

# Matthew 17 • The Transfiguration of Jesus

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Matthew 17, open your Bibles. We're studying through the Book of Matthew here on Sunday morning. We're going a chapter at a time each Sunday, which gives us a nice, kind of an overview, I suppose of the book.

You might notice as you're looking at chapter 17 in your Bible, I don't know if you have the ESV like I'm reading. You might have a different Bible translation, but whatever word is the very first word in your Bible, and in the ESV, it's the word, and, that's an important word. That's an important word for you to take note of because you guys remember your grammar in school? I mean, I personally don't because I've told you many times I was a horrible student. I learned everything after high school.

But if I would have been paying attention in grammar class, I would have learned that there's these little words called conjunctions. You remember those? Like, and, or even also, can be a conjunction. And well, this word in the Greek that starts off chapter 17 is a conjunction. That's why it's translated in the ESV and, okay.

And when you see a conjunction, you know that it is going to make a statement that is directly connected with something that happened before. Okay. All the homeschool moms are going, just what I taught my kids this week.

Again this tells you that chapter 17 is connected to chapter 16, and particularly the very last statement of chapter 16. Let me put it up on the screen for you just to remind you. This is that statement Jesus made where He said,

## **Matthew 16:28 (ESV)**

*“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.”*

*“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, okay. Conjunction, enter the conjunction, which starts chapter 17. And remember, there were no chapter divisions when Matthew wrote this. Those didn't come till hundreds and hundreds of years later.

We begin talking about the fulfillment of what Jesus promised. “...*some standing here will not taste death until...*” they will see this glorious kingdom. And, this is what happens.

*“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” (ESV)*

And basically what Peter, James, and John are allowed to see here is just a little sneak peek, a little preview of coming attractions, if you will, for when Jesus returns in His kingdom. And this is the way He's going to return. He's going to be in this glorious view of what they got to see here.

And then, but it wasn't just Jesus there. It says, “<sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.””

All right, stop there for a minute because we need to talk about this. Some of you might be a little confused if this is the first time you've gone through Matthew and you're thinking. Okay, wait a minute. I thought Moses and Elijah lived many hundreds of years earlier. Well, they did. They did. But here they are.

Probably the two most iconic figures in Hebrew history, standing there talking with Jesus. And these men are so important to the Jewish understanding of God's redemptive plan.

I mean, think about it. Moses. He's the man who brought the nation of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, led them through the wilderness, ultimately to the promised land. He didn't get to go in with them, but he brought him right up to the border. But more importantly, Moses is the one through whom the Law of God came to the people of Israel.

In fact, Moses was so intimately connected to the law that the people of Israel referred to it as the Law of Moses, even though, technically that wasn't true. It was through him that it was communicated to the people, but it's the Law of

God really. But they called it the law of Moses. So here's a man who is part of the law in the Jewish mind, so much that he's the man. He's the human representative, if you will, of the law. Right.

And then you have Elijah. A man who held a unique position among Israel's many prophets. I mean, Israel had many prophets. Elijah was just one of them. But uniquely, Elijah never experienced physical death. The Bible says that he was just simply taken by the Lord. And I mean, that's makes you a little bit special, wouldn't you say?

But more than that, another thing that set Elijah apart is that it was Elijah whom God said would come back again before the day of the Lord. This is a prophecy that's given in the Book of Malachi, which we'll look at here in just a minute.

But think about that. Elijah was a man who never died, and he was a man who's going to return before the day of the Lord. So he also takes a pretty special place in Israel's history.

Now, here they are, the two of them standing with Jesus and talking. And they're having this conversation between them.

And then, the next interesting element to this whole process is this statement by Peter where he says, *“Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents...”* That word literally means tabernacles. It's like a shelter. He says, I'll build three tabernacles *“here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”*

We're not given any explanation as to why Peter said what he said, other than the fact that if you read this same story in the Book of Mark, it says that Peter said that because he didn't know what else to say and he was terrified. And that's Peter. If he didn't know what to say, he would just say something. It often didn't make a whole lot of sense, but he'd talk.

Anyway, here's the interesting question though, about what Peter said, because he says, Lord, I'm glad we're here. This is all cool and everything, but if You want I'll build some shelters, for You and Moses and Elijah.

How did he know that was Moses and Elijah? Did you ever think about that? Did you ever stop to ask that question? How did he know? The Bible doesn't tell us that Jesus identified these two men. There were no such thing as photographs and so how did he know? How did he know who these men were? It's an interesting question, is it not?

Well, I believe, personally, that this passage reveals for us one of the blessings that just simply comes along with being in the presence of the Lord. And I'm talking about a unique being in the presence of the Lord here. We talk about it, when we come together, we're in church together. And you might even have said or heard someone else say, well, it was really cool church today. I really felt like, we were really in the presence of the Lord. Yeah. But not like this. This is different.

These men are being allowed to experience the presence of the Lord in ways that are entirely uncommon. And part of what it means to be in the presence of the Lord is to know, okay. Is to know, and this is an important thing.

I remind people that when we're in the presence of the Lord, we're going to know things that we don't know now. Paul even talks about this. You remember he, he talked about the fact that, now it's like we see through a dim mirror, right? But what does he say about when we're going to be in the presence of the Lord? He says, then I'm going to know fully. I will know fully. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Here's the question that often comes up. People will ask me, pastor Paul, do you think I'll recognize my loved ones in heaven? And I'm like, yeah, of course you will. Do you think that when you're in the presence of the Lord, you're going to know less than you know now? It's like, my question is, back to you. Do you recognize your family now? Yeah. Well, do you think you're going to have less when you're in the presence of the Lord? Do you think you're going to know less when you're in God's presence? No, you're going to know more.

You see through a mirror dimly now. You're going to see and be—and you're going to know as you are known. Which is by the way, is perfectly. The Bible says, God knows you even to the number of hairs on your head. (Luke 12:7) That's how you're going to know. When you're in the presence, the never removed presence of the Lord. Yeah, of course you're going to recognize your—of course no, no issue there at all. You're going to know fully.

Verse 5. It tells us here that, “*He (and that's referring to Peter) was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, (isn't that interesting language? a bright cloud) and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (and) <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*”

I really believe that this is a very significant passage here in the Book of Matthew, in that in the presence of these other two men. Moses who communicated the Law of God to the nation of Israel and so forth. And in the presence of Elijah, a man who not only never experienced physical death, but is also prophesied to be returning before the day of the Lord.

Yet God, the Father says concerning Jesus, this is My Son. Listen to Him. Listen to Him. Again, in the presence of the man who gave us the Law. In the presence of the man who spoke for God. That's what prophets do, right? Prophets speak for God.

And here you have the embodiment of really, the law and the prophets. And God says, but listen to Him. Listen to Jesus. This is the One you're to focus on.

This is something that the author of the Book of Hebrews started off his letter saying. Let me put this on the screen from Hebrews chapter 1.

**Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)**

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son...*

*Long ago, (he wrote) at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, (right?) but in these last days (how has He spoken to us?) he has spoken to us by his Son...*

And it's like the author of Hebrews is saying the same thing. It's now Jesus, listen to Him. And that doesn't mean that we ignore or disregard what it says in the Old Testament. Not at all and you guys know that.

Here at Calvary Chapel, we study through the Old Testament, just like we study through the new. Genesis through Malachi. We study all the books of the Old Testament and they're wonderful and they give us tremendous insight into the things of God. But the point is, Jesus is the final Word. He's God's final Word to you and me, to the world. Jesus is the One we are to listen to.

Verse 9, let's keep reading. *"And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." <sup>10</sup> And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?"*" They're asking about this prophecy that we're going to look at here in just a moment.

And <sup>11</sup> *He answered, (and I want you to listen to how Jesus responds here) “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things.”* Did you notice the tense of that statement? He will. That's future tense. Okay.

But He keeps talking. <sup>12</sup> *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.”* <sup>13</sup> *Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”*

At least partially, because what Jesus is saying here to the disciples, I'm going to show you this. What He's saying to them is, Elijah does come and he will restore all things. That's yet to come, but in the first fulfillment of that prophecy, he has already come in the person through the ministry of John the Baptist. And that has been fulfilled partially.

Here's the deal. I believe that what we're talking about here is a biblical prophecy that has 2 fulfillments. It's what we call the law of double reference, where there is a short term and a long term of a biblical prophecy. And there are many of these in the Old Testament but this one's for Malachi. In fact, this is the last 2 verses you read in the Old Testament before you start reading Matthew. Let me put it up on the screen for you. The prophecy goes like this,

**Malachi 4:5-6 (NIV84)**

*“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”*

*“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”*

Now this is a very important biblical prophecy. We're going to leave it up on the screen so you can look at it. And notice there are some key elements to this prophecy that help us to understand a little bit more about the timing of when the prophet Elijah is to return. Did you see it on there? We'll see if you got it right. We'll highlight it for you. There it goes. The timing is, *“before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”*

What is the great and dreadful day of the Lord? That's really, it's the judgment of God that is encompassed in the Great Tribulation period. Okay. The great

and dreadful day of the Lord. Those terms don't usually apply, well, they don't apply at all to Jesus's first coming. It wasn't great and dreadful. It was wonderful because Jesus came and died on the cross for our sins. He gave His life for us that we might be saved, forgiven, and born again. And that's one of the reasons we called the day of crucifixion, Good Friday. It wasn't dreadful. It was horrible for Jesus but it was wonderful for you and me.

We see here that in the prophecy of Malachi that we had up on the screen, that there is an element of this that is yet to be fulfilled. And that's why Jesus said, Elijah does come and he will restore all things, but he has already, that has already begun to be fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. Who, by the way, if you'll remember, when John the Baptist's father was in the temple. He was a priest by the way. He was burning incense in the temple. Do you remember? Luke tells us this.

An angel appeared to John the Baptist's father before John was born before he was even conceived. And he said, your wife is going to have a son and Zachariah was like, you must have the wrong person because my wife is way past childbearing years. And the angel said nonetheless, you're going to have a son, and he's going to, you're going to name him John. He's going to go before the Messiah, the coming.

But here's what the angel said about John. He will come forth and in the spirit and the power of Elijah. (Luke 1:17) It didn't say he would be Elijah. It said he would minister before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.

And then you'll remember when the Jewish religious leaders came to John during his times of baptism and they asked him, who are you? Are you Elijah? John said, I am not.

So you've got John's testimony that he was not physically Elijah. He was John. He was ministering in the spirit and power of Elijah, but the real Elijah who never experienced death, is still yet to come. I believe probably during the Great Tribulation, and he will do a work of turning the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the sons to the fathers. Anyway, let's keep going.

Verse 14. *"And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, <sup>15</sup> said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.' <sup>17</sup> 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.' <sup>18</sup> And*

*Jesus rebuked the demon, (so we're made aware of the fact that there was, it was a demonic spirit that was causing these seizures) and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>20</sup> 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 to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."'"*

Well, this is a wonderful passage. It's a great reminder to you and me that, faith is a critical element of our lives. Jesus is very clear and very abrupt in His response to the disciples when they said, why couldn't we do this? We tried casting this thing out. Why couldn't we do? He said, well, you don't have enough faith. Your faith isn't strong enough at this point in your lives.

He doesn't mince words, He just says, it's this is a faith issue. And then He goes on to say, even *"if you have faith... (just as small as a) mustard seed,"* which I've personally never seen a mustard seed, except in a photograph. And they're pretty small. He says, even if you have that. In other words, what He's saying is, if you had any faith at all, you could say to this mountain, be moved.

I've told you guys many times that during the course of my Christian life, I struggled with these passages in the Bible that talk about faith. Because when Sue and I first started getting serious about walking with the Lord, we attended a church and there was a strong element in that church. That was being influenced by the Word Faith Movement and some of you are familiar with the word faith movement. We call them faith preachers, or the name it claim it group, or whatever you want to call it. And they not only focus on faith, they fixate on faith.

And a lot of the people in the church that we attended fixated on faith to the point that I thought at the time, and I was a young man at the time, I thought, well, this is unhealthy, but I didn't know why. I couldn't explain to you why. Which was a little embarrassing because I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't tell you what it was.

And so when we moved on, when Sue and I moved then to Seattle, where I started going to Bible college. I maintained that discomfort with the Word Faith Movement, but I still couldn't explain it. And throughout my walk with the Lord, every time I would come to passages like this, I would be instantly uncomfortable. It's like, Lord, why did You say that? Why did You tell people that if they just have faith, they can move a mountain? Because I was



remembering these people from this church we attended in Montana, where they were just going off. Just crazy, just being weird about these things.

And yet, as I studied through the Bible, this issue of faith kept coming up, coming up, coming up. It's like, Paul, you can't deny it. Faith is critical.

Well, what's the missing element? What were they missing? Finally, it came to me after a while. They've taken faith and they've taken passages like this, and they've divorced them from what the Bible has to say about the sovereignty of God.

You can't take certain Bible passages that you really like or find exciting and divorce them from other passages in the Bible that maybe rain on your parade a little bit. You got to take the whole counsel of God's Word. That's the part I didn't get before.

And I started studying through the Bible and realizing that yes, faith is critical to our walk with Jesus Christ, but so also is a full understanding of the sovereignty of God. And what that means is, He doesn't just indiscriminately give you and me power to do what we want to do when we think it ought to be done.

In fact, there's an interesting passage that's tucked away in the Old Testament Book of Lamentations, of all places, that speaks to this. Let me put this on the screen. Lamentations 3.

**Lamentations 3:37 (ESV)**

*Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?*

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Boom. I mean, that one hit me like a ton of bricks. I remember when I read that, it was like, boing! It was like a bomb went off in my head because the Lord was finally beginning to give me some understanding of where the Word Faith Movement went astray. They stopped looking faith plus sovereignty. Right? And sovereignty means, we follow the will of God when it comes to this issue of faith.

And John, when he wrote his first epistle, he talked about it as well. Let me show you 1 John chapter 5. He said,

**1 John 5:14-15 (ESV)**

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, (the Lord) that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

What's John saying there? Our confidence, guys, confidence is another word for faith. They're literally synonyms. Our confidence toward Him is knowing that what we ask for is in accordance with His will. That's sovereignty, right? You see, this is the whole issue.

We believe in faith. We believe that faith is critical. We believe we need to grow in our faith. I pray all the time, Lord, build up my faith. I want to be a man of faith.

But at the same time, I want to be a man who understands that I serve a sovereign God who is not obligated to my desires or my whims, about what I think ought to be done.

And that's one of the reasons why people become so disheartened when they're in a Word Faith Movement and they're taught that basically if you have enough faith, God is obligated to give you what you ask for. And they've completely divorced it from the sovereignty of God. And they walk up to God and they pray for healing or they pray for something else. And guys, they have the faith, but it doesn't happen because God wasn't in it. He had another plan. It's hard to understand sometimes that God might have a different plan than mine, but I guess it's true.

But if people aren't taught to understand and to embrace the sovereignty of God, you know what they do? They get done praying about something with all the faith they can muster and believe me, they have faith and it doesn't happen. And somebody on this side says, well, you didn't have enough faith. And somebody over here says, there's sin in your life. And nobody says, have you asked God if this was His will? Yeah. We didn't think about that because you see, that's not what we've been taught.

We've been taught to treat God like a vending machine. I put in the proper coins, the amount of faith I hit the button, I pull the thing, out it comes. I get

what I want, right? Isn't that what the Bible says? Well, yeah, if you only focus on certain passages and you don't take the whole counsel of God's Word. Right?

This is why we study through the whole Bible, you guys. If I were to sit and talk to you every single Sunday about faith, faith, faith, and I never talk to you about sovereignty. And I never, ever gave you the whole counsel of God's Word. I just kept reading the verses I wanted to read, and you would walk out of here imbalanced.

And that there are a lot of Christians that are walking around imbalanced because they haven't been taught through the whole Bible. You got to take it all. You can't take one verse or passage and allow it to contradict another. Okay, I think I beat that horse sufficiently.

Verse 22, *"As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men,'<sup>23</sup> and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."* And they were greatly distressed." Your New King James Bible says, *"they were exceedingly sorrowful."*

And finally, verse 24, *"When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the tax?'"* Did you notice how they asked the question? It's a leading question. It's a... If this was a court of law, an attorney for the other side would stand up and say, objection leading the witness. Because you're basically saying, so, is your master not supporting the temple?

By the way, the tax they're referring to is the temple tax. In fact, some Bibles like the New King James actually put temple in there, even though it's not in the text because they wanted you to know which tax they were referring to. And it's important to know which tax they were referring to because the Jews hated paying Roman taxes. But this was one tax they felt was an honor to pay because this money went toward the maintenance and upkeep of the Jewish temple, and that was very important to them.

So these men who are coming to Peter are coming, and you can hear it in their question with an accusing sort of a slant to their question. So does your master not pay the temple tax? You see how that's leading the whole thing and Peter knows that it's a leading question and he knows that it's a question that's attempting to find some reason to accuse Jesus.

And so he just, in verse 25, you'll notice he immediately goes, yes, He does. He doesn't know. He's just saying that because he doesn't want Jesus to be seen in a

bad light so he just instantly says, yes. But I want you to keep reading with me in verse 25, because this is important. *“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? From their sons or from others?””*

Now you got to understand how taxes were done back in those days. Today, everybody gets taxed, but back in those days, the king received a taxation from the people to support his family and his kingdom. So the money went to make roads and build up things, but it also went to support his family personally. Okay.

Jesus is asking Peter, let me, He says, let me ask you a question. When a king taxes the people, does he tax his own family, or does he tax those outside his family? And Peter is responding or going to respond here in verse 26 by saying, outside his family, it's from others. It's not his own sons, right?

We're in verse 26. *“Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.”* In other words, exempt. What is Jesus saying here? Guys, it's the temple. It's the temple of God. Who's the Son here when it comes to God's temple? It's Jesus, isn't it?

What Jesus is saying to Peter is, I'm exempt. I'm the Son, right? I have a unique place in Israel's history as the Son of God, the unique Son of God. I'm exempt from paying the temple tax. That's what He's saying. Make no mistake about it.

Let's keep going though. Verse 27 is critical so pay attention to this verse. *“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.”*

Okay. First of all, I'm not a fisherman, but I like this way of paying taxes. This could get me into being a fisherman, right? No.

As Jesus makes the point here that He's exempt, He says, however, so as *“not to give offense,”* let's just go ahead and do this. So what does He do? He pays the tax. Jesus pays a tax that He was exempt from paying. Would you ever do that? If the IRS said to you, you're exempt from this tax, would you go, I want to pay it anyway? No, I don't think so. None of us would.

But what He's doing here is He's giving you and me a wonderful principle, and it's a principle that the ears of the mature can hear. I find often that new believers have a hard time embracing this, but essentially the principle is there are times, even though we have great liberty and freedom in Jesus, there are

times when it may be best or even necessary, to lay down that freedom for the sake of others. What do you think?

Yeah, like I said, it's a truth that I have found that it younger believers often struggle to grasp. I can often tell that someone is maturing in their walk with Jesus when they can grasp this. Because it's the idea that although I am free, and by the way, we like our freedom, especially here in the United States of America. We love our freedom but in Christ, we have wonderful freedom too.

The Bible says we have liberty in Jesus. We have liberty to do things, other people might not have the liberty to do. But there are times when it is prudent to lay down that liberty for the sake of my brothers and sisters in Jesus.

And Jesus himself is the model. We see it right here in Matthew 17, where He says, but however, so as not to offend, let's just go ahead and pay the tax. Right?

Listen, this is not a one-time thing for Jesus. This is how, I mean, His whole appearance on earth is predicated in this basic principle of laying down His rights. Let me show you how the apostle Paul expresses this in Philippians up on the screen. He says,

**Philippians 2:4-7 (ESV)**

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (and that means, held on to) but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

If I were to give you a modern day paraphrase of what Paul is saying here is, he's saying, Jesus being completely equal with the Father, God, right, did not consider that equality a right to be held on to, but He willingly sacrificed it so that He might empty Himself to become like you and me. Taking the very form of a servant, even to the point of giving His life for you and me on the cross. Do you see that principle of sacrifice?

The point is this, Jesus didn't have to lay down His life. He didn't have to empty Himself. It was His right not to. He had freedom not to give His life and yet He gave it anyway, because He wanted to show this principle of sacrifice that He's calling you and me also to model in our lives. We have wonderful freedoms. We have great freedoms.

In fact, Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Check this out. He says,

**1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (ESV)**

*“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

*“All things are lawful,” (I have freedom) but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. (and that's talking about building up your brothers and sisters, so he says here) Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

And what that means is, let no one use his freedom to tear down his brother or sister, but let you instead use your freedoms to build people up if possible.

Let me give you a modern day example. I might horrify some of you by saying this, but did you know that the Bible does not condemn the drinking of alcohol? What it condemns is drunkenness. Okay. You might've heard somewhere that God condemns all drinking of alcohol. He does not say that.

You have freedom. How you like that? You can go home and say, hey, Pastor Paul said, I got freedom. Well, you do. You've always had it. I'm not telling you anything that hasn't always been the case. You have... If you're one of those people that, wants to have a glass of wine with your dinner, you're not violating anything from the Bible.

You may not become inebriated. That is expressly forbidden in the Word of God and it's incredibly foolish. But you know, the drinking of alcohol. Okay. So you have a freedom.

Now, what are you going to do with that freedom? Because you see, there are other people who don't experience... They may be free in the sense of being free in Christ, but physically, emotionally, they're not free to take a drink because maybe they've got a history of alcoholism and they know, they know, they can't drink. I can't take anything. I can't drink anything at all because I can't stop once I start. Okay? And there are people that are like that, right? Because

we all have different weaknesses. So what are you going to do with your freedom?

Well, there were other issues in the Bible times that people struggled with. One was eating meat that had been sacrificed to a religious idol. Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians. And he said, listen, if it causes your brother distress that you eat meat sacrifice to an idol, then don't do it. Give up your freedom for the sake of your brother. Sacrifice. Yes, you're free to do it, but you're not free to cause your brother to stumble. That you're not free to do.

I got to tell you something that really distresses me. When I get on social media and I see pictures of Christians out having dinner, toasting their glass of wine with a picture on social media. That distresses me. I got to tell you that. And the reason it distresses me is because they don't know who sees that picture. And and there may be some young Christian who knows that you're a Christian, and they see what you're doing, and they think, well, he can do it, she can do it. I can do it too. And so they are emboldened.

This is what Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 9 and 10, read those 2 chapters. And he says there that, if I embolden my brother to do that, and then he falls into sin, guess what? That's on me. That's on me. I am at fault.

Listen, you have the freedom to have a glass of wine with dinner. Don't take a picture and don't put it on social media, because you could very easily cause someone to stumble. If that's your freedom, do it privately.

Because the whole point of this is, as Paul said, to look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Care about their feelings, care about their weaknesses. Don't let your freedom become a means of someone else stumbling in their faith.

Jesus modeled for all of us this whole idea of sacrifice your freedoms. What did He say to Peter? I'm exempt from this tax, but let's just go ahead and pay it. We don't want to offend, right? We're going to care about them. We're going to care more about them than about our freedom. This is an important truth. And again, I'll just tell you right now, it's one for the ears of the mature. Well, it's one for everybody's ears, but I find usually it's only mature Christians that embrace it. Younger Christians struggle with it because they've just gotten a hold of their freedom and they don't want to sacrifice it, frankly, and it's due to immaturity.

I'm free in Jesus, and you'll hear them saying that. I'm free. I can do that. I can walk into a bar. I'm free. I got liberty in Jesus. Yeah, but you don't have liberty

to cause somebody to stumble. So be careful how you live, right? Because other people are watching and they know you're a believer. And they're looking to you with expectation. It's important thing to keep in mind, amen?

Boy, didn't I meddle in your life today. What an annoyance. Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. If you need prayer, come on up front. We'll have some folks up here to pray with you.

Father, we thank You so much for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for this example that Jesus gave us, as we see here in the Book of Matthew. This idea of laying down my rights.

And Lord as Americans, we struggle with laying down our rights because they're hard earned. But we didn't earn any of the rights we have as Christians. They were given to us through Jesus. He earned them for us and yet I pray my Father that You would help us to have the kind of discernment that we should have when we are allowing other people to look into our lives and see how we are exercising our freedom.

Lord, build up our faith. Build our faith, Lord. We're not going to be satisfied with just a mustard seed size. Keep building our faith, strengthen us, Lord, to trust in You above everything.

Thank You for burying our sins on the cross that we might be made alive. We give our hearts to You and we pray that You would lead us through this week to the glory of your Name.

For it is in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, that we pray. And all God's people said, amen.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.