to die for us even when we were faithless. Whatever it is that you are clinging to in faith, the stock market, a presidential candidate, your strength or knowledge or competence, all of it will eventually fail you. It matters what you put your faith in. So, put your trust in the God who never fails.

CONCLUSION

Those astronauts on the Apollo 13 mission quickly realized their faith in their spacecraft was misplaced. While they had to put all their hope in Mission Control to guide them home safely, faith in something even greater was needed. On April 19, 1970, President Richard Nixon and Congress urged all Americans to pray for their safe return. What was clear in that moment was that this was out of their control. It was going to require faith in something more than technology. More than people's abilities or human ingenuity. It would require faith in God to do the impossible. The same is true for us today.

What is your faith in? Because it's not a matter of whether you have faith or not. We all do. It matters what your faith is in. Faith in anything other than Jesus Christ will fail. So, let me ask you, are you trusting him today?

Would you pray with me?...