

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 8A – Matthew 17: The Transfiguration of Jesus

NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, FAQs

1) Abstract

David Turner's lecture on **Matthew 17** offers an in-depth **expository and exegetical analysis** of the chapter, highlighting its key events and theological themes. He primarily discusses the **Transfiguration of Jesus**, emphasizing its significance as a **glimpse of Christ's divine glory** and a confirmation of his unique status as the Son of God, superior to figures like Moses and Elijah. The lecture also examines the **healing of the demon-possessed boy**, attributing the disciples' initial inability to their **lack of faith**, and addresses the incident of **paying the temple tax**, where Jesus demonstrates humility and avoids unnecessary offense. Throughout, Turner stresses the **disciples' ongoing spiritual development** and their struggles with understanding Jesus' mission, particularly his impending suffering and death, underscoring Matthew's consistent portrayal of their "little faith" yet growing understanding.

2) Briefing Document:

Here's a detailed briefing document reviewing the main themes and most important ideas or facts from the provided sources on Matthew 17:

I. Overview of Matthew 17 Narrative Structure Dr. David Turner's lecture on Matthew 17 divides the chapter into four natural sections:

1. **The Transfiguration of Jesus (17:1-13):** This incident serves as a backdrop for two significant lessons for the disciples.
 - **The Transfiguration proper (17:1-3):** A brief description of Jesus' transformation.

- **Peter's Hasty Response and Heavenly Correction (17:4-8):** Peter's proposal to build shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus is rebuked by the Father's voice, emphasizing Jesus' sole authority.
 - **Teaching on Elijah's Coming (17:9-13):** Jesus' cryptic explanation connects John the Baptist to the prophecy of Elijah's return, hinting at his own future suffering.
1. **The Healing of a Demon-Possessed Boy (17:14-21):** This section highlights the disciples' inability versus Jesus' power.
 2. **Jesus Predicts His Death and Pays the Temple Tax (17:22-27):** This involves another prediction of suffering and an incident demonstrating Jesus' voluntary submission and humility.
 3. **Chapter Summary:** A review of overarching themes in Matthew, particularly those stressed from 13:53 onward.

II. Key Exegetical and Theological Issues

A. The Transfiguration of Jesus (17:1-13)

- **A Glimpse of the Kingdom's Power:** The transfiguration is interpreted as a "picture, a glimpse, if you will, of the power of the kingdom, which will eventually come in fullness and in completeness when our Lord Jesus returns to this earth." It serves as a "foretaste" for the disciples (p. 1).
- **Authentication of Jesus' Identity:** This event is "an integral part of Matthew's high Christology and his apocalyptic eschatology." It "authenticates both Jesus' true identity and God's plan to invade this world and rule it forever" (p. 5).
- **Unveiling of Intrinsic Glory:** The transfiguration is not an external glory but "the momentary uncovering of the Son of God's own intrinsic glory, which has been temporarily veiled only to be reassumed at the resurrection and ascension" (p. 5). It's a "miraculous temporary unveiling of the glory Jesus has had with the Father from all eternity" (p. 5).
- **Jesus' Preeminence:** The presence of Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets) is significant, but their role is supportive. God's command from heaven, "Listen to Him," (17:5) underscores Jesus'

unique authority and preeminence over even these great Old Testament figures. Peter's idea of building three equal shelters for them was "on the wrong track" as it "did not promote the sole sufficiency of Jesus for His disciples" and elevated Moses and Elijah to a status "which belongs only to Jesus" (p. 6).

- **Elijah and John the Baptist:** Jesus' explanation of Elijah's coming (17:9-13) links John the Baptist to Malachi 4:5-6. While John denied being Elijah (John 1), Luke 1:17 states he would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (p. 2). Jesus refers to his own suffering as mirroring John's. The source notes the "intricacies" of this prophecy, suggesting John fulfilled it in one sense while leaving open a future, ultimate fulfillment (p. 6).

B. The Healing of the Demon-Possessed Boy (17:14-21)

- **Contrasting Inability and Power:** This incident "contrasts the inability of the disciples with the power of Jesus" (p. 2).
- **Lack of Faith:** The core problem identified is "the lack of faith, both on the part of Jesus' contemporaries, verse 17, and on the part even of his own disciples, in verse 20" (p. 2).
- **Nature of Faith:** The lecture clarifies that "the issue is not the intensity or the amount of faith, but the degree of perception of its object. The power of faith is in the person to whom it's directed" (p. 7). True faith is "not believing in faith, but in the Heavenly Father," and not demanding God's actions but believing "that God is able and that he will empower us to do great things, to extend his kingdom through words and deeds" (p. 7).

C. Jesus Predicts His Death and Pays the Temple Tax (17:22-27)

- **Prediction of Suffering:** This is the second explicit prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection (17:22-23), following 16:21 (p. 2, 8).
- **Voluntary Submission and Humility:** Jesus is not obligated to pay the temple tax, nor are his disciples ("The king does not collect taxes from his son and his son's friends." p. 3). However, he chooses to pay "forgoing one's liberties for the sake of avoiding offense and furthering the testimony of the kingdom" (p. 3). This demonstrates "a striking blend of humility and power," as

Jesus performs a miracle (catching a fish with a coin) to facilitate this submission (p. 3).

- **Lessons for Peter:** Peter's incorrect answer to the tax collectors and his agreement to pay the tax (17:25) further highlight his tendency to "speak too quickly" and his ongoing learning process as a "model disciple" whose "problems mirror those of the disciples" (p. 3, 9).
- **Jesus' Treatment of Sinners vs. Hypocrites:** The incident implicitly recalls Jesus' prior interactions, noting that he "did not mind offending the Pharisees on the matter of ritual hand-washing in 15:12, but... will not protest the temple tax" (p. 3). This leads to the teaching: "Jesus treated non-religious sinners gently and religious hypocrites harshly, and his disciples should do the same" (p. 3).

III. Overarching Themes in Matthew 13:53 - 17:29

This "inter-discourse section" (13:53-17:29) emphasizes several recurring themes:

- **Unbelief and Opposition to Jesus:** Despite his miracles, "his evil contemporaries for the most part still do not believe in him" (p. 4). This is seen in:
 - The unbelief of his hometown, Nazareth (13:53ff), who dismissed him due to his "humble origins" (p. 8).
 - The murder of John the Baptist by Herod (14:1-12), foreshadowing Jesus' own suffering (17:12) – "it's uncanny how John the Baptist and Jesus have parallel lives" (p. 8).
 - The "faint praise" of those who saw Jesus only as a prophet like Elijah or John the Baptist, not the Messiah (16:14, p. 8).
 - Jesus' lament over the "faithless and depraved generation" (17:17, p. 7).
 - The ongoing "conflict with the Jewish leaders continues and is worsening" (p. 4).
 - The unbelief of Capernaum despite the miracles performed there (11:23-24, 17:27).

- **Jesus' Focus on Disciples' Development:** A primary stress is Jesus' "ongoing patient teaching of them to develop their faith and to help them grow and to prepare them ultimately for the time when he will depart the earth" (p. 8).
- **Disciples' Skepticism/Lack of Understanding:** Illustrated by their surprise at Jesus' ability to perform miraculous meals (feeding of 5,000 and 4,000, p. 8-9), their misunderstanding of the "leaven of the Pharisees" (16:6), their fear during the storm (14:26), their "concern over offending the Pharisees" (15:12), and their "intolerance of the Canaanite woman" (15:23).
- **Disciples' "Little Faith":** Despite these struggles, their faith is "genuine faith that confesses the true identity of their Lord" (p. 7), and "it is a growing faith" (p. 9). They have accepted his passion predictions, though they remain "preoccupied with carnal concerns such as who will be the greatest" (p. 4).
- **Peter as a Model:** Peter's numerous "faux pas" (16:21, 17:4-5, 17:25) serve as examples of the disciples' learning curve, showing that "he is indeed the model disciple so his problems mirror those of the disciples" (p. 9).

3) Study Guide: Matthew 17: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does Dr. Turner connect Matthew 16:28 to the Transfiguration in Matthew 17?
2. What was Peter's hasty response during the Transfiguration, and how was it corrected by the heavenly voice?
3. How does Jesus cryptically answer the disciples' question about the coming of Elijah, and who do the disciples understand him to be referring to?
4. According to Dr. Turner, what is the central problem highlighted in the narrative of the healing of the demon-possessed boy?
5. In the incident of the temple tax, how does Peter's answer to the tax collectors differ from his answer to Jesus?

6. What does Dr. Turner suggest is the practical lesson for disciples today from Jesus' decision to pay the temple tax despite not being obligated to do so?
7. How does Dr. Turner describe the nature of Jesus' glory during the Transfiguration? Was it external or intrinsic?
8. According to the lecture, what two erroneous effects would Peter's proposal to set up three tents have had during the Transfiguration?
9. What is the distinction made between the "faith" of the crowd and the "little faith" of Jesus' disciples in the context of healing the epileptic boy?
10. Besides unbelief and opposition, what major theme is stressed in the narrative block from Matthew 13:53 to 17:29 concerning Jesus' interaction with his disciples?

Answer Key

1. Dr. Turner favors the explanation that Matthew 16:28, which states some will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom, is tied to the Transfiguration. He argues that the Transfiguration serves as a glimpse or foretaste of the power of the kingdom that will eventually come in fullness.
2. Peter's hasty response was to suggest setting up three temporary shelters (tents) for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, implying they were of equal status. The heavenly voice corrected this by calling Jesus "my beloved Son" and commanding the disciples to "listen to him," emphasizing Jesus' unique preeminence.
3. Jesus answers the question about Elijah cryptically by comparing his own future suffering to what had already happened to this "so-called Elijah." The disciples then realize Jesus is speaking of John the Baptist, understanding John to be the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy in a spiritual sense.
4. The central problem highlighted in the healing of the demon-possessed boy is the lack of faith. This faithlessness is seen both on the part of Jesus' contemporaries and, importantly, on the part of his own disciples, who were unable to cast out the demon.
5. Peter answers the tax collectors' question wrongly, indicating Jesus *should* pay the tax. However, he answers Jesus' question rightly, implicitly

acknowledging Jesus' unique sonship which would exempt him from the tax. This highlights Peter's tendency to speak quickly and sometimes err.

6. The practical lesson for disciples today is to forgo one's liberties for the sake of avoiding offense and furthering the testimony of the kingdom. Jesus, though not obligated, chose to pay the tax to prevent stumbling others, demonstrating humility and a focus on kingdom priorities over personal rights.
7. Dr. Turner describes Jesus' glory during the Transfiguration as the momentary uncovering of the Son of God's own intrinsic glory, which had been temporarily veiled since his incarnation. It was not an external glory coming upon him, but an objective fact of his divine nature briefly shining forth.
8. Peter's proposal to set up three tents would have had two erroneous effects: first, "damning Jesus with faint praise" by not giving him the unique glory due to him alone, and second, elevating Moses and Elijah to a status that belongs only to Jesus, implying they were on the same level.
9. The crowd's "faith" was limited to the material realm, acknowledging Jesus only as a prophetic figure capable of healing illnesses, but not recognizing him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In contrast, Jesus' disciples had "little faith," but it was a genuine faith that confessed his true identity as Lord.
10. The major theme stressed in this narrative block regarding Jesus' interaction with his disciples is his ongoing, patient teaching of them. This focus aims to develop their faith, help them grow in understanding, and prepare them for his eventual departure from the earth, despite their weak but growing faith.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the theological significance of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17 within the broader context of Matthew's Gospel. Discuss how it authenticates Jesus' identity, fulfills Old Testament patterns, and relates to Matthew's "high Christology" and "apocalyptic eschatology."
2. Compare and contrast Peter's understanding of Jesus' identity and mission, as depicted in Matthew 16 and 17. How do his "faux pas" during these

chapters reveal his spiritual immaturity, and what lessons does Jesus attempt to impart to him and the other disciples?

3. Discuss the recurring theme of "little faith" (oligopistia) among the disciples in Matthew 17 and other passages. How does this theme characterize the disciples' spiritual journey, and what does it reveal about the nature of genuine faith according to Dr. Turner?
4. Examine the conflict between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries as highlighted in Matthew 17 and the preceding narrative block (13:53-17:29). How do events like John the Baptist's death, the unbelief in Nazareth, and the temple tax incident contribute to the intensifying tension?
5. Analyze how Matthew 17 integrates various theological themes prevalent in the Gospel, such as Jesus' unique sonship, the continuity of prophecy (Elijah/John the Baptist), the nature of the kingdom, and the preparation of the disciples.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalyptic Eschatology:** A theological perspective focusing on the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom, often involving dramatic, sudden, and supernatural intervention in history, as revealed through prophecy and visions.
- **Christology:** The branch of Christian theology dealing with the person, nature, and role of Christ. "High Christology" emphasizes Jesus' divine nature and pre-existence.
- **Exegesis:** The critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture. It involves a careful, systematic study of the biblical text to discover its original, intended meaning.
- **Expository:** Pertaining to exposition, which is the act of setting forth, explaining, or interpreting a text or subject. In biblical study, it often refers to a systematic explanation of a passage's meaning.
- **Forerunner:** A person who comes before another, especially to prepare the way. In the New Testament, John the Baptist is considered the forerunner of Jesus.

- **Incarnation:** The Christian doctrine that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. It refers to the belief that the eternal Son of God took on a human nature.
- **Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees:** A metaphor used by Jesus to warn his disciples about the corrupting influence of the false teachings and hypocrisy of the religious leaders.
- **Oligopistia:** A Greek term meaning "little faith," frequently used by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel to describe the disciples' intermittent lack of trust or understanding.
- **Passion Prediction:** Refers to Jesus' prophecies about his suffering, death, and resurrection, which become increasingly explicit as he approaches Jerusalem.
- **Pericope:** A selected passage from the Bible, forming a self-contained literary unit, often used for reading or commentary.
- **Pharisees:** A prominent Jewish sect in the time of Jesus, known for their strict adherence to the Mosaic Law and oral traditions, often in conflict with Jesus.
- **Son of Man:** A title Jesus frequently uses for himself in the Gospels, emphasizing both his humanity and his divine, authoritative role as the apocalyptic judge and king.
- **Sukkot (Feast of Booths):** An ancient Israelite harvest festival, during which people lived in temporary shelters (booths or tents) to commemorate God's provision during their wilderness wanderings.
- **Temple Tax:** A half-shekel tax required of adult Jewish males for the maintenance of the Jerusalem Temple.
- **Transfiguration:** A pivotal event in the Gospels (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36) where Jesus' appearance is miraculously transformed and his glory revealed to Peter, James, and John, accompanied by Moses and Elijah.
- **Unbelief of Jesus' Generation:** A recurring theme in Matthew, indicating the general lack of faith and spiritual blindness among many contemporaries of Jesus, particularly the Jewish leaders, despite his miracles and teachings.

4) FAQs

What is the significance of the Transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17?

The Transfiguration of Jesus, described in Matthew 17:1-3, serves as a pivotal event that offers a "glimpse of the power of the kingdom" and authenticates Jesus' true identity as the Son of God. It is seen as a temporary unveiling of Jesus' inherent divine glory, which had been veiled since his incarnation. This event connects Jesus to Old Testament patterns and predictions, reinforcing his status as the Son of God and his promise of a future kingdom. It's an integral part of Matthew's "high Christology" and "apocalyptic eschatology," demonstrating God's plan to rule the world forever. The Transfiguration also confirms Peter's earlier confession of Jesus as the Messiah, aligning with previous endorsements from the Heavenly Father, such as at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17).

How does the Transfiguration emphasize the preeminence of Jesus over Moses and Elijah?

During the Transfiguration, Peter's suggestion to set up three temporary shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Matthew 17:4) is corrected by a heavenly voice stating, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). This divine intervention underscores Jesus' unique and supreme status. While Moses and Elijah were significant figures—Moses as the prototypical prophet and Elijah as a courageous defender of the law—they were "only servants of God, not His son." Peter's proposal erroneously equated them with Jesus. The Father's command to "listen to Jesus" signifies that Jesus alone is the ultimate authority and the beloved Son whose words must be heeded and obeyed, surpassing even the greatest Old Testament figures.

What is the primary lesson for the disciples concerning their "little faith" in Matthew 17?

The healing of the demon-possessed boy in Matthew 17:14-21 highlights the disciples' "little faith" (Matthew 17:20). The narrative contrasts the disciples' inability to heal the boy with Jesus' immense power, attributing their failure to a lack of faith.

This passage teaches that the power of faith lies not in its intensity or amount, but in the object to whom it is directed—the Heavenly Father and Jesus. The disciples, like many of their contemporaries, were vulnerable to focusing on obstacles rather than the Lord's power. The lesson emphasizes that genuine faith recognizes Jesus' true identity as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and believes that God is able and will empower them to extend His kingdom. It cautions against a self-centered "name it and claim it" theology, instead promoting trust in God's will and ability.

How does Matthew 17 address the relationship between John the Baptist and Elijah?

Matthew 17:9-13 explores the disciples' question about the coming of Elijah. Jesus cryptically explains that Elijah "has already come" and refers to John the Baptist. While John himself denied being Elijah in John 1, Zacharias, John's father, was told in Luke 1 that John would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah." Jesus confirms that John's ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah's return in some sense, even though John was not literally the person of Elijah. Jesus further connects John's suffering to his own future suffering, emphasizing the intricate and interwoven ministries of Elijah, John, and Jesus in God's plan. This passage suggests a fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6 through John, while also leaving open the possibility of an ultimate future fulfillment by the person of Elijah.

What is the significance of Jesus' decision to pay the temple tax in Matthew 17?

In Matthew 17:22-27, Jesus predicts his death and then addresses the matter of paying the temple tax. While Jesus and his disciples are not obligated to pay the temple tax, as the "king does not collect taxes from his son and his son's friends," Jesus chooses to pay it through a miracle (having Peter catch a fish with a coin in its mouth) to avoid causing offense (Matthew 17:27). This incident demonstrates Jesus' blend of humility and power, and his willingness to forego his liberties for the sake of avoiding offense and furthering the testimony of the kingdom. It also serves as a lesson for disciples to prioritize avoiding offense and promoting the kingdom, rather than standing on their rights. Peter, who initially answers the tax collector's question wrongly, learns another lesson about speaking too quickly.

What themes from earlier chapters of Matthew are reinforced in Matthew 17?

Matthew 17 is deeply interwoven with themes prevalent throughout Matthew's narrative, particularly those from the narrative block beginning in 13:53. Key reinforced themes include:

1. **Unbelief and Opposition to Jesus:** Despite Jesus' numerous miracles, the unbelief of his contemporaries, including his hometown of Nazareth (13:53ff) and the Jewish leaders (Herod's execution of John in 14:10, foreshadowing Jesus' suffering), continues and intensifies (17:17).
2. **Conflict with Jewish Leaders:** This conflict is underlined by the parallel between John the Baptist's execution and Jesus' coming suffering (14:10 connected to 17:12) and Jesus' explicit predictions of his death (16:21, 17:12, 17:22-23).
3. **Jesus' Focus on His Disciples and Their Growing Faith:** Despite their skepticism, lack of understanding, and "little faith" (e.g., during the storm in 14:26, their misunderstanding of the leaven of the Pharisees in 16:6, Peter's blunders), Jesus consistently teaches them, developing their faith and preparing them for his departure.

How does Matthew 17 contribute to Matthew's overall Christology and understanding of Jesus' identity?

Matthew 17 significantly contributes to Matthew's "high Christology," which presents Jesus as the divine Son of God. The Transfiguration is a dramatic demonstration of Jesus' inherent divine glory, temporarily unveiled to the disciples, confirming his status as "the beloved Son." This event authenticates Jesus' true identity, aligning with previous affirmations like his miraculous birth and the heavenly endorsement at his baptism. The passage also highlights Jesus' unique authority, evidenced by the Father's command to "listen to him," placing Jesus above even Moses and Elijah. The repeated predictions of his suffering, death, and resurrection, coupled with his divine power shown in the exorcism and the miraculous payment of the temple tax, solidify his identity as both the suffering Messiah and the Son of God with ultimate authority.

What lessons does Matthew 17 offer regarding the disciples' ongoing spiritual growth and preparation for the kingdom?

Matthew 17 illustrates that while the disciples have genuine faith and acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, they still have much to learn. Their "little faith" is evident in their inability to heal the demon-possessed boy, their occasional lack of understanding, and their preoccupation with worldly concerns (e.g., who will be the greatest, 18:1). Jesus' patient teaching throughout this chapter, correcting Peter's hasty responses during the Transfiguration, explaining the role of Elijah/John, and demonstrating humility in paying the temple tax, aims to develop their faith and prepare them for authentic "kingdom community." They are learning to prioritize Jesus' authority, to act with humility and compassion, and to understand the reality of his suffering, death, and resurrection, which is crucial for their future mission.