

Jesus at Work
Matthew 17:14-27
July 22nd, 2018

Intro

After 3 momentous events – confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the rebuke of Peter, and the Transfiguration – the narrative moves into 3 short scenes of Jesus at work in ways that characterize His ministry.

All are loaded with the supernatural and miraculous – demon, healing/exorcism, prediction of the future, prediction of the resurrection (another miracle), a unique account of providential knowledge as he directs Peter to a certain fish to find a coin in its mouth.

I know that people can struggle with accounts like that in the Bible. They may appreciate Jesus' moral teaching and example of love and sacrifice, but have a hard time reconciling the miraculous of the Bible with a modern, scientific understanding of how the world works.

Tim Keller addresses that head on in his book, *The Reason for God*. Keller pastors in New York and interacts with many secular, scientific minded people every week. Here's how he addresses this:

“Science has proven that there is no such thing as miracles.” But embedded in such a statement is a leap of faith. It is one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and cannot speak to any others. It is quite another to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist. . . . When studying a phenomenon, the scientist must always assume there is a natural cause. That is because natural causes are the only kind its methodology can address. It is another thing to insist that science has proven there can't *be* any other kind. There would be no experiential model for testing the statement: “No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible.” It is therefore a philosophical presupposition and not a scientific finding.

1. Jesus heals. (17:14-21)

- a. Jesus, Peter, James, John – come down the mountain and are confronted with a situation that the other 9 couldn't handle.
 - i. You ever come back to work or home after vacation and get bombarded with problems as you walk in the door? That must have been this experience for Peter, James, and John if not Jesus.
- b. Luke and Mark also include this incident right after the transfiguration, with Luke specifying that it was the next day.
- c. The need – a boy with apparent seizures that have a demonic cause. (v. 15)
 - i. The term “lunatic” was also used of someone with epileptic seizures, which seems to be what is being described here, especially when we look at Luke's account.
 - ii. **Luke 9:39-40** and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth, and as it mauls him, it scarcely leaves him. ⁴⁰ "And I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not."
 - iii. Just like being blind, mute, or deaf in the gospels can be caused by demonic forces or natural causes, so apparently epilepsy. But just as we would never say all blindness, muteness, or deafness is from demonic causes so we would not say all epilepsy is either.
- d. The failure of the disciples (v. 16)
 - i. They were given by Jesus the ability to heal the sick earlier.

1. **Matthew 10:8** "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.
- ii. Their failures are prominent in this section
 1. 14:26ff – crying out in the boat, Peter sinking in little faith
 2. 15:16 – lacking in understanding about what defiles
 3. 15:23 – asking Jesus to send away Canaanite woman
 4. 15:33 – unsure how to feed a large crowd
 5. 16:22 – Peter's rebuke
- e. The failure of the generation to believe (v. 17)
 - i. Unbelief (lack of faith, no faith); perverted (twisted, distorted, like an object on a potter's wheel that becomes misshapen)
 - ii. Faith 3 times in this passage:
 1. v. 17 – No faith (unbelieving)
 - a. this "generation" – How long am I to put up with you?
 2. v. 20a – little faith
 - a. difference not immediately clear between this and mustard seed faith
 - b. the one was unable to help this boy
 - c. the other could move a mountain
 - d. Carson – despite the etymology of the word, it probably does not refer so much to the littleness of their faith as to its poverty. Little faith, like a little mustard seed, can be effectual; poor faith, like that of the disciples' here, is ineffectual.
 3. v. 20b – mustard-seed faith
 - a. seen in the simple request of the father who bows before Jesus, calls him Lord, and asks for mercy.
 - b. **Mark 9:22-24** "And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" 23 And Jesus said to him, "'If You can!' All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief."
 - c. Seen in the simple statement and request – I do believe; help my unbelief
 - d. You don't need more faith in faith, you need humble faith in Jesus.
 - e. Moving a mountain is proverbial for overcoming great difficulties; nothing being impossible is limited by context, not belief.
 - f. John Calvin: He does not mean that God will give us whatever comes heedlessly into our minds or mouths. In fact, since there is nothing more contradictory to faith than the foolish and unconsidered wishes of our flesh, it follows that where faith reigns there is no asking for anything indiscriminately."
 - iii. Jesus is exasperated (How long...?!)
1. If you've traveled to a less developed country or one with significantly different cultural practices, you may have had the experience of finding them interesting, quaint, part of the experience. But those who live there long term as missionaries or ex-pats often find the experience to wear on them and they become exasperated.

- a. Missionary in one Asian country that doesn't follow our same cultural patterns of lines to board trains, etc. got so frustrated that he took his huge backpack and started swinging it around to keep a little space so he could board the train.
 - b. Another guy in Russia, not a missionary, just someone I met at the airport, had just found out that his luggage was lost again, and apparently it was a regular occurrence for him as he flew in and out of Moscow regularly for work and lived there most of the time. He unleashed a frustrated, verbal tirade that expressed his exasperation.
 2. Doriani - The popular philosophy of Star Wars says anger is the pathway to the dark side. But if we reflect a bit, we see that in this broken world, good emotions and good actions often require that we first care enough to be upset, dismayed, even angry when we see evil.
 - a. G. Walter Hansen's article, *The Emotions of Jesus and Why We Need Them*: The gospel writers paint their portraits of Jesus using a kaleidoscope of brilliant "emotional" colors. Jesus felt *compassion*; he was *angry, indignant*, and consumed with *zeal*; he was *troubled, greatly distressed, very sorrowful, depressed, deeply moved, and grieved*; he *sighed*; he *wept and sobbed*; he *groaned*; he was in *agony*; he was *surprised and amazed*; he *rejoiced* very greatly and was full of *joy*; he greatly *desired*, and he *loved*.
 3. Yet he was never out of control with his emotions, which is where we often go wrong. One mom describes emotions and the need to rein them by comparing them to a powerful horse. If you let the horse run out of control, it's dangerous. You might get hurt and it might hurt others. But if you control them, a horse can be great.
- f. Jesus removed the demon and healed the boy.
 - i. A Mighty Fortress Is Our God v. 3
 1. Though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us; The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.
- g. The reference to prayer and fasting (v. 21) was likely not in the original. It is not found in the earliest and best Greek texts that we have. It does occur in Mark's account.

2. Jesus predicts His **suffering** and **resurrection** again. (17:22-23)

- a. **Luke 9:43-44** And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."
- b. Remember in 16:21 it said that from that time Jesus began to show His disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised. This is another example of Him continuing to repeat the truth to them.
 - i. This time they are sad but they don't challenge him on it. This is progress!
 - ii. Praise God for slow, steady progress in your life. It's easy to get overwhelmed at all the areas of life that are still not fully conformed to Christ. We shouldn't become complacent but we should be glad for progress even when slow and should be glad God is patient with us.

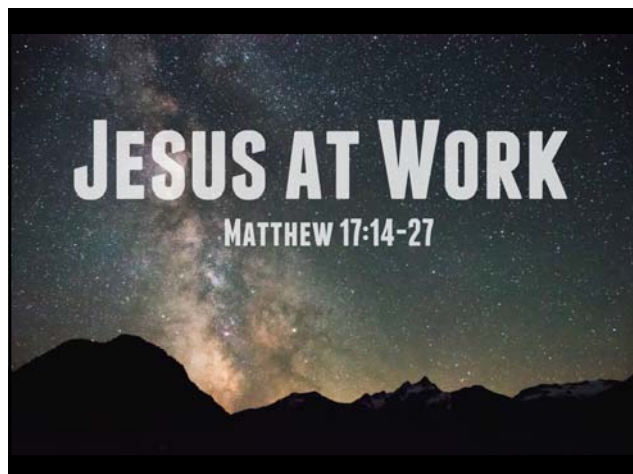
3. Jesus pays the **temple tax**. (17:24-27)

- a. Capernaum – located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee

- b. The two-drachma tax was collected for the upkeep of the temple from every adult Jewish male.
 - i. **Exodus 30:12-13, 16** "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. ¹³ "This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary . . . ¹⁶ "And you shall take the atonement money from the sons of Israel, and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves."
- c. Jesus points out that He is exempt from paying it in the same way the son of a king is exempt from paying taxes.
- d. Even though he is exempt, he is willing to pay it so as not to offend.
 - i. More the idea of snare or entrap them into some sin of conscience by not being able to follow through with their obligation to collect the temple tax
 - ii. May have also made them think that he opposed the temple and all it stood for, which was not true. He came to fulfill it.
 - iii. Jesus did something (paid the tax) that he didn't need to do in order not to cause offense.
 - 1. We should be aware of things that cause unnecessary offense and avoid them.
 - 2. Example – my conversation this week on the phone about the Trinity.
 - a. The caller was disingenuous, didn't listen to my answers, was loaded with counter points that he fired in quick succession, demeaning.
 - b. A little Google searching revealed that this is what he does – he calls churches that believe in the Trinity and yells at them.
 - c. Helpful reminder for me in what *not* to do when I try to engage people on spiritual topics.
- e. Demonstration of miraculous knowledge.
 - i. Not miraculous that a fish would see a shiny coin and try to swallow it and have it get stuck. But the fact that Jesus would know that and instruct Peter to do this is amazing of course.
 - ii. He gets a shekel, which is worth 4 drachmas, enough to cover both Peter and Jesus.

4. Applying Truth to Life

- a. The **object** and **sincerity** of faith are much more important than the size of faith.
 - i. Mustard-seed size faith in Jesus, even accompanied by "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief"
- b. Jesus came to **die** for sinners.
 - i. **1 Timothy 1:15** It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.
 - ii. Demonstration of God's love that He would rescue rebels.



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