

PRECEPTS FOR LIFE
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SERIES: Matthew (The King, His Kingdom And Me)

TITLE: Program 30 – Woe To The Stumbling Block!

FRIDAY

OPEN

When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He knew that His death was approaching. He told His disciples that the Son of Man was going to suffer at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees, but that He was going to be raised from the dead. (See Matthew 17:12, 22-23) And so in His final days around the Sea of Galilee, He had much to teach them, much that would build their faith, and those are the precepts that we're going to look at today.

PART ONE

Jesus had just been transfigured. They saw Him in His glorious state. They saw what it would be like when He came with the angels to rule and reign on the face of this earth to take His throne. James and Peter and John were there, and they heard the heavens open up as God said, “...**This is My beloved Son...listen to Him!**” (Matthew 17:5) It was an awesome

moment. [Peter wanted to build three tabernacles: one for Moses and one for Elijah, who appeared with Jesus, and one for Jesus. When they heard the voice of God, they fell to the ground and Jesus reached down and touched them, and told them not to be afraid.] (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 17:3-7) Now, they've come down from that mountain of transfiguration. "[And] **as they were coming down from the mountain....**" Matthew chapter 17, verse 9, **"...Jesus commanded them saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'"** (Matthew 17:9) Here is this absolutely glorious moment when they see Him in His coming power and in His coming glory, the glory that He has with the Father, and now He's saying, "Don't tell this vision to anyone until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 17:9) But in the wonder of it all, it's almost like it goes over their head. They don't want to think about Him being crucified. It doesn't occur to them that He's going to be "raised from the dead." "And....," Jesus, **"...His disciples asked Him, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'"** (Matthew 17:10) They have just seen Him in His glory, and now they want to know, **"Why...do [they] say that Elijah must come first?"** "And [Jesus] answered and said, **'Elijah is coming....'**" future tense—"...Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.'" (Matthew 17:10-21) Now the question is, "Who is the 'they'?" Who is the 'their'?" Well the "they" and the "their" is referring to the Pharisees, the Pharisees who were plotting to put Jesus to death. The Pharisees who want to destroy Him, who want to get rid of Him, and what He's telling them when they ask ["But, you know, I thought Elijah had to come first." And He said, "Elijah is coming, and he's already come."] (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 17:10-11) He says, **"... [But] they did not recognize him...."** (Matthew 17:12) "[And] then....," it says, **"...the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the**

Baptist.” (Matthew 17:13) All of a sudden it occurred to them that John the Baptist and “Elijah” were synonymous. But how were they synonymous? Well, what I want us to do is, I want us to go back in Matthew. Matthew chapter 11, Matthew has told us quite a bit about John the Baptist and his connection even with Elijah. In Matthew chapter 11, after Jesus had finished giving the instructions to the twelve, and when he was telling them about John the Baptist, and John wanted to know “**...Are you the Expected One, or [should] we look for someone else?**” (Matthew 11:3) Remember Jesus said to the disciples, “**Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.**” (Matthew 11:11-12) The violent men were the Pharisees, and they were trying to get into the kingdom of heaven. And this is why John the Baptist suffered at their hands. This is why Jesus would suffer at their hands. But then Jesus makes this interesting statement in verse 14 of Matthew 11, “**And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who is to come.**” (Matthew 11:14) John the Baptist had come to prepare the way of the Lord, to prepare the way for the messenger of the covenant, but the problem was that they didn’t want to accept it. (See Malachi 3:1 & 4:5) They didn’t want to believe his message. They did not want to repent, even though he said, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (Matthew 3:2) Well the Pharisees didn’t like that. The scribes didn’t like that. Now, Jesus came with the same message, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (Matthew 4:17) And they didn’t like that. So they want to get rid of John the Baptist, they want to get rid of Jesus, they want to destroy Him. Well when we come to Matthew chapter 14, remember we hear about [the death of John the Baptist, and how Salome dances and asks for the head of John the Baptist. And how Herod, grieved and scared still because of his pride, has John who is in heaven—who is in prison—

beheaded and sent to heaven.] (See Matthew 14: 6-10) Now we come to Matthew 17, and He says, **“...Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him...then the disciples understood that He [spoke] to them about John the Baptist.”** (Matthew 17:11-12, 13) Now what I want us to do is I want us to go to one more scripture, the last book in the Old Testament, in Malachi chapter 4. In Malachi chapter 4, the final words, and then God stops speaking for 400 years, and His final words are this, **“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”** (Malachi 4:5) So He’s saying Elijah has already come in the form of John the Baptist, but you wouldn’t accept him, you wouldn’t accept the message. And it was the message that He was all about, it was the message telling that the messenger of the covenant had come. In Malachi chapter 3, He promised **“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will [come suddenly] to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,’ says the LORD of hosts.”** (Malachi 3:1) So he was the forerunner. We know that from Luke chapter 1, when Zacharias is in the temple and all of a sudden an angel appears to him and tells him he’s going to have a son. And, that that son is going to come in the power of the Lord, and he quotes Malachi.] (See Luke 1:8-16) He quotes Malachi. So now it says they come down from that mountain. They ask, “But Elijah has to come first?” And He explains to them about John the Baptist, and then in verse 14, **“When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and...very ill...he often falls into the fire and often into the water. [And] I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.’ And**

Jesus answered and said, ‘You unbelieving and perverted generation...’
” (Matthew 17:14-17) Now I marked “unbelieving” the way I mark the references to the Word of God. I marked it with a Bible, and then what I did is I put a slash through it, because it showed that they were not believing God’s Word. If you do not believe God’s Word, then you do not have faith, and “...**Without faith it is impossible to please [God].**” (Hebrews 11:6) And so Jesus turns and says, “...**You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long [will] I be with you? How long [will] I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.**” And it says, “**And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’**” (Matthew 17:17-19) Now remember I told you that I put a red pitchfork over every reference to the “devil,” over every reference to the “evil spirits.” So here in verse 19, when it says, “...**Why could we not drive it out?**” I put a pitchfork over it. (Matthew 17:19) Because, they’re saying, “Why couldn’t we drive the demon out?” (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 17:19) And that is a good question because remember, He had told them, “I’m going to give you the power, the power to cast out demons.” (See Matthew 10:1) But they couldn’t cast out demons, and they had tried, because the father of this lunatic says, “...**I brought him to Your disciples, and [your disciples] could not cure him.**” (Matthew 17:16) And so what’s the question? Well, “...**The disciples...said [to Him] privately, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’** And [Jesus] said to them, ‘**Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed...**’” (Matthew 17:19-20) Now of all the seeds, the mustard seed is one of the very tiniest of seeds, and He says, “...**If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘[Be moved] from here to there,’ and it will move; [for] nothing will be impossible to you.**” (Matthew 17:20) Did you hear that, Beloved? What does God want you to have? God wants you to take Him at His word. He wants you to

believe. He doesn't want you to be unbelieving, and so when those disciples were trying to cast out the demons, the reason that they couldn't do it was because they did not have enough faith. They were men of little faith. He's in the process of building their faith. He's in the process of building your faith, Beloved. He's building our faith by giving us the Word of God. He's building our faith by showing us who Jesus is, by reminding us that He's going to come. He's going to suffer at the hands of men. He's going to be raised from the dead, but He's also going to come in His glory. And so God the Father has said, **"...This is My beloved Son...listen to Him!"** (Matthew 17:5) Listen to the Word of God. We'll be right back to listen more.

PART TWO

[If you have faith, Beloved, nothing will be impossible.] (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 17:20) Now you have to remember that faith is taking God at His word. You don't need a whole lot of faith, you need faith the size of a mustard seed that's very, very tiny. But then, He's telling the disciples, "You can cast out demons. All you have to do is believe Me." And this is why He's upset with them, because He says, "[You're an] **unbelieving and perverted generation...**" He says, **"...How long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you...?"** (Matthew 17:17) Can you imagine being there in all your power and all your majesty and having evidenced and manifested that power and that majesty to your disciples, and still not having them believe? I wonder what God thinks today, Beloved, when here we have the Word of God. Here we have His exceedingly **"...great and precious promises..."** that gives us and promises us everything that pertains to **"...life and godliness..."** (2 Peter 1:4 & 1:3) Yet we're not living accordingly. O Beloved, you did not listen to this program by accident. God wants to increase your faith. And that's why we have this program, **"Precepts for Life,"** that you might learn the Word of God, that you might

discover truth for yourself so that you can believe and nothing will be impossible. Well, it says, **“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:21)** Now this was a verse that was added later, and so it seems like what they did was drop this in and say, “Okay, if you want to get rid of a demon like this, it’s got to be through prayer and fasting.” But that was added much later. Let’s move on to verse 22, **“And while they were gathering together in Galilee...,”** this is the Galilee, this is where I’m sitting in the Galilee, **“...Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going 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 deeply grieved.” (Matthew 17:22-23)** I think they were deeply grieved because they simply stopped at the fact that He was going to be killed. They thought He was bringing in the kingdom. They saw Him in His glory, and now He’s saying that He’s going to be killed? And that’s where they stopped. They, don’t get it that He’s going to be raised the third day. If He’s killed, yes, it’s grievous, but if He’s raised the third day, it’s glorious, because He’s conquered death. And it says in verse ah- 24, **“[And] when they came to Capernaum....” (Matthew 17:24)** Now remember, Capernaum was where Jesus lived. He stayed there with Peter. It was probably like His headquarters. And this is probably His last trip to Capernaum, because He’s on His way from the Galilee to go to Jerusalem to be crucified, and He’s going to be raised the third day. It says, **“[And] when they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, ‘Does you teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?’ ” (Matthew 17:24)** Now who was writing this gospel? It is Matthew, he’s a tax collector, so he’s going to make sure you know this story. **“[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 the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?’ ” (Matthew 17:25)** Now, think! Think! This happens and Peter is questioned outside the house, he

comes in the house, before he can say anything, Jesus is putting the question to Peter. He knows what is going on. He is omniscient. “[And] **Peter said, ‘From strangers...,’**” not from their sons, “...[Then] **Jesus said...‘Then the sons are exempt. However, so that we do not offend them...,’**” offend means so that we do not cause them to stumble, “...**Go to the sea...throw in 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 you and Me.**” (17:26-27) I will pay my taxes, although I do not have to. I do not have to! He is the King! He is the King. He is the Son, and Peter is the son of the kingdom. He doesn’t have to do it, but Jesus does not want to give offense because He knows that they do not understand. So he pulls up the fish, opens the mouth and there is the shekel. What is He doing? Jesus is letting Peter know, “I know everything, I know everything, it’s all in My control. Believe Me. Believe Me.” Well in chapter 18, it says, “**At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And He called a child to Himself and set [that child] before [Him]**” (Matthew 18:1-2) And this is what He did, He says, “...**Truly I say to you...,**” picture that child in my arms, and my arm around him, “...**Truly I say to you, [that] unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)** Jesus just got that child, sat it down, and the child humbled himself and sat down. “[And] **whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**” (Matthew 18:5-6) Children were not treated well in those days, and Jesus is saying, “Listen, when you treat a child well, you are treating Me well. When you receive that child, you are receiving Me. Children are important.” He says, “**Woe to the world because of its**

stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling locks come; but woe to that man through [which] the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; [for] it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands [and] two feet and be cast [in] the eternal fire.” (Matthew 18:7-8) In other words, “Listen. Get rid of everything that is going to keep you from believing. Everything that is going to keep you from the kingdom of heaven, let it go.” (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 18:8) **“If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out...throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.”** He says, **“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:9-10)** He says their angels are constantly before the Father. Those angels are guardian angels. They’re watching over them because they are precious, and you must treat them as precious. And whatever is going to keep you from treating those children as precious, get rid of it. Get rid of it, because otherwise you’re going to go into a fiery hell. (See Matthew 18:8-10) He says, **“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”** He says, **“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the [ninety and nine] on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you...,”** there again, He’s saying “Truly, remember it’s 31 times in Matthew, **“...He rejoices over it more than...ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is...the will of your Father who is in heaven that [not] one of these little ones perish.” (Matthew 18:11-14) “...[It’s] the will of your Father...in heaven....” (Matthew 18:14)** Children are important to the Lord, and if they’re important to the Lord, they’re to be important to you, Beloved. So receive them and you’re receiving Jesus.