

Preparation for the Tribulation**Matthew 17:21—27**

With the Tribulation probably only months away (but delayed twice by the Father. The first time it was pushed back one year to give Israel additional time to repent as shown in Luke 13:6—9. It was then put on hold with Israel's final rejection of the offer of the Kingdom through Stephen and the introduction of the Church, the Body of Christ. Although we speak of God's program with Israel as being changed, all of God's plans for the human race were already laid out from before the foundation of the world. See Ephesians 1:4) we can see a change in the direction of Jesus' ministry. He announced his upcoming death to the Disciples and they rejected that possibility leading Him to declare that they had little faith. If they had faith in Jesus they would have believed what He told them. He had been training the Disciples in the importance of complete trust. During the Tribulation God will seem very far away from them and it will appear that Satan will win (Deuteronomy 31:17; Isaiah 8:17; 54:7—8; Psalm 30:7). Only faith in what God tells them will get them through this time on earth of testing and wrath.

Without a faith grounded in God the Disciples will be totally at the mercy of Satan. The story of the demon that could not be cast out by the Disciples is a picture of what will happen during the Tribulation if they waver in their faith. Wavering in faith is not about having a certain amount of faith for all they needed was faith the size of a mustard seed. It was all about the object of their faith, Jesus Christ. It's not about how much but about whom. A large faith in the wrong thing will be worthless while a small faith in the right thing (Person) can move mountains.

The Disciples lost the power to cast out Satan because they did not have faith in what Jesus told them. It is only after the resurrection that they began to fully trust Him and with this newfound faith in Jesus Christ came the ability to perform miracles again.

Prayer and fasting (verse 21)

According to Mark 9 the man's son was possessed from childhood and this demon was in complete control of him even trying to destroy him. When Jesus commanded the demon to leave the boy the demon threw the boy into terrible convulsions and when he left, the boy was as a corpse. This is a picture of Israel in the Tribulation with Satan having a death-grip on Israel and unwilling to let go. The Little Flock is helpless and only God will be able to save Israel from Satan's clasp. Revelation 12:13—17 speaks of this time when the Little Flock will be pursued but protected during the Tribulation.

The Disciples were mystified as to why they were unable to cast out this demon. Jesus tells them that this type only comes out with prayer and fasting. Just a few chapters back Matthew relates the story of the Pharisees coming to Jesus complaining that He is eating and drinking with publicans and sinners while the disciples of John and they were fasting. Jesus replied that as long as the Bridegroom was with them it was a time of rejoicing but there will come a time when He is taken and then they will fast. This time of fasting is looking forward to the Tribulation after Jesus Christ is taken up into heaven (Matthew 9:10—15). The parable in Luke 19:11—15 clearly states that Jesus Christ needed to go to heaven to receive the Kingdom before He came back to rule. He also told His Disciples that He needed to leave but would give them another Comforter in His place (John 14:12—17).

Jesus announces His death again (verses 22—23)

The first time Jesus told the Disciples He was going to go to Jerusalem and be put to death at the hands of the Pharisees they rejected what He said. They were looking for the Kingdom to be set up, not to see their Messiah being put to death. At the Transfiguration Moses and Elijah were talking about the events that were to shortly transpire, specifically Jesus' death. This would be the second recorded time the Disciples

(Peter, James and John) heard this would happen. Now Jesus tells them again that He must be killed but will rise on the third day. This truth is now sinking in because instead of denying what Jesus said they now are remorseful that He will be put to death. Their faith in what He told them has increased and they now believe Him and become deeply grieved. They are coming to an understanding that their Messiah will die but at this point don't fully understand the big picture. Only after His resurrection do they receive a fuller understanding of how all these events tie in to the setting up of the Kingdom (Mark 9:30—32, 44—45; Luke 9:43—45; 18:31—34; 24:7—8, 44—45; John 2:22; 12:16).

Which Gospel?

Most people assume there is only one Gospel in the Bible. They are horrified to hear people speak of multiple gospels and accuse those who teach multiple Gospels as being heretics. The Gospel is merely Good News. It's God's good news to mankind that they can have eternal life. Those who believe in a single Gospel throughout the Bible also believe that the Gospel is progressive, in other words, they also believe it has changed over time as God reveals Himself and His plan to mankind. They also accuse us of saying Israel was saved by works while we are saved by faith. If they would actually take time to understand why we believe in two Gospels they would see that we believe, as they do, that salvation is always by faith but we also believe that God changed how believers were to demonstrate their faith. Israel absolutely needed to repent and be baptized. If they had faith to believe God then they would need to demonstrate that faith by being baptized (Luke 7:30). Those who said they had faith but didn't get baptized were demonstrating that they really didn't have faith. We in the Church, the Body of Christ, demonstrate our faith by obeying God and adding nothing to our faith. If I decide to get baptized to seal my salvation then I would be demonstrating a lack of faith and therefore I would not be saved.

The Disciples, and all Kingdom believers, needed to believe in their Messiah, Jesus Christ, and demonstrate their faith with baptism. Anything less would show a lack of faith. They needed to come to the Son as prescribed by the Father. We need to believe in the Person of Jesus Christ being God and believe in His death, burial and resurrection for our salvation in this Age of Grace (1 Corinthians 15:1—4). Paul couldn't make this any clearer. It's obvious that the Disciples could not believe in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection before it happened. Their Gospel must be different than our Gospel. Even those who deny multiple Gospels in the Bible would have to admit that the Gospel preached by the man Jesus is different than the Gospel given to Paul by the risen and glorified Jesus Christ. It seems baseless to argue today's Gospel of Grace is the same as the Gospel of the Kingdom but with a progressive change after Christ's death on the cross. According to Paul there is no part of his Gospel that can be changed (Galatians 1:6—9) so why can the Gospel of the Kingdom, as preached by Jesus, be so easily changed?

Taxes and fishing (Verses 24—27)

Peter was confronted with paying taxes while in Capernaum. Jesus told him that the first fish he caught with a hook would have the tax money in its mouth. It seems like a strange story but there are several things that can be learned. First notice that Jesus put Himself under the control of the government. This is because God instituted government and those who are in charge were put there by God (Romans 13:1—7). Second, we get a glimpse into what the Kingdom will be like. Verse 25 says that the king makes strangers pay the tax and not those of his own family. The king's family is exempt. In the Kingdom, Christ will be King and the family (Israel) will not be paying taxes. Only the Gentiles will be made to pay taxes while Israel enjoys the riches of the Kingdom (Isaiah 60). One last truth that is illustrated here is Christ's command over the creatures of the earth. At creation man was given dominion over the animals. This was lost after the fall. Christ will have dominion over creation when He rules on the throne in the Millennial Kingdom. According to Isaiah 43:20 the beasts of the field will honor Christ. They do this by being obedient to Him, just as this fish was.

For previous notes and additional mid-Acts materials please visit www.MidActsTruths.com