

He knew it was God's will for him to suffer on the cross. He knew that the result of the cross would be the joy of living in the presence of his Father forever, glorified with the glory they shared from all eternity. He knew that the result of the cross would be the joy of worshipping his father with a countless multitude of men and women redeemed by his blood. So, he endured the cross by faith. He trusted that what God said would be the result of his suffering would be the result.

15. Based on the last three questions, how would you qualify “nothing will be impossible for you”?

Nothing God promises to you or commands for you to do will be impossible to you if you have a true faith in the true Christ. You will be able to do whatever God assigns you to do for the glory of Christ and the good of his people. Every mountain standing between you and the work of God in and through you will be removed as you trust in Christ and his promises.

16. Verses 24-27 begin with Peter being asked if Jesus pays the temple tax. Read Exodus 30:11-16. What is the temple tax?

Every male over 20 had to pay a half shekel of silver each year as the redemption price for themselves. They had to pay the money in place of dying; it is in atonement for their lives. The money is then used to fund the worship in the temple. This is a requirement of God's law. To not pay the tax would be sin and incur the just wrath of God against you.

17. Peter is confident that Jesus will pay it and goes to find Jesus to make arrangements for paying it. Before Peter can say anything, what does Jesus ask him? Summarize the point of the analogy.

Jesus asks Peter if kings collect taxes from the people they have conquered or from their own children. The obvious answer is that kings only collect taxes from foreigners. Children, sons to be exact, are exempt from paying taxes.

18. What does this mean about the nation Israel's relation to God and what does this mean about Jesus?

First, he is implying that the people of Israel are not true sons. God, the king, has been requiring this tax payment for all these centuries from the foreigners who owe him tribute. He is showing here that “law keeping” is not the way you become God's son. In fact, in this case, law keeping proves you are not God's son. Second, he is implying that he is the true son and therefore is exempt from paying the tax. He does not have to submit to this law because he is the Son.

19. Who else is a “true son” in this story?

Peter. Therefore, all who are joined to Christ by faith are also sons and not subject to the law as a the way to “atone” for their lives.

20. Why does Jesus devise such a strange way to pay the tax?

There are two things that Peter's fishing in order to pay the tax shows. First, the demands of the law are met by the grace of God through the work of Christ. God's law must be fulfilled. The only people who are going to heaven are those who have fulfilled the requirements of the law. No human, except Jesus has done that. So any human that gains heaven will do so, only because Jesus has obeyed the law and suffered the curse of the law for him or her. I am righteous in God's sight because Jesus paid sin's death penalty and because Jesus obeyed the law for me. Second, the people for whom Jesus fulfills the law are all those who trust in him. Peter had to exercise faith in order to pay the tax. He had to take his fishing line and hook, throw it in the water, and open the mouth of the first fish he caught. He trusted the word of Christ. This is what faith is, trusting that all that God has promised me in Jesus is better and more sure than all the happiness that this world can give. What you are watching in this strange story is Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.”

21. What “mountains” currently are standing between you and all that God wants to be for you and do for you in Christ?

22. How are you trusting in Jesus and his promises in order to see those mountains moved? What specific promises do you have from Jesus in regards to those mountains?

12. Why was their faith of such poor quality? What was wrong with it? Remember, they were confident that they could cast out the demon so it wasn't confidence or positive expectations they were lacking. (CLUE: compare the faith of the centurion in 8:5-10 as Jesus calls his faith "great".)

They had "faith" in their ability to cast out the demon but their faith was useless because it was directed at the wrong object. The object of your faith determines the quality of your faith. The centurion trusted in Christ and his word and so received what he asked for. The disciples were not trusting in Christ and his word. We are not told what they were trusting in exactly but it would be a safe bet they were trusting in themselves and their abilities or goodness, rather than in Christ and his promises.

Here is an illustration of how this works that you may want to use or adapt as you see fit. A person who is afraid to fly will wait to the last minute to board the plane. He sits in his seat stiff and clutching the armrests or the people sitting next to him. He breathes rapidly and is very pale. He can barely stifle a cry of terror as the plane lifts off the runway and points its nose into the sky. The entire trip is pure misery. When he lands he bolts from the plane and falls into the arms of those waiting, trembling with relief to have made it. On that very same flight there are dozens of people who travel all the time and have hardly noticed taking off or landing. They have been calm and serene the entire time. Both kinds of people trusted in the airplane, right? They both bought tickets and got on the plane and safely arrived at their destination. In terms of experiencing what the plane is for, it doesn't matter that one had great faith while the other had very little faith. The important thing is that they trusted a trustworthy object. A small faith in the airplane gained the objective of traveling to the destination, just as did a great faith.

But now let's say that I built an airplane using a car engine and materials I have lying around my house. I built it based upon a design I found on the Internet. Then I invite you to join me for the maiden flight. I'm going to fly from the Rock County airport to the Dane County Airport. You agree to go with me. We tell all our friends how happy we are to be flying this awesome machine and how certain we are to enjoy our flight. Our friends tell us we are crazy to be getting on this plane. We inform them that we have great faith and they are unbelievers. We say that this plane will get us to Madison safely. We have no fear but are absolutely confident we will make it. We are sincere in our belief that the plane will get us to Madison. Jesus would say, after we crashed, "O you of little faith." We have little faith because the object of our faith is not trustworthy.

13. Jesus says, in v. 20, that if you have a mustard seed size faith in him and his promises then you will be able to move mountains, nothing will be impossible to you. Does this mean, as Pentecostal/charismatic teachers claim, that the only reason Christians are sick or poor or in trouble is because they do not have faith? Does this mean that nothing you want as a Christian will be impossible? (NOTE: The metaphor, "moving mountains" is a very common way of talking about removing obstacles to accomplishing a goal.) The answer to both these questions is "NO" as can be seen in the context.

13a. What does Jesus promise the disciples in Matthew 10:1 that explains his anger with their inability? How does this limit "nothing"?

Jesus promised them the ability to cast out demons and heal. Nothing Jesus has promised will be impossible for those who have faith.

13b. What does the fact that Jesus healed the boy in spite of the unbelieving and perverse generation tell us about the relationship of our faith and God's will?

Faith is not determinative, God's sovereign pleasure is the determinative cause of all things.

13c. In vv. 22-23 Jesus again tells the disciples that he is going to be betrayed and killed and then rise on the third day. What does this statement following upon the heels of "nothing will be impossible for you" tell us about the limits of "nothing"? (CLUE: How does Jesus feel about going to the cross in 26:36-42?)

There is not just one suffering son in this story. Jesus is going to suffer at the hands of men and be killed. He is going to ask his Father to deliver him from this suffering, three times, but his Father is going to say "No, you must suffer." God the Father is going to refuse to do for his own Son what God the Son freely did for this human father and son. If "nothing" is only limited by what I want, then Jesus must not have had enough faith to avoid the cross, because he did not want to go to the cross. Do you really want to say that Jesus suffered on the cross because he lacked faith?

14. How did Jesus willingly go the cross and endure it according to Matt. 20:28, John 4:34, 17:5, 19:30 & Hebrews 12: 2?

adulterous, unbelieving and perverse. The disciples are not followers of Jesus because they are somehow better or more “spiritual” by nature. There must be an explanation for their following of Jesus that is outside of themselves. NOTE: You might want to show them Matthew 11:25-27, 13:11 & 16:17 & Eph. 2: 4-7.

6. Compare Jesus’ language here with Numbers 14: 11-12. Why did God ask this question back in Numbers? How is this similar to what Jesus is asking here?

In Numbers 13-14 God asks a very similar question about Israel. This takes place about 15 months after God delivered the nation Israel from slavery in Egypt. He performed the 10 plagues, he parted the Red Sea for them and drowned the Egyptian army, he fed them every day with manna, he provided water out of rocks, he led them every day with a pillar of cloud in the day and of fire at night. Then when they came to the edge of the land of Canaan they refused to go into the land because they were afraid of the people. They accused God of bringing them out into the desert only to kill them. They were forming a mutiny in order to kill Moses and Aaron and then go back to Egypt. In short they refused to believe that God could do what he promised in spite of enormous evidence to the contrary.

Jesus is doing essentially the same thing. These disciples have seen Jesus heal hundreds of people. They know that Jesus, just like Yahweh, promised that they would be able to heal people. In fact, they have healed people prior to this (Matthew 10:1ff). Just like Israel, the disciples refuse to trust in Christ and his promises but instead trust in themselves and so cannot do what God promised and commanded.

7. How does God/Jesus respond to unbelief? (See Romans 2:5-11 and 14: 23).

He hates it and promises to punish those who refuse to believe in him and his promises. This means that the disciples, by their inability to heal the boy show that they deserve God’s wrath, not his favor. He is declaring God’s animosity and hostility towards unbelievers. It is a perverse and evil thing to not trust in the God who has made us and who has revealed himself to us in Jesus. God has proven himself over and over again and it is wicked to not submit to him, to not trust in him, to not obey him. God threatens to treat with contempt those who treat him with contempt by refusing to trust his promises and obey his commands.

8. In the face of all this unbelief, what does Jesus still do in 18? What does this tell us?

In spite of the fact that no one believes, Jesus heals the boy. This shows that faith is not the determinative force in the universe. Rather God’s sovereign pleasure is the ultimate determinative force in the universe. God commands faith and responds to faith but is not limited by the lack of faith. He is sovereign in his grace. He is kind to wicked people. Every day he gives life, breath and everything else to billions of people who despise him. He often heals and restores to health people who do not trust in him out of the greatness of his mercy. Thus he does here.

9. What happens next? What does this tell us about the disciple’s expectations? What does this tell us that faith is not?

The disciples get Jesus alone and ask him why they were not able to cast out the demon from the boy. The disciples fully expected the boy to be healed. They were absolutely positive that when they commanded the demon to leave, it would leave. They are surprised that they were unable to heal the boy. Faith is not having positive thoughts and expectations. Faith is not being confident that what you say is going to happen will happen for that is what the disciples did and believed and nothing happened. If you use your imagination a little bit you can see the disciples trying one formula after another to heal the boy. They kept trying all the special words they could think of, they did all the different things they had seen Jesus do. But nothing they did worked and they were surprised.

10. What is the reason that Jesus gives for their inability to heal the boy?

They have little faith.

11. After accusing them of having little faith Jesus tells them that faith the size of a mustard seed will enable humans to move mountains. In fact, nothing will be impossible for those who have faith the size of a mustard seed. What does Jesus show us he means by “little faith” by using the mustard seed as an analogy?

He shows that he does not mean they have a small quantity of faith, but rather that they have no faith because a mustard seed is synonymous with “little” as shown by the parable in 13:31. Jesus is not talking about the quantity of faith but rather the quality of faith.

THE RULE OF GOD REQUIRES FAITH IN CHRIST Matthew 17:14-27

Please review this week's catechism.

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time you trusted someone and they let you down. What was that like? Describe a time you were absolutely sure something was going to happen and it didn't happen. What was that like? Have you ever been absolutely confident that God was going to do something or prevent something from happening but what you expected didn't happen or what you hoped wouldn't happen, did happen? How did/does that make you feel?

In this passage the disciples expect something to happen just as they have seen it happen hundreds of times before. However, what they expect to happen doesn't happen. Jesus has some strong words of rebuke for them and when they ask why what they expected to happen didn't happen he explains why. In this passage we will discover some very important lessons about what faith is and is not and why it is important.

STUDY

1. Summarize what has happened from Matthew 16: 13-17:13.

Jesus and the disciples have been alone for an extended period of time. Jesus began this "retreat" by asking the disciples what the crowds were saying about him. After reporting the various opinions of the people, Jesus asked them what they thought about him. Peter, speaking for all the disciples proclaims that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus tells him he is right but then tells him the only reason he knows is because God the Father revealed this to him. Then he tells Peter that he and the other apostles are going to form the foundation of church that God is going to build. He then reveals that he, the Messiah is going to suffer and be killed by the Jewish leaders and then rise from the dead. Peter takes offense at this statement and rebukes Jesus for talking so pessimistically. Jesus responds with his own rebuke and calls Peter Satan. He condemns Peter for setting his heart on what

humans love rather than on what God loves. He then explains what it means to be a Christian. Then, six days later, in spite of Peter's wickedness, Jesus takes Peter, John and James up on a mountain and there reveals his divine glory. Moses and Elijah show up to talk with Jesus and God the Father shows up in the glory of the cloud and tells the three disciples to listen to what Jesus says. Peter tries to foment a revolution by building three permanent shelters for the glorified Jesus, Moses and Elijah so he can others up here to see this and so join in the revolution. However, the glory ends and while they are walking down the mountain the disciples again reveal their ignorance by asking Jesus why he didn't keep Elijah around when he had him in order that Elijah might set things in order and get the revolution going.

2. When Jesus comes down from the mountain with Peter, James and John, what does he find?

There is a crowd of people around the nine disciples who have been trying to heal a boy. The boy's father sees Jesus and runs up to him, falling on his knees he begs Jesus to heal his son and informs him that the disciples were not able to heal him.

3. How does Jesus respond upon being informed that the disciples could not heal the boy?

Jesus exclaims, "O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

4. Compare and contrast 17:14-17 with 16: 1-4.

Jesus' comment in both cases is provoked by the behavior of a few people. The Pharisees demand Jesus performs a miracle to prove he is the Messiah. The disciples are unable to heal this boy. These actions by a few lead Jesus to condemn an entire generation. (NOTE: Generation means everyone alive on planet earth at that time.) In both cases these actions are seen as evidence of a condition or state of being. The actions are the result of a nature that is "wicked and adulterous", "unbelieving and perverse". The Pharisees demand a sign because they are wicked and adulterous, the disciples cannot heal the boy because they are unbelieving and perverse.

5. What conclusions are we to draw from this comparison?

The disciples are by nature no different from the Pharisees. The entire human race commits acts of sin because every person is by nature, wicked,