



Chapter 17

Have you ever appeared to know what's going on, even though you were clueless? You knew in preschool that $2+2=4$, but only because your older sister told you. You parroted that funny expression at just the right moment that made everyone laugh, but you're not even sure why it's funny. You crushed that presentation, but only understood a fraction of what you said.

Icebreaker:

1. Have you ever had a moment like this where you appeared to know far more than it turns out you really did know? (Wives, please don't answer on behalf of your husbands.)

Chapter 17 includes a scenario like this. Earlier, Peter had appeared to know what's going on when he proclaimed that Jesus is "the Christ [i.e., Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). He aced the test, but Peter's actual lack of understanding was exposed soon after when he tried to rebuke Jesus for predicting His future suffering and death. Peter had no place for a Messiah who would suffer and die. Jesus had to confront Peter's distorted expectations that left no room for the Messiah to be the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52-53). Now, Peter (and others) will see a side of the Messiah that will knock them off their feet.

Verses 1-13

Matthew's precise timeline—"after six days"—may be one of several signals about how these events relate to those of Exodus 24 when Moses ascended Mount Sinai and heard the LORD's voice after six days. Jesus ascends with His "inner circle" of Peter, James, and John; likewise, in Exodus 24, Moses had Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. Other parallels, such as the bright appearance, the cloud, and the mountaintop scene itself can't help but remind us of how this is a theophany ("an appearance of God") similar to what Moses experienced.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah only reinforces the similarities. Elijah had his own encounter with God on Mount Sinai (referred to in 1 Kings 19 as "Horeb"). Both men, as central figures from the OT, perhaps represent the Law and Prophets, culminating ultimately here in Jesus. Additionally, Moses and Elijah have significance with the dawning of God's Kingdom as they are explicitly singled out in Malachi 4:4-6, and are alluded to in Revelation 11:1-13 (esp. v. 6).

2. Ok, that's a lot of explanation! Take a minute or two to discuss the contrast between this "transfigured Jesus" and the "suffering Jesus" presented in 16:21.
3. Have you encountered people today who think of Jesus as simply "meek and mild"? If so, how do these verses present another dimension to who Jesus is?

Commentators observe how Peter's *ready-fire-aim* mentality results in a response that is "lame" or "clumsy." It might have been a great opportunity to remain silent, but Peter's words show how unprepared he was for the moment. Who wouldn't be?!

Almost comically, Peter is interrupted by the Father's voice.

4. The text says that the disciples were knocked-off-their-feet terrified. When/where have you ever experienced the majesty of God in a way that heightened your awareness of God's presence, glory, and power?

The disciples have been in Jesus's shadow for a while now but are only beginning to grasp what's truly going on. The conversation down the mountain is a step toward understanding.

5. If you're a Christ-follower, how have you grown in your understanding of who God is and what the gospel means for our lives? If so, share an example with your group.

Verses 14-21

Presumably, while Peter, James, and John were with Jesus, the other nine disciples were presented with a boy suffering from epileptic seizures. This encounter exposes the disciples' faith problem! Perhaps their faith grew shaky while Jesus and the three others were away. Or, in the words of NT scholar Grant Osborne, maybe they "believed their newfound power over illness and the demonic realm gave them status, and they may have been showing off rather than centering on the God who alone has true power." Either option is possible.

6. How are these proposals—a shaky, wavering faith or a boastful, prideful faith—both a lack of genuine faith? When or how have you encountered them?

7. Osborne states that true faith is about "absolute dependence on God." How does that description help us to properly apply v. 20? In other words, is Jesus really promising (as some claim) to do whatever we ask if only we have the "faith" for it? Why not?

Verses 22-27

Jesus repeats the summary of what's coming and, rather than a rebuke like Peter gave, Jesus's words leave them "greatly distressed." On one level, this could be an appropriate response if they grasp the degree of suffering Jesus will endure. On another, though, it reveals that they still don't grasp what's about to happen.

Beginning in verse 24, commentators speculate on the exact nature of this "two-drachma tax." Regardless, Jesus is demonstrating that, because of the dawning of the Kingdom, the current power structures and obligations are fading. The entire temple system is being usurped. On a greater scale, the governments of this world will also be upended. Christ and His followers are not subject to them because they are citizens of another, greater Kingdom.

Even so....and this is really important..."not to give offense to them"...Jesus's followers should at times lay aside their rights. This is akin to Paul's arguments in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-9. The irony is that, as Jesus's followers, we have unprecedented freedom and liberty; however, at the same time, *we may need to lovingly and freely give up the exercise of those freedoms and liberty*. The miracle of the fish should remind us that God is capable of caring for us in whatever we might need to sacrifice along the way.

8. Think about how un-American this is! We love to exercise or even flaunt our rights. This is deep, but talk with your group about how this kind of "I've-got-my-rights" attitude can actually hinder the gospel's proclamation.

Tying the Bow

Freedom *and* servanthood. Victory *and* suffering. Strength *and* weakness. Conquering King *and* Suffering Servant. These are just a few of the contrasts that mark the way of Jesus. They also should illuminate our expectations for what it means to follow Jesus.

9. Pray with your group, asking God to allow you to see Jesus as He truly is—as both a *Suffering Servant* and *Awesome Son of God*. Pray, as well, for the strength to boldly trust Jesus even when it is costly to us.