

The Church's True and Glorious Home (and the Only Earthly Road That Leads There)

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- [0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our reading for this morning, and we are in Matthew's Gospel and chapter 16, so please do turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16 and verse 24, reading through to chapter 17.
- Matthew 16, I'm reading from verse 24. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
- For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his life?
- Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
- Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
- [1 : 30] And he was transfigured before them. And his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him.
- And Peter said to Jesus, He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.
- And a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.
- But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise and have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.
- And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one of the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. And the disciples asked him, Then why did the scribes say that first Elijah must come?
- [2 : 48] He answered, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come. And they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased.
- So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.
- And when they came to the crowd, A man came up to him, and kneeling before him said, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic, and he suffers terribly.
- For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him. And Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, How long am I to be with you?
- How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me. And Jesus rebuked him. And the demon came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.

[3 : 53] Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? He said to them, Because of your little faith.

For truly I say to you, If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, You will say to this mountain, Move from here and go to there. And it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you.

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. And they will kill him.

And he will be raised on the third day. And they were greatly distressed. When they came to Capernaum, the collector of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the tax?

And he said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax?

[4 : 59] From their sons or from others? And when he said from others, Jesus said to them, Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up.

And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself. Amen.

May the Lord bless his word to us this morning. Well, do turn with me to Matthew 17 and the last verses of chapter 16 that we read there.

It's a great tragedy that so often today, the professing church is in a state of great confusion about all sorts of things. But it shouldn't surprise us, should it?

Because when people stop listening to Jesus, follow their own ideas of what the church should be, then confusion and worse is inevitable.

[6 : 11] And so we today need the words of verse 5 here, chapter 17 in Matthew's gospel, ringing in our ears, just as those first disciples did. You see, this, says the voice from heaven, this and no other is my beloved son.

Listen to him. Listen to him. Because there's only one voice that can lead the church in any age out of the fog of confusion and misunderstanding and into the way of light and truth.

So as to understand the true nature of the church's calling. And that is the voice of the church's one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

And in these chapters that we've been studying in Matthew's gospel, we've already heard Jesus give many correctives to his disciples. In chapter 15, we saw so clearly the scope of his church, the family of God.

It is from all nations, Jesus says, Jews and Gentiles. It's not just the faith of one particular culture. It's for them all. Well, that's anathema today, isn't it, to our pluralist culture?

[7 : 22] It's often scandalized the very idea of evangelizing with the gospel of Christ to other cultures, to other religions. But listen to Jesus. Go, he said, into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

Christian believers. Not interfaith conferences. Then in chapter 16, he made it very clear that the builder of the family of the one true church is Jesus Christ alone.

It's his household. It's his church. And it's built on one foundation alone. And that is the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, to his person and his work.

The unique, historical, once for all, delivered to the world message of the apostles, which is not mutable and changeable by the authority of mere men.

So no so-called leaders in the church today have any authority at all to overturn what is the command of our Lord and Savior through his apostles, as Peter puts it in his second letter.

[8 : 32] And now here in chapter 17, Jesus' teaching clears up any confusion at all about the true home of his household, his church.

It is not some merely earthly movement, not even an earthly empire that he's come to inaugurate, but it is a heavenly kingdom of everlasting glory.

And therefore, his church will never be at home here on this earth. It'll never be able to share the glory of this earth, and it will always be at odds with this world and scorned by this world.

That's such a vital lesson, isn't it, that the church has to learn? Because so often today, the church seems to be desperate for the approval of this world, falling over itself to fit in with this world, to seek relevance with this world.

The recent Church of Scotland General Assembly just went further down the path of normalizing our culture's view of homosexual marriage for the church.

[9 : 37] The Church of England is totally taken up with prioritizing in its work what? Evangelism? No. Removing offending statues from their buildings, anything that falls foul of the new woke orthodoxy.

And even evangelical groupings this past year have been so desperate to be in with the government, to have seats on the government's COVID committees, that they even supported the government taking illegal action against freedom of Christian worship.

How ironic is that? Well, let's be charitable. Let's say that some of this is well-meaning. It's wanting to be a good witness, as people put it. Although actually, what I find is what that very often means is not a good witness at all.

It just means we want to be liked. We want to be not disliked by those who are around us because we're Christians. But perhaps it's well-meaning. But Peter, remember, in chapter 16, verse 22, was well-meaning, wasn't he, when he said to Jesus, Far be it from Lord that you should suffer or die.

But Jesus said to well-meaning Peter, you're doing Satan's work, not God's, by saying that. You're infected in your thinking, said Jesus, by the assumptions of man and not God.

[10 : 54] And so it is today, you see, when people say, oh, the church must move for the times, the church must be relevant, must be credible to the world by doing that. No, says Jesus, my church will never be at home in this world because it's not of this world.

My kingdom is a heavenly kingdom. kingdom. The city of God and the city of man cannot unite. And unless you grasp that, you will never understand what it means to follow me now in this present world, says Jesus.

And unless the church is clear on this, it will collapse and disappear. It will be lost. It will be submerged in this present age.

And our faith will collapse and disappear amid the struggles that we all inevitably face. They'll cripple us and we'll lose all hope if that's the way we think.

So this chapter is vital to all of us. It teaches us the truth about the real glory of our true home and about the only road to that glorious home where we, the church of Jesus Christ, truly belong.

[12 : 12] So we're going to think about this under two headings. First of all, there is only one true home of the church and it's sharing in the glory of Jesus, the Son of God, forever and ever.

Jesus' kingdom is not an earthly kingdom but a heavenly one which shall certainly be ours to share when he comes in the glory of his Father to judge the world in righteousness.

Look at chapter 16 verse 27. In a sense, you see what follows on in chapter 17 expands that verse. The transfiguration gives us a glimpse of that promised glory when Jesus says he will repay each for what they have done.

And if what you have done is in this life rejected this world's glory and taken up your cross and followed him, as verse 25 puts it there, losing your life for his sake, then that is the glory that you will share on that great day.

The true glory of Jesus, the King of Heaven, which he shares with all of those who will share his heavenly home. And what this extraordinary scene in chapter 17 makes clear is that this is the goal that the whole story of the Bible has been about right from the very beginning.

[13 : 35] Remember how Matthew anchors his gospel story in the Old Testament right back in chapter 1. Do you remember? Jesus, he says, in chapter 1 is the promised son of David, the son of Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel.

And now he's saying you're seeing the climax of this story. This is where it's all been going right from the very start. And that's the significance of the mention here of Moses and Elijah.

And the disciples would immediately have recognized these parallels. Moses in Exodus went up onto Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, to meet God. And in Exodus chapter 24, we're told he was there six days and the glory of God descended in a cloud.

It even says he had three companions who went with him part of the way. And God spoke out of that cloud. And in chapter 34 of Exodus, remember Moses' face, we're told, shone like the sun.

Just as verse 2 here tells us, Jesus' face shone like the sun. And Matthew's already shown us in how many ways Jesus' life was foreshadowed in the life of Moses and the life of Israel as a whole.

[14 : 45] And here again, he's saying this is where all the law and the prophets were pointing right from the very start to Christ, to his church as the goal of history. That's the story. And Moses and Elijah together, well, they represent the whole of the law and the prophets.

Remember back in chapter 5, Jesus said, I've not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill their story. And Moses and Elijah both met God as it happens on Mount Horeb.

Elijah, remember when he fled from Jezebel? and both were persecuted on earth for their loyalty to Jesus, the King of Heaven.

Their approach of Christ was better to Moses than all the treasures of Egypt, says Hebrews 11. And Elijah, remember, he was the one who stood alone against all the prophets of Baal, against the whole culture of his day.

Both of these men were true disciples who bore their cross in their day, a cross of shame. for the sake of Jesus.

[15 : 55] And both of these stories were intimately associated with God's great promise of redemption. Moses at the beginning, remember, he was the leader of the great exodus out of Egypt to the land of promise, to the new home of God's people.

And Elijah, Elijah was spoken of by the prophets as one who would somehow reappear at the end of God's story, signaling that at last the ultimate bondage of God's people was coming to an end.

And the promised great day of the Lord was at hand when at last a new exodus would lead to an ultimate salvation, to the restoration of all things, ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth that the prophet Isaiah so wonderfully pictured as God's everlasting kingdom was consummated in life everlasting.

Turn back just to see that a few pages to the very last verses or two of the Old Testament just before the beginning of Matthew's gospel in Malachi chapter 4.

Verse 4, remember the law of my servant Moses, he says, the statutes and rules I commanded him at Horeb for all reason. Remember Moses and behold, verse 5, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

[17 : 17] You see, here we are, Moses who began God's people, who began God's church with the exodus from Egypt and Elijah who presages the final exodus, the great redemption of all God's people here on earth and together they're pointing to the glory of Jesus.

And verse 3, they're talking to him. They're talking to him about the work that he has come to do to deliver his people, to bring his people truly home at last.

In Luke's account, in Luke chapter 9, he says explicitly they spoke about his departure, his exodus, literally, is the word that he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.

And that's what they had been pointing towards all through the story of the law and the prophets. The fulfillment at last in Jesus the Messiah of God's great redemption of his people.

Not now from Egypt, but from the great house of bondage, the world of sin and rebellion and its great penalty, death itself. and liberation into mankind's true home at last to share the glory that we were created for.

[18 : 36] We were created to be images of the glory of God. And here is Jesus winning that glory for us as our great Savior and Redeemer, the Son of God.

And God himself, verse 5, says, yes, this is the one that you pointed to. And in him, all of my promises are being fulfilled.

It's the same words, isn't it, from heaven that came at Jesus' baptism in chapter 3. Two hugely significant words of scripture put together in this one phrase. This is my Son, quote Psalm 2, the messianic Son of God, the great King at last.

And he's the well-pleasing one I delight in, quoting Isaiah chapter 42, speaking about the promised servant of the Lord, the one who would come and suffer for his people to atone for their sins.

He is the great prophet. And there's a third illusion, too, because in the words, listen to him, he's quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 18 and verse 5, and God's promise to raise up one at last, like Moses, to him you shall listen.

[19 : 51] You see, now at last, in the flesh, in Jesus of Nazareth, all is fulfilled. He alone is God's ultimate king come to rule the world.

He's God's ultimate priest to atone for the sins of the world. He's God's ultimate prophet to lead and to instruct the world in truth. No mere man, he is the God man, God the Son himself.

the glory of heaven come to earth to bring us home to heaven. And for a moment, you see, he's transfigured and they glimpse his true glory.

The glory of the mountain of the Lord, of God's true dwelling place and the glory of his home, the home of his household, the home of his church.

It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? And yet, the word from heaven to the three disciples also actually is a rebuke. Listen to him, he says, because they hadn't been listening properly, had they?

[21 : 02] This is in chapter 6. Poor Peter had only got part of the story, even in his great confession. And in fact, here in these words from heaven, there's a triple rebuke.

There's three things that they must get clear on that we must be clear on. And the first is that they must see Jesus and Jesus alone as the unique climax to all God's plans and promises of salvation.

The voice in verse 5 rebukes Peter's idea in verse 4 of setting up these tents, these shrines, one for each of Jesus and Moses and Elijah.

Because no, Jesus is not just another one of the prophets. That's what the people thought back in 16 verse 14. Who do they say am? One of the prophets. No. He is the one to all to whom all these prophets and great men pointed.

He is the goal. And to him alone belongs this dazzling glory. It's his light that bathes all of them.

[22 : 09] That's why verse 8 when they look up you see Moses and Elijah have faded away. Only Jesus remains because the prophets work is done. And now Jesus alone encapsulates all the glory of God's covenant promise.

He at last is Emmanuel. He is God with us. As the angel said before his birth do you remember? Do you remember how at Sinai when God appeared to them and spoke in the cloud the people were terrified at the glory on the mountain?

They fell down trembling just as the disciples did here in verse 6. And they cried out then do you remember for a mediator for Moses to keep them at a distance from God and his fearful holiness which is so terrifying to sinful people.

But look here at verse 7 do you see? That rightful fear is bridged by God himself in the flesh. and he touches them and he says have no fear because in Jesus we have at last the mediator who can bring us near to the glory of God.

He alone can bridge the chasm of our sinfulness and bring us home to God the Father. And so all others even the great prophets of the past they must fade away forever because he the unique sovereign and savior is here.

[23 : 44] And that's an important rebuke again isn't it today to so many in a world of pluralism like we live in where people want to say no there are many ways many mediators to the mountain of God.

People who want Jesus to be just one among many of the great ones who can lead us to God. No says the voice. There can be no tents no temples no shrines for others.

We must listen to Jesus alone to find the true God because he alone is Emmanuel he alone is God with us forever.

the second rebuke that's implied in these words obviously is that his kingdom is not of the earth.

He didn't come to set up tents or temples on earth for himself and for his people. He came to bring us home to a permanent heavenly kingdom which still lies in the future.

[24 : 47] And this is but a glimpse of it. It's not yet fully realized. That's so important to grasp especially today. But many people do seem to think that the church is just about this world and that the church should be devoted just to setting up tents on earth.

That's the whole mistake of the social gospel of liberalism. Just take it up entirely with making tents on earth like food banks or like homeless shelters by tackling climate change and all these sorts of things.

They haven't listened to Jesus saying that my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, he goes on to say there when he says that in John chapter 18, his servants would be fighting with weapons and with armies.

But no, our weapons are not the weapons of the world. As Paul the apostle says to the Corinthians, our weapon rather is the divine power of the gospel of salvation.

That's why the crusades in the middle ages were so mistaken, isn't it? The medieval popes and their churches were not listening to Jesus either. But they were thinking the things of man.

[26 : 00] That's why they were engaging in earthly battles, not heavenly battles. But the social gospel makes exactly the same error. Focused only on earthly matters.

Now don't misunderstand, of course, of course all Christ's people are called to share in acts of love and compassion and mercy. That's obvious. We're to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Doesn't he sing? But when an organization that calls itself Christian aid has a slogan that says we believe in life before death, well too often what it really means I'm afraid is that we only really believe in life in this world and not in eternity.

And we certainly don't prioritize the gospel of eternity. Just the same when the prosperity gospel today focuses only on health and on wealth and on prosperity now in this world, in this life.

No, says Jesus, look at chapter 16 verse 26 again. What does it profit to gain all these things in this world and then forfeit real life?

[27 : 19] My kingdom alone is the truly glorious and permanent reality and it's a heavenly kingdom. That's what explains by the way the section at the end here.

Look at verses 24 to 27. Seems strange this little section all about tax. The tax man asks Peter about Jesus' tax returns.

That's still a very popular way, isn't it, to try and discredit a public figure? Publish your tax returns. Well, Peter says, verse 25, of course Jesus pays his taxes.

He's very keen for Jesus to have a good witness, to be shown to be obeying the government. But look what Jesus says. Don't be so enthusiastic about paying taxes, Peter.

Verse 26, the sons of the kingdom don't pay taxes. I am the heir of the universe and you also are my sons, part of my royal family.

[28 : 18] You own the cosmos. We are not subject to taxes. That's what he's saying. So we could write to the chancellor, dear Mr.

Sunak, since as a Christian I am heir not only to this earth but the whole cosmos and will one day inherit it all and I will sit with the Lord Jesus Christ judging men and angels according to Jesus.

I have the right to claim total exemption from tax. If you don't believe me, Mr. Sunak, ask the Scottish finance minister. She knows her Bible. She'll tell you it's absolutely true.

If you think gift aid is good, well what about this? Jesus is saying it's not about reclaiming tax. He says you are not subject to any earthly taxes. verse 26, very clear, the sons, plural, the sons of his kingdom are free from all taxes on earth.

How about that for an attraction to the Christian faith, eh? But before we all rush off to uncourt the champagne, I suppose we better read verse 27. So as not to cause offenses, Jesus, literally not to cause others to stumble, over what my kingdom really means and its understanding, Jesus commands Peter to pay the tax.

[29 : 40] While at the same time showing clearly that Jesus has all the means of the universe at his royal command, even money stuck in the mouth of a fish for his people's entire needs here on earth.

Now be clear, I better just say this, Jesus is not suggesting we'll all be able to pay all of our taxes by taking up fishing. I expect there probably is some church somewhere, probably in America, that builds itself on that distinctive, the fishing church that pays no tax.

No, that's not what he's saying. What is his point? Well, friends, it's perfectly clear, isn't it? Jesus, the Son of God, the King of Heaven, the Creator and the Lord of all things, has turned his back on all his heavenly rights and privileges in order to voluntarily give himself on earth so as to open the door of his heavenly kingdom to lost sinners like us, to bring people home to his heavenly glory through his own total submission to pay the price for his people, for his church.

Not, as Peter says later, not a price in silver and gold coins, but with his own precious blood paying the full price for sins here on earth, our sins, not his own.

And that's the way that he sets the sons of the kingdom free and brings them home to the glory of heaven. And that's the way that he is calling all who are his to follow him.

[31 : 33] Do you see? Peter and all Christ's people are to have far greater priorities to be taken up with on earth than to be concerned just with our rights and our privileges, whether it's tax breaks or whether it's anything else at all of mere temporal significance.

Jesus' concern above all, he says that no one should stumble, that is no one should sin and lose the salvation of his kingdom, but that his people should be willing also to give up all earthly glory and privilege for the ultimate privilege of leading others on the way home to glory.

And that's the third rebuke that's implied in the voice from heaven. They must listen to Jesus telling them, as he has done there at the end of chapter 16, that their true home is to share in his heavenly glory, but it's not yet.

It's only when he comes again in his glory. And also they're to listen to him when he tells them that the way home and the only way home now on this earth is by sharing in his self-humbling way, sharing in the way of the cross.

And that's what we see so clearly demonstrated in this section in the middle from verses 9 to 23, and that's our second main heading. There's only one way on earth to that home in glory, and it's to share in Jesus' suffering on earth.

[33 : 10] That's what the end of chapter 16 says so clearly. We'll share in his glory then, verse 27, only if we share his suffering now, verse 24, if we take up our cross and follow him on his earthly path.

And in these verses that immediately follow the transfiguration, Jesus makes clear, both in his words and in his actions, that the only way for the power and the glory of heaven's kingdom to touch and to transform lives here on earth now is by embracing the principle of the cross in our earthly lives.

First we have Jesus' plain words in verses 9 to 13, and we must listen to him. But verse 9 is just as surprising, isn't it, as it was in chapter 16, verse 20.

Tell no one, Jesus says again. It was utterly natural that they wanted to tell everyone about this majestic glory. Why on earth would Jesus command them not to?

For the same reason as he commanded Peter not to proclaim him as the Christ in chapter 16, because half truth about the gospel is not enough. A message that proclaims glory alone, even the glory of Jesus' heavenly kingdom, is not the whole truth, and therefore it's not the true gospel.

[34 : 32] gospel. So first in words, and then in an acted parable, Jesus spells it out so clearly. It's death first, and then glory afterwards.

Verse 9, look, the Son of Man must be raised from the dead first. first. But just like Peter in chapter 16, as soon as death is mentioned, they recoil.

That's the force of verse 10, isn't it? What about the prophecy that Elijah comes to preclude the glory of the kingdom, the glorious dawn of the day of the Lord? We've read Malachi, we've just seen Elijah with you.

Surely that means the glory of heaven is imminent now. How then can there possibly be any room for the death of the Messiah? We can't have that. That's what they mean.

It's just like what Peter said in chapter 16. But Jesus says, no, you're wrong. At least the scribes' understanding of Elijah is wrong.

[35 : 36] Your minister's understanding is wrong. The scriptures are right. Of course, Elijah does come. Verse 11, and it will herald the coming glory of God, but not the way that your scribes, your preachers have taught you.

They were blind to the real truth of scripture, so blind that they failed to recognize this new Elijah when he did come. Verse 12, John the Baptist was that Elijah figure.

He did herald the coming glory. But like all the prophets, he pointed people to me. And for that, verse 12, they scorned him and they killed him.

And they will do the same to me. The Son of Man will surely suffer at their hands. glory. But that will be the road home to glory.

And that is God's power at work to restore all things. That and that alone is what will open the door to the glory of heaven that you've glimpsed.

[36 : 39] will love to God. And that message, the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior, that message alone, Jesus is telling them must be the key that I've spoken about in your hands and on your lips to unlock the kingdom of heaven for lost sinners.

The way to the glory of heaven is the way of the cross here on earth. The way home to the glory of heaven for Jesus was to turn his back on earthly glory and embrace scorn and shame of the cross.

Jesus won the world through shame as the hymn puts it. And that's the only earthly road for any to their true home in glory.

That's Jesus' plain testimony here. And his words are immediately echoed powerfully and deliberately in his actions here.

He did not remain transfigured on the mountain. But he turned his back on the majestic glory. His by right the glory.

[37 : 47] And he descends deliberately into the valley bottom. And we see well verses 14 to 21 so vividly the world that he came into.

It's a world of disease, a world of demons, a world of darkness. A world full of the impotence, powerless humanity, even verse 16, even among Jesus' closest disciples.

But from that glory to this dark world he came because he must suffer in order to bring home to glory his precious people, his church.

Because, look at verse 22, he must be delivered into the hands of men to death in order to save. Let me quote to you from my father's notes.

It would be difficult to find a more complete contrast than that between this passage and what precedes it. There, the majesty and glory of Christ. Here, the misery of man in this fallen world, represented by the demon-possessed boy and his distracted father.

[38 : 54] And this is the strength and wonder of the gospel message. Over against the dark shadows and terrifying enigmas of life and the tragic plight of man, God has set the glory and sufficiency of his Christ.

A Christ who comes down to where men are in their need to heal and to save them. What we see in this story is an enactment of the gospel of divine condescension.

You see, that alone is how the power of the kingdom of heaven comes down to this earth. It's the power of the cross alone that opens heaven's gate.

That road to glory is through Jesus' death and his resurrection. And that's a principle, you see, that holds true always in the mission of his kingdom.

The power of heaven touches earth, transforms earth, transforms the darkness, the impotence of this world, only, only where the pattern of the cross of Jesus has been embraced by his people.

[40 : 06] And Matthew's account here of the healing and the exorcism is much more concise than Mark's in chapter nine. And he abbreviates to make the total contrast absolutely clear.

The contrast between the impotence and the unbelief of his disciples and the power and the complete authority of Jesus. They couldn't heal him. They couldn't cast out the demon, verse 19.

By the way, notice the nuance there. This boy was both diseased, says Matthew, and demonized. The two things were related, but they are distinguished. Notice that. But why the disciples' impotence?

Jesus says, verse 20, because they have little faith. And that phrase in Matthew always means unbelief. It doesn't mean excusable doubts.

It means sinful unbelief. Verse 17 puts it plainly, doesn't it? They're faithless and twisted in their thinking. They should have been able to give the help needed.

[41 : 06] Jesus had previously given these apostles authority over demons and to heal every disease. Remember back in chapter 10. But they had no real faith to do so, says Jesus, because real faith isn't just an intellectual thing.

It's not just understanding. The disciples are growing in understanding, slowly, but they are growing in understanding. But no real faith means embracing the principle of the cross.

Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem and the cross. The Christ must suffer. He must be delivered over to death in this world. And wherever Christ went, enactments of this gospel took place because his whole life was lived in obedience to this unvarying principle of fundamental obedience to the will of God.

He didn't heal because he was God. God is powered and derived solely from the fact that he was God, but because he was God incarnate, because he was the God man come down in obedience unto death.

Jesus, from the very beginning of his ministry, took up his cross, denied himself. And these disciples hadn't yet understood what that really meant for him or for their own lives if they were going to share in his gospel mission.

[42 : 44] They hadn't grasped that between the old world, the world of disease and demons and darkness here in verses 14 to 21, and the new world of living as sons of the kingdom of heaven with all the privileges, with all the freedom and the powers of this earth.

What Jesus is talking about in verses 24 to 27, between these two worlds, do you see in the text in front of us, between these two worlds is verses 22 and 23, the way of the cross of Jesus.

And it's embracing that, says Jesus, that is what real faith means. It's not just an intellectual thing. It's a moral thing.

It's an existential thing. It involves everything you have, everything that you are here on this earth. Real faith in Jesus is something you do.

You take up your cross and you follow Jesus. You turn your back on all the glory and the status and the position that you have in this world, even by rights.

[43 : 54] And you follow him and walk in the only road to the true home of glory everlasting. And real spiritual power in the church's witness, likewise, I'm afraid it comes only through disciples walking in that way of the cross and that way alone.

And we need to grasp that today, don't we, in our contemporary church, in our lives. Because we long to see the power of heaven at work in our witness, in our influence in the world, in our own church life here and in this city.

We want to see mountains of spiritual opposition retreat through our witness. But Jesus says here, look at verse 20. Jesus says here, it's not because we lack great faith that we're not seeing that.

It's real faith, he says, even as tiny as a grain of mustard seed, real faith is sufficient. So do we lack real faith?

Jesus says it's only cross-bearing disciples who know the secret of real spiritual power. I think it was William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who said the secret of a man's power lies in the measure of his surrender.

[45 : 35] Jesus turned his back on the glory, on all personal status, on his rights, on his ego. all the glory that was rightly his.

And he did so in order to bring others home, to share that everlasting glory. And the power of heaven touched human lives and transformed them through his message forever.

the only road to glory in heaven and the only road of real spiritual power here on earth is that road, the road of the cross.

Jesus won the world through shame, says that hymn, and beckons thee his road, his road.

Amen. Let's pray together. we pray with one of the great saints of the early church.

[46 : 57] O Lord, our God, teach us, we beseech thee, to ask thee a right for the right blessings. Steer thou the vessel of our life toward thyself, thou tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls.

Show us the course wherein we should go. Renew a willing spirit within us. Let thy spirit curb our wayward senses and guide and enable us unto that which is our true good to keep thy laws and in all our works evermore to rejoice in thy glorious and gladdening presence.

For thine is the glory and the praise from all thy saints forever and ever. Amen. Amen.