

Jesus Revealed as the Mighty One

Matthew 17:14-23

Halifax: 12 March 2006

Last week,

- We were able to ascend the Mount of Transfiguration with the disciples and behold the resplendent glory of our Lord Jesus.
 - We saw how the divinity of our Lord did shine even through His human nature...
 - We saw how He communed with Moses and Elijah, showing His perfect agreement with the Law and the Prophets, even though He was universally misunderstood by His people on earth...
 - And we learned how He received the approval of His Father in heaven who spoke to Him out of the glory cloud, saying,
 - “This is beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”
 - It was a very glorious seen!
- But what a contrast when the Lord comes down from the Holy Mount...
 - He finds waiting for Him a desperate child with a desperate father with nine desperate disciples.
 - He descends from the realms of glory to the depths of human misery and sin.
 - But this pitiful seen in this dark work only becomes, for our Lord Jesus,
 - an occasion to show how His majestic power, though it is yet to be unveiled in this world, is able to overcome this world.
 - We have seen the glory of His majesty above in the transfiguration,
 - now we see the glory of His power on earth to vanquish His enemies!
 - We learn once again that nothing is too hard for Him.
 - There is no case too desperate for Him to handle.

TRANS> This morning I want to help you connect with this passage...

- I want to show you how desperate we are without His power...
- And then how everything changes when He comes in His power...
- And then I want to explore why we often do not experience His power on earth...

First...

I. Look at how desperate we are without His power...

- . Jesus had gone away with Peter, James and John...
 - The transfiguration was a preview of the glory the Lord Jesus would soon be given when He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven...

- 0. He would ascend into Heaven and be glorified in His human nature...
 - He would go to be with the Father—not only as He had always been with Him from eternity as the Son of God...
 - but He would be there as the Son of man at the right hand of the Father, representing His people as their Mediator.
 - He would be there as God-man.
 - The transfiguration was a preview of His coming glory!

- 0. But it was also a preview of the reality of His absence from this world when He ascended into heaven to sit at God’s right hand in glory...
 - Just as He left nine of His disciples behind when He ascended the Mount of Transfiguration,
 - so His physical presence would soon be taken away from His disciples and they would have to live by faith rather than by sight...
 - His Spirit would be with them, but they would see the Lord Jesus no more on this earth.
 - And so Jesus ascension was a kind of test to give them a taste of what it would be like when He was taken from them.

- . And you see in our text that it was absolutely desperate for them!
 - 0. There is this desperate boy that is brought to them...
 - . He has become a play thing of Satan...
 - 0) He is an epileptic—
 - that is, one who randomly overtaken by seizures
 - (the word is not scientifically equivalent, but is used to describe those who had seizures)
 - He is an epileptic in that sense, but he is no ordinary epileptic!
 - 0) His is clearly what we might all “demonically induced epilepsy.”
 - Ordinary epilepsy can throw a person into a seizure,
 - and they may in fact be subject to whatever dangers are present...
 - But this boy had an epilepsy that routinely came upon him when he was in a dangerous place.

- The father says it often cast him into the fire and the water...
 - It wasn't just that he occasionally had a seizure when he happened to be near fire or water...
 - but it was a regular occurrence that his seizures threw him into such perils.
- . Now I have told you before that Satan's work was made visible in ways like this when Jesus was here in order to teach us lessons by analogy...
- And here we see what a poor sinner is like under the dominion of Satan...
 - A fit comes over him and he is immediately thrown headlong into destructive behaviour.
 - Even this week,
 - we witnessed in the news how a 12 year old girl in our city was murdered by a man who fell under the power of lust and malice...
 - This man was driven headlong to destruction by his lusts...
 - In Ephesians 2:2, Paul tells the Ephesians that before they were converted,
 - they "walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the prince the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience."
- . There is a real sense in which this boy is a picture of every human being until Christ sets us free.
- 0) We are fallen into sin and are under the dominion of Satan...
- Some are under the power of respectable sins—
 - sins like covetousness, pride, self-glory—
 - Others are under the power of not so respectable sins—anger and rage, lust, drunkenness and addiction...
 - but all are taken captive to do the devil's will and all are thrown into the fits of sin...
 - There is the successful businessman who swells with pride one day and envy the next...
 - He has honour in the world, but he is not approved of God...
 - There is the not-so-successful gutter drunk who debases himself in the depths of his lusts.
 - Everyone knows that he is in desperate bondage and pities him, but he cannot seem to escape...

- Then there is the sweet young mother who struggles with both of these—
 - one day she is swollen up with pride and self-glory because she is praised for her accomplishments,
 - the next day she is dragged away by her appetites to bring shame upon herself.
 - In both cases, she is overtaken by behaviour that is spiritually destructive.

0) This desperate boy is found everywhere...

- All are dragged away into destructive behaviour...
 - We can see it in the child,
 - We can see it in the teenager,
 - We can see it in the young adult,
 - We can see it in the middle aged and in the senior...
- We can look at our city and we see what a firm hold sin has on us...
 - How few there are that give glory to God!
 - What pride, what greed, what malice is to be found all across our land.

TRANS> This desperate boy is found everywhere...

0. And then there is this desperate father...

- . He is the one who sees something of the problem
 - He sees the problem and he wants to do something about it,
 - but he can find no solution.
 - Again and again he has pulled his boy out of the fire and out of the water,
 - but it is only a matter of time until he is back in again.
 - He represents government that tries to curb violence in the street or deal with poverty...
 - He is an exasperated manager trying to get his employees to work...
 - He is an individual trying to get a handle on an addiction.
- . Do you ever find yourself helpless like this?
 - There is the parent with the rebellious child—

- He has tried this and he has tried that—read this book and read that book—but nothing seems to help.
- There is that relative who goes on his sin and will not turn to Christ...
- You have talked to him, you have encouraged him to go to church, you have given him books, but nothing ever changes.
- You are like this desperate father...
 - at least, I hope you are!
 - That is, I hope you care about the people around you when you see them caught in sin...
 - I hope you are earnest the way this father was to seek out a remedy...
 - It is bad to be seeking a remedy and not able to find one...
 - but it is far worse to be indifferent and unconcerned!
 - This father was not like that...
 - He could not leave his boy to burn in the fire and to drown in the water...
 - He did what he could to rescue him.
 - But he was desperate to find a real solution.

TRANS> So you see that there is this desperate boy and this desperate father...

0. And then there are these desperate disciples!

- . They expected that they would be able to help...
 - They were supposed to be able to help!
 - About a year before this, Jesus had given them power to heal all sicknesses and to cast out demons...
 - And they had done it with great success...
 - They had come back to Jesus rejoicing that the demons were subject to them!
 - But for some reason, they are just as desperate as the boy and his father in this situation.
 - As the Father says,
 - “I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”
 - Here were ministers who had been given the remedy, but they cannot apply it!

- It is all failure!
- . Do we not see this with ministry in our city—even in our own congregation?
 - Where is the power of Jesus Christ to change lives?
 - We have known His power before—
 - There are people in our city and in own congregation that have been marvellously converted...
 - But we look out at our city and we see how little impact the ministry of the word has had here!
 - We take the sum total of all the Christian ministries in our city and we see very little in the way of real change...
 - The citizens of Halifax are still cast into the fires of their lust and their pride and their addictions and their blasphemy.
 - Where is the power of the gospel to turn them from the idols to the living God?

TRANS> It is a desperate situation without the Lord Jesus.

II. But look at how everything changes when the Lord Jesus comes!

- . His return from the Mount of Transfiguration is a preview of His return at the end of the age...
 0. He will come with power to deliver us from our desperate condition on this earth...
 - He will vanquish Satan and send him to his place together with all those who are in league with him...
 - all his angels and all the men and women on this earth who do not know Christ and are sold out to follow the devil...
 - whether in respectable sins or not so respectable sins.
 - They will all be cast into the lake of fire.
 0. How we ought to look forward to His promised coming and pray for it.
 - When He comes everything will be made right.
- . Look at what our glorious Captain does when He comes into the desperate situation presented to us in Matthew 17!
 0. With majestic confidence He looks on the pitiful spectacle and He says:
 - “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”

- . With these words, He makes it clear that we are not mere victims...
 - We should not be in such a mess as we are!
 - It is because we are “faithless and perverse” that we are so desperate.
 - **Faithless** refers to our lack of a right connection with God...
 - And **perverse** speaks of that which is distorted and twisted—
 - the word was often used in Jesus’ day to refer to piece of potter’s clay that had been ruined before it was put into the oven.

- . The Lord further says, “How long shall I be with you?”
 - 0) There is a warning in these words...
 - He is suggesting that He will not be with them forever...
 - They must learn to deal with these things when He is no longer physically present with them.

 - 0) He adds the words, “How long shall I bear with you...”
 - showing them that they are testing His patience...
 - that by now, they should be able to deal with something like this.

- . Nevertheless, He will take care of the matter...
 - “Bring him to Me!” He says...
 - These are words partly of irritation because the disciples had not done what they ought to have been able to do,
 - but also of hope—because they show that Jesus is going to take of it.
 - Jesus is going to undertake for this desperate boy!
 - He has come and He will handle it!

- 0. And how everything changes!
 - . The Captain of our Salvation that we sing about in Psalm 45 has come to the battle!
 - He has come with His sword on His thigh and with His arrows that always pierce the heart of His enemies!
 - He has never yet lost a battle...
 - His servants lose many battles, but not the Lord Jesus.
 - We never see Him **trying** to raise the dead or **trying** to cast out the demon... He is always able to do it.

- . At once He takes aim and shoots our His fiery word at this vicious devil!
 - He rebukes the devil and from that very hour the child is completely cured.
 - Just one word and His enemies are crushed!
 - His enemies fall beneath His feet!
 - Not one can stand!

- 0. Jesus is always and forever our salvation.
 - . How glad you ought to be that He has come into the world to destroy our foes when we were helpless before them!
 - He has come with power to destroy sin and death and Satan...
 - He has met them in this world and He has conquered them in His own person...
 - And now He is delivering all His elect in this world from their power until He comes again...
 - He has sent us out, not to save people, but to bring them into the salvation that He has accomplished by the preaching of the gospel.

 - . He is indeed the only Saviour...
 - We are desperate and it is impossible for us to destroy our enemies apart from Him.
 - He is the only one who could pay the penalty of sin for us because no one else was worthy...
 - He alone was able to conquer Satan and death...
 - And He alone has done it!
 - It is only as resting upon His virtue and power that we can overcome the enemy.

TRANS> But this being so...

III. Why is it that sometimes we do not experience His power?

- . The disciples put the question to Him that we must ask: "Why could we not cast it out?"
 - Jesus had given them power to do this, and they could not...

- 0. It is a very good question we ought to always ask...
 - Why is it that our city goes on in its godlessness and we seem to have so little power to change things?

- Why is it that my child goes on in his rebellion and there seems to be so little power to change him?
 - Why is it that I myself continue to struggle with my pride or my laziness or my envy or my lust or my bitterness or my anger or my lack of zeal for the Lord?
0. You are right to ask these questions because you **ought** to be able to do some of these things...
- . Yes, Jesus was gone up on the Mount of Transfiguration...
 - He was not physically present with His disciples...
 - But He had specifically given His disciples the power to heal sickness and to cast out demons...
 - They were supposed to be able to do these things without His physical presence.
 - . Soon He would be gone permanently to glory,
 - but this did not mean that His power would be gone!
 - Quite the opposite!
 - He told them that they would do even greater works when He was gone.
 - They ought not to have been dependent on His physical presence,
 - but it is clear that they were...
 - And they were right to ask why they had no power to cast out this demon...

TRANS> And now that Jesus is in heaven, you are right to ask why you do not have the power to do what He has called you to do...

- . But please, do not misapply this!
 - 0) The disciples were given power to heal all manner of sickness...
 - You have not been given **that** power.
 - The point is not that there is something wrong if you are not able to cure all kinds of sickness!
 - The point is that there is something wrong if you are not able to do what the Lord has given **you** to do!
 - It is clear that this power to cast out demons and heal all sickness was given to the apostles to set them apart as those who spoke the word of God.

- I don't have time to go into all the details about that now, but it is very important to understand that this particular power has not been given to everyone.
- 0) Rather we need to sort out what God has called **us** to do and what He has promised us today and examine why we are not able to do these things...
-) For example, He has promised us that sin will not have dominion over us and that we will be sanctified...
 - If that is not happening, there is something wrong and you need to ask Him where the power is...
 - If you are continually being brought under the power of your lusts and drawn away, you need to find out why that is!
 -) Likewise, He has promised in particular that He will bless not only us, but also our children to make them His people...
 - Many times this promise has not been experienced!
 - We say, "I have tried, I did my best, but my children do not believe."
 - Well why is that if God has promised to be a God to you and to your children after you?
 -) Again, He has promised that He will build His church and gather the elect into it from every nation...
 - And if we do not see that happening, we need to ask why we are not able to do this?
 - There is a problem and we need to ask "Why?"
 - It was promised to Israel that they would conquer the entire land of Canaan...
 - And when they didn't, it was proper for them to look into the reasons for their failure...
 - I don't mean to say that with the gospel there will no battles or that everyone will immediately respond...
 - But if it doesn't seem to be going forth, we need to ask our Lord the reason for it...
 - To be very specific, why is our church not growing? Why are not reaching our loved ones and our neighbours with the gospel?
 - We have our end of year report and we need to ask why?

TRANS> So you see there are many things that God has promised us that we ought to be seeing...

- Our own sanctification...
- The salvation of our children...
- The winning of the nations to Jesus Christ!
- If this is not happening, we need to say:
 - “Why Lord?”
 - “Where is the power that you have given to us to do these things in your name?”

. And just look—Jesus answers this question.

0. He goes directly to the heart of the problem...

- He says, “Because of your unbelief.”

. We need to deal with what He says here!

- Admittedly, it rubs us the wrong way to be told that we lack faith!

0) We have all been offended with those who think that what is promised to the apostles is promised to us today...

- There are those persons who say that if there is any sickness, it is because of a lack of faith...
- I have a friend who was told that he could get rid of his glasses if he had enough faith to believe that God would heal his eyes.
 - He threw out his glasses and tried to convince himself that his eyes had been healed and he went on like this until the day he went to renew his driver’s license and couldn’t pass the eye test...
 - He then had to chalk it up to the fact that he just didn’t have enough faith.
 - But he was wrong—and he knows it now—
 - He was wrong because this was not something that God has promised—not until the resurrection.

TRANS> I know that some of you have been troubled by this kind of thing...

- You have been told that if you had enough faith, your father would be saved...
 - or that your aunt would be healed of her cancer...
 - And you are right to be offended with those who propagate this kind of nonsense...

0) But Jesus does say that in this case,

- The disciples could not heal this lad because of their unbelief!
 - It was their fault—it was something they **should** have been able to do if they had believed.
 - To them had been given the power and the promise to heal all kinds of sickness and to cast out demons...
 - Just because this doctrine of “not enough faith” has been misapplied does not mean it has no application to us at all!
 - If God has promised us something and we don’t have whatever it is, it is because of our unbelief!
 - And we need to go ahead and admit it instead of looking for excuses and justification!
 - It doesn’t mean you are not a Christian...
 - Jesus was not saying they were unbelievers in the sense that they did not have saving faith...
 - He is saying they were guilty of unbelief on this particular occasion...
 - They did not believe God concerning this particular promise.
- . But what was the nature of their unbelief?
- 0) Was it that common form that unbelief takes when we simply do not believe that God is either willing or able to do what He has promised?
- You remember how it was when the twelve spies went into Canaan to explore and ten of them concluded that there was no way Israel could take the land...
 - “The inhabitants were giants and their cities are fortified up to heaven...”
 - This was true as far as it went,
 - but the point was that God had promised and they needed to believe the promise...
 - So it is that we need to believe God’s promise that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.
 - And the promise that no temptation has taken us but such as is common to man, that God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to bear it...
 - And the promise that God will be a God to you and to your children...

- You do not have a promise that your aunt will be healed of cancer or that your father will believe the gospel,
 - but you do have promises about other things and if those promises are not fulfilled it is because of your unbelief and you need to admit it.
- For us, unbelief is often in the form that God cannot or will not do what He has expressly promised...
- 0) But interestingly enough, that does not seem to be the case with the disciples in Matthew 17.
-) The fact is, they fully expected the boy to be healed.
 - They had gone about on their own over the cities of Galilee when Jesus had sent them out and had returned to Him rejoicing that the demons were subject to them!
 - It does not seem to be the case that they doubted if they would be able to heal this child!
 - The defect of their faith was not a lack of confidence that the thing would happen...

TRANS> Then what was it?

-) The defect in their faith must have been that they thought they could do this in their own strength...
 - In other words, they had transferred their faith from God and put it in themselves!
 - They had become old pros at healing and casting out demons!
 - They forget that the source of their strength was the Lord and not themselves!
- . There is always a danger in religion to forget the source of your strength—
- to fall into this kind of unbelief that is a misplaced faith rather than a lack of confidence.
- 0) It happens so easily...
-) You meet with a bit of success by the grace of God, and then you begin to swell with pride...
 - At first there was gratitude when you experienced the power of God's grace at work...
 - but now pride begins to swell so much that it crowds out all the gratitude.

- You can often detect the problem in its early stages by a lack of gratitude...

TRANS> But sometimes you don't detect it...

-) But His great mercy, God will cause you to fall flat on your face...
 - He cause you to fail miserably!
 - That is what He did to the disciples.
 - He would not allow them go on in their unbelief (self-reliance) because He loved them and wanted to use them for His glory.

0) It would have been disastrous if He had allowed them success!

- I once heard an evangelist whom I would have to say the Lord did not love...
 - This man had had a very successful ministry that was admired by people all around...
 - He had tens of thousands at his church...
 - And I heard him say in a sermon that if he could have shown the apostle Paul some of the things he had learned about evangelism, Paul would have met with greater success!
- I pity that man for all his success...
 - He would have been much better off if he had miserably failed in his evangelistic efforts.

0. So what should you do if you meet with a failure in matter about which God has given you His promise?

- . What should you do if...
 - You perceive that your children are not receiving the grace of God?
 - If you find that sin is having dominion over you? That you are not really growing?
 - If we find that the gospel is not going forth in our city?
 - If another year has gone by and we have not seen much fruit...
- . First let me tell you what you must not do...
 - The worst thing you can do is see that you are failing and turn to some unbiblical means—
 - for example...
 - to turn to pop psychology for your children...

- to turn to legalism to try to keep sin from having dominion...
- or for our church to put on a harlot's attire to attract lovers...
 - You know what I mean by that—to turn worship into a display of human art or into form of entertainment to attract unbelievers...
- No, no, no—the use of unbiblical means is never the way to go when the power of Christ has departed...
 - That is the easiest way to become self-deceived into **thinking** we have His power when we don't.
 - It happens all the time!
 - A church has a name that they are alive, but the Lord thinks they are dead.

TRANS> It is never right to try to accomplish the things that God has promised by the use of unbiblical means...

- . Hear rather what our Lord says!
 - “This kind does not go out but by prayer and fasting.”
- 0) Now this seems like a rather curious comment...
 - This man had brought his son to the disciples to be healed—
 - How were they expected to pray and fast?
 - Were they to tell the man to give them some time—that they would go on a fast?
 - There are a few manuscripts that do not have this verse, so some have said it ought to be left out...
 - but it is in the vast majority of the manuscripts,
 - and besides, it is found in Mark's version of this story...
 - those who omit it from Matthew think it was accidentally inserted by a scribe who was familiar with Mark...
 - but whatever the case, this assures us that this is a true saying of Jesus at this time whether it was originally in Matthew or not...
- 0) But I don't think Jesus meant this to be taken as to say that they must pray and fast in this particular instance...
 - I think He was referring to their general practice—
 - If they were going to be able to have His promised power at work, they would need to be given to prayer and fasting as a way of life.

- The nine disciples had not been so earnest about truly seeking the Lord's grace—
 - to us the language of Ephesians 6, they had not been putting on the armour of God by prayer and supplication...
 - so when the day of battle came, they were not able to stand...
 - They were not spiritually prepared for battle.
- I really like the way John Calvin put it...
 - He suggests that Jesus is in effect saying,
 - “You are effeminate exorcists and seem as if you were engaged in a mock-battle got up for amusement; but you have to deal with a powerful adversary, who will not yield till the battle has been fought out. Your *faith* must therefore be excited by *prayer*, and as you are slow and languid in *prayer*, you must resort to *fasting* as an assistance.”
- . My brothers and sisters, Jesus has given us power to overcome our enemies...
 - But do not suppose you can ever experience this power without faith...
 - And do not suppose you can ever have strong faith that is not upheld by vigorous prayer.
 - Fasting is often needed to draw us away from our worldly pride and lust that we might turn our attention upon the Lord.
 - You may find your prayers to be dull and languid, and so they are.
 - Fasting will help to put an edge back on your prayers again.

Conclusion

- The Lord Jesus is just as powerful as He ever was...
 - If you are not experiencing His power to give you what He has promised,
 - There is nothing wrong with Him...
 - There is something wrong with you!
 - It is your faith that is the problem.
- You need to get down on your knees start looking to Him.