

CHAPTER 17

In this chapter we have,

- I. Christ in his pomp and glory transfigured (v. 1-13).
- II. Christ in his power and grace, casting the devil out of a child (v. 14-21). And,
- III. Christ in his poverty and great humiliation,
 1. Foretelling his own sufferings (v. 22, 23).
 2. Paying tribute (v. 24-27). So that here is Christ, the Brightness of his Father's glory, by himself purging our sins, paying our debts, and destroying for us him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Thus were the several indications of Christ's gracious intentions admirable interwoven.

⌄ MATTHEW 17:1-13

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

We have here the story of Christ's transfiguration; he has said that the *Son of man should shortly come in his kingdom*, with which promise all the three evangelists industriously connect this story; as if Christ's transfiguration were intended for a specimen and an earnest of the kingdom of Christ, and of that light and love of his, which therein appears to his select and sanctified ones. Peter speaks of this as *the power and coming of our Lord Jesus* (⌄² Peter 1:16); because it was an emanation of his power, and a previous notice of his coming, which was fitly introduced by such prefaces.

When Christ was here in his humiliation, though his state, in the main, was a state of abasement and afflictions, there were some glimpses of his glory intermixed, that he himself might be the more encouraged in his sufferings, and others the less offended. His birth, his baptism, his temptation, and his death, were the most remarkable instances of his humiliation; and these were each of them attended with some signal points of glory, and the smiles of heaven. But the series of his public ministry being a continued humiliation, here, just in the midst of that, comes in this

discovery of his glory. As, now that he is in heaven, he has his condescensions, so, when he was on earth, he had his advancements.

Now concerning Christ's transfiguration, observe,

I. The circumstances of it, which are here noted, v. 1.

1. The time; *six days* after he had the solemn conference with his disciples, ^{<402>}Matthew 16:21. St Luke saith, *It was about eight days after*, six whole days intervening, and this the eighth day, that day seven-night. Nothing is recorded to be said or done by our Lord Jesus for six days before his transfiguration; thus, before some great appearances, *there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour*, ^{<403>}Revelation 8:1. Then when Christ seems to be doing nothing for his church, expect, ere long, something more than ordinary.

2. The place; it was *on top of a high mountain apart*. Christ chose a mountain,

(1.) As a secret place. He went apart; for though a city upon a hill can hardly be hid, two or three persons upon a hill can hardly be found; therefore their private oratories were commonly on mountains. Christ chose a retired place to be transfigured in, because his appearing publicly in his glory was not agreeable to his present state; and thus he would show his humility, and teach us that privacy much befriends our communion with God. Those that would maintain intercourse with Heaven, must frequently withdraw from the converse and business of this world; and they will find themselves never less alone than when alone, for the Father is with them.

(2.) Though a sublime place, elevated above things below. Note, Those that would have a transforming fellowship with God, must not only retire, but ascend; lift up their hearts, and *seek things above*. The call is, *Come up hither*, ^{<404>}Revelation 4:1.

3. The witnesses of it. He took with him Peter and James and John.

(1.) He took three, a competent number to testify what they should see; for *out of the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*. Christ makes his appearances certain enough, but not too common; *not to all the people, but to witnesses* (^{<405>}Acts 10:41), that they might be blessed, who have not seen, and yet have believed.

(2.) He took these three because they were the chief of his disciples, the first three of the worthies of the Son of David; probably they excelled in gifts and graces; they were Christ's favourites, singled out to be the witnesses of his retirements. They were present when he raised the damsel to life, ^{<415>}Mark 5:37. They were afterward to be the witnesses of his agony, and this was to prepare them for that. Note, A sight of Christ's glory, while we are here in this world, is a good preparative for our sufferings with him, as these are preparatives for the sight of his glory in the other world. Paul, who had abundance of trouble, had abundance of revelations.

II. The manner of it (v. 2); *He was transfigured before them.* The substance of his body remained the same, but the accidents and appearances of it were greatly altered; he was not turned into a spirit, but his body, which had appeared in weakness and dishonour, now appeared in power and glory. *He was transfigured, metamorphothe* — *he was metamorphosed.* The profane poets amused and abused the world with idle extravagant stories of metamorphoses, especially the metamorphoses of their gods, such as were disparaging and diminishing to them, equally false and ridiculous; to these some think Peter has an eye, when, being about to mention this transfiguration of Christ, he saith, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made it known unto you,* ^{<416>}Peter 1:16. Christ was both God and man; but, in the days of his flesh, he took on him the *form of a servant* — *morphen doulou,* ^{<417>}Philippians 2:7. He drew a veil over the glory of his godhead; but now, in his transfiguration, he put by that veil, appeared *en morphē theou* — in the form of God (^{<418>}Philippians 2:6), and gave his disciples a glimpse of his glory, which could not but change his form.

The great truth which we declare, is, that *God is light* (^{<419>}1 John 1:5), *dwells in the light* (^{<420>}1 Timothy 6:16), *covers himself with light,* ^{<421>}Psalms 104:2. And therefore when Christ would appear in the *form of God*, he appeared *in light*, the most glorious of all visible beings, the first-born of the creation, and most nearly resembling the eternal Parent. Christ is *the Light*; while he was in the world, he *shined in darkness*, and therefore *the world knew him not* (^{<422>}John 1:5, 10); but, at this time, that Light shined out of the darkness.

Now his transfiguration appeared in two things:

1. *His face did shine as the sun.* The face is the principal part of the body, by which we are known; therefore such a brightness was put on Christ's face, that face which afterward *he hid not from shame and spitting*. It shone as the sun when he goes forth in his strength, so clear, so bright; for he is the Sun of righteousness, the Light of the world. The face of Moses shone but as the moon, with a borrowed reflected light, but Christ's shone as the sun, with an innate inherent light, which was the more sensibly glorious, because it suddenly broke out, as it were, from behind a black cloud.

2. *His raiment was white as the light.* All his body was altered, as his face was; so that beams of light, darting from every part through his clothes, made them white and glittering. The shining of the face of Moses was so weak, that it could easily be concealed by a thin veil; but such was the glory of Christ's body, that his clothes were enlightened by it.

III. The companions of it. He will come, at last, *with ten thousands of his saints*; and, as a specimen of that, there now *appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him*, v. 3. Observe,

1. There were glorified saints attending him, that, when there were *three to bear record on earth*, Peter, James, and John, there might be some to bear record from heaven too. Thus here was a lively resemblance of Christ's kingdom, which is made up of saints in heaven and saints on earth, and to which belong *the spirits of just men made perfect*. We see here, that they who are fallen asleep in Christ are not perished, but exist in a separate state, and shall be forthcoming when there is occasion.

2. These two were Moses and Elias, men very eminent in their day. They had both fasted forty days and forty nights, as Christ did, and wrought other miracles, and were both remarkable at their going out of the world as well as in their living in the world. Elias was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot, and died not. The body of Moses was never found, possibly it was preserved from corruption, and reserved for this appearance. The Jews had great respect for the memory of Moses and Elias, and therefore they came to witness of him, they came to carry tidings concerning him to the upper world. In them the law and the prophets honoured Christ, and bore testimony to him. Moses and Elias appeared to the disciples; they saw them, and heard them talk, and, either by their discourse or by information from Christ, they knew them to be Moses and Elias; glorified saints shall

know one another in heaven. They talked with Christ. Note, Christ has communion with the blessed, and will be no stranger to any of the members of that glorified corporation. Christ was now to be sealed in his prophetic office, and therefore these two great prophets were fittest to attend him, as transferring all their honour and interest to him; for *in these last days God speaks to us by his Son*, ^{<800>}Hebrews 1:1.

IV. The great pleasure and satisfaction that the disciples took in the sight of Christ's glory. Peter, as usual, spoke for the rest; *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. Peter here expresses,

1. The delight they had in this converse; *Lord, it is good to be here*. Though upon a high mountain, which we may suppose rough and unpleasant, bleak and cold, yet *it is good to be here*. He speaks the sense of his fellow-disciples; It is good not only for *me*, but for *us*. He did not covet to monopolize this favour, but gladly takes them in. He saith this to Christ. Pious and devout affections love to pour out themselves before the Lord Jesus. The soul that loves Christ, and loves to be with him, loves to go and tell him so; *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. This intimates a thankful acknowledgment of his kindness in admitting them to this favour. Note, Communion with Christ is the delight of Christians. All the disciples of the Lord Jesus reckon it is good for them to be with him in the holy mount. It is good to be here where Christ is, and whither he brings us along with him by his appointment; it is good to be here, retired and alone with Christ; to be here, where we may behold the beauty of the Lord Jesus, ^{<1274>}Psalm 27:4. It is pleasant to hear Christ compare notes with Moses and the prophets, to see how all the institutions of the law, and all the predictions of the prophets, pointed at Christ, and were fulfilled in him.

2. The desire they had of the continuance of it; *Let us make here three tabernacles*. There was in this, as in many other of Peter's sayings, a mixture of weakness and of goodwill, more zeal than discretion.

(1.) Here was a zeal for this converse with heavenly things, a laudable complacency in the sight they had of Christ's glory. Note, Those that by faith *behold the beauty of the Lord* in his house, cannot but desire to *dwell there all the days of their life*. It is good having a nail in God's holy place (^{<1008>}Ezra 9:8), a constant abode; to be in holy ordinances as a man at home, not as a wayfaring man. Peter thought this mountain was a fine spot of

ground to build upon, and he was for making tabernacles there; as Moses in the wilderness made a tabernacle for the Shechinah, or divine glory.

It argued great respect for his Master and the heavenly guests, with some commendable forgetfulness of himself and his fellow-disciples, that he would have tabernacles for Christ, and Moses, and Elias, but none for himself. He would be content to lie in the open air, on the cold ground, in such good company; if his Master have but where to lay his head, no matter whether he himself has or no.

(2.) Yet in this zeal he betrayed a great deal of weakness and ignorance. What need had Moses and Elias of tabernacles? They belonged to that blessed world, *where they hunger no more, nor doth the sun light upon them*. Christ had lately foretold his sufferings, and bidden his disciples expect the like; Peter forgets this, or, to prevent it, will needs be building tabernacles in the mount of glory, out of the way of trouble. Still he harps upon, *Master, spare thyself*, though he had been so lately checked for it. Note, There is a proneness in good men to expect the crown without the cross. Peter was for laying hold of this as the prize, though he had not yet fought his fight, nor finished his course, as those other disciples, <112>Matthew 20:21. We are out in our aim, if we look for a heaven here upon earth. It is not for strangers and pilgrims (such as we are in our best circumstances in this world), to talk of building, or to expect a continuing city.

Yet it is some excuse for the incongruity of Peter's proposal, not only that *he knew not what he said* (<113>Luke 9:33), but also that he submitted the proposal to the wisdom of Christ; *If thou wilt, let us make tabernacles*. Note, Whatever tabernacles we propose to make to ourselves in this world, we must always remember to ask Christ's leave.

Now to this which Peter said, there was no reply made; the disappearing of the glory would soon answer it. They that promise themselves great things on earth will soon be undeceived by their own experience.

V. The glorious testimony which God the Father gave to our Lord Jesus, in which *he received from him honour and glory* (<117>2 Peter 1:17), when *there came this voice from the excellent glory*. This was like proclaiming the titles of honour or the royal style of a prince, when, at his coronation, he appears in his robes of state; and be it known, to the comfort of mankind, the royal style of Christ is taken from his mediation. Thus, in

vision, he appeared with a rainbow, the seal of the covenant, about his throne (^{<6613>}Revelation 4:3); for it is his glory to be our Redeemer.

Now concerning this testimony from heaven to Christ, observe.

1. How it came, and in what manner it was introduced.

(1.) There was a cloud. We find often in the Old Testament, that a cloud was the visible token of God's presence; he came down upon mount Sinai in a cloud (^{<294>}Exodus 19:9), and so to Moses, ^{<2945>}Exodus 34:5; ^{<4125>}Numbers 11:25. He took possession of the tabernacle in a cloud, and afterwards of the temple; where Christ was in his glory, the temple was, and there God showed himself present. We know not the balancing of the clouds, but we know that much of the intercourse and communication between heaven and earth is maintained by them. By the clouds vapours ascend, and rains descend; therefore God is said to make *the clouds his chariots*; so he did here when he descended upon this mount.

(2.) It was a bright cloud. Under the law it was commonly a thick and dark cloud that God made the token of his presence; he came down upon mount Sinai in a thick cloud (^{<296>}Exodus 19:16), and said he would *dwell in thick darkness*; see ^{<1182>}1 Kings 8:12. But *we are now come, not to the mount that was covered with thick blackness and darkness* (^{<328>}Hebrews 12:18), but to the mount that is crowned with a bright cloud. Both the Old-Testament and the New-Testament dispensation had tokens of God's presence; but that was a dispensation of darkness, and terror, and bondage, this of light, love, and liberty.

(3.) It overshadowed them. This cloud was intended to break the force of that great light which otherwise would have overcome the disciples, and have been intolerable; it was like the veil which Moses put upon his face when it shone. God, in manifesting himself to his people, considers their frame. This cloud was to their eyes as parables to their understandings, to convey spiritual things by things sensible, as they were able to bear them.

(4.) *There came a voice out of the cloud*, and it was the voice of God, who now, as of old, *spake in the cloudy pillar*, ^{<1917>}Psalms 99:7. Here was no thunder, or lightning, or voice of a trumpet, as there was when the law was given by Moses, but only a voice, a still small voice, and that not ushered in with a strong wind, or an earthquake, or fire, as when God spake to Elias, ^{<1111>}1 Kings 19:11, 12. Moses then and Elias were witnesses, that *in*

these last days God hath spoken to us by his Son, in another way than he spoke formerly to them. This voice came from the excellent glory (¶2 Peter 1:17), the glory which excelleth, in comparison of which the former had no glory; though the excellent glory was clouded, yet thence came a voice, for faith comes by hearing.

2. What this testimony from heaven was; *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.* Here we have,

(1.) The great gospel mystery revealed; *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* This was the very same that was spoken from heaven at his baptism (¶Matthew 3:17); and it was the best news that ever came from heaven to earth since man sinned. It is to the same purport with that great doctrine (¶2 Corinthians 5:19), *That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.* Moses and Elias were great men, and favourites of Heaven, yet they were but servants, and servants that God was not always well pleased in; for Moses spoke unadvisedly, and Elias was a man subject to passions; but Christ is *a Son*, and in him God was always well pleased. Moses and Elias were sometimes instruments of reconciliation between God and Israel; Moses was a great intercessor, and Elias a great reformer; but in Christ God is reconciling the world; his intercession is more prevalent than that of Moses, and his reformation more effectual than that of Elias.

This repetition of the same voice that came from heaven at his baptism was no vain repetition; but, like the doubling of Pharaoh's dream, was to show the thing was established. What God hath thus spoken once, yea twice, no doubt he will stand to, and he expects we should take notice of it. It was spoken at his baptism, because then he was entering upon his temptation, and his public ministry; and now it was repeated, because he was entering upon his sufferings, which are to be dated from hence; for now, and not before, he began to foretel them, and immediately after his transfiguration it is said (¶Luke 9:51), that *the time was come that he should be received up*; this therefore was then repeated, to arm him against the terror, and his disciples against the offence, of the cross. When sufferings begin to abound, consolations are given in more abundantly, ¶2 Corinthians 1:5.

(2.) The great gospel duty required, and it is the condition of our benefit by Christ; *Hear ye him.* God is well pleased with none in Christ but those that hear him. It is not enough to give him the hearing (what will that avail us?)

but we must hear him and believe him, as the great Prophet and Teacher; hear him, and be ruled by him, as the great Prince and Lawgiver; hear him, and heed him. Whoever would know the mind of God, must hearken to Jesus Christ; for by him God has in these last days spoken to us. This voice from heaven has made all the sayings of Christ as authentic as if they had been thus spoken out of a cloud. God does here, as it were, turn us over to Christ for all the revelations of his mind; and it refers to that prediction concerning *the Prophet God would raise up like unto Moses* (~~Deuteronomy~~ Deuteronomy 18:18); *him shall ye hear.*

Christ now appeared in glory; and the more we see of Christ's glory, the more cause we shall see to hearken to him: but the disciples were gazing on that glory of his which they saw; they are therefore bid not to look at him, but to hear him. Their sight of his glory was soon intercepted by the cloud, but their business was to hear him. We walk *by faith, which comes by hearing, not by sight,* ~~2~~ 2 Corinthians 5:7.

Moses and Elias were now with him; the law and the prophets; hitherto it was said, *Hear them,* ~~Luke~~ Luke 16:29. The disciples were ready to equal them with Christ, when they must have tabernacles for them as well as for him. They had been talking with Christ, and probably the disciples were very desirous to know what they said, and to hear something more from them; No, saith God, *hear him,* and that is enough; him, and not Moses and Elias, who were present, and whose silence gave consent to this voice; they had nothing to say to the contrary; whatever interest they had in the world as prophets, they were willing to see it all transferred to Christ, that in *all things he might have the pre-eminence.* Be not troubled that Moses and Elias make so short a stay with you; hear Christ, and you will not want them.

IV. The fright which the disciples were put into by this voice, and the encouragement Christ gave them.

1. The disciples *fell on their faces, and were sore afraid.* The greatness of the light, and the surprise of it, might have a natural influence upon them, to dispirit them. But that was not all, ever since man sinned, and heard God's voice in the garden, extraordinary appearances of God have ever been terrible to man, who, knowing he has no reason to expect any good, has been afraid to hear any thing immediately from God. Note, even then when *fair weather comes out of the secret place, yet with God is terrible*

majesty, ^{<8372>}Job 37:22. See what dreadful work *the voice of the Lord makes*, ^{<1294>}Psalms 29:4. It is well for us that God speaks to us by men like ourselves, whose terror shall not make us afraid.

2. Christ graciously raised them up with abundance of tenderness. Note, The glories and advancements of our Lord Jesus do not at all lessen his regard to, and concern for, his people that are compassed about with infirmity. It is comfortable to think, that now, in his exalted state, he has a compassion for, and condescends to, the meanest true believer. Observe here,

(1.) What he did; *he came, and touched them*. His approaches banished their fears; and when they apprehended that they were apprehended of Christ, there needed no more to make them easy. Christ laid his right hand upon John is a like case, and upon Daniel, ^{<617>}Revelation 1:17; ^{<788>}Daniel 8:18; 10:18. Christ's touches were often healing, and here they were strengthening and comforting.

(2.) What he said; *Arise, and be not afraid*. Note, Though a fear of reverence in our converse with Heaven is pleasing to Christ, yet a fear of amazement is not so, but must be striven against. Christ said, *Arise*. Note, It is Christ by his word, and the power of his grace going along with it, that raises up good men from their dejections, and silences their fears; and none but Christ can do it; *Arise, be not afraid*. Note, causeless fears would soon vanish, if we would not yield to them, and lie down under them, but get up, and do what we can against them. considering what they had seen and heard, they had more reason to rejoice than to fear, and yet, it seems, they needed this caution. Note, Through the infirmity of the flesh, we often frighten ourselves with that wherewith we should encourage ourselves. Observe, After they had an express command from heaven to hear Christ, the first word they had from him was, *Be not afraid*, hear that. Note, Christ's errand into the world was to give comfort to good people, that, being delivered out of the hands of their enemies, they might *serve God without fear*, ^{<6174>}Luke 1:74, 75.

VII. The disappearing of the vision (v. 8); *They lift up themselves, and then lift up their eyes, and saw no man, save Jesus only*. Moses and Elias were gone, the rays of Christ's glory were laid aside, or veiled again. They hoped this had been the day of Christ's entrance into his kingdom, and his public appearance in that external splendour which they dreamed of; but

see how they are disappointed. Note, It is not wisdom to raise our expectations high in this world, for the most valuable of our glories and joys here are vanishing, even those of near communion with God are so, not a continual feast, but a running banquet. If sometimes we are favoured with special manifestations of divine grace, glimpses and pledges of future glory, yet they are withdrawn presently; two heavens are too much for those to expect that never deserve one. Now *they saw no man, save Jesus only*. Note, Christ will tarry with us when Moses and Elias are gone. The *prophets do not live for ever* (^{<3015>}Zechariah 1:5), and we see the period of our ministers' conversation; but *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*, ^{<3817>}Hebrews 13:7, 8.

VIII. The discourse between Christ and his disciples as they came down from the mountain, v. 9-13.

Observe,

1. *They came down from the mountain.* Note, We must come down from the holy mountains, where we have communion with God, and complacency in that communion, and of which we are saying. *It is good to be here*; even there we have no continuing city. Blessed be God, there is a mountain of glory and joy before us, whence we shall never come down. But observe, When the disciples came down, Jesus came with them. Note, When we return to the world again after an ordinance, it must be our care to take Christ with us, and then it may be our comfort that he is with us.

2. As they came down, they talked of Christ. Note, When we are returning from holy ordinance, it is good to entertain ourselves and one another with discourse suitable to the work we have been about. That communication which is good to the use of edifying is then in a special manner seasonable; as, on the contrary, that which is corrupt, is worse then than at another time.

Here is,

(1.) The charge that Christ gave the disciples to keep the vision very private for the present (v. 9); *Tell it to no man till the Son of man is risen*. If they had proclaimed it, the credibility of it would have been shocked by his sufferings, which were now hastening on. But let the publication of it be adjourned till after his resurrection, and then that and his subsequent glory will be a great confirmation of it. Note, Christ observed a method in

the manifestation of himself; he would have his works put together, mutually to explain and illustrate each other, that they might appear in their full strength and convincing evidence. Every thing is beautiful in its season. Christ's resurrection was properly the beginning of the gospel state and kingdom, to which all before was but preparatory and by way of preface; and therefore, though this was transacted before, it must not be produced as evidence till then (and then it appears to have been much insisted on by ^{<4016>}2 Peter 1:16-18), when the religion it was designed for the confirmation of was brought to its full consistence and maturity. Christ's time is the best and fittest for the manifesting of himself and must be attended to by us.

(2.) An objection which the disciples made against something Christ had said (v. 10); “*Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? If Elias make so short a stay, and is gone so suddenly, and we must say nothing of him; why have we been taught out of the law to expect his public appearance in the world immediately before the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom? Must the coming of Elias be a secret, which every body looks for?*” or thus; “*If the resurrection of the Messiah, and with it the beginning of his kingdom, be at hand, what becomes of that glorious preface and introduction to it, which we expect in the coming of Elias?*” The scribes, who were the public expositors of the law, said this according to the scripture (^{<3015>}Malachi 4:5); *Behold I send you Elijah the prophet.* The disciples spoke the common language of the Jews, who made that the saying of the scribes which was the saying of the scripture, whereas of that which ministers speak to us according to the word of God, we should say, “*God speaks to us, not the ministers;*” for we must not receive it *as the word of men*, ^{<5123>}1 Thessalonians 2:13. Observe, When the disciples could not reconcile what Christ said with what they had heard out of the Old Testament, they desired him to explain it to them. Note, When we are puzzled with scripture difficulties, we must apply ourselves to Christ by prayer for his Spirit to open our understandings and to lead us into all truth.

(3.) The solving of this objection. *Ask, and it shall be given, ask instruction, and it shall be given.*

[1.] Christ allows the prediction (v. 11); “*Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things;* so far you are in the right.” Christ did not come to alter or invalidate any thing foretold in the Old Testament. Note, Corrupt and

mistaken glosses may be sufficiently rejected and exploded, without diminishing or derogating from the authority or dignity of the sacred text. New-Testament prophecies are true and good, and are to be received and improved, though some hot foolish men may have misinterpreted them and drawn wrong inferences from them. He shall come, and restore all things; not restore them to their former state (John Baptist went not about to do that), but he shall accomplish all things (so it may be read), all things that were written of him, all the predictions of the coming of Elias. John Baptist came to restore things spiritually, to revive the decays of religion, to *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*; which means the same with this, *he shall restore all things*. John preached repentance, and that restores all things.

[2.] He asserts the accomplishment. The scribes say true, that *Elias is come*, v. 12. Note, God's promises are often fulfilled, and men perceive it not, but enquire, *Where is the promise?* when it is already performed. *Elias is come, and they knew him not*; they knew him not to be the Elias promised, the forerunner of the Messiah. The scribes busied themselves in criticizing upon the scripture, but understood not by the signs of the times the fulfilling of the scripture. Note, It is easier to explain the word of God than to apply it and make a right use of it. But it is no wonder that the morning star was not observed, when he who is the Sun itself, was *in the world, and the world knew him not*.

Because they knew him not, *they have done to him whatsoever they listed*; if they had known, they would not have crucified Christ, or beheaded John, ~~418~~ 1 Corinthians 2:8. They ridiculed John, persecuted him, and at last put him to death; which was Herod's doing, but is here charged upon the whole generation of unbelieving Jews, and particularly the scribes, who, though they could not prosecute John themselves, were pleased with what Herod did. He adds, *Likewise also shall the Son of man suffer of them*. Marvel not that Elias should be abused and killed by those who pretended, with a great deal of reverence, to expect him, when the Messiah himself will be in like manner treated. Note, The sufferings of Christ took off the strangeness of all other sufferings (~~419~~ John 15:18); when they had imbrued their hands in the blood of John Baptist, they were ready to do the like to Christ. Note, As men deal with Christ's servants, so they would deal with him himself; and they that are drunk with the blood of the martyrs still cry, *Give, give,* ~~420~~ Acts 12:1-3.

(4.) The disciples' satisfaction in Christ's reply to their objection (v. 13); *They understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist*. He did not name John, but gives them such a description of him as would put them in mind of what he had said to them formerly concerning him; *This is Elias*. This is a profitable way of teaching; it engages the learners' own thoughts, and makes them, if not their own teachers, yet their own remembrancers; and thus knowledge becomes easy to him that understands. When we diligently use the means of knowledge, how strangely are mists scattered and mistakes rectified!

474 MATTHEW 17:14-21

THE EXPULSION OF A DEMON

We have here the miraculous cure of a child that was lunatic and vexed with a devil. Observe,

I. A melancholy representation of the case of this child, made to Christ by the afflicted father. This was immediately upon his coming down from the mountain where he was transfigured. Note, Christ's glories do not make him unmindful of us and of our wants and miseries. Christ, when he came down from the mount, where had conversation with Moses and Elias, did not take state upon him, but was as easy of access, as ready to poor beggars, and as familiar with the multitude, as ever he used to be. This poor man's address was very importunate; he came kneeling to Christ. Note, Sense of misery will bring people to their knees. Those who see their need of Christ will be earnest, will be in good earnest, in their applications to him; and he delights to be thus wrestled with.

Two things the father of the child complains of.

1. The distress of his child (v. 15); *Lord have mercy on my son*. The affliction of the children cannot but affect the tender parents, for they are pieces of themselves. And the case of afflicted children should be presented to God by faithful and fervent prayer. This child's distemper, probably, disabled him to pray for himself. Note, Parents are doubly concerned to pray for their children, not only that are weak and cannot, but much more that are wicked and will not, pray for themselves. Now,

(1.) The nature of this child's disease was very sad; *He was lunatic and sore vexed*. A lunatic is properly one whose distemper lies in the brain, and returns with the change of the moon. The devil, by the divine permission, either caused this distemper, or at least concurred with it, to heighten and aggravate it. The child had the falling-sickness, and the hand of Satan was in it; by it he tormented then, and made it much more grievous than ordinarily it is. Those whom Satan got possession of, he afflicted by those diseases of the body which do most affect the mind; for it is the soul that he aims to do mischief to. The father, in his complain, saith, *He is lunatic*, taking notice of the effect; but Christ, in the cure, rebuked the devil, and so struck at the cause. Thus he doth in spiritual cures.

(2.) The effects of the disease were very deplorable; *He oft falls into the fire, and into the water*. If the force of the disease made him to fall, the malice of the devil made him to fall into the fire or water; so mischievous is he where he gains possession and power in any soul. He *seeks to devour*, ⁴⁰⁸1 Peter 5:8.

2. The disappointment of his expectation from the disciples (v. 16); *I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cured him*. Christ gave his disciples power to cast out devils (⁴⁰⁹Matthew 10:1, 8), and therein they were successful (⁴¹⁰Luke 10:17); yet at this time they failed in the operation, though there were nine of them together, and before a great multitude. Christ permitted this,

(1.) To keep them humble, and to show their dependence upon him, that without him they could do nothing.

(2.) To glorify himself and his own power. It is for the honour of Christ to come in with help at a dead-lift, when other helpers cannot help. Elisha's staff in Gehazi's hand will not raise the child: he must come himself. Note, There are some special favours which Christ reserves the bestowment of to himself; and sometimes he keeps the cistern empty; that he may bring us to himself, the Fountain. But the failures of instruments shall not hinder the operations of his grace, which will work, if not *by* them, yet *without* them.

II. The rebukes that Christ gave to the people first, and then to the devil.

1. He chid those about him (v. 17); *O faithless and perverse generation!* This is not spoken to the disciples, but to the people, and perhaps especially to the scribes, who are mentioned in ~~494~~ Mark 9:14, and who, as it should seem, insulted over the disciples, because they had now met with a case that was too hard for them. Christ himself could not do many mighty works among a people in whom unbelief reigned. It was here owing to the faithlessness of this generation, that they could not obtain those blessings from God, which otherwise they might have had; as it was owing to the weakness of the disciples' faith, that they could not do those works for God, which otherwise they might have done. They were faithless and perverse. Note, Those that are faithless will be perverse; and perverseness is sin in its worst colours. Faith is compliance with God, unbelief is opposition and contradiction to God. Israel of old was perverse, because faithless (~~389~~ Psalm 95:9), forward, for in them is no faith, ~~520~~ Deuteronomy 32:20.

Two things he upbraids them with.

(1.) His presence with them so long; *“How long shall I be with you? Will you always need my bodily presence, and never come to such maturity as to be fit to be left, the people to the conduct of the disciples, and the disciples to the conduct of the Spirit and of their commission? Must the child be always carried, and will it never learn to go alone?”*

(2.) His patience with them so long; *How long shall I suffer you?* Note,

[1.] The faithlessness and perverseness of those who enjoy the means of grace are a great grief to the Lord Jesus. Thus did he suffer the manners of Israel of old, ~~443~~ Acts 13:18.

[2.] The longer Christ has borne with a perverse and faithless people, the more he is displeased with their perverseness and unbelief; and he is God, and not man, else he would not suffer so long, nor bear so much, as he doth.

2. He cured the child, and set him to-rights again. He called, *Bring him hither to me.* Though the people were perverse, and Christ was provoked, yet care was taken of the child. Note, Though Christ may be angry, he is never unkind, nor doth he, in the greatest of his displeasure, shut up the bowels of his compassion from the miserable; *Bring him to me.* Note,

When all other helps and succours fail, we are welcome to Christ, and may be confident in him and in his power and goodness.

See here an emblem of Christ's undertaking as our Redeemer.

(1.) He breaks the power of Satan (v. 18); *Jesus rebuked the devil*, as one having authority, who could back with force his word of command. Note, Christ's victories over Satan are obtained by the power of his word, the sword that comes out of his mouth, ^{<ref>Revelation 19:21}. Satan cannot stand before the rebukes of Christ, though his possession has been ever so long. It is comfortable to those who are wrestling with principalities and powers, that Christ hath spoiled them, ^{<ref>Colossians 2:15}. The lion of the tribe of Judah will be too hard for the roaring lion that seeks to devour.

(2.) He redresses the grievances of the children of men; *The child was cured from that very hour*. It was an immediate cure, and a perfect one. This is an encouragement to parents to bring their children to Christ, whose souls are under Satan's power; he is able to heal them, and as willing as he is able. Not only bring them to Christ by prayer, but bring them to the word of Christ, the ordinary means by which Satan's strongholds are demolished in the soul. Christ's rebukes, brought home to the heart, will ruin Satan's power there.

III. Christ's discourse with his disciples hereupon.

1. They ask the reason why they could not cast out the devil at this time (v. 19); *They came to Jesus apart*. Note, Ministers, who are to deal for Christ in public, have need to keep up a private communion with him, that they may in secret, where no eye sees, bewail their weakness and straitness, their follies and infirmities, in their public performances, and enquire into the cause of them. We should make use of the liberty of access we have to Jesus apart, where we may be free and particular with him. Such questions as the disciples put to Christ, we should put to ourselves, in communing with our own hearts upon our beds; Why were we so dull and careless at such a time? Why came we so much short in such a duty? That which is amiss may, when found out, be amended.

2. Christ gives them two reasons why they failed.

(1.) It was *because of their unbelief*, v. 20. When he spake to the father of the child and to the people, he charged it upon their unbelief; when he spake to his disciples, he charged it upon theirs; for the truth was, there

were faults on both sides; but we are more concerned to hear of our own faults than of other people's, and to impute what is amiss to ourselves than to others. When the preaching of the word seems not to be so successful as sometimes it has been, the people are apt to lay all the fault upon the ministers, and the ministers upon the people; whereas, it is more becoming for each to own his own faultiness, and to say, "It is owing to me." Ministers, in reproving, must learn thus to give to each his portion of the word; and to take people off from judging others, by teaching all to judge themselves; *It is because of your unbelief*. Though they had faith, yet that faith was weak and ineffectual. Note,

[1.] As far as faith falls short of its due strength, vigour, and activity, it may truly be said, "There is unbelief." Many are chargeable with unbelief, who yet are not to be called *unbelievers*.

[2.] It is because of our unbelief, that we bring so little to pass in religion, and so often miscarry, and come short, in that which is good.

Our Lord Jesus takes this occasion to show them the power of faith, that they might not be defective in that, another time, as they were now; *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall do wonders*, v. 20. Some make the comparison to refer to the quality of the mustard-seed, which is, when bruised, sharp and penetrating; "If you have an active growing faith, not dead, flat, or insipid, you will not be baffled thus." But it rather refers to the quantity; "If you had but a grain of true faith, though so little that it were like that which is the least of all seeds, you would do wonders." Faith in general is a firm assent to, a compliance with, and a confidence in, all divine revelation. The faith here required, is that which had for its object that particular revelation by which Christ gave his disciples power to work miracles in his name, for the confirmation of the doctrine they preached. It was a faith in this revelation that they were defective in; either doubting the validity of their commission, or fearing that it expired with their first mission, and was not to continue when they were returning to their Master; or that it was some way or other forfeited or withdrawn. Perhaps their Master's absence with the three chief of his disciples, with a charge to the rest not to follow them, might occasion some doubts concerning their power, or rather the power of the Lord with them, to do this; however, there were not, at present, such a strong actual dependence upon, and confidence in, the promise of Christ's presence with them, as there should have been. It is good for us to be diffident of ourselves and of our own

strength; but it is displeasing to Christ, when we distrust any power derived from him or granted by him.

If ye have ever so little of this faith in sincerity, if ye truly rely upon the powers committed to you, *ye shall say to this mountain, Remove*. This is a proverbial expression, denoting that which follows, and no more, *Nothing shall be impossible to you*. They had a full commission, among other things, to cast out devils without exception; but, this devil being more than ordinarily malicious and inveterate, they distrusted the power they had received, and so failed. To convince them of this, Christ shows them what they might have done. Note, An active faith can remove mountains, not of itself, but in the virtue of a divine power engaged by a divine promise, both which faith fastens upon.

(2.) Because there was something in the kind of the malady, which rendered the cure more than ordinarily difficult (v. 21); “*This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting*. This possession, which works by a falling-sickness, or this kind of devils that are thus furious, is not cast out ordinarily but by great acts of devotion, and wherein ye were defective.”

Note,

[1.] Though the adversaries we wrestle, be all principalities and powers, yet some are stronger than others, and their power more hardly broken.

[2.] The extraordinary power of Satan must not discourage our faith, but quicken us to a greater intenseness in the acting of it, and more earnestness in praying to God for the increase of it; so some understand it here; “This kind of faith (which removeth mountains) doth not proceed, is not obtained, from God, nor is it carried up to its full growth, nor drawn out into act and exercise, but by earnest prayer.”

[3.] Fasting and prayer are proper means for the bringing down of Satan's power against us, and the fetching in of divine power to our assistance. Fasting is of use to put an edge upon prayer; it is an evidence and instance of humiliation which is necessary in prayer, and is a means of mortifying some corrupt habits, and of disposing the body to serve the soul in prayer. When the devil's interest in the soul is confirmed by the temper and constitution of the body, fasting must be joined with prayer, to keep under the body.

⌘ MATTHEW 17:22-23

CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS FORETOLD

Christ here foretels his own sufferings; he began to do it before (⌘ Matthew 16:21); and, finding that it was to his disciples a hard saying, he saw it necessary to repeat it. There are some things which *God speaketh once, yea twice, and yet man perceiveth it not*. Observe here,

1. What he foretold concerning himself — that he should be betrayed and killed. He perfectly knew, before, all things that should come to him, and yet undertook the work of our redemption, which greatly commends his love; nay, his clear foresight of them was a kind of ante-passion, had not his love to man made all easy to him.

(1.) He tells them that he should *be betrayed into the hands of men*. He *shall be delivered up* (so it might be read and understood of his Father's delivering him up *by his determined counsel and fore-knowledge*, ⌘ Acts 2:23; ⌘ Romans 8:32); but as we render it, it refers to Judas's betraying him into the hands of the priests, and their betraying him into the hands of the Romans. He was *betrayed into the hands of men*; men to whom he was allied by nature, and from whom therefore he might expect pity and tenderness; men whom he had undertaken to save, and from whom therefore he might expect honour and gratitude; yet these are his persecutors and murderers.

(2.) That *they should kill him*; nothing less than that would satisfy their rage; it was his blood, his precious blood, that they thirsted after. *This is the heir, come, let us kill him*. Nothing less would satisfy God's justice, and answer his undertaking; if he be a Sacrifice of atonement, he must be killed; without blood no remission.

(3.) That *he shall be raised again the third day*. Still, when he spoke of his death, he gave a hint of his resurrection, *the joy set before him*, in the prospect of which *he endured the cross, and despised the shame*. This was an encouragement, not only to him, but to his disciples; for if he rise the third day, his absence from them will not be long, and his return to them will be glorious.

2. How the disciples received this; *They were exceedingly sorry*. Herein appeared their love to their Master's person, but with all their ignorance and mistake concerning his undertaking. Peter indeed durst not say any thing against it, as he had done before (^{<0162>}Matthew 16:22), having then been severely chidden for it; but he, and the rest of them, greatly lamented it, as it would be their own loss, their Master's grief, and the sin and ruin of them that did it.

^{<0172>}MATTHEW 17:24-27

OUR LORD'S PAYMENT OF TRIBUTE

We have here an account of Christ's paying tribute.

I. Observe how it was demanded, v. 24. Christ was now at Capernaum, his headquarters, where he mostly resided; he did not keep from thence, to decline being called upon for his dues, but rather came thither, to be ready to pay them.

1. The tribute demanded was not any civil payment to the Roman powers, that was strictly exacted by the publicans, but the church-duties, the half shekel, about fifteen pence, which were required from every person or the service of the temple, and the defraying of the expenses of the worship there; it is called *a ransom for the soul*, ^{<0312>}Exodus 30:12, etc. This was not so strictly exacted now as sometimes it had been, especially not in Galilee.

2. The demand was very modest; the collectors stood in such awe of Christ, because of his mighty works, that they durst not speak to him about it, but applied themselves to Peter, whose house was in Capernaum, and probably in his house Christ lodged; he therefore was fittest to be spoken to as the housekeeper, and they presumed he knew his Master's mind. Their question is, *Doth not your master pay tribute?* Some think that they sought an occasion against him, designing, if he refused, to represent him as disaffected to the temple-service, and his followers as lawless people, that would pay *neither toll, tribute, nor custom*, ^{<0313>}Ezra 4:13. It should rather seem, they asked this with respect, intimating, that if he had any privilege to exempt him from this payment, they would not insist upon it.

Peter presently his word for his Master; “*Yes, certainly; my Master pays tribute; it is his principle and practice; you need not fear moving it to him.*”

(1.) *He was made under the law* (^{<4004>}Galatians 4:4); therefore under this law he was paid for at forty days old (^{<4022>}Luke 2:22), and now he paid for himself, as one who, in his state of humiliation, *had taken upon him the form of a servant,* ^{<4007>}Philippians 2:7, 8.

(2.) *He was made sin for us, and was sent forth in the likeness of sinful flesh,* ^{<4008>}Romans 8:3. Now this tax paid to the temple is called *an atonement for the soul,* ^{<4015>}Exodus 30:15. Christ, that in every thing he might appear *in the likeness of sinners,* paid it though he had no sin to atone for.

(3.) *Thus it became him to fulfil all righteousness,* ^{<4015>}Matthew 3:15. He did this to set an example,

[1.] *Of rendering to all their due, tribute to whom tribute is due,* ^{<4013>}Romans 13:7. The kingdom of Christ not being of this world, the favourites and officers of it are so far from having a power granted them, as such, to tax other people's purses, that theirs are made liable to the powers that are.

[2.] *Of contributing to the support of the public worship of God in the places where we are. If we reap spiritual things, it is fit that we should return carnal things. The temple was now made a den of thieves, and the temple-worship a pretence for the opposition which the chief priests gave to Christ and his doctrine; and yet Christ paid this tribute. Note, Church-duties, legally imposed, are to be paid, notwithstanding church-corruptions. We must take care not to use our liberty as a cloak of covetousness or maliciousness,* ^{<4016>}1 Peter 2:16. If Christ pay tribute, who can pretend an exemption?

II. How it was disputed (v. 25), not with the collectors themselves, lest they should be irritated, but with Peter, that he might be satisfied in the reason why Christ paid tribute, and might not mistake about it. He brought the collectors into the house; but Christ anticipated him, to give him a proof of his omniscience, and that no thought can be withholden from him. The disciples of Christ are never attacked without his knowledge.

Now,

1. He appeals to the way of the kings of the earth, which is, to take tribute of strangers, of the subjects of their kingdom, or foreigners that deal with them, but not of their own children that are of their families; there is such a community of goods between parents and children, and a joint-interest in what they have, that it would be absurd for the parents to levy taxes upon the children, or demand any thing from them; it is like one hand taxing the other.

2. He applies this to himself; *Then are the children free.* Christ is the Son of God, and Heir of all things; the temple is his temple (^{<308E>}Malachi 3:1), his Father's house (^{<406E>}John 2:16), in it *he is faithful as a Son in his own house* (^{<308E>}Hebrews 3:6), and therefore not obliged to pay this tax for the service of the temple. Thus Christ asserts his right, lest his paying this tribute should be misimproved to the weakening of his title as the Son of God, and the King of Israel, and should have looked like a disowning of it himself. These immunities of the children are to be extended no further than our Lord Jesus himself. God's children are freed by grace and adoption from the slavery of sin and Satan, but not from their subjection to civil magistrates in civil things; here the law of Christ is express; *Let every soul* (sanctified souls not excepted) *be subject to the higher powers. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*

III. How it was paid, notwithstanding, v. 27.

1. For what reason Christ waived his privilege, and paid this tribute, though he was entitled to an exemption — *Lest we should offend them.* Few knew, as Peter did, that he was *the Son of God*; and it would have been a diminution to the honour of that great truth, which was yet a secret, to advance it now, to serve such a purpose as this. Therefore Christ drops that argument, and considers, that if he should refuse this payment, it would increase people's prejudice against him and his doctrine, and alienate their affections from him, and therefore he resolves to pay it. Note, Christian prudence and humility teach us, in many cases, to recede from our right, rather than give offence by insisting upon it. We must never decline our duty for fear of giving offence (Christ's preaching and miracles offended them, yet he went on with him, ^{<405D>}Matthew 15:12, 13, better offend men than God); but we must sometimes deny ourselves in that which is our secular interest, rather than give offence; as Paul, ^{<408B>}1 Corinthians 8:13; ^{<404B>}Romans 14:13.

2. What course he took for the payment of this tax; he furnished himself with money for it out of the mouth of a fish (v. 27), wherein appears,

(1.) The poverty of Christ; he had not fifteen pence at command to pay his tax with, though he cured so many that were diseased; it seems, he did all gratis; *for our sakes he became poor*, ^{<408B>}2 Corinthians 8:9. In his ordinary expenses, he lived upon alms (^{<408B>}Luke 8:3), and in extraordinary ones, he lived upon miracles. He did not order Judas to pay this out of the bag which he carried; that was for subsistence, and he would not order that for his particular use, which was intended for the benefit of the community.

(2.) The power of Christ, in fetching money out of a fish's mouth for this purpose. Whether his omnipotence put it there, or his omniscience knew that it was there, it comes all to one; it was an evidence of his divinity, and that he is Lord of hosts. Those creatures that are most remote from man are at the command of Christ, even the fishes of the sea are under his feet (^{<408B>}Psalm 8:5); and to evidence his dominion in this lower world, and to accommodate himself to his present state of humiliation, he chose to take it out of a fish's mouth, when he could have taken it out of an angel's hand. Now observe,

[1.] Peter must catch the fish by angling. Even in miracles he would use means to encourage industry and endeavour. Peter has something to do, and it is in the way of his own calling too; to teach us diligence in the employment we are called *to*, and called *in*. Do we expect that Christ should give to us? Let us be ready to work for him.

[2.] The fish came up, with money in the mouth of it, which represents to us the reward of obedience in obedience. What work we do at Christ's command brings its own pay along with it: *In keeping God's commands, as well as after keeping them, there is great reward*, ^{<408B>}Psalm 19:11. Peter was made a fisher of men, and those that he caught thus, came up; where the heart is opened to entertain Christ's word, the hand is open to encourage his ministers.

[3.] The piece of money was just enough to pay the tax for Christ and Peter. Thou shalt find *a stater*, the value of a Jewish shekel, which would pay the poll-tax for two, for it was half a shekel, ^{<408B>}Exodus 30:13. Christ could as easily have commanded a bag of money as a piece of money; but he would teach us not to covet superfluities, but, having enough for our present occasions, therewith to be content, and not to distrust God, though

we live but from hand to mouth. Christ made the fish his cash-keeper; and why may not we make God's providence our storehouse and treasury? If we have a competency for today, *let to-morrow take thought for the things of itself*. Christ paid for himself and Peter, because it is probable that here *he* only was assessed, and of him it was at this time demanded; perhaps the rest had paid already, or were to pay elsewhere. The papists make a great mystery of Christ's paying for Peter, as if this made him the head and representative of the whole church; whereas the payment of tribute for him was rather a sign of subjection than of superiority. His pretended successors pay no tribute, but exact it. Peter fished for this money, and therefore part of it went for his use. Those that are *workers together with Christ* in winning souls shall shine with him. *Give it for thee and me*. What Christ paid for himself was looked upon as a debt; what he paid for Peter was a courtesy to him. Note, it is a desirable thing, if God so please, to have wherewithal of this world's goods, not only to be just, but to be kind; not only to be charitable to the poor, but obliging to our friends. What is a great estate good for, but that it enables a man to do so much the more good?

Lastly, Observe, The evangelist records here the orders Christ gave to Peter, the warrant; the effect is not particularly mentioned, but taken for granted, and justly; for, with Christ, saying and doing are the same thing.