

# AM Matthew 17:1-20 & Luke 9:28-36 That Touch

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Preacher: Dr Alistair Mackay

[ 0 : 00 ] together. First of all in Matthew chapter 17 and then we'll read a few verses from Luke chapter 9.

Matthew chapter 17 at verse 1. 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. 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 said. And he said that first Elijah must come and say that first Elijah must come and say that first Elijah and then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them 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's 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 oh 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? 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. And if we turn to Luke's gospel chapter 9 we'll read the parallel but slightly different account that Luke gives us of the transfiguration in verse 28 of Luke chapter 9.

[ 3 : 41 ] Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white and behold two men were talking with him Moses and Elijah who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him and as the men were parting from him Peter said to Jesus Master it's good that we're here let us make three tents one for you one for Moses one for Elijah not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things a cloud came over them and overshadowed them and they were afraid as they entered the cloud and a voice came out of the cloud saying this is my son my chosen one listen to him.

And when the voice had spoken Jesus was found alone and they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. May God add his blessing to those readings from his word.

Matthew 17 verses 7 and 8 it says 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 this is holy ground. Indeed that mount of transfiguration was holy ground. The disciples knew that.

They heard a voice from the cloud which said this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.

And when they heard that they fell on their faces and they were terrified. Just like Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and Ezekiel before them and Saul of Tarsus and John of Patmos and time to come. They were on their faces on the ground terrified.

[ 6 : 28 ] But Oh that conjunction of grace but Jesus came and touched them.

as he or she may have touched you. And touch is not one sided. Now our reaction to that touch may vary.

It may be a response of welcome of affection of comfort of love or it may be a response of inquiry or resentment or outrage or even of repulsion.

These responses come from hearts that soften or of hearts that harden to that touch.

But touch is not neutral. physical contact is one prime way that disease may be spread.

[ 8 : 03 ] We call these diseases contagious. Spread by touch but the touch is never neutral. people. And the Lord Jesus this morning as the gospel is preached is holding out his hand to touch you.

But are our hearts prepared to respond in a fitting way? our passage you see tells us of ordinary but chosen people overwhelmed by their own unfitness and sin in the presence of divine majesty in the presence of God himself.

So what's our attitude as we are present together before God? Are we ready to argue? Are we ready to reject his advance?

Or are we faced down in a basement in his presence? Our passage tells us too that the Lord Jesus came to these ordinary folk to touch them.

Jesus came and touched them. They didn't take it on themselves to approach him. They were faced down on the ground and the dust but he came to them in their helplessness and hopelessness and touched them.

[ 9 : 41 ] So what happens when we come to public worship? Well physically we walk into church of course of course we do but in our souls are we making the running or are we waiting on God?

Are we waiting for our Father and his one and only Son by his Holy Spirit to come to us and touch us?

See the angel took the coal from the altar and came to Isaiah to touch his lips. Isaiah didn't go and take the coal for himself. Our passage tells us that Jesus didn't touch them with indifference with a blank face nor was this touch with a frosty face with reluctance with any distaste this this was a willing touch and as we worship are we willing are we willing to receive the touch of our Saviour the touch he's more than willing to give or are we indifferent?

Are we simply not willing? Do we epitomise that awful chilling verse as Jesus wept over Jerusalem how often he wanted to gather them together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing.

our passage also tells us that there's not just a touch here it says Jesus came and touched them and said touch is but one of our senses have we come to worship prepared for all of our senses to be filled with Christ?

[ 11 : 47 ] Are we ready to feel his touch? Are we ready to hear him? Are we ready to fix our eyes on him? Are we ready to smell that sweet aroma of the gospel of Christ?

And are we ready to taste and see that the Lord is good? Are we ready to have Jesus of Nazareth as our all and in our all?

Our passage tells us also that in touching us and speaking to us our Lord is giving us two messages one is a command a command to action and the other is a message of peace to our souls he's telling us that fine as it may be for us to worship and bow before him and rest in his presence all of our days he needs us to get up he has stuff for us to do he wants us up and doing and this is where it gets really uncomfortable because we may be stepping outside of our comfort zone we're scared because we're scared we're acutely aware of our own inadequacy and nothingness and actually that is just what Jesus wants as disciples he's already taught us that there is such blessedness for the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God what that poverty of spirit in Matthew chapter 5 verse 3 the very first beatitude that what poverty means is not the word for poorish on the breadline just able to make ends meet but instead it's a different word that means completely destitute miserable poor blind naked starving completely at a loss spiritually because the miracle of grace is that when we can bring nothing to the table but our nothingness through

Christ Jesus and faith in his name such poverty confers eternal inheritance rights to the kingdom of heaven so the second part of the message is get up don't be afraid those people who count things

in the Bible have calculated that the encouragement from God not to fear is one of the commonest commands for such it is in scripture it has been counted that it appears over 300 times in fact 365 times some authorities would say 366 and our passage tells us can you see it in your mind's eye Jesus touching his poor petrified disciples maybe on the arm as he gently he says get up don't be afraid and when they lift their heads from the dust because they're still down there in the dust you know and they look up and what do they see they see

Jesus only what the Greek text literally says is that they saw himself Jesus only three words are we ready to fix our eyes on himself Jesus only this morning you see now this is a truly remarkable passage of God's word our modern English translations may lose a little of the wonderment of all of this that Matthew expresses the ESV retains this but the New International Version loses this Matthew says behold three times behold Moses and Elijah behold the cloud behold the voice but behold also the transfiguration of Jesus some would call it transformation there are parallel passages in Mark 9 and

[16:42] Luke 9 what is transfiguration well the Greek word translated transfiguration is metamorphosis we would say metamorphosis we've adopted that word straight into English in scientific terms to describe the change that occurs with butterflies or moths where the caterpillar or larva is next cocooned inside that protective layer as the pupa till it emerges as the butterfly or moth to me some of the most beautiful wonderfully made creatures in all of God's creation but this metamorphosis is not change effected by outside agencies working on the caterpillar but change from within you see in the metamorphosis that occurred in our

Lord Jesus own glory radiated from within it was not in any way reflected and if you look at Mark's account chapter 9 verse 15 we find that when Jesus had come down from the mount some days later presumably it says there as soon as all the people saw Jesus they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him why were they overwhelmed with wonder could there still have been some of that glow of glory on our Lord's face just as Moses face had shone after his encounter with God and Sinai we don't know but something about his appearance was overwhelmingly wonderful what little we know about the appearance of angels from scripture characterizes them as clothed in an effulgence of dazzling bright white light the very presence of God is associated too with unapproachable light with incredible radiance of glory now

Jesus set aside his essential glory in the incarnation in coming in human flesh as a babe in Bethlehem and we read of that in Philippians chapter 2 but on this mountain some of that glory breaks through and the light is so white that no fuller no bleacher on earth could generate such brightness as it says in Mark 9 it says literally gleaming white exceedingly but why here why now what's going on with Moses and Elijah turning up what's this about well it's been about a week since Simon Peter has declared that Jesus is the Messiah the son of the living God if we look back to Matthew chapter 16 we'll find in verse 16 that that is what

Simon Peter says and this is something that was revealed to him not by flesh and blood but as Jesus said there revealed by his father in heaven this was the first time anyone had declared the Messiah ship of Jesus of Nazareth with such crystal clarity and as we read later in Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus is teaching the disciples firstly not to tell anyone about the Messiah ship because his time had not yet come but also warning and teaching them that he has to go to Jerusalem and he has to suffer many things at the hands of the elders the chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life and remember

Simon Peter's response no no no no no no that that that'll never happen to you no end off and Jesus retort get behind me Satan we cannot begin to understand the testing that Jesus humanity had to endure in this we remember his agonies in Gethsemane but it's kicking off right here as soon as his sufferings and death are mentioned which bit of human nature wants to suffer and die absolutely none but this was perfect man who sought to do his father's will who was completely obedient despite despite the awfulness of what lay ahead for him agonies which we cannot comprehend and Jesus then did what he always did at this time when not one of the disciples was behind him in seeking indeed delighting to do

[22:29] God's will seemingly awful as that will might be when Jesus must have been enduring unspeakable loneliness in following through on the new covenant plan he did what he always did he met with God he prayed now we don't read that in Matthew's account you might think Jesus was leading a private hill walking party but Luke tells us that about a week later Jesus took Peter John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray it was as he was praying that his

appearance was metamorphosed I cannot but think that this whole experience this transfiguration was for

Jesus own benefit he was human as well as divine it was for his encouragement as well as for his disciples teaching and for our teaching and encouragement too now Peter's declaration about the messiahship had taken place in Caesarea Philippi right up in the north of the country and it was just about a week later and the mountain there which most authorities agree is the likely site of the transfiguration was Mount Hermon Mount Hermon is 9400 feet high and that's 11000 feet above the Jordan as it winds its way to the Dead Sea what a view there must have been from that height actually a view not infrequently obscured by clouds which seem to form and clear very quickly even nowadays and just a wee note that the site of the

Mount of Transfiguration to which tourists are usually taken is a different mountain altogether Mount Tabor which is far further south in Israel historically very unlikely to be the Mount of Transfiguration but logistically it's a doddle for the tourist industry but having said all that I doubt if the view was important because Jesus often prayed at night or in the very early morning Luke's account tells us that in Luke 9:12 should I say once again the disciples seem to have been asleep or at least very sleepy to begin with despite this extraordinary spectacle going on around them Peter and his companions were very sleepy but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men standing with him

I'm owing up right away to not having a complete grasp on the status of Moses and Elijah we know Moses had died Deuteronomy 34 tells us that though no one knew where he was buried because the statement is that God himself was the undertaker the burier verse 6 Deuteronomy 34 but here Moses is very much alive it doesn't say he was transfigured or Elijah for that matter but they were gloriously splendid it says in one translation but here he is Moses he's to there talking to Jesus to transfigured Jesus and they're conversing likewise Elijah back in 2 Kings 2 was missing presumed dead remember how the company of the prophets sent fit men who spent 3 days looking for him that was after he had disappeared in a chariot of fire well here he is now he's alive he's talking not transfigured only Jesus transfigured but he is gloriously splendid too and he's in conversation with the transfigured

Jesus so what we have here on that mountain is the transfigured glorious Messiah with glory that the three disciples saw for themselves and we have the gloriously splendid greatest lawgiver Moses and the gloriously splendid greatest prophet Elijah and they were conversing with Jesus they weren't giving him a pep talk as such but we are told what they were talking about they were talking about the exodus that's the very word used in the Greek text and we don't mean the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt or the book written by Moses but Jesus own exodus his road out which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem his exodus his road out of unresurrected humanity they were talking about the cross they were talking about his death and they were talking about his resurrection it was as if all history was rising up and pointing

[ 28 : 40 ] Jesus to the cross but please notice that it was Jesus himself not priests or pilots or Romans who were going to do this Jesus himself was about to bring this to fulfilment at Jerusalem a willing sacrificial lamb this was indeed glorious and Jesus shone like the sun then the conversation appeared to have come to an end and Moses and Elijah were clearly recognisably getting ready to go some authorities argue actually that Moses and Elijah these two splendidly glorious men it says make further appearances at the resurrection of the

Lord at the empty tomb and at his ascension asking the disciples why they're standing there gazing up into heaven read the relevant passages it may be it may not be the two of them but back to Herman and you know yourselves by body language when a visit is over somebody's getting ready to go it's not difficult to sense that and Moses and Elijah are getting ready to go when Simon Peter does it again he opens his mouth and he speaks and you can just imagine all the heads Jesus Moses Elijah James John they turn to look at him and Peter thinks that it's great for them to be there and he wants to make tents temporary dwellings tabernacles it says in some versions for the three of them what where was the material for the tents going to come from do they have one each did they need privacy what was that about why would they need a tent

I wonder if that was one of those moments we all have sometimes when having opened our mouths without prior engagement of our brains we say something we later regret why did I say that even Luke was perplexed by Peter's outburst and very graciously in Luke 9:33 in brackets in parenthesis it says he did not know what he was saying none of Psalm 9:46 and 10 for Peter be still and know

that I am God that was who Peter was but you can kind of see where he was coming from because he had in front of him the greatest lawgiver the greatest prophet and Messiah himself and he didn't want the moment to pass but here is the most wonderful lesson for us we don't need Moses and we don't need Elijah we don't need Spurgeon or John Knox or Calvin or Billy Graham or John Stott we need Jesus only we need him to be our substitute and by the grace of God Jesus only was what they were given the very Jesus who was going to lay down his life for them he was going to lay down his life for Moses and for Elijah and Spurgeon and Knox and Calvin and Billy Graham and you and me but this extraordinary witnessing of glory and transfiguration for the three disciples was just about to get a whole level more wondrous so so far they've shaken themselves awake remember it may be the middle of the night remember that middle of the night I should still be awake still be asleep feeling much known I'm sure by farmers and parents of young children they have witnessed jaws dropped no doubt the change in their master and the glorious splendor of two men whom they unequivocally recognize as Moses and Elijah Peter in advisedly opens his mouth and while he is still speaking a cloud appears and overshadows them they entered the cloud and as they did so they were deeply afraid now they may have been fishermen these three disciples but they were informed religious Jews as well and the significance of the cloud did not escape them cloud that symbolized the covering of the divine presence the cloud that led the children of

[ 34 : 14 ] Israel out of Egypt Moses was familiar with cloud on Mount Sinai as he received the law and tablets of stone written with the finger of God the cloud of God's presence had filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and 34 the Shekinah glory it has been called though that actual term Shekinah appears nowhere in scripture and the cloud of God's glorious presence had filled Solomon's temple as it was inaugurated so no one could go in the glory of the Lord filled the temple 1 Kings 8 verses 10 and 11 you see Peter James and John were terrified they were afraid in this cloud and rightly so for a voice came from the cloud saying this is my son whom I love with him

I am well pleased listen to him now the three of them had not been afraid despite being in the presence of transfigured Jesus and they hadn't been afraid despite being in the presence of gloriously splendid Moses and Elijah which I think kind of confirms that whatever the appearance of these men was like they were still men but at the voice of God they were on their faces on the ground quaking with fear the message was how can we say powerful point one this Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God point two he is my son I am God point three God the father loves the son in ways that it will take us an eternity of astonished adulation to begin to understand point four God is well pleased with him because he is perfect in every way holy harmless undefiled and he is fulfilling the covenant plan of salvation that came from the heart of the triune God and he is going to do that so perfectly with his awful exodus God is well pleased with him just as he was when he tore the heavens apart at Jesus baptism and declared his son's identity and his own pleasure in all that he was and just as he was in John 12 when in response to Jesus cry of prayer father glorify your name people thought it thundered but those with ears to hear heard the reply I have glorified it and will glorify it again and oh the glory of the cross of shame and of salvation and point five of the divine message is to declare

Jesus authority listen to him not anybody else listen to Jesus himself only and the disciples were on their faces in the dust where could have been more appropriate maybe they thought they were going to die they had heard the voice of God but Jesus came and touched them get up he said don't be afraid and when they looked up they saw no one except himself Jesus only the law giver the law keeper the law explainer the heart and the purpose behind the law the prophet the priest the king the fulfillment of prophecy the one thing needful you see

God has been in all those mountain top experiences with Abraham on Mount Moriah Mount Zion with Moses on Mount Sinai with Moses on Mount Nebo as he died with Elijah on Mount Carmel with Elijah on Mount Horeb and the quiet whisper the still small voice with Christ Jesus on Mount Hermon but oh what a difference on the hill of Calvary it was there the son of God suffered and died he who was pure and sinless became sin for you and me taking my sin on his own body on the tree and there God the father turned his face away from the sin that Christ Jesus had become in his flesh until as Jesus breathed his last the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom from heaven to earth as

[ 39 : 53 ] Christ paid the price and access restoration renewed relationship was purchased by his blood himself Jesus only is more than enough do you see him today have you given your heart to

him have you peace with God through his shed blood does he fill your hearts does he fill your senses do you feel his touch amen let's pray together k other