

Matthew 17 - Three pictures of Greatness

If you could take anyone in the world to meet Jesus personally, who would you take?

A. Read Matthew 17:1 - 8

1. Imagine you are, say, James – What's it like on the mountain – what do you see – describe it for us as best you can? What effect does this have on you?
2. What do we learn about Jesus from the voice from the cloud? (Where else do we hear similar things said of Jesus? [Mt 3:16-17]) How does this effect how you view Jesus and how you relate to him?
3. Did you notice the time reference in vs. 1? What did Jesus teach about immediately before this in Mt 16:21-28? How would “the mountain event” be a nice balance to what happened 6 days before it? (With this in mind, what might the last verse of Mt 16 refer too?) When you're finding it tough going as a Christian, how might the transfiguration be an encouragement to you?

B. Read Matthew 17:9 - 13

1. The disciples ask Jesus about Elijah. The Passage they are referring to is Malachi 4:5-6. Read this passage. What is said there about Elijah – What expectations are given? If you lived in first century Israel and saw Elijah walking by, how significant would that be for you?
2. What does Jesus say about who Elijah is (see also Mt 11:13-14)? What does this imply about Jesus?
3. Why, do you think, Jesus focuses on how people treated John? (There're a number of reasons that Jesus regularly says “Don't tell anyone who I am”. Does what we've seen suggest a reason why he might have said it here in vs. 9 and also in Mt 16:21?) Does the fate of both John and Jesus say anything about what we might expect as followers of Jesus?

C. Read Matthew 17:14 - 23

1. What contrast is there in vs. 20 [Jesus says they have little faith, but then goes on to say even little faith is powerful. In effect he is referring to the poverty or absence of their faith.] Who is Jesus describing as “unbelieving” in vs. 17, the crowd, or the nine disciples not with him on the mountain, or both?
2. Jesus says faith is powerful (moving mountains was proverbial for overcoming great difficulties). Why were the disciples unable to do the works of the kingdom that Jesus had given them authority to do back in Mt 10:1? Does this passage teach that if we have faith, we should be able to heal sickness?
3. In vs. 23 what causes the disciples grief? What are they hearing and what are they not hearing?

D. Read Matthew 17:24 - 27

1. What does the fact Jesus is the first to speak when Peter arrives imply about Jesus?
2. Explain the logic of Jesus argument in vs. 25-26. What does this way of reasoning say about how Jesus viewed himself? Why then does Jesus pay the tax? Give examples of where we can follow the example of Jesus and go beyond what we are obliged to for the sake of others.

Summarize what you have learnt about Jesus in this study.

Matthew 18:1-14 Don't hurt the little ones

Who is the greatest person on earth?

A. Read Matthew 18:1 - 6

1. What do the disciples ask about? Why might they be interested in this particular question?
2. What is it about a child that makes them a good model for how someone enters the kingdom of heaven i.e. becomes a Christian? [see vs. 4] Why do you think humility is necessary to be a Christian? What is the opposite of humility? Do you think the disciples were expecting this answer from Jesus?
3. What warning does Jesus give in vs. 3? Being humble is different to being weak. Define what it is to be humble. Give some examples of humility.
4. In vs. 5, what is it about the way we welcome a child that means we welcome Jesus? [stick to the text] In vs. 6, which children in particular is it terrible to lead into sin? [stick to the text] Verses 5-6 at first sight seem to be about children, but who is really at the centre of Jesus' teaching? [See also Mt 10:40-42]
5. How might we cause an immature believer to sin? Give (make up) specific examples. How does Jesus emphasize what he thinks of that?

B. Read Matthew 18:7 - 11

6. In Verses 7-9, how significant to Jesus is sin and avoiding it – rate it on a scale of 1-10? What two ways does Jesus use to describe the fate of those who do not enter life? Do you think Jesus literally want us to cut body parts off? What does he mean then? Share with the group something in your life that you need to take radical surgery to?
7. Verse 10 speaks of “little ones”. Given what we've seen above, especially in vs. 6, who are these “little ones”? [believers – possibly immature believers] Why might we look down on other Christians? [also remember vs. 1] The details of the end of vs. 10 might not be clear – don't worry about that – what is clearly being said here? [They are “important” to God somehow, and therefore should be important to us]
8. If you were a shepherd, and you know each sheet by name, and you had 100 sheep and lost one – what would you do? [max 1 minute for this question]

C. Read Matthew 18:12 - 14

9. What is the point of the story Jesus tells in vs. 12-13? [Don't go on to vs.14 at this stage] Why does the shepherd rejoice more over the one sheep than over the 99 sheep? How does this story relate to what we have seen from Mt 18:1-11?
10. What point is Jesus making about God in vs. 14? What point is Jesus making for us to go home with today?

Matthew 18:15 – 35 When Others Sin

How did your parents settle fights between you and your siblings?

A. Read Matthew 18:15 – 20

1. Describe the four step “procedure” Jesus gives if someone sins against you. Is the person on view anyone in general, or someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus? Why do you think Jesus doesn’t give a “procedure” to follow when someone who isn’t a Christian sins against you?
2. What are the possible outcomes? What is it that prevents a solution? What do you think cause people not to listen and repent?
3. What do you think is the purpose of treating him “as you would a pagan or tax collector”? Given Jesus attitude to tax collectors and sinners (Mt 9:10-13), how would you treat that person while they continued not to listen. What about when they do listen and repent?
4. Jesus is saying what to do if someone sins against you, but also implied is how to act when we are in the wrong. When someone approaches you about your sin, how should you respond?
5. Compare verse 18 with Mt 16:19, which was directed to Peter. To whom is this spiritual authority now given? What might this binding and loosing refer to?
6. What additional promise is given in verses 19 - 20? From the rest of Scripture, what qualifications might there be on this?

B. Read Matthew 18:21 – 35

7. What do you think is on Peter’s mind when he asks the question in verse 21? Would Jesus be happy for Peter to withhold forgiveness when asked for the 78th time? What is Jesus really saying? Given the context of Peter’s question and Jesus’ answer, why do you think Jesus went on to tell a parable?
8. Put the story of verses 23 - 34 into your own words. How much money is involved in each case? How does the master respond to the servant’s begging in verses 26 - 27 (does he give him what he asks for)? What is the significance that verse 29 is like verse 26?
10. Jesus is doing more than answering Peter’s reluctance to forgive. What, according to Jesus’ parable, should motivate us to be able to freely forgive others? Describe how much have you have been forgiven? What’s it mean in verse 35 to “forgive from your heart”?
11. What warning is given in verse 35? How does this fit with salvation by grace alone? Are there people you hold a grudge against, that you should forgive?
12. (Additional question - if there’s time) In both sections today the person we are to forgive has either “listened to us” or “begged for patience”. From the rest of Scripture, what should be your response to those who do not acknowledge they have hurt you?