

Real Faith in the Real Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] This week we will continue the study of the theme of following Jesus in everyday life. And today we will focus on Matthew chapter 17.

You can follow along in your bulletin or on the screen. Starting in verse 14 we read, And when it 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 faceless 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 see to this mountain.

[1 : 1 6] Move from here to there, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of man, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.

And they were greatly distressed. When it came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma texts went 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 his mouth, you'll find the shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself. This is the word of God. Thank you, Echo.

[2 : 3 1] Let's pray together as we ask God to speak to us from his word. Lord Jesus Christ, Heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, as we come to your word this morning, God, we ask that you will make clear to us what is in your word.

Father, we are not interested in rabbit trails or human philosophy. We want to know what you have to say to us. And so speak to us. We are listening. Come and speak to each one of our hearts.

You know where we're at. Lord, for those of us that are weary and need rest, come and invite us to rest. For those of us, God, that are going our own way, bring us back to the fold.

Jesus, come and speak to us from your word, we pray. In your wonderful and gracious name, amen. Well, as Echo reminded us, we are continuing to work through the book of Matthew.

And Matthew is such an amazing book of the Bible because in it we see both Jesus' gentleness and his challenge. You know, the amazing thing about Jesus, he's both encouraging and challenging.

[3 : 39] He's challenging because he says, if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to lay down your life, pick up your cross, don't live for yourself, live for me. And to me, Jesus is very challenging, but at the same time, he's so encouraging.

He's so gracious. He's so patient. He's so gentle with our failings and our mistakes and our foibles. And we see that again throughout Matthew's gospel. Jesus, even with our mistakes, he's in our corner.

He's on our side. And we've seen that the last few weeks. And we see it again in our passage today. Today there are two stories, and we're going to see two things.

We're going to see what real faith in the real Jesus looks like. Real faith in the real Jesus. And so look at the first encounter, the first story with me from verses 14 to 21.

In this passage, Jesus wants to show us what real faith looks like. A man comes to Jesus and he has a real problem, right? It's not a first world problem, like his internet is slow or his Instagram isn't working.

[4 : 46] This is a real problem. He has a son who suffers terribly. He suffers from seizures, life-threatening seizures. And like any parent, he's worried about his son.

And this instance, we're told that these seizures are caused by an evil spirit. Obviously, not every medical condition is caused by that. But in this instance, that's what Matthew tells us.

And he has heard about the miracles of Jesus, and so he brings his son to Jesus for Jesus to heal him. But the problem is, Jesus is not there.

Where's Jesus? He's up on the mountain. Remember last week, Neil taught us about the transfiguration. Jesus is up on the mountain with Peter and James and John. And so he comes to the other nine disciples, and he asks them to heal his son, but they aren't able to do anything.

And so he's desperate. He wants his son to be healed. And fortunately for him, just at that moment, Jesus comes down and walks into their midst, and he encounters this man, and he casts out the demon, and the man's son is healed.

[5 : 59] Well, what does Matthew want us to see in this passage? Why has Matthew included this in his gospel? Well, what Matthew wants us to see is not what Jesus does to the boy, but what Jesus says to his disciples.

In fact, in both of these instances, Jesus has a private conversation with his disciples afterwards. There's something that happens, and then Matthew says, but afterwards Jesus went and spoke to his disciples.

And that's what Matthew wants us to see. The focus of this passage is not the boy, it's the disciples, because Jesus wants us to see what real faith looks like.

Firstly, look at how many times the word faith appears in our passage. In verse 17, he says, O faithless and twisted generation. And then when the disciples come to Jesus and say, Hang on, we couldn't cast out the demon.

What's going on here? What does Jesus say? Verse 20, Because of your little faith. For truly, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you'll say to this mountain, Be uprooted, move from here to there, and nothing will be impossible for you.

[7 : 09] Now, just by the way, in biblical language, to move a mountain is kind of proverbial or colloquial for overcoming difficulties. You may feel like, I've never heard of somebody that just moved the peak from here onto Lanta or Lama, right?

What's up with that? It's proverbial for nothing will be impossible. You'll be able to overcome great obstacles. But three times, Jesus talks about faith. O faithless generation, you of little faith.

O faith as small as a mustard seed. But the disciples are confused here because back in chapter 10, you might remember from when we looked at it, Jesus sends his disciples out on his mission.

He says, Go and heal the sick, cast out demons, restore those that are unwell, and they go and they do it. Amazingly. And now, it appears that they can't do it.

Maybe they lost their mojo. They lost their power somehow. What's going on? Well, Jesus says something really unusual because look at what he says here. He says, Oh, it's because of your little faith.

[8 : 16] Okay, well, that makes sense. But then Jesus says something really unusual afterwards because look at what he says. He says, Truly I say to you, if you have faith, like a grain of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you.

Well, if there's one thing that you know about a mustard seed, it's really small, right? If you like Dijon mustard or whole grain mustard, you know it's really small, right? And so, what's going on here?

These days, we might say a grain of sand. And so, this doesn't make sense because on one hand, Jesus says, Oh, the problem here is your little faith. But then he says, What you need is this like teeny tiny little faith here.

So, that doesn't seem to make much sense, right? Well, what's going on here? The issue isn't the quantity of faith or the size of your faith. Jesus is not saying, Listen, if you've got a small amount of faith, you're in trouble.

But if you've got a mountain of faith, yeah, okay, you're right. These are the good guys. And oh, sorry for these suckers over here. The issue is not the quantity or the amount of faith.

[9 : 22] It's the object of your faith. In other words, in other words, saying that, the issue is not how much faith you have. It's who your faith is in.

What ultimately are you trusting in? You see, the disciples come to Jesus and they say, Jesus, we don't understand. We did all the right things. We did now what you told us to do last time.

We stood in the right position. We stretched our hands just right. We said, one, abracadabra, two, rumba-shumbas, three, hail Marys, and we couldn't cast out the demon.

What's wrong? Well, we did everything we did last time. We tried this. We tried that. Why couldn't we cast out the demon? Look what they say, verse 19. Why couldn't we cast out the demon?

What are we missing? What are we doing wrong? But who's their faith in really? Sure, on the surface, it looks like their faith is in God.

[10 : 23] But where's the locus of their faith? Where's the object of the faith? Where is their confidence really lying? It's not in Christ. It's actually in themselves.

In Mark's version of this, there's a line at the end where Jesus says, but this only happens through prayer. Some versions will say, and fasting.

That's not in the original version. The monks added that in the Middle Ages because they loved fasting. So they thought everyone should fast like them. The Bible doesn't actually say it. But Jesus says, this only happens through prayer.

But if you look at this passage, nowhere do we see the disciples praying. They don't seem to pray at all. They seem to just come out and say, okay, we've done this before. Step back, everybody. Let me show you.

Shamba, ramba, abracadabra, go! And nothing happens. When I was a teenager, I grew up in Johannesburg in South Africa. And I was part of a really great church there.

[11 : 20] And there was a season where our church was very focused on miracles and healings. And so we used to have prayer and worship and healing nights quite regularly.

And I remember as a teenager, one day I was at one of these evenings. We were praying for people. And there were many people that were being prayed for. And actually, if I'm honest, there were many people in that season who really said that God healed them.

I don't really know how to verify it. Nobody got out of wheelchairs. But there were people who said, hey, you know, my ankles really sore. And at the end of the evening, God had healed them. Amazing. I remember there was one night.

I can still picture it so clearly. There was someone who said they had a really bad back. A lot of back pain. And so a bunch of us gathered around this person. And I was 17 and bold and arrogant and thought I had all the answers.

And I remember praying this really bold prayer. Satan, we cast you out of this thing. In Jesus' name, this back will be healed. Rawr!

[12 : 20] Rawr! You know, boldness with all my confidence. This back will be healed in Jesus' name. And I spent about 10 minutes praying for this person.

And nothing was happening. And so I moved on to the next person. And I remember someone coming to me later that evening. The person I was with. There was an older gentleman.

And he said, Wow, Kevin, you pray with such faith, such conviction, such boldness. That was wonderful. And I remember feeling quite weird inside. Because if I was honest, I didn't tell him this. But if I was honest, I didn't feel much faith at all.

Actually, I had more faith in my own boldness, my words, my confidence. In a way, I kind of feel, or felt like, if I was bold and strong and said the right things, God was obligated to heal.

Because that's what God does, right? He has, he answers the prayers of those that pray with bold faith. But you see what is happening there? My faith wasn't in Christ.

[13 : 20] My faith was in myself. And that's what's happening here with the disciples. Jesus says here, the problem with these disciples, in fact, the problem with many of us, is actually their faith is in their methods.

It's in their lack of prayer. It's in their techniques. Which means in a twisted way, their faith is in themselves. If you're familiar with the Old Testament, there's this great story in 1 Kings chapter 18, where Elijah has a showdown with the prophets of Baal.

And what's happening in Israel is, Israel is meant to worship Yahweh, the one true God, but there are all these pagan worshipers, these Baal worshiping prophets, that are kind of infiltrating Israel. And so Elijah says, let's have a showdown.

You build an altar, you pray to Baal, I'll build an altar, I'll pray to Yahweh, and let's see which God answers. And so they say, deal. And so they build these altars, and the prophets of Baal go and they're crying out to God to Baal, answer our prayer, you know, receive the sacrifice, and nothing happens.

And so they think, maybe we need to pray louder. And so they chant louder. Maybe we need to dance higher. And so they go through all the motions, and nothing happens. And then eventually, they bring out swords and knives, and start cutting themselves.

[14 : 33] Maybe we need to suffer, then God will hear us. So there's blood all over the place, but still nothing happens. You see where their confidence is? It's in themselves.

If we dance louder, if we shout louder, if we cut ourselves and suffer, then God will hear our prayers. And we may think that that's primitive and archaic, but friends, even as Christians, sometimes we can have a similar approach.

Our faith more closely resembles the prophets of Baal. As we fight and we think, if we shout, if we demand, if we bold, God will hear us. But actually, our faith is in ourselves.

But in that story, Elijah, after a while, he says, okay, that's not working. Let's try this. And he builds this altar, and he prays this amazing prayer. He says, Oh, Lord God, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel.

Answer me, O Lord, that these people may know that you, O Lord, are the one true God. Fire comes down, and the altar is consumed. Friends, that's faith.

[15 : 38] That's faith. Not our faith in my faith or in my prayers, but in who Christ is. You know, as a pastor, I sometimes get this, not in this church, in the church down the road, where, that was tongue in cheek, where people come and say, you know, my niece has got a big job interview, and can you please pray for her?

Because your prayers are special, right? Actually, no, no, no, you don't need your pastor to pray for you. You just need Jesus. You go to Jesus, right? Look what happens here in verse 18, when the disciples have tried and they can't do anything.

Jesus says, bring him to me. Friends, that's what we need. We need to come to Jesus. Don't go to the pastor. His prayers aren't special. Don't go to Mother Mary.

She can't answer your prayers. She can't do anything for you. No, come to Jesus. Jesus is the one that we need. And the disciples, they try their techniques and their methods and nothing.

But look at the boy's father. Look at verse 14. He says, when they came to the crowd, a man came to him and kneeling before him, he said, Lord, have mercy on my son.

[16 : 51] That's what we need. Come to Jesus. Lord, have mercy. I need your grace. And look at verse 17 with me. Something unusual happens here. Jesus says, oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you?

How long must I put up with you? You think, oh, Jesus is having a bad day. I mean, you know, maybe he's losing it a little bit. No, no, well, Jesus is actually quoting Numbers 14 here, where God says to Moses, how long must I put up with these people?

How long must I, after all I've done, are they still not going to trust me? But if you remember what happens in Numbers 14, the context is, just before God had, or Moses had sent the spies into the promised land, and they come back and say, God is with us, let's go.

We can go and take the land. And they don't trust God. They say, no, we can't do it. And they're lacking faith, and they think we can't do it. And then eventually they say, okay, fine, we'll do it. We will take on the giants.

We will overcome the enemy. We will conquer. And God says, how long must I put up with these people who trust themselves rather than me? You see what Jesus is saying here?

[17 : 57] Jesus is saying, the disciples are acting just like the Israelites did in the wilderness. Friends, what does genuine faith look like? What does saving, healing faith look like?

It looks like the Father. He comes to Jesus on His knees. No confidence in Himself. No confidence in His prayers. No confidence even in His faith. All His hope is in Jesus.

Lord, have mercy. Have mercy on my Son. Now that's true for the way that you become a Christian. If you become a Christian, it's only through Jesus. Don't put your faith in yourself.

It's all Jesus. But it's also true for the way you grow as a Christian. In other words, the context here is not this Father coming to faith.

It's actually, His Son is in difficulty. His Son needs redemption. His Son needs healing, right? Friends, some of us here, we carry great wounds from our past.

[18 : 55] Some of us here are greatly scarred. And how are we going to find healing? How are we going to deal with the wounds from our past? How are we going to deal with the issues in our life? Oh, the story is the same.

It's the same way. The solution for both is the same. We don't trust in our techniques. We don't put faith in our faith. Oh, we come to Jesus. Do you remember the words of that old hymn?

Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to your cross I claim. Exposed, I come to thee for dress. Helpless, I come to thee for grace.

Friends, this is the point of the story. It's not necessary to have a great amount of faith. Even a small amount of faith will do. As long as your faith is in a great God, come to Jesus.

And so, this week, friends, put your full weight in Jesus. Some of you may have challenges at work this week. And I know when I have challenges at work, my temptation is to dabble down to I'm going to work twice as hard.

[19 : 55] Okay, fine. Everyone's going to, if that happens, I will sort it out. I will say, Watermark. No, no, no, Watermark doesn't need me. Watermark needs Jesus, right? Come to Jesus.

Friends, some of us, maybe this week, we're going to have challenges at home. Maybe our kids going through a difficult time. Friends, come to Jesus. Okay, come get on your knees.

Say, Lord, I need your mercy. Friends, maybe some of us are parents or elderly or maybe there's a relationship that's difficult and you feel like I can solve it. No, friends, come on your knees.

Come to Jesus. Lord, I need your mercy. Friends, maybe I feel great guilt or shame for the past. Maybe some of us have done something really stupid and feel like, how can I ever get redemption from what I've done?

Friends, come to Jesus. Come, Lord, I need your mercy. He loves to save. Well, the first thing, real faith. But look at what happens in the second story.

[20 : 53] Here we see not only what real faith looks like, but the real Jesus. Because here in the second passage, a tax collector comes to Peter and he asks him whether Jesus pays the temple tax.

Now, the temple tax was a tax that every male over the age of 20 in Israel had to pay for the upkeep of the temple to make sure it all looked fine and to supply the goods and the services for the sacrifices, enough goats and sheep and to make sure that the temple ran smoothly.

And so, this tax collector comes to Peter and he says, does your rabbi pay the tax? And Peter says, yes, he does. Okay? All good. But then, later on, Jesus comes to Peter and he asks a really fascinating question.

Look what he says in verse 25. Peter, from whom do the kings and the emperors exact tax? From their families or from their subjects?

And the answer is very obvious, right? Every emperor, every king exacts taxes not from their family but from their subjects. In fact, the reason you tax the subject is to support the royal family often, okay?

[22 : 04] Unless, of course, you don't like your family. Maybe you'll send the tax man off to your mother-in-law or something like that. But most royal families are exempt. Their privilege is they don't need to pay tax.

And Peter's a sharp guy. He gets this conclusion. Verse 26, the sons are free. What's Jesus' point here? His point is, as heaven and earth's true king, did Jesus really need to pay the temple tax?

No. Certainly not. And just think about it, in a month's time, Jesus knows what's going to happen. He's going to die on the cross and the temple is going to become obsolete.

In fact, the royal curtain that separates the holy and the most holy place is going to be torn in two, destroyed, when Jesus dies on the cross. What's the point in paying the tax for the dry cleaning and to wash it and make sure it all looks pretty?

In a month's time, it's going to be destroyed. In a month's time, the whole temple system is going to come to an end. In a month's time, they're not going to need to offer sacrifices of bulls and goats and sheep and stuff because Jesus, the Lamb of God, is going to die on the cross, take upon Himself the sins of the world.

[23 : 16] Jesus knows what's coming. Why pay the temple tax? I mean, as the Son, not just of the King of the earth, but the Son of God, the one true King, the true and better fulfillment of everything the temple points to, does Jesus really need to pay the temple tax?

In fact, in those days, rabbis were exempt. So even on a very horizontal level, Jesus doesn't need to pay the tax. And yet, He does.

Why? The answer is, because He's perfect. Because He's perfectly gracious. And He's perfectly humble.

And He's perfectly gentle. Because Jesus Christ pays the debts that He doesn't owe so that those who do owe a debt that they cannot pay get to go free.

You see, friends, Jesus Christ is the one King who came not to be served, but to serve. Jesus Christ is the one King who came not to demand His rights, but to give up His rights.

[24 : 23] Jesus is the one King who came not to protect His life or preserve His life, but to give up His life on the cross, having no obligation to do so. And yet, He did so to rescue all those who will come to Him with simple faith and trust Him.

Doesn't the story remind you of what Trish read to us in Philippians chapter 2? That though Jesus Christ is God, and He counted, though Jesus Christ, though He is God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, something to be demanded, something He was entitled to, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant being born in human likeness.

And taking the form of a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And that's the point of verse 22 and 23.

Look at it in your bulletins with me. We skipped over it earlier, but this is the point. Verse 22, as they come into Galilee, Jesus says to them, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, but He will be raised on the third day.

Friends, Jesus Christ is the Son who acted like a subject, a slave, so that those of us who really are slaves can become sons and daughters of the true King.

[25 : 45] But there's another reason that Jesus gives why He pays the tax. Look at verse 27. He says, however, not to cause them offense, and then He goes and tells Peter to pay the tax.

What does Jesus mean when He says, don't cause them offense? The word the offense means a stumbling stone. He says, don't cause them to stumble. Don't cause an issue here, right? Someone's walking along and they stumble.

He says, let's not cause an issue. If Jesus said, forget it. I'm a rabbi. I'm heaven and earth's true king. I'm not going to pay the tax. You go tell your guys to sort themselves out, right?

By causing an uproar, what's Jesus going to do? He's going to distract from His real mission why He came, which is not to save money, but to save lives.

One commentator said it like this. Jesus knew that He didn't need to die on this hill because there's another hill that's coming just around the corner that He is going to die on, the hill of Calvary.

[26 : 48] Now, what does this mean for us as we come to close? Well, one of the things it means is that Christian freedom doesn't mean freedom to do whatever you want.

It means freedom to love and serve without needing to be loved in return. Do you see what Jesus says here? He says, the sons of the kings are free and daughters are free. Friends, if you're a Christian this morning, you're a son or a daughter of the great God, the king of all the universe.

And that means you're free. Remember how Galatians chapter 5, Paul writes and says, it is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Friends, if you're a Christian this morning, you're free. But Christian freedom doesn't mean freedom to do whatever I want.

It means freedom to love without needing to be loved in return. Some Christians think, Jesus paid the penalty. I'm free. I can do whatever I want. No, no, no. Jesus says, I'm the freest person who ever lived.

But I'll use my freedom to love and serve those and to set them free. In Galatians 5, Paul goes on and he says this, you are called to freedom, brothers and sisters, but don't use your freedom for yourself.

[28 : 00] Rather, through love, serve one another. Martin Luther, 500 years ago, said this, a Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none.

Glory. Ah, but look at the second line. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful subject of all, servant of everyone. And that's what Paul writes. And that's what Jesus is.

You son of the king, you're free. Ah, but don't go and cause offense. Use your freedom to love and serve those around us. Friends, we live in a time and an age which is riddled with entitlement, right?

We all feel entitled to a comfortable life a convenient life, a problem-free life, a criticism-free life. But you know what? The more we live entitled, the more enslaved we become and the more miserable we are.

And the more we demand our rights and demand our privileges, the more miserable we will become. Jesus comes and he turns all of that on his head and he says, if you know me, if you come to me in real faith and real repentance, nothing in your hands you bring simply to my grace you cling, I'll set you free.

[29 : 12] I'll bring you into God's family. I'll show you what real freedom looks like because I'll set you free to love others without needing to be loved in return. I'll set you free to serve others without needing to be served in return.

I'll set you free to honor others without needing to be honored in return because you'll be completely loved, completely secure, completely free in me. Friends, that's the real Jesus, the king who acted like a servant so that those who are servants and slaves could be free and become sons and daughters of God.

As a friend, this week, every morning, why don't you come to Jesus? Don't come trusting your confidence. Don't come trusting yourself. Don't come to Jesus and use him to build your empire, your kingdom.

Come to Jesus with your little faith. Come with your simple faith. But come trusting in the great God. Come to him like the man in verse 14. Come on your knees. Come and surrender.

Come say, Jesus, I need your mercy. Come and have your way in my life. Let's pray together as we come to him now. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that, as we said earlier, you are the glorious king, the awesome one.

[30 : 29] Lord, you are both challenging and encouraging. You're so glorious, God. You invite us to come and find our rest in you. You invite us to come and find our freedom in you.

God, I pray, won't you help us to have simple faith in you? Faith may be as small as a mustard seed, but faith in a great God. Father, won't you deliver us from sensing the need to trust ourselves?

God, won't you deliver us from putting our trust in our own faithfulness, our own religiosity, our own devotion, our own boldness. Jesus, help us to be like the Father in verse 14.

This simple man, we don't know his name. We don't know anything about him. Nothing commendable about him other than the fact that he came on his knees to you. Jesus, I pray, help us.

Won't you give us faith, God, to come on our knees and to trust in you? Father, for those of us that are not Christians this morning, won't you open the eyes of our heart to see you, that we will turn to you and trust you, Jesus.

[31 : 37] God, for those of us that are Christians but maybe are hurting, those of us that have got wounds, those of us that are struggling this morning, those of us, God, that feel weak and empty, Jesus, help us to come to you and to trust you.

Jesus, thank you that you are infinitely gracious, perfectly humble, perfectly tender. Thank you for your mercy.

We trust you. We trust you.