

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

It's difficult today to know what to do with your life. You may be graduating from high school but haven't a clue what you're going to do. Or you may have already graduated from college but the field you chose is not what you expected. Some people even have second thoughts about their career when they're well into their forties!

"What am I supposed to do with my life?" may be the most well worn question we could ask. Matthew helps us settle that question. The answer begins not with a what, but a who. If you want to know what to do with your life, the answer begins with knowing who Jesus is. I mean really knowing Him. The disciples thought they knew who Jesus was but found out quickly they did not have a clue! This chapter naturally follows from chapter sixteen and Peter's great confession about Jesus. As we work through Matthew seventeen, we'll follow this simple outline:

I. A Visible Display of Who Jesus Was (vv. 1-13)

II. A Valid Demonstration of What Jesus Wants (vv. 14-27)

I. A Visible Display of Who Jesus Was (vv. 1-13)

Within this chapter, there is quite a contrast. It begins on a mountain and ends at the sea. It starts with Jesus receiving honor and glory and sums up with Him paying taxes. Also notice that the first word of chapter seventeen is the word "and" (v. 1). This connects chapter seventeen with the last verse in chapter sixteen (v. 28). Jesus going to the mountain of transfiguration comes on the heels of Him revealing the cross. The cross leads to the crown. Suffering is the path to glory for the Son of God. This snapshot prefigures the coming kingdom of Christ, giving the disciples—and us—a preview of His future glory.

As we move through this section of chapter seventeen, there are *three distinct parts* we'll consider as the visible display of who Jesus really is appears before us.

First, let's take notice of the *Heavenly Vision* (vv. 1-2). There were three particular disciples Jesus chose to be His "inner circle"—Peter, James, and John (v. 1). All three were in the fishing business together. Jesus took all three into Jarius' home. All three would later be with Him in Gethsemane (cp. 26:37).

This seems to indicate that there are degrees of nearness to Jesus. Though He loves all His people equally, some are more responsive to His love than others. Know in the end, however, you can be as close to Jesus as you want to be (cp. James 4:8).

These men were taken by Jesus up on a high mountain. Some scholars believe the mountain to be Mount Hermon, a snow-capped ridge some 9,400 feet high. Matthew mentions that Jesus took the disciples "apart," that is, He took them privately. What a great picture of showing the need we all have to be alone with Jesus. We require times to be refreshed and being alone with Jesus is the perfect place for those spiritual refreshments. Later, Peter would recall this time with the Lord, referring to it as the "holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:18).

Though Matthew does not record it, Jesus used this time to pray (Luke 9:29). We now begin to see what Jesus was up to—a time to get away from the hectic activities of everyday life and pray. For Him, it was a time to leave the distracting noises of busy schedules and pray.

This also offers the first clue about how one can get to know Jesus as He really is—*praying alone by yourself away from all distractions*. The disciples never forgot these moments there. James later referred to Jesus as the "Lord of Glory" (James 2:1). John remembered this moment when he wrote "we

Reflection Connection

Do you think the other disciples took it that Jesus was discriminating against them when only a certain few could accompany Him often times? Explain the difference between real discrimination and what Jesus was doing.



Reflection Connection

So much to do yet Jesus took time to pray. How may we know when it's o.k. to get away from ministry and take time to pray? Be specific and share with the group.

beheld His glory" (John 1:14). Peter not only recalled the "holy mountain" but also remembered being an "eyewitness of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

As the disciples observed, Jesus was "transfigured before them" (v. 2). The term used here is the basis of our word "metamorphosis," which is a change on the outside that comes from the inside. For example, a caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon only to emerge from inside to outside as a beautiful butterfly. Similarly, for a brief moment, all Jesus was on the inside burst to the outside. Glory radiated from His face which Matthew says, "did shine as the sun."

All of the Gospels but John record the transfiguration of Jesus. Why not John? One reason surely is because John put Jesus' deity on display whereas Matthew, Mark and Luke set forth His humanity. And here is a moment when Jesus is the perfect man. Thus, the purpose of the transfiguration is to display His perfect, sinless, holy humanity. This is who Jesus is—God's holy and righteous Son.

Second, observe the Heavenly Visitors that appeared with Jesus (vv. 3-4). We must carefully examine this for it is not a coincidence. Along with Jesus, there are three disciples representing clearly the New Testament era—Peter, James, and John. On the other hand, Moses and Elijah appear, representing the Old Testament time period. This vision was none other than a meshing, a coming together of the Old Testament and New Testament. Keep this in mind as we examine the conversation that they had (v. 3).

Moses and Elijah are mentioned by name which reveals *two important lessons* for us. *First, we learn that there's life after death.* Centuries had passed since these two men had lived. Yet the disciples experienced them as alive. *A second lesson we learn is that they were recognizable, which gives us a clue about knowing our loved ones in heaven.* How we will know each other, the Bible gives no explicit detail. Yet, this passage gives us assurance we will know our friends and family in heaven.

Moses represented the law, while Elijah represented the prophets. As the two were conversing with Jesus (v. 3), it's natural to wonder what they were talking about. Were they speaking of the weather? Or could it have been their favorite chariot race?

Again, while Matthew did not reveal the conversation, Luke tells us they spoke of Jesus' death (9:31). Jesus' death makes the difference in our life. Were it not for His death, no person could have life—at least, eternal life. Calvary distinguishes Jesus' death from all others and makes the Gospel possible. From Moses' perspective, every drop of lamb's blood shed for the people that he recorded in Leviticus only pointed to what Jesus was about. For Elijah, every prediction that had ever been uttered from the mouths of all the Old Testament prophets found their fulfillment in Jesus as He made His way toward Calvary.

Unbelievable as it may be, the disciples dozed off to sleep (Luke 9:32). Imagine it! A vision like this and they fell sound sleep!

Peter was the first to awaken. Rubbing his eyes and seeing the three there, Peter spontaneously spoke (as he usually did): "it's good to be here..."

Before we are too hard in our judgments on Peter, recall our own immature reactions to what God is doing. Actually, Peter's response is little different from our own desires to stay where it is safe, cozy, comfortable and clear. It's true

Reflection Connection

Do you ever wonder if you will know your loved ones in heaven? How do you think you will know them? Allow time for the class to discuss this.



Peter wanted a mountain without a valley; but so do we. Peter wanted a crown with no cross, but so do we. Peter wanted to remain in the glory of Jesus and stay on the mountain; so do we.

Peter's plan would be to build three tabernacles or literally "booths", one each for Moses, Elijah and, of course, Jesus. But Peter discovered quickly that attempting to bring Jesus down to the level of a mere man provoked heaven itself to intervene. Jesus' name is above every name and must remain so throughout eternity (Acts 4:12; Philippeans 2:9-11).

The Heavenly Father, therefore, interrupts Peter (vv. 5-8), offering clearly the truth about His Son (vv. 5-6). Suddenly, a "bright cloud" enveloped them. The term "bright" was indicative of the "Shekinah" glory of God, the same cloud that led the people through the wilderness out of Egypt. Thus, it was no ordinary cloud.

Reflection Connection

What was the significance of Peter's three tabernacles he suggested? Have you ever been so caught up with the presence of God that you didn't dare want to disturb it? Share with the group.

The Father's voice then spoke: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 5). This is not the first time the Father had commended His Son. At Jesus' baptism, the same words were spoken (3:17). There the Father approved Jesus' personal, private life. Now Jesus' public life and ministry were approved. In every way, the Father was pleased with the Son.

If the Father was pleased with His Son in every way, do you think He is also pleased with us in every way? Obviously He is not. But there is a way for God to be pleased with you and me. How? The first step is by trusting our entire body, soul, and mind to Jesus. Now that we know Him, it is hard to reject Him. Let Jesus touch your life today!

II. A Valid Demonstration of What Jesus Wants (vv. 14-27)

We may all like the mountains but we cannot stay on the mountain top. The mountain top experiences we have with Jesus are meant for encouragement, refreshment and much needed strength. Those are times of special nearness to God. But, now we must leave and travel to the valley. In the valley we will discover a valid demonstration of what it is Jesus wants us to do. Observe the different stops along the way.

Our first stop on the way down is for freeing a child (vv. 14-21). This is a chaotic scene with a man, his son, nine of Jesus' disciples, and the crowd. What a perfect composite of the world in which we live—a pain-filled world encountered by a powerless church. Yet we cannot fail to appreciate a loving Savior!

Note the father's *plea* to Jesus (vv. 14-16). As is the case much of the time, we must consider what all the Gospels record concerning a matter since they compliment each other. Luke informs us this young boy was the man's only son (9:38) while Mark adds that the problem had vexed the boy since he was very young (Mark 9:21).

The boy probably experienced some type of nervous disorder. However, that his condition was demonically induced is clear (v. 18). The demonizing of persons we find on the pages of the New Testament demonstrates for us the destruction Satan and sin can do to our life.



Reflection Connection

Do you think demonic possession exists today? What is your evidence? How much control did Satan have over those who were demonically oppressed in the text? Do you think the Devil has other means of controlling people? If so, name some.

The man pleads with Jesus for “mercy.” His disciples had tried but failed miserably: “I brought him to the disciples, and they could not cure him” (v. 16). How sad. Had not Jesus commissioned the disciples? Had they not received His power? Yet powerless they remained.

What an unfortunate commentary on today’s church. Jesus graced the church with His power to minister but the world sees little benefit from an anointed church. We’re assured the power of Jesus never runs dry (vv. 17-18). Thus Jesus cuts to the quick: “O faithless and perverse generation!” On a generation that loses faith, comes perversion. “Perverse” is a word that means “twisted.” Thus, a sort of “twistedness” awaits the person who lacks faith.

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Jesus then requests the boy be brought to Him (v. 17). This act in itself is the ultimate solution: *bring the pain, the suffering, the sorrow, and the sin to Jesus.* Our educators may say “bring them to us, we’ll teach them.” Our psychologists may say “bring them to us, we’ll counsel them.” Our politicians say “bring them to us, we’ll provide for them.” Only Jesus can say “bring them to me, I’ll save them!”

“From that very hour,” Matthew records, “the child was cured” (v. 18). We should never give up. *We must never give up!* There is help to be had from Jesus. There is no substitute for Him.

After the man and his son departed for home, the disciples got alone with Jesus and spoke to Him privately (v. 19). Their question was simple: “Why could we not cast him out?” Actually, this was a good sign. Though the disciples were obviously embarrassed by their failure, they cared enough to find out what was going on.

Too many powerless Christians stand before a needy world but don’t seem to notice either their lack of power or the world’s chronic pain. The first step in solving problems, many times, is just to admit the problems exist. The disciples wanted to know why they failed. Three *reasons* present themselves as to precisely why the disciples lacked the power to do the ministry.

First, it was because of their unbelief (v. 20). Jesus said it was the littleness of their faith. Most of us have faith for good times. Unfortunately, we have small faith for bad times. Jesus said if you have faith “as a grain of mustard seed.” Though we often talk about the *size* of the mustard seed to which Jesus was referring, the size really doesn’t make a faith small. *Rather than size, it’s the fact that faith is alive, a living faith that can grow.* That’s what faith does: it grows. If we possess a mustard seed faith—faith that bursts with life—“nothing shall be impossible.” Here Jesus is referring to the great potential faith has.

The second reason the disciples failed was prayerlessness. “This kind goeth not out but by prayer...” Jesus responds (v. 21). Prayer was the missing ingredient in the disciples’ ministry. More than likely, it’s a missing ingredient in ours as well.

The third reason the disciples failed was a lack of fasting: “this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (v. 21). If heaven is conquered by prayer, our flesh is conquered by fasting. Fasting promotes a discipline—a *self-discipline*—

Reflection Connection

How does our personal faith affect our ministry? Think of a time when faith enhanced your ministry and share it with the group.



Reflection Connection

How often is fasting encouraged in the church? Do you think fasting is a part of the Old Testament law that has been fulfilled in Christ? Why or why not? Could fasting be harmful? Explain.

Reflection Connection

How important to biblical teaching is paying your taxes? Are all taxes just? How do Christians handle unjust tax laws?

whereby we give ourselves over to whatever the Lord would want for us.

Jesus moves on through Galilee (v. 22) and while they're on the move, He takes time to foretell the cross once again (vv. 22-23). He's only six months or so away from Passover when He will be betrayed. Jesus now spends much longer periods with His disciples. He speaks of the agony the cross will be (vv. 22-23a). The cross would not take Jesus by surprise. He knew what awaited Him but He insisted on going anyway. Jesus submitted Himself into the hands of the loving Father. This is exactly what our Lord desires from each of us.

He also spoke of the victory over death He would experience (v. 23b). The "third day he shall be raised again." Death will not defeat Him. Even with such open, clear language, the disciples still did not get it. They were "exceedingly sorry" Matthew records.

Finally, we find Jesus at Capernaum, His ministry headquarters, and a temple official came inquiring from Peter about Jesus' tax obligations. It does not appear to be a routine house call but a way to accuse Jesus.

The tax spoken about here was evidently a Temple tax which every Jew paid annually to keep up the temple (cp. Exodus 30:11-16). It equaled usually two-thirds of a day's wage.

Peter answered for Jesus and went to find Him to see what to do. Jesus already knew about this (v. 25). Jesus' words are interesting. Kings and the king's family were always free from paying taxes. Indeed, the king was supported by taxes!

Technically, as God's Son and King over the Father's kingdom, Jesus was free from paying taxes. Nonetheless, there is another side to it. Jesus was free to not pay but He forfeited His freedom to pay (v. 27). So as not "to offend" Jesus gave up His freedom. There is a moral principle we learn from our Lord here: *there are some things we may not be required to do based solely on a technicality. But for the sake of the Gospel witness, we do them freely anyway* (cp. 1 Corinthians 9:12).

Furthermore, Christians are obligated to fulfill duties as citizens of this world. To be bound by the law of Christ is to be subject to human law (Romans 13:1-2; 5-7). Thus, to meet one's obligations is a good testimony before a lost world.

Wrap Up

Jesus was revealed on the mountain as the perfect, sinless, Son of God. The Father offered His full approval of His Son there. Until we embrace who Jesus is, we will never know what God wants from us. However, once we catch the visible display of Jesus as the Son of God, we are in a sure position to experience a valid demonstration of what God wants from us: to have a life totally surrendered to Him.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse four, Peter suggested that three "tabernacles" be made each for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The term Peter used is one which means "tent" or even more literally "booths". In Hebrews, the author writes about the "tabernacle" Moses had constructed on Mount Sinai (v. 5). It is the same word Peter uses. However, Peter probably had more in mind a smaller type shelter as some translations bring out. The point is that Peter's suggestion about three tabernacles revealed a fundamental misunderstanding about the uniqueness of the Son of God. No one—not even Moses or Elijah—could be compared to Jesus, God's Son and Savior of the world.

