

Sept 6, 2009

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN I'M NOT HERE?

MATTHEW 17.14-27

As the new people of God the disciples must be prepared to carry out the new Temple-building vocation after Jesus ascends to the Father. In order to do this they must trust the word that he has given them concerning their continuing authority and the fact that the present Temple system is passing away.

1. THE DISCIPLES AND THE MOONSTRUCK BOY (14-21)

The lunatic and Israel (14-16): Crowd in Mt = a character with certain personality traits. Always fickle. Sheep having no shepherd upon whom Jesus has compassion (9.36). Crowd = majority of Israel.

The man and his son, while literally dealing with a particular and quite personal problem, are emblematic of the condition of Israel.

Other clues: "moonstruck" (usually trans. "epilepsy") - lit. speaks about being affected by the moon (*lunatic* fr. Latin *luna* meaning moon. A *lunar* month = a month governed by the moon.)

Israel governed by a lunar calendar. All major feasts determined by the cycle of the moon. This son, I believe, is demonstrating the effects of the present worship of Israel on her people. The worship is demonic.

Note: not sure that epilepsy is the best way to describe this condition. This condition throws the boy into fire and water specifically. Too specific to be an out-of-control seizure. May have similarities, but not sure if it is exactly the same.

Fire & water - no doubt destructive demonic activity. But also associated with the worship of Israel. Near-bringsings ("sacrifices") must pass through both for purification and assimilation into God's presence. Points to the same place: Israel's worship driven by demons.

Jesus response: "faithless and perverse generation" (v. 17) - echoes of Dt 32.20, in Song of Moses, dealing with Israel and her rebellion. In the context also deals with her worship of demons.

The mountain (v. 20): present Temple mount; place of worship and center of old creation kingdom.

Literally deals with this boy and his problem, but emblematic of Israel and her problems.

Man asks, "*kyrie eleison*," Lord have mercy. He recognizes Jesus' authority to remedy the situation. This man recognizes Jesus as the Savior of the "sons of Israel."

Should disciples have been able to heal him? Yes. Cf. 10.1, 8. They were not exercising the authority he gave them. This was a lack of faith.

Focus not on Jesus healing but upon Jesus' disciples and the ministry in Israel being handed over to them after ascension. How will they be affected by the "faithless and perverse generation" that is Israel? How will they be affected by "the crowd?" It seems at this point in this anticipation of Jesus coming absence that they have allowed the crowd to dictate to them what they should believe and not believe.

Jesus' exasperation and healing of the boy (17-18): Dt. 32.20 - Song of Moses; deals with Israel rebelling and worshipping demons (cf. Dt 32.17). When new and greater Moses goes away, Israel becomes faithless.

"How long shall I be with you?" Indicates that he is dealing with how they will handle things after he leaves.

"How long shall I put up with you?" He will not have patience forever. He is even now exasperated with them.

Jesus uses his authority to deliver and heal, but this is the authority that he gave to them.

The faith that is required (19-21): Faith is believing, resting in, and acting upon the word of God. Jesus gave them authority back in ch. 10 and they refused to exercise that authority. That is unbelief. When you don't act upon what Jesus told you, you are living in unbelief.

Mustard seed - not the amount of faith but the One in whom you trust. Also might be assoc. w/ the kingdom (cf. 13.31-32). Faith that characterizes the kingdom of heaven people can speak to mountains and they will be moved.

Moving mountains: mountains refer to places of worship and kingdoms. The present mountain is the Temple which is now harboring and encouraging a faithless Israel; an Israel that is rejecting her Messiah. It needs to be removed.

The disciples will do this through the preaching of the gospel which involves the giving up of their lives. Jesus says that these kinds of demons are not cast out except by prayer and fasting. It will be through true worship that involves self-denial and self-death that this will be accomplished. Fasting is a form of taking up one's cross, denying oneself, and following Jesus.

2. THE SON OF MAN DYING AND RISING (22-23)

The prophecy (22-23a): Son of Man = Ezekiel, the prophet and high priest who ministers to God's people in exile from the land. God has forsaken the Temple in Jerusalem and moved to Babylon with his people. It is where God's people are that God himself dwells and sets up this priesthood.

Ezekiel prophesies by word and enactment. He endures the judgment himself *before* Judah goes through them.

Throughout Ezekiel's ministry he prophetically enacts the judgments that are still coming on Judah. He, in some form or fashion, endures the judgments himself through these enactments *before* Judah goes through them. So Jesus.

Ezekiel's ministry in all of these strange acts God has him perform is actually the one who destroys Jerusalem according to Ezek 43.3. It is through his prophetic word and his faithful worship of YHWH that Jerusalem is destroyed. So Jesus.

The sorrow of the disciples (23b): There is sorrow, but it must be tempered by the hope of the resurrection.

3. THE DISCIPLES AND THE TEMPLE TAX (24-27)

The question of paying the Temple tax (24-26): Capernaum = homes of Jesus and Peter (cf. 4.13; 8.5, 13).

Temple tax - Ex 30.11-16 & "atonement/covering money" as a ransom when the men of Israel are mustered/counted. ½ shekel and used for the service of the Tab/Tem (offerings and repair). Taken from all men 20 years and older when mustered.

God created a war camp in which he would draw near and fight with his people. This created a holy environment. The army would be a moving Tab/Tem. People needed a "covering," protection from God's holiness. Money provided it.

It seems to me that when Israel's leaders collected this money they were mustering God's army and God was drawing near. What if God draws near and you don't have the proper "covering?" You are judged.

Covering ultimately not provided by silver and gold, but by blood of Jesus (cf. 1Pt 1.18). Leaders in Israel continue to depend on old system and have not realized where the covering is.

Jesus' question about kings and sons: people other than the sons pay the taxes. God is their Father (6.9). Jesus is the Son of God (16.16) They are brothers (12.49; 25.40; 28.10). They are free from this tax and all that it represents; i.e. the old system.

Provision from the sea (27): Pay the tax so as "not to cause offense" - doesn't want to start a revolution and draw attention.

Sea and fish - Gentiles who will pay homage to Jesus and his Church and will provide for whatever the Jews take away. (cf. Paul's 1st missionary journey in Acts in which he collects from Gentiles for the poor saints in Judea.)

The disciples can pay whatever is exacted from them b/c God will provide for their needs, even if he must make fish cough up coins.

1. *The level of your maturity is measured by what you do when you are left to your responsibilities.*

2. *Prayer and fasting are the primary means by which the demons are cast out.*