

June 17, 2018

“The Paradigm Shift”
Matthew 17:14-23

FCF: Poor assumptions and our frustrations/floundering

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Jesus clearly intends a paradigm shift for us.
(anchor) We need to continually take heed to what He is saying.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Our frustrations and floundering have a lot to do with the poor assumptions we make. Think of our history of poor relations with Native Americans. Don't expect to see buckskin, braids, feathers, and a teepee. We need to have our assumptions checked. That was the case years ago when the Europeans came to North America. The assumption was you would look a man in the eye to show respect and trust. Not so for “the Indian”. For them, it was the opposite. It was actually disrespect and presumption to do such a thing. Imagine the problems that caused.

Our assumptions and preconceived ideas often need to be examined and challenged. And that is certainly the case with the ways of Jesus and what it means for us to follow Him.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 17:14-23](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Volcanoes have been much in the news as of late. Kilauea in Hawaii has led to the loss of hundreds of homes. And Volcan de Fuego in Guatemala has led to the loss of hundreds of lives, scores of others missing, and the decimation of whole towns. Volcanoes are ruptures in the crust of the earth that allow lava, ash, and gases to escape from a magma chamber below. They are found where tectonic plates are coming together or pulling apart. Which leads to all sorts of disruption and difficulty here upon the surface. And, thus, the need to monitor things closely.

That's a metaphor for a paradigm shift. Ways of seeing, thinking, and living held down deep are forced to move which then causes all sorts of disruption and difficulty. Which makes it vital to monitor things, to continually check and consider how we're doing in this new reality.

How is that relevant to our text? Much of what Jesus says here is counter-intuitive. It cuts against the grain of how we're used to seeing, thinking, and living. He clearly intends a paradigm shift for us. Which means we need to continually take heed to what He is saying.

How do we see our paradigm challenged and shifted here? Three things become clear, three marks of a disciple, a follower of Jesus. First, we are to be ever descending. Second, we are to be ever depending. And then, third, we are to be ever dying. That's the paradigm shift.

I. EVER DESCENDING

The first mark is that we are to be ever descending ([READ Matthew 17:14-18](#)). Note the contrast with the Transfiguration - from a blazing cloud of glory to a muddled crowd of chaos.

A) Facing the Difficulties

But Jesus doesn't back away. No, He presses forward, facing the difficulties.

1. Harkening back

All of this harkens back to Moses as he came down Mt. Sinai and was met by Israel's apostasy.

2. Pressing ahead

Jesus presses ahead into the chaos of a possessed child, a pained father, and watching crowds.

B) Facing the Discouragement

But it's not just the difficulties Jesus faces here. It's the discouragement as well.

1. The trashing of His creation

He's reminded all the more of the trashing of His creation, the trespass and vandalizing by Satan.

2. The failure of His disciples

But beyond even that, there is the failure of His disciples. Jesus had been on the mountain with Peter, James, and John. The other nine were left behind. That said, mature disciples were supposed to be able to carry on in their master's absence. That's hardly the case here. For they hardly could. And we can hear the discouragement in Jesus' words ([READ Matthew 17:17](#)).

To follow Jesus is to be ever descending - facing the difficulties and the discouragement.

Illustration:

Southwest Airlines has had an ad campaign for some time featuring folks who want to skip town after an awkward blunder. An intern who blows the cover of a secret agent. A general who gives away his network password. A traveler who mistakes a getaway car for his pre-arranged ride. And the tagline each time? "Want to get away?" Jesus did. But He kept going.

Application:

Don't misunderstand. There are times for rest - a break, a vacation. The sabbath itself is part of the fabric of creation. But the One who is our rest urges us forward, down the mountain and into the valley, a valley of difficulties and discouragements. Some of which will come from the outside. And some from the inside. Following Jesus means we are ever descending.

Jesus intends a paradigm shift for us. We need to continually take heed to what He says.

II. EVER DEPENDING

We are to be ever descending. And also ever depending ([READ Matthew 17:19-20](#)).

A) Assurance Given

There is a real assurance given here, tremendous encouragement if we have ears to hear.

1. The images

Think about the images. A grain of mustard seed is among the smallest of things. A mountain? Mountains were the most stable of all things. To move one is do what was deemed impossible.

2. Their meaning

The meaning of all this? The context is vital. This is not a blank check. Jesus has said that the kingdom has come and is advancing. So no kingdom work will be impossible. Disease will give way to healing, emptiness to fullness, broken relationships to reconciliation, poverty to abundance, injustice to justice, racism to peace - each to some measure, even in this life.

B) Condition Stated

It's an amazing assurance that is given. But note the condition that is stated - faith.

1. Ineffective faith

Jesus is speaking here of two kinds of faith - ineffective and effective. It's not that the disciples had no faith. But it was ineffective, divided and impoverished. They'd had some success, begun to rely on themselves, were faced with a great need, and now found themselves failing miserably.

2. Effective faith

Ineffective faith looks inwardly. Effective faith looks to Jesus. It's not about a confidence of outcome or a zeal of feeling. Nor is it about how much faith. It's about where and in whom.

Mustard seed and mountains. To follow Jesus is to be ever-depending in all things.

Illustration:

Think back to the commissioning of the Cherokee Team a few weeks ago. To have an experienced team can be a blessing and a curse. The knowledge of what to expect and how to respond can be good. But it can cause trouble if that's what you're looking to and relying upon.

Application:

Which transfers over into a host of things. We should be grateful for all the experience, learning and gifting we have. We should be grateful for those things but never reliant upon them.

There's a great assurance given here. But a clear condition stated. And we mustn't think that there's a single one of us or a single facet of our lives that is an exception to this. None of us or any of our circumstances. And that's true whether we're at a reservation or our workplace. That's true whether we're on foreign soil or in our own kitchen. We must be ever depending.

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III. EVER DYING

Which brings us to the last of the marks. To follow Christ is to be ever descending, ever depending, and ever dying (**READ Matthew 17:22-23**). This is the second such prediction made.

A) His Words

1. A new element

Meaning this is not the first time the disciples have heard Jesus speak such words. But now there is a new element. Not only will He be killed. He will be betrayed, handed over to His enemies.

2. The fuller picture

(**READ Matthew 16:21**) All this will be set in motion by a betrayal. This was too much to bear.

B) Their Distress

Which moves us from Jesus' words to their distress, their great sorrow and grief.

1. Expectations for the King and the kingdom

Their expectations for the King and the kingdom were being turned on their head. This is not who they thought He would be. The Son of Man as the Man of Sorrows? The Messiah as the

Suffering Servant? This was not who they thought the King was supposed to be nor how His kingdom was to come. Which is why He taught in the parables such as we find in Matthew 13.

2. Expectations for themselves

But there was something else. Jesus was upending their expectations about the King and the kingdom. And also what it would mean to follow Him. This was not going to be a parade of triumph. They were following the crucified One. Which meant theirs would be cruciform lives.

To follow Jesus is to be ever descending, ever depending, and ever dying at all times.

Illustration:

Semper Gumby - “always flexible”. That’s the motto of these Cherokee trips. Always flexible and willing to die to self that others might live. That means coming back to camp after a long day on your job site and asking, “How else can I help?” That means pitching in after dinner with another crew to help them with their assigned task, even though you’d rather play frisbee.

Application:

There are a thousand ways to transpose that over into our normal lives. But you see why Jesus’ words here had to be repeated, why they had to be emphasized. This is a counter-intuitive thing. It’s hard to die to self. Not that all our desires are bad. In and of themselves, many of them are good - peace and quiet, health and happiness. There’s nothing wrong with such things or desiring them. But we mustn’t be ruled by them. For following Jesus means ever dying.

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CONCLUSION:

Again, this is all so very counter-intuitive. It’s just not how we’re accustomed to thinking and living. It’s also quite counter-cultural. That is, if we strive to think and live in these ways, we will stand out. We will get noticed and attract attention. When folks ask, tell them why.

We had several discussions as a team at Cherokee - on the way up, on the way back, and throughout the week. One of these involved a scenario I put before the group. “Imagine we’re at the Paint Town Community Center, prepping those walls. Someone approaches and asks, ‘Why are you here? Why are you doing this?’ What will you say?” There are several layers to this and numerous ways to answer that question. We kicked this around and discussed a few possibilities. Here’s a synthesis of what we came up with. “I’m glad you asked. We’re here because of the love of Jesus. He has been so merciful to us and we wanted to show some of that to you.” It’s an answer that is simple, truthful, heartfelt, and may well invite more conversation.

The point being that living this way in this world will get you noticed. And we need to have an answer. That’s not just for a mission trip. Think with me. Where has Jesus sent you? Where do you live, work, and play? As we are ever descending, depending, and dying, that will attract attention. People will start to wonder and to ask questions. When they ask, tell them why.

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