

Chapter 17:14-21 – The Disciples’ Failures in Light of the Coming Cross

Outline of the Book

- The First Major Section - Where did Jesus Come From? (1:1 - 4:16)
- The Second Major Section - What did Jesus do? (4:17 - 16:20)
 - Discourse #1 - The Sermon on the Mount (5 - 7)
 - Narrative #1 (8 - 9)

 - Discourse #2 - The Sermon on Mission (10)
 - Narrative #2 (11 - 12)

 - Discourse #3 - The Sermon on the Mysteries (13)
 - Narrative #3 (14 - 16)

- The Third Major Section - What happened to Jesus? (16:21 - 28:20)
 - Narrative #4 (16 - 17)
 - Discourse #4 - The Sermon on Community (18)

 - Narrative #5 (19 - 22)
 - Discourse #5 - The Sermon on Consummation (23 - 25)

 - Narrative #6 - The Passion, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection (26 - 28)

Outline of the Passage

- Narrative #4 - (16:21 - 17:27)

Throughout this passage, the failure and misunderstanding of the disciples is shown to us. They have not understood the nature of discipleship and the purpose of God in relation to the cross.

 - Prediction of Death (16:21-28)
 - Jesus predicts his death for the first time
 - Peter rebukes Jesus
 - Jesus explains "the way of the cross"
 - Display of Glory (17:1-13)
 - Jesus displays his glory
 - Peter misunderstands the vision
 - Jesus explains the coming of "Elijah"
 - The demon which the disciples could not cast out (17:14-21)
 - Prediction of Death (17:22-27)
 - Jesus predicts his death for the second time.
 - Peter is questioned by the Jews
 - Jesus explains the temple tax.

The Disciples' Failed Exorcism (14-21)

- Note: v. 21 is omitted by many manuscripts. The words concerning prayer are definitely original in Mark 9:29 and may have been mistakenly repeated by a scribe here. But the evidence seems fairly split, so it is hard to be conclusive. The addition "and fasting" is also uncertain, as the original reading in Mark 9 almost certainly omitted this. But there is little impact on the theology here.
- The miracle is not the focus of these verses, but rather the rebuke from the Lord against the disciples and the people.
- We see a glimpse of Jesus' frustration. He knew the passions of being human like us (sin apart), but also shared a will and desire that was fully aligned with God his Father. As God is grieved by sin, so Jesus was too. But in his humanity, we see that grief expressed in a way that is all too real to us. While we are often frustrated by

the wrong kind of things, Jesus frustration was born out of his Holy desire. While we might think little of the incident at hand, God's standard is always higher.

- Jesus rebuked the man AND the disciples (as well as the crowds generally). He uses strong language to condemn their lack of faith and their moral failure.
- The man did not appreciate the unique nature and power of Jesus as the Son of God. He treated the disciples as equal with him, and demonstrated a lack of understanding of the name in which the disciples could do anything.
- The disciples seemed to lack the right mindset to perform the exorcism, as they had done many times before (Matt. 10:8). They doubted themselves, rather than having faith in God through Christ. And that faithlessness was reflected in their prayerlessness in Christ's absence (while he was on the mount).
- Jesus rebukes their "little faith", but then says that "faith like a grain of mustard seed" (i.e. very small). Why the apparent contradiction?
 - Because the first word is a technical expression that refers more the quality of faith rather than size
 - Jesus rebukes their lack of genuine "living" faith, but encourages us that a little genuine faith in God's power is able to do amazing things.

Jesus' second prediction and the temple tax (22-27)

- The disciples are "greatly distressed" (or grieved). They are not so much fighting the idea as before, but are troubled by it.
- The "two-drachma" tax was equivalent to one "half-shekel", which was an old testament tax that Israelite men paid toward the temple (Exodus 30:13)
- The teaching here follows the sermon on the mount in dealing with the Christian and the law, but also prepares Christians to compromise and appease systems around them which do not know Christ and stuck with the old law. This is very fitting lesson in how Christ's disciples will live in a world that rejected them.