

Matthew 17:14-21

“Prayer and Fasting”

September 30th 2012

Introduction – stand and read the text

- What an amazing passage of Scripture this is
 - Understand the context – you know one of the reasons I love being a Calvary Chapel Pastor is normally we are teaching through a section of Scripture, you don't have to spend that much time on context, because the context is what you studied the week before
 - And though, I believe this series we are doing on being a vertical church is so important – sometimes when you are looking at different portions of Scripture is like dropping you in the middle of the jungle

So where are we?

- Understand Matthew 17 opens up with Jesus on top of the Mount of Transfiguration
 - For those of you who are newer to the Scriptures, the Mount of Transfiguration was when Jesus took 3 of the disciples up onto a high mountain, and those 3 got a little glimpse of who Jesus was on the inside, they saw a glimpse of His deity
- Only 3 disciples got to see that – Peter, James and John
 - There were thousands that followed Christ in the crowds, there were at least 70 disciples Jesus sent out, and then there were 12 that Jesus as we looked at least week, prayed all night and then choose to be the Apostles

But of the 12, there were 3 that were around Him all the time

- Peter, James and John
 - Some Bible teachers see this as His senior leadership team – you had the crowds, 70 leaders and 12 ministry heads and then 3 on the senior staff – could be
 - I personally wonder if Peter, James and John weren't always around Jesus because they were the special students – you know what I'm saying
- Jesus wasn't worried about Andrew and Bartholomew, but James and John wanted to set people on fire, (real Bible story from Luke 9) and Peter was always saying the crazies things
 - So I just wonder if Jesus was like – you three, right by my side, “why can't we be on our own” – you just can't, “you are my senior staff” – stay close

But no matter the reason, senior staff or special ed – these three were always by Jesus' side, and became like Jesus' little click

- and while all the rest of the disciples were in the valley, Jesus, Peter, James and John were up on the Mountain, and those 3 disciples got a real treat, seeing Jesus transfigured
 - but as so often happens after we experience some Mountain top time with God, you know what I'm talking, those amazing break through moments – you can bet – there is a time of trouble and testing, waiting in the valley
 - this was true for Jesus, and Peter and James and John

As they headed down the Mount of Transfiguration, it said in our text they were approached by a man whose son was being ripped off by the enemy

- Satan had this boy in bondage and it was bad

And the man says to Jesus – I brought my boy to Your other disciples, those not on the top of the mountain, but they could do nothing

- they couldn't help him, Jesus
 - can You? – can You help my boy?

And by the way, just a side note to our study today

- is there someone in your family, a son, a daughter, a grandson – a brother or sister
 - who when you consider where they are at, it breaks your heart?
 - Sin and Satan is ripping them off in so many ways they don't even see it
 - And your heart breaks like this day in our text this morning – I want him, I want her, I want my loved one to see things clearly but the enemy is throwing them this way and that

Friend – what do you do?

- Well, like the man in this story, you bring your son, you bring your daughter, you bring that grandson or brother or sister – you bring them to Jesus
 - the church may have let them down
 - the disciples of Christ may seem powerless to do anything
- But don't you give up and don't you give in
 - You bring that one to Jesus

How do I bring them to Jesus?

- Well, like we have been learning in our studies on prayer – you intercede, you start praying, you start as we will learn in a few minutes this morning, fasting for the spiritual healing of that child, that friend, that parent
 - through the avenue of prayer you bring them to Jesus
- Paul tells the Corinthian church...

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,” – 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

- We walk in the flesh, we are flesh, we live in a fleshly world, but Paul says, that is not where the battle is
 - The battle for the heart of your son, your daughter, your friend, your co-worker – it is spiritual battle – the enemy has ripped them off, the enemy has blinded their eyes
- And so because of that – the weapons to fight this battle are not fleshly weapons
 - The weapons are not guns and knives
 - The weapons are not even threats and or yelling
 - The weapons are spiritual
- You see I bring them to Jesus, I bring them before Him in prayer and saying – Lord – open their eyes, Lord break the spiritual strongholds, Lord save them, save them Jesus!

- We use the spiritual weapon of prayer to wage a spiritual battle for our kids, for our friends, for our family or co-workers

And this is key precious church, because if you are not going to intercede for them, who will

- well – you will pastor Jason – I would love to pray for your kids, I do pray for some of your kids
 - but I will never pray for them like you will
 - Bring them to Jesus through the avenue of prayer

This man does just that, he brings his son to Jesus, saying, Your disciples could do nothing – can You help my boy?

- now Jesus says...

“O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.” – Matthew 17:17

- He heals the boy, but Jesus looks to the crowds, Jesus looks to His disciples and says – you guys are faithless and perverse – not exactly the kind of thing you want to hear from Jesus – not the verse you paint on your wall at home and say – that is His word to Me! - But it was the truth they needed to hear
 - You are faithless and perverse
 - And because you are faithless and perverse, you are powerless

Well, the disciples are amazed once again at the power of Jesus, the power He has over evil, the power to deal with situations that seem outside of everyone else’s control

- but these disciples, once the crowd started to disperse, asked Jesus – hey – why couldn’t we deal with that demonized boy?
 - why did we not have power over that situation?
- Maybe you have wondered something similar in your life? – you wonder why I am so powerless?
 - And Jesus says something curious to me

“Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” – Matthew 17:20-21

- It’s your lack of faith, it’s your lack of trust in Me and who I am and what I say
 - however this kind only goes out by prayer and fasting

What? – hold on – What?

- this kind only goes out by prayer and fasting
 - what kind? – what is Jesus talking about
- Some have suggested that He is talking about a certain type of demon
 - This was the prayer and fasting demon – “come out” works on most demons, you know this one requires you put down the nachos for an afternoon
 - Is that what Jesus was saying? – this kind
- Some have suggested Jesus was talking about the kind of faith
 - That to heal sick people you need regular faith, to trust God to provide money you need another type of faith – but to cast out demons, oh that requires “prayer and fasting faith”
 - Is that what Jesus was talking about?

You know I don't know – and really in the end I don't think it matters what Jesus was talking about – whether He's talking about a certain kind of evil, or a certain kind of faith

- what Jesus was telling His disciples at the core was there are things you are going to be up against in your life that you don't have what it takes to deal with simply inside you
 - your winning personality and good looks aren't going to cut it for many things that someday will be heading your way, that will be facing your family
 - you must have a lifestyle of prayer and fasting

And when Jesus confronted their unbelief, my wife suggested to me one time, could it be that it was their unbelief that prayer and fasting was not just needful, but necessary and sufficient to deal with the problems they would face

You see, we can look at this passage and think, why didn't Jesus give them some warning

- why didn't He tell them that a "prayer and fasting" demon was on the way – so start passing on the lamb chops every once in a while or that a certain faith was going to be required of them soon, so start praying, start fasting
 - why not give them a head's up?

Well, you see precious church the answer to that, is that Jesus already had

- in Matthew chapter 6 that we began this series with on prayer – Jesus tells His disciples – it's not if you pray as a disciple, it is when you pray and here is how to do it
 - as a disciple, it is not if you fast, but when you fast, here is how you do it
 - you see Jesus had already told the same disciples – chapter 6 comes before chapter 17 – always has, always will, always does
- He had told them beforehand, that as disciples they must have a lifestyle of prayer and fasting
 - The question wasn't why didn't Jesus warn them
 - The question was why didn't the disciples believe what Jesus said
- Why didn't the disciples believe that God in heaven was telling them the truth – prayer and fasting as a disciple is essential and important
 - Not to make God love anymore
 - Not to get a sure ticket to heaven
 - But because you are going to face things in your life, your family's life, that you don't have the ability to deal with

And prayer and fasting not only prepares you, but when you're up against it – prayer and fasting will actually take you through

- The question is not why didn't Jesus tell them – He had
 - The question is why didn't they believe and obey?

Now we can speculate all day long as to why the disciples weren't praying and fasting

- maybe they felt left out of Jesus' little click
 - maybe they were bummed – why don't we ever get to go up on the mountain – why don't we get to go on ministry trips

- we'll show Him, we are going to pray, we aren't going to fast – there, Jesus
- We can guess and we can speculate all we want as to why the disciples did not have a lifestyle of fasting and prayer
 - But I have much better question this morning
 - Why don't we? – oh???

You see you do believe the Bible is not some dry dusty history book that only applied 2,000 years ago, right?

- you believe it is applicable, it applies right now to our lives – yes?
 - You believe you are a disciple right? – we are not just filling a pew, playing church, religious folk are we – aren't we disciples, not perfect but genuine followers of Jesus?

If the answer to that is yes, then the question isn't why didn't the disciples have a lifestyle of fasting and prayer, the question is why don't you?

- why don't you see Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 6 when He said not "if you pray, but when, disciple, not if you fast, but when, disciple"

Why don't we believe that it is important?

- maybe it is simply because we don't understand why it's important?
 - Well precious church – let me help you with that
 - Prayer and fasting in this context is important, because of what Jesus had just accused them of being
- He had just called them "Faithless and Perverse" and because of that – they were powerless to do anything
 - They were "Faithless and Perverse" because I believe they weren't Praying and Fasting

You see I really believe that Prayer is the answer to faithlessness and Fasting is the answer to perversity

- I have shared this before, but let me remind you...

The answer to faithlessness if prayer

- why?
 - Because when I see a need, I see a deficiency in me or in you, or in our church or in our culture and I begin to pray
 - I begin as we have been learning to talk it over with Dad, in a real way, pouring out my heart, in a respectful way – Lord, not my will but Yours be done
- What I begin to see is God work, and God move
 - I begin to see God do things as I have partnered with Him in prayer
 - And when I see God work – it fills me with faith, and when you and I are full of faith, that is the opposite of being faithless
 - And I am encouraged to keep praying, to keep asking that God would move in our midst, because I am becoming full of faith

You see sometimes I hear that prayer doesn't change things, it only changes me – and I understand the heart of that – I believe God is sovereign, I believe God is in control

- But I need to ask you if you really believe that this morning, that prayer changes nothing but me – what Bible are you reading?

- Because this one is full of stories and lessons of when God's people – full of faith in Him, not in themselves, full of faith in Him, full of trust that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him, this book is full of stories of men and women who partnered with God to change the course of history

An example I have used before, but it is such a powerful picture of this to me, is the first time Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army, King Hezekiah and His friend Isaiah got on their faces and began to pray

- and God changed the situation – He sent one angel who slaughtered 186,000 Assyrian warriors in one night
 - God moved – you say – it had nothing to do with man praying
 - Well...
- The second time Jerusalem was surrounded 200 years later, this time by the Babylonian empire, it says in Ezekiel chapter 22

“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD.” – Ezekiel 22:30-31

That Scripture is heavy to me

- because it seems to indicate, God was completely justified in sending Jerusalem into captivity, but He wanted to follow another course of action
 - and He was looking for one man, one woman to stand in the gap before as Moses had stood in the gap in Exodus 34
 - where it says when talking about destroying the rebellious children of Israel

“So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.” – Exodus 32:14

The word in the text translated “relent” means to turn from an undesirable course of action”

- You see God was justified, He had every right to destroy the people, He had every right to have the Assyrians tear through the wall of Jerusalem, but listen, but He didn't want to, it was undesirable
 - And God partners with Moses and his devotion to prayer to arrive at the desirable action
 - Just as He partnered with Isaiah and Hezekiah had stood in the gap in Isaiah 36-39
- But in Ezekiel's day
 - He found no one, and Jerusalem went into captivity in Babylon

You see I believe God is willing to revive North County, I believe God is willing to free your son, your daughter, your co-worker from the power of sin

- God is willing
 - But is anyone willing to partner with Him, to be the opposite of faithless, but to be faithful to partner with Him in prayer

The answer to faithlessness if prayer

The answer to perversity is fasting

- Why do I say that??
 - Because fasting in its essence is learning to say no to your flesh
 - You decide to fast, alright Lord, tomorrow no food, I am going to take the time I would normally eat and instead I am going to pray

Now consider what happens

- So you get up the next day and at first you forget
 - So you go to your cupboard, start to pull out the fruit loops, so good, those fruit loops
 - But right as you are about to pour the bowl, you remember – oh no – I'm fasting
 - And you with tears in your eyes put the fruit loops back in the cupboard
- And your flesh, that voice inside you says
 - What are you doing???
 - What is going on??
 - And you answer – I'm fasting
 - Fasting? What is that???

Then lunch time comes and your flesh starts really screaming – feed me, give me food

- and you say “no”
 - your flesh has never been told no ever
 - and it is not happy – what do you mean no
 - how long is this going to last
- you are going to die
 - you are not going to die by the way
 - you always need to check with your doctor if you have any medical conditions that would hinder fasting – I do certain things as a diabetic to fast that others do not have to do
- but check with your doctor, I say that again because we live in a litigious society and I don't want a CD of this service to be next to grandma passed out on the floor and you saying pastor Jason told her not to eat

Check with your doctor, but really pray this in if you have never fasted

- and then start with a meal or two, then a day or three
 - because you have to learn to say No to your flesh
 - and listen to me, this is key
- By learning to say no to your body when it comes to food something your body really does need, it translates into victory over telling your flesh no to things it doesn't need as well

Such an important word today because the church in general seems pretty weak today

- But why – well Instead of Jesus, there is a lot of junk
 - Instead of Christ – there is carnality
 - Because we are big on faithlessness and perversity
 - And light on faith and purity

But there is an answer, friends

- The answer is that we actually believe the things Jesus is saying
 - That as a disciple – I need to pray – not just to have relationship with Jesus as we have been learning, that is so true
 - But I need to pray because there is power in prayer to change things
- And God is looking for men and women to partner with, to be men and women who are full of faith to see His will accomplished in our families and in our communities

God is looking for men and women who are willing to believe what He said about fasting

- that as I take time to say no to my flesh and go without a meal – that I am learning to say no to my flesh and things it really needs like food, and it will become easier to say no to my flesh on things it doesn't really need, like sin

But then even more so friends, that as a disciple I believe what Jesus says, that put together, when I take time to fast and pray, something, some kind of thing comes out

- and it is the only way I can deal with things I am going to face.
 - Do you wonder why you struggle continuing with the same sin? – not just sin – because you remember “if you got skin, you got sin” – that's right church
 - But the same sin – can I in love ask you a question – have you taken Jesus at His word as a disciple and take time to regularly fast and pray – over that specific sin
- DO you have a loved one who seems in bondage to sin
 - Again can I ask you a question - have you taken Jesus at His word as a disciple and take time to regularly fast and pray – over that specific child, or grandchild

Precious church, there are things that you are going to face in your life, that you don't have the ability within you to face

- there are things your family, your community, your church, your pastors are going to face
 - an as disciples – if we really believe that Jesus knows what He is talking about – then we need to take Him at His Word and realize – it is not if I have a lifestyle of fasting and prayer but when I do, I will be ready to meet the challenge, to break down the chains that are on my family and on my community