

PM Matthew 17 What God wants from us as we Worship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2023

Preacher: Rev Stephen Steele

[0 : 00] We'll read the whole of this part of God's Word. 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 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, 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 up their eyes they saw no one but Jesus only. 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.

[1 : 05] And 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. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

And when they came to the crowd a man came up to him and kneeling before him said, Lord have mercy on my son for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire and often into the water.

And I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him. 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. And Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him. And the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, why could we not cast it out?

[2 : 09] 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.

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, the Son of Man is about 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 greatly distressed.

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? He said, yes.

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?

And when he said from others, Jesus said to him, then the sons are free. However not to give offence to them, go to the lake and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel.

[3 : 09] Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself. Amen. What does God want for us as we worship?

And particularly as we sit under the word being preached. It is good every so often to reassess why we do what we do, lest we would end up doing things simply for the sake of doing them.

And if we forget what the purpose is meant to be. So what is meant to be happening when the word is preached? That's what I want us to consider this evening under two main headings.

We're going to start by thinking about the preacher's role. And then we're going to think about Jesus' goal. And obviously those two things should be very closely linked.

And the first one obviously flows from the second. And then at the end we're going to think very briefly about what the result of it all should be.

[4 : 20] But two main headings this evening. Firstly, coming to consider the preacher's role. If you are to pray for the preacher, whoever that is on any given Lord's Day, you need to know what he's meant to be doing.

And as you pray here for the future that God would provide a man for you in the future, thinking about the preacher's role will be helpful in that regard.

And in this passage, God the Father does two things that every preacher should do when they enter the pulpit. And we see them both in verse 5.

When the disciples hear a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Do you see what God the Father does there?

Firstly, he declares who Jesus is. And then he tells the disciples to listen to him. And that is a minister's privilege and responsibility every Lord's Day.

[5 : 37] If I asked you what the Bible was about, what would you say? There are a number of ways you could answer that. Hopefully your answer would be something to do with God.

The Bible is about God and the glory of God. And where do we see that glory most clearly? Well, we see it in Jesus Christ.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians, For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus says in John 5.39, How the scriptures bear witness about me. In the last chapter of Luke's gospel, Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures.

And how did he do that? Well, by showing them how the law, the prophets and the Psalms spoke about him. In other words, the whole Old Testament.

[6 : 43] And if Jesus was the focus of the Old Testament, even though many missed it, I think we can safely say that he is also the focus of the new.

Older theologians used to talk about the scope of scripture. That's a word which occurs in our confession of faith, in the larger catechism. And by the scope of scripture, they meant, what is it all about?

And what did they see the scope of scripture as? They saw it as the glory of God. And particularly the glory of God in the redeeming work of the Son of God.

The scope of scripture, what scripture is about, it's about the glory of God in the redeeming work of the Son of God. Today we might talk about being Christ-centered, but it's the same thing.

Jesus specifically says of the Holy Spirit, He will glorify me. He will glorify me. And so actually churches which try to have their primary focus on the Holy Spirit, get things a bit out of sync.

[7 : 59] Because even though the Spirit and the Son are equal in power and glory, the Spirit loves to glorify the Son. It's not a perfect illustration, but think of one of those historic buildings which have floodlights around them, and the lights shine back on the building, their aim is to show the building in all their glory.

And that's what the Spirit loves to do with the Lord Jesus. And so if the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is the theme of the Bible, then it should be the theme of sermons from the Bible.

And here in this passage, God the Father declares who Jesus is. This is my beloved Son. And he goes on, In whom I am well pleased.

And if God the Father delights in the Son, should we not? If God the Father is well pleased with His Son, should we not delight in His Son?

Should that not be something that we do as we come together? Yes, the Father will say, Listen to Him. But the order is important.

[9 : 25] Firstly, here's who He is. And then, in light of that, listen to Him. I read an article lately by a lady who became a Christian.

Before she was converted, she would have called herself gay. And she said that she knew from reading the Bible that what felt natural to her was now off limits. But she struggled with the why question.

And she said in the end, it came down to trust. She knew Jesus was worthy of her trust. Because He had demonstrated it at the cross.

And she put it like this. The obedience of faith only works when it's rooted in a person, not a rule. And I think she's right.

The obedience of faith only works when it's rooted in a person, not a rule. Is that not what we have in the Ten Commandments? How do they begin?

[10:26] Well, the very first thing they begin with is who God is. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It starts with who God is and what He's done for them.

And then, you shall have no other gods before me. The context is redemption. And we see more evidence of that in the passage in front of us.

We see the same order. Before God tells us to listen to Jesus, He tells us who He is. He is His beloved Son with whom He is well pleased.

And so yes, absolutely. A minister's responsibility is to tell you to listen to Jesus. But it's also their responsibility and privilege to tell you who this Jesus is.

And perhaps sometimes preachers and people alike can be too impatient to get to the practical, to get to the application, to get to what Jesus wants us to do.

[11:35] But we need to start with who Jesus is. And that is true, not just for the non-Christian, it's true whether someone is a non-Christian, whether they're a new Christian, whether they're a mature Christian.

Because seeing Jesus is actually first and foremost what God uses to change us. Seeing Jesus is first and foremost what God uses to change us.

2 Corinthians 3.18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Seeing glory changes us. There is a biblical principle, a principle that is true right across humanity, that we become like what we worship.

We become like what we worship. That is a terrible thing if people worship the empty idols that are all around us. They become like what they worship. But for us who are servants of Jesus Christ, God's glorious, radiant Son, we, by the work of the Spirit, become like what we worship.

[13:00] Have you noticed the order of Paul's letters? Some letters like Romans and Ephesians are particularly clear examples of this.

They start with who we are in Christ and then they get the application later on. Ephesians is a particularly good example of that.

It starts with three chapters and if you were to go home and read those three chapters, I think the only command, the only exhortation that you will find in those opening three chapters is to remember.

To remember who they are. To remember what God in Christ has done for them. Then the second half of the book, chapters four through six, they go to application and it's application after application after application.

But it's all built on the foundation of what God has done for us and who we are in Christ. It's been rightly said that we are what we love before we are what we do.

[14:05] We are what we love before we are what we do. What we love defines us more than what we do. And of course, what we love, what we do will flow from that inevitably.

So it is right and necessary that a minister applies God's word. Not simply to say, well, I'll just state the truth and leave application to the Holy Spirit.

A minister should apply God's word. But it should flow from who Jesus is. The name of William McCune isn't that well known today.

He was a Scottish seceder minister. He died in 1762, aged just 28. He had been a minister for seven years and he had been married for ten days.

Four years before he died, he preached an ordination sermon in Aberdeen. And as part of that sermon, he compared the evangelical preacher of Christ to the legal disclaimer as he called him.

[15:21] In other words, the legalistic preacher. And he said that the legalistic preacher is always inculcating, always hammering home the duties of Christianity, but seldom the privileges.

In other words, people come to church and they're always being told what they need to do, but they're rarely reminded of who they are in Christ. Macune goes on to say, instead of making

privilege the foundation of duty, the legalist makes duty the foundation of privilege. Which is the opposite of what Paul does in those letters like Ephesians and Romans. Paul makes privilege the foundation of duty.

starting with who we are in Christ and then saying, well here's how to live in light of that. Whereas the legalistic preacher makes duty the foundation of privilege.

In other words, he starts with what you need to do, he majors on what you need to do, and the implication is that if you perform well enough, God might love you.

[16 : 40] It's not God has shown in Christ just how much he loves you. Now in light of that, go out and serve him. And here's how he wants you to serve him.

But it's more, go and serve him. Then maybe he'll be pleased with you. The difference isn't always obvious at first sight because a lot of the time the two men may be preaching similar duties.

though the legalist will add to those duties. But privilege must be the foundation of duty.

Not duty, the foundation of privilege. And so putting together what we've looked at so far, if Christ is the scope of scripture and if our duty must be rooted in the fact that we have already become children of God through what Jesus did at the cross, then preaching needs to major on exalting the Lord Jesus.

Many of you will have heard of Matthew Henry, probably the most famous Bible commentator ever. Someone who's less well known is Matthew Henry's father Philip.

[18 : 02] Philip Henry wrote a book entitled Christ is All. Here are some of the chapter titles. Christ is our hope. Next chapter, Christ is our refuge.

Next chapter, Christ is our righteousness, our son, our shield, our strength. Let me ask you this evening, is Jesus your hope?

Is he your refuge? Is he your righteousness, your son, your shield, your strength? If not, then nothing, I say, will be of any lasting advantage to you.

Jesus is at the centre of the Bible and he must be at the centre of our lives. And if you're struggling in your faith at the moment, if you feel cold and distant from God, one thing that may help is reading a book specifically about the Lord Jesus.

And I'll be happy to talk about some options later. So God the Father starts by declaring who Jesus is.

[19 : 18] And then in light of that he says, listen to him. Listen to him. And again, the preacher is to do the same. And of course to say listen to Jesus is no different from saying listen to God.

Jesus is the word of God in the flesh. If someone rejects the Jesus of the Bible, then they are rejecting God.

If someone hopes to be admitted into heaven by God one day and yet they ignore Jesus' words, that he is the way, the truth, and the life, if they ignore Jesus' words, that no one gets to the Father through him, if they ignore Jesus' words, you must be born again.

Well, they are not going to be admitted into heaven because to reject Jesus, to reject what he says in scripture, is to reject God.

And the preacher is to declare, listen to him, not listen to me. the authority of the preacher is only ever a delegated authority.

[20 : 31] It is only a delegated authority. So the preacher cannot make up his own message, nor can he go beyond what Jesus says.

I read something helpful by a Presbyterian minister in America recently, and he said the pastor's job isn't to micromanage your life. In other words, it's not to go through every single part of life and say, this is the Christian way to do X.

He goes on, while this model is attractive, it lacks a nuance of biblical wisdom literature. And when he says it's attractive, I think he means attractive not just to certain types of ministers, but also to certain kinds of people who don't really want to have to make decisions for themselves, but they'd rather just be told what to do in every single circumstance.

But the guy I was reading says that it results in a church where everyone is expected to do X, where X is presented as if it's God's law, but it's actually just that church's idea of obedience.

And the result is a culture where people think that real faithfulness looks like X. And all the while people aren't being equipped to use biblical wisdom to make their own decisions and to recognize that godly believers may come to different conclusions.

[22 : 08] We must not stop short of what scripture commands, but neither can we go beyond it. we must walk that tightrope. Our confession of faith has a great chapter on Christian liberty and liberty of conscience.

Yes, the whole idea of Christian liberty can be used as an excuse for sin, but surely we have to have some concept of godly Christians who can come to decisions on things other than what we do.

The preacher is to say, listen to him. Listen to him. Not listen to what I think is good advice packaged up as if it is the only Christian way. So firstly, tonight the preacher's role.

Secondly, we have Jesus' goal. Jesus' goal. I want us in this second point to look particularly at what the Lord Jesus does in this passage to have the camera focus on him rather than on all the others on the mountain.

What does Jesus do for his faithful disciples in this passage? Well, verse seven, he comes to them, he touches them and he tells them not to be afraid.

[23 : 37] He comes to them, he touches them and he tells them not to be afraid. is that Jesus' only goal for us as we said under the preaching of his word?

Well, no, I don't think we can go that far. But surely, it is a big one. It's said that the most frequent command in scripture is do not be afraid.

I haven't counted, I have no reason to doubt it. It is a frequent command. What does that tell us? it tells us that God's people are often fearful.

Fearful because they're conscious of their own sin. Fearful because they're worried about the future. Fearful because of the state of the world around them.

I think how many times Jesus comes to his disciples and says, take heart. Take heart. And do you think that what Jesus wants for his people is any different now that he's in heaven?

[24 : 45] That's actually the whole point of one of the most beautiful Puritan works. Thomas Goodwin wrote a book entitled The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth.

And in it he argues that Jesus' heart towards sinners is no different now he's in heaven from what it was when he was on earth. Now that might sound obvious.

You say, well Jesus hasn't changed. Of course he feels the same way about sinners now that he's in heaven. And yet have you ever met people whose idea of a good sermon is one where they get absolutely roasted?

I've had someone tell me that they like going to hear a certain preacher because it would be so convicting that they would come out wondering if they were even a Christian. And they thought that was a good thing.

Every week they would go thinking they were a Christian. Every week they would come out again not really sure if they were. Now absolutely one of the goals of preaching is that the Holy Spirit would use it to show on believers who think they're Christians that they're actually not.

[25 : 58] Christians that are not but is it Jesus we see in the Gospels someone who wants to shake his disciples confidence that they're really his people? Or is he someone who wants to reassure those who were doubting?

Jesus wants to shake the Pharisees yes but he doesn't want to shake those who've just put their trust in him. And the Jesus in heaven is no different from Jesus who was on earth.

He still is the same human flesh now glorified. He remembers that we're dust. Now this might sound a bit soft a bit woolly but I've quoted McEwan who said it's the legalistic preacher that is big on duty and small on privilege.

I've quoted Goodwin. here are two more Puritan quotes to try and bolster what I'm saying. Richard Sibbes we are only poor for this reason that we do not know our riches in Christ.

We are only poor for this reason that we do not know our riches in Christ. What is our big problem as Christians? We often think it's lack of effort.

[27 : 21] I need to try harder. Sib says no. He says our greatest problem is that we do not know our riches in Christ. A final name to quote John Owen.

He said unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges is our sin as well as our trouble. John Owen is here for an interview.

John, what brings us trouble as Christians? He says it's unacquaintedness with our privileges. Do we need rebuked and challenged by the preaching of God's word?

Absolutely. God's word is needed for reproof and correction as well as teaching instruction in righteousness. But actually that will be one of the effects of what we looked at under point one tonight.

One of the effects of saying who Jesus really is, is that that in itself will show us our sin. What is it in our passage this evening that leads to the disciples being terrified and falling on their faces?

[28 : 37] Well it's the revelation of God's glory. It's hearing the voice from heaven. In fact someone has said that true preaching is to speak in such a way that if God himself were to speak from heaven he wouldn't have anything more to add.

Whether you think that's a helpful description of preaching or not, God is speaking in the preaching of the word in a way that we can be even more certain of than if we heard a voice from heaven.

Is that not what Peter says as he thinks back to the transfiguration in 2 Peter when he says that what we have in the Bible is actually more sure.

How does that make sense? How is what we have in the Bible more sure than a voice from heaven? I think it means that if we heard a voice from heaven today we couldn't be sure whether it was really God or not.

But in the Bible Peter says we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed to which you will do well to pay attention. And on that mountain of transfiguration seeing Jesus in his glory and hearing the voice from heaven it led to the three disciples being terrified because in light of the shining brilliance of Jesus' glory we see our sin so much more clearly.

[30 : 09] as he speaks to us by his word and spirit one of the Lord Jesus goals is to show us our sin because he wants what's best for us and what is best for us is if we see our sin and we're convicted of it we confess it and are forgiven.

He wants to show us our sin but he doesn't want to leave us there. And surely by the conclusion of the sermon and by the time the benediction comes surely the message of the Lord Jesus to his people week by week is the same as it is here.

Rise and have no fear. True preaching must preach the law but it also must go on to preach the gospel. In Pilgrim's Progress one of the characters is a man called Faithful and he meets a man who knocks him down and then he hits him again and when Faithful comes round he cries out to the man for mercy.

The man says I know not how to show mercy and he knocks him down again. Who's the man? He's Moses representing the law.

The law shows us our sin. It shows us our saviour. It shows us our duty but it can't save us. it cannot show mercy because that's not what it was designed for.

[31 : 42] It's not a flaw. It's just not what it was designed for. It's on that Mount of Transfiguration to show that he pointed to Jesus.

Moses can convict of sin. Moses as we thought this morning can get the people to the edge of the Jordan River but he can't get them through it.

Only Jesus can say rise and have no fear. And surely that is one of Jesus' biggest goals for his people as his word is preached.

Psalms 85 verse 8 Let me hear what God the Lord will speak for to his people he will speak peace.

So the preacher's role Jesus' goal just very briefly as we close let's think about the result.

Verse 8 would not be a great thing to be able to say of us during the act of preaching that we see no one but Jesus only.

[32 : 56] That the preacher disappears behind the cross. That we stop thinking so much about how the sermon applies to someone else. That all these things disappear from our minds and we see Jesus only.

Now of course we can't stay on the mountaintop forever. But there's a sense in which this saying no one but Jesus only should continue even as we come down. Not that we cut ourselves off from other people.

Not at all. That's not our calling. Even on that mountain there were three of the disciples together. It wasn't a private encounter with Jesus for any one of them.

So we don't cut ourselves off from other people as we go back out into the weak and into the world. But we should look at people through Jesus' lenses.

We should look at our fellow Christians as those in whom Jesus lives by his spirit. As our brothers and sisters in Christ. As the younger of the two Margarets said about the older as they were tied to

those stakes in the Solway Firth.

[34 : 07] I see Christ wrestling there. And we should look at unbelievers as those whom the Lord Jesus does not want to perish. And if we share his concern about them, we can actually do something that these three disciples weren't allowed to do.

And that is tell them about what we've seen. verse 9, tell no one the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. Well the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

If we don't tell people the good news we're living as if he hasn't. And so as we come down from the mountain as it were each Lord's Day, the vision of the Lord Jesus that we've seen there should shape how we see others, both believers and unbelievers.

And we ourselves should never come away unchanged. Amen. Well we turn