

# Matthew 17:1-13

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, now we turn to the preaching of God's Word. As James had mentioned this morning, next week we will be continuing our series in the book of Exodus.

This evening, though, we'll be looking at a text from the book of Matthew. Matthew 17, verses 1-17. This is the story of the transfiguration. So if you have your Bibles, you can turn there with me.

And as you do, as we prepare to read this passage tonight, I want us to first consider our hearts and our attitudes in how we approach the text, and also how we respond to the text.

Most of you may know Charles Spurgeon, who was the famous English minister from the 1800s. He was a powerful preacher, a great orator who would speak in front of thousands and captivate the hearts and minds of those people.

We know that many people were led to open displays of emotion when he preached. And though Spurgeon didn't really care about senseless emotion just for the sake of emotion, emotion that lacked any sort of spiritual depth, he saw an appropriate place for emotion within the church.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] He once wrote this. He said, And I thought of that quote tonight, especially pertaining to this text, because I think this text kind of does an emotional check for us.

I think this text can really evoke emotion within our hearts. And while emotion in itself isn't the object of our aim, when we look at this glorious passage, we should have the desire to see the reality of Christ's identity.

That we may look at this glorious passage and that we may experience the beauty of the Gospel. That it might stir within us this deeper affection for Christ, this longing that we see His face.

And so let's turn to this passage. Matthew chapter 17, verses 1 through 13. And after six days, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, His brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And He was transfigured before them. And His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with Him.

[ 3 : 1 4 ] 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. He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.

And a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise and have no fear. And when they lifted their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one of this vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

The disciples asked Him, Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? He answered, Elijah does come, and He will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come.

And they did not recognize Him, but did to Him whatever they pleased. And so also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

[ 4 : 26 ] This is the Word of God. Will you pray with me? Almighty God, You are the Father of lights.

And so we ask, Lord, that You'll shine in our hearts and in our minds that we might understand Your message as You speak to us through Your Word.

May the Gospel come to us not only in word, but also in the power of Your Holy Spirit this evening. May He guide us in truth and strengthen us to all obedience so that we may glorify You.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now I wonder how many of us have had the opportunity to share the Gospel before. Maybe some of us haven't been so blessed as to somewhat ask us so bluntly, so who is this Jesus character?

What did He do? What does He say? What is His message? But perhaps some of us have. Maybe we've had the opportunity to share the Gospel before, to share the narrative of Jesus' life.

[ 5 : 29 ] And the question, when you have that opportunity, or if you ever have that opportunity in the future, what stories will you include in the life of Jesus as you retell it?

Certainly, I would imagine you may start with the nativity scene, talk about Jesus being born of a virgin, being placed in a manger in the city of Bethlehem, His birth announced to the shepherds.

You may talk about something about His ministry, Him feeding the 5,000, or turning water into wine, healing the sick and the lame. Maybe something about His message, what He has done, what He says about the Kingdom of God, what He says about Himself.

Certainly, we'd include the passion narrative in there where Jesus is arrested and crucified, how He's resurrected and ascends to Heaven. But would we choose to include this story of the transfiguration?

Do we find it important and essential to the life and ministry of Jesus? My guess is that probably many of us would probably not include it. I don't know personally if I would include it until I look at this text and prepare for it this evening.

[ 6 : 38 ] And I wonder if it's in part because we may not really understand where this fits into the narrative, Matthew's narrative of His Gospel.

Perhaps we don't really understand when it talks about Moses and Elijah, what do they have to do with this story? What do they have to do with God's overall plan of redemption? But it's my hope as we walk through this text tonight that we gain a better appreciation for who Jesus is and a better understanding for how this narrative fits into God's plan of redemption.

And so then I think it's important as we begin to understand the context of this passage. At the very beginning in verse 1, it begins after six days. So it's important to understand what was happening before chapter 17 was recorded.

After six days. What happened six days ago? Well, if we look back in Matthew 16, starting in verse 13, we see that Jesus and His disciples have arrived in Caesarea Philippi. And we see this important conversation that's recorded by Matthew here in His Gospel.

Because Jesus turns to His disciples and He says, Who do people say the Son of Man is? Disciples respond, Well, some say it's John the Baptist, some say Elijah, some say another prophet.

[ 7 : 53 ] And Jesus asks them bluntly, Who do you say the Son of Man is? Peter responds, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

So we see Jesus' response. First, He blesses Peter for recognizing His true identity. But then He tells His disciples, Don't tell anyone that I'm the Christ. And He goes on from there to say how He must go to Jerusalem, how He must suffer and be killed, and how He will rise again on the third day.

And so Peter, maybe, because he had a little confidence in getting the first answer right, he responds again to Jesus and says, Far be it from you, Lord. This will never happen to you. We know how Jesus responds.

He turns from blessing Peter to rebuking Him. He says, Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. Not only was Jesus going to suffer, but He was calling on His disciples to suffer with Him.

And so we see then that this transfiguration, this story really stands at a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry. It's really a watershed because if you look to the one side, it's all that's happened in Jesus' ministry to bring Him to this point where Peter recognizes that He is truly the Christ.

[ 9 : 08 ] And then we look from here the transfiguration onward, and this is Jesus' journey to the cross where He is to suffer and die. And so these themes that Matthew begins in chapter 16, He's continuing on to chapter 17 where Jesus, talking about who Jesus is and what He is to accomplish.

And so that's what I want our focus to be tonight. First, to think about Jesus' identity and secondly, Jesus' mission. And so let's look first at Jesus' identity.

You've probably heard the expression know your audience, right? It's advice that's given to public speakers and maybe others in a large group or maybe a small group when they want to communicate effectively or persuasively to those around them.

In order to do that, you have to know your audience. You need to know their background. You need to know their story, what they're going to understand about what you're communicating to them. And so that's what we really see Matthew doing here throughout his Gospel.

Matthew is largely writing to a Jewish audience. And so he's very careful to point out as he goes along in his Gospel exactly who Jesus is. He's not just a good teacher.

[ 10 : 18 ] He's not just a good leader or man. He is truly the Messiah, the one who has been anticipated, the one who Jewish tradition and prophecy and history points to.

And so he directly links who Jesus is, talks about Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and that's what we begin to see in this passage here, these allusions going back to the Old Testament, primarily the book of Exodus.

So while we're not studying the book of Exodus tonight, we're going to be turning back there quite a bit to see these allusions that Matthew uses. If we look at verse 1, after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Now if you were a Jew in that day and age and you were familiar with the Old Testament, this may trigger a memory from Exodus 24 where God commands Moses to come with Aaron and Nadab and Abihu to worship.

And as Moses ascends Mount Sinai, it says that he's covered by a cloud for six days. Then in verse 2 here we see in our text, Matthew, he immediately enters into this glorious vision and Jesus was transfigured before him and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.

[ 11 : 39 ] And so we see here this glorious unveiling. This word transfigured, it can be translated as transformed. It's actually only used a few times in the New Testament apart from Matthew and Mark talking about the transfiguration story here.

Paul uses it a couple times and he's not talking about a physical transformation so much as a spiritual transformation. You may know Romans 12 too. Paul writes, do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

And so we see in this case it's not only talking about a spiritual transformation of Christ but this physical transformation. But we need to understand when this transformation is not as if Jesus is changing in some way but rather this previously hidden dimension of his glory is now being revealed to his disciples.

As if all the dullness of earthly conditions were temporarily stripped away so that his true nature could be revealed to these men. And so again, the question is does this remind you of anything from the Old Testament?

If we look back to Exodus 34, Moses up on Mount Sinai for 30 days and 40 nights. 40 days, 40 nights where he receives these Ten Commandments and he returns to the people of Israel and it says the skin of his face shone to such a degree that it scared the Israelites.

[ 13 : 05 ] He had to wear a veil over his face so they wouldn't be afraid. And so while we see some differences here, this allusion to the Old Testament, there's actually some obvious differences as well because while Moses' face shone as a reflection of God's glory, we see here in our passage that Jesus shone with his own innate glory.

Jesus here is the source of light. It's a glory of such intensity and such otherness. It again reminds us of the story in Exodus where Moses comes to God and he asks, may I see your glory?

God responds to him, you cannot see my face and live. So he puts Moses in the crack of a rock and he passes over him with his hand in front of him until he has passed by and Moses is allowed to see his back.

And so this is the glory of God. This incomparable glory that we see throughout the Old Testament is now what we see displayed in Christ here. And so while Jesus has been transfigured, he's transformed, this glimpse of his glory is being seen, we see with him also Moses and Elijah appear with him.

And I think this may be at the point that we may become confused a little bit. What role do they have to play here? I think even Jesus' disciples were a little confused. We see Peter in his request, hey, how about I build some tents for you guys?

[ 14 : 28 ] We'll talk about that in a second, but here we must question what is the purpose of Elijah and Moses in this text? I think maybe most common interpretation that we hear nowadays is that maybe Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets.

And while there may be some level of truth there, we need to consider this passage in the context of that day, how it would have been received by the disciples and others when they read Matthew's account. Because Moses wasn't only considered a lawgiver in that time, he was considered a prophet himself.

He's spoken of as a prophet in the Old Testament. Not only that, but Elijah, would he have been considered as a representation or representative for all the prophets?

Maybe, maybe not. He wasn't one of the writing prophets. And so what do we do here with this image of Elijah and Moses? I think the most compelling argument may be this. One commentator writes that their appearance sums up the entire drama of the old order from beginning to end.

Moses being the predecessor and Elijah being the precursor of the Messiah. And so these men, as they stand within the Old Testament, they point to the coming of the Messiah.

[ 15 : 48 ] The one who would come to provide salvation for his people. And so, though they add to the drama in this narrative, this isn't the climax of Matthew's story.

Because we see that Matthew, he really cuts Peter off as he's kind of making this request. Let me build you some tents. He says, Behold, he focuses our attention on this bright cloud that's overshadowing them.

Again, it may remind the reader of the story of Exodus where God's presence is repeatedly seen appear in a cloud. Not only on Mount Sinai, but also in the wilderness, leading the people of Israel through the wilderness.

But it's not only the appearance of the cloud that's important in this text, it's the voice coming from the cloud. Matthew is directing our focus here to the climax of the passage, which is the voice of God from this cloud.

This is my Son whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him. And so in these two chapters, 16 and 17, we see repeated a profession of Christ's identity from Peter.

[ 16 : 57 ] And now, a proclamation from the voice of God Himself. Jesus is the Son of God. And so you might have heard these words before.

These are the words that were recorded by Matthew in Matthew chapter 3 after Jesus' baptism. When the Spirit of God descends like a dove and repeats these same words, except here, Matthew adds an extra command at the end.

He says, listen to me. So again, if we were to look back at the Old Testament, it may jog our memories to the text that Roddy read earlier from Deuteronomy 18, verse 15, where God promises to send a new prophet.

And He prophesies through Moses, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. Listen to Him. It says.

So we see here that Jesus is clearly this prophet that has been prophesied. God's own Son has been sent.

[ 18 : 02 ] So Matthew is pointing out here not only the identity that Jesus shares in God's glory, but He also shares in God's authority. And we are to listen to Him.

And so when the disciples hear this, it says that they fall down in fear. Now it's interesting when you compare this narrative to the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke who both talk about the transfiguration.

Mark and Luke both talk about the disciples' reaction, their fear, much earlier on in the narrative. But here, Matthew reserves this description of their fear until after these words are spoken.

As if it's the appropriate time for us and the disciples to have an emotional response when we recognize the identity and the authority of Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah.

And it says when they raise their heads, it says literally in the Greek they see only Jesus Himself. And so left before them is not Moses, it's not Elijah, it's only Jesus.

[ 19 : 08 ] It's only Jesus who possesses this glory. It's only Jesus who possesses this authority. It is only Jesus to whom we are to listen. And so imagine the lasting impact that this would have on the disciples.

I mean, this may evoke emotion in us who are just reading it, but if you are there seeing a glimpse of God's glory in His Son, Jesus. We think about the Gospel of John, how He writes in John 1.14, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory.

The glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth. This is what John has witnessed firsthand. We think about Peter's writing. 2 Peter 1.16, he writes this, Therefore, we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father and a voice was born to Him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven and we were with Him on that holy mountain.

And so we see that these men were moved by the glory of God. But we recognize that what they saw was just a glimpse of Jesus' glory.

[ 20 : 38 ] Because Jesus didn't remain in His unveiled glory here. We know that as they descended the mountain beforehand, Jesus goes back to as He was before. And so we may question, well, why didn't He remain in His glory?

He revealed Himself to His disciples. Why not to everyone else at this point? But that really goes into our second point here, the mission of Jesus.

We've identified Jesus as His identity as the Son of God, as the Messiah. Well, what is His mission? If we look back to when Moses and Elijah appear in this text, we talked about Peter's response, a rather odd suggestion.

This is a good thing. We're all here. How about I build you a tent, Jesus, and you one, Moses, and one for you, Elijah. We don't really know what He meant by that, what He wanted to do with these tents, what He expected to become of this.

But it seems that He has some sense that the day of the Lord was near. And He had this desire for the Messiah to remain among His people. But the thing is that this desire for the immediate establishment of God's kingdom that God may dwell right there personally among His people, it goes to show Peter's continued lack of understanding.

[ 21 : 59 ] We already looked at chapter 16 where Peter rebukes Jesus for saying, no, no, no, Lord, you're not going to suffer and die. That can't be. We question, now, is this just a continuation of Peter's misunderstanding?

Now, He's saying, Jesus, look, you don't have to suffer. You are here in Your glory. You can remain in Your glory. Let's set up Your kingdom now so that everyone knows it. But we see Jesus' response in verse 9 that this is not a part of His plan.

He commands His disciples not to tell anyone what had happened until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. And so we see that this is a repeated command that's recorded by Matthew that Jesus says throughout His ministry.

In chapter 16, we already looked at it. When Peter declares Jesus as the Christ, Jesus responds by saying to His disciples, don't tell anybody.

When Jesus performed miracles early in the Gospel of Matthew, multiple times, He tells these people, the recipients of these miracles, don't tell anybody. And so why the secrecy?

[ 23 : 10 ] Well, it seems as though Jesus is wanting to avoid creating any misunderstanding of who He is and what He's here to accomplish. You may know that the Jews were expecting Messiah to come, but they wanted this Messiah to come set up an earthly kingdom to overthrow the Roman Empire.

So Jesus wanted this ambition, this desire, not to be a distraction to the people, not to be a distraction from what He had actually been called to do, what His mission actually was, to come and suffer and die.

And so we see an allusion to this mission when we go back to look at the voice of God again in the cloud. We talked about that it reminds us of Jesus' baptism where the Spirit of God came down and spoke these same words of His Son Jesus, this is my Son with whom I'm well pleased.

It reminds us of Deuteronomy where it talks about listening to Jesus. But I think there's a third allusion here because when God says this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, that second part of that phrase, in whom I'm well pleased, in whom I take delight, this again is a repetition of an Old Testament prophecy if we go back to the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 42, which is one of these servant songs, one of several servant songs in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 42.1 says this, Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

[ 24 : 41 ] So God prophesied through Isaiah that this Messiah who was coming, who would possess all power and all authority, was coming as a servant to His people.

And so we see this theme more clearly in the second part of our passage here. When Jesus is descending the mountain with His disciples, His disciples are obviously confused. They've seen a glimpse of Jesus' glory.

They've seen Him talking with Moses and Elijah, so they assume that the day of the Lord is near, and they ask, why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? Maybe a peculiar question to us, but it was obvious that they themselves understood another prophecy from the book of Malachi.

Malachi 4.5 says, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And so if the disciples knew this, they knew the scribes knew this, they had just seen Elijah with Jesus in His glory, if the day of the Lord is near, why didn't Elijah stick around?

What's going on here? They want to know. Jesus clarifies in verse 12. He says, I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize Him, but did to Him whatever they pleased.

[ 25 : 58 ] So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. And so Jesus is making clear to His disciples, once again, if we look back in Matthew 11, He's already said this to His disciples, that John the Baptist is Elijah.

So yes, this prophecy says that Elijah will come. John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the prophecy. John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the Lord. He has done so, yet He was not recognized and He was persecuted and killed.

And so Jesus says, in the same way, I too must suffer and die. And so Jesus is making clear here that this transfiguration is really only a mere foreshadowing of what is to come.

Where Jesus' glory would be eternally revealed, where Jesus would live in perfect communion with His people, but that day has not come. He's making the point that the cross precedes the crown, that pain precedes glory, that His humiliation precedes His exaltation.

And so this is the counterintuitive plan of salvation. Jesus says later in the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 20, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

[ 27 : 20 ] This is the good news of the Gospel, that the Messiah has come to serve His people and to save them from their sins. And so this is exactly what we read about if you were part of a community group this past week and looked at Philippians 2.

Philippians 2, it says that though Jesus was in the form of God, He did not account 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 and being found in human form.

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And so we see though that Jesus did not stay in the grave.

On the third day we know that He rose from the grave, that He ascended into heaven, that He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty where He will come to judge the living and the dead. So we can be confident that Jesus will come again, that Jesus will establish His eternal kingdom.

And so what does that mean for us now, believer, as we stand in between the already and the not yet? Yes, Jesus has been has come and He has provided a means of salvation, but He has promised to come again.

[ 28 : 32 ] What are we to do? What's our response to this narrative? We see Jesus' command here, God's command in the cloud to listen to Him.

It says that in verse 5. And so not only are we to admire who Jesus is, not only are we to respect Him or even remain in awe of Him, we are to listen to Him.

And so this command, it means much more than just hearing. It's about hearing and obeying. Obeying all that Jesus has said. And then following Him.

Following Jesus on His path to Jerusalem. This is what Jesus had just said in chapter 16. If anyone comes after Me, let him deny himself and take up His cross and follow Me.

And so not only are we saved through the blood of Jesus, we are also called to become more and more like Him as we copy Him and follow Him in His suffering.

[ 29 : 38 ] It's Jesus that creates this pattern for us of being brought low in order to be brought up. And so as we continue in the Gospel though, this call to suffer doesn't stand alone.

Because this call to suffer we see coupled with this call to share the good news of the Gospel. We already looked at how before Jesus' death and resurrection, He wants this to remain a secret.

He doesn't want others to know of His identity to that point in time. But this command changes. He says, only do so until after the Son of Man has raised from the dead.

And so in the final verses of Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 28, He again peers to His disciples on a mountaintop and these are the words that He says to them. He says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

[ 30 : 41 ] And so this is how we respond. By listening to the Son. By following in His example. By sharing this good news of the Gospel with others.

And we do so with an eager anticipation for when we too will see God's glory. And because this is the reality here, that the vision of God is the ultimate goal of Christianity.

It's not just that we may have faith. It's not just that our sins may be forgiven. Our faith is the means of our salvation, but our goal of our salvation is that we may see Christ.

We are on a pilgrimage in this life. A pilgrimage from faith to sight. And so may we long for the day when we may see Christ in all His glory.

When we may behold His shining face. In the book of Revelation, John writes of his vision of a new Jerusalem. We know that Jesus is coming again.

[ 31 : 47 ] He's going to establish a new heaven and a new earth. And this is what John says of this new Jerusalem. And I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb.

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives its light and its lamp is the Lamb. And so as we conclude, we can do so in the same way that we began as Spurgeon urges us to respond not only with our heads but also our hearts that we may rejoice in the arrival of the Messiah who brings salvation to His people.

That we may long for His return when we too may see God in all His glory. And so may that desire for the vision of Christ surpass all else in our lives.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for revealing just a glimpse of Your glory to Your disciples.

That that was recorded in Your Word that we may understand Your true identity. That we may understand better Your mission. And so Lord, may that compel us to desire to see Your face also.

[ 33 : 12 ] And as we await for Your return, Lord, we pray that we'll be faithful in listening to You. To understand Your identity. To see Your suffering and desire to follow in it knowing that we are made more and more like You.

God, may it be our heart's desire to see the face of Jesus. Our Savior, the Son of God. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.