

The Transfiguration of the Christ

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[0 : 00] Please turn again with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 17 and the account of the transfiguration of the Christ. The transfiguration of the Christ.

They say that as you were dying, you see in flashback all the significant moments of your life. All the most important times and places and people.

If that's true, then on our deathbeds, what part will Jesus play in our flashbacks? Is he of such significance to us that without him we can't make sense of our lives?

But likewise, if this flashback theory is true, then what people, events, times and places came into Jesus' mind as he was dying upon the cross?

Yes, perhaps his baptism in the River Jordan. Perhaps some of his miracles. Perhaps the great Sermon on the Mount. But surely, surely his transfiguration.

[1 : 10] Surely the events retold in Matthew 17 verses 1 through 13 were so important to him that as he was dying, his mind returned in flashback to them.

He's dying in agony. Humiliated in his shame. But his mind is flashing back into the day he was transformed into the brightness of the sun.

These two events might have seemed a million miles apart. But in the context of Matthew's gospel, they are closer than we may think.

And one cannot come without the other. The cross cannot come without the crown. It's very easy to fixate merely upon the majesty of Christ as he reveals himself in the glory of his post-resurrection form here.

But there are really so many more things we can learn about Jesus from this transfiguration. Yes, there is majesty in verses 1 through 5.

[2 : 16] But there is also meekness, verses 6 through 9. And mission, verses 10 through 13. And Matthew's message to us all this morning is Consider Jesus.

The Jesus who has so recently in Matthew's gospel been proclaimed Christ. Consider what being the Christ meant for Jesus.

And how because of all Jesus Christ has done for us, He needs to become, if He is not already, The most important and significant person in our lives, Such that when we are dying, We flash back, not just to our families and to our loved ones, But to Jesus.

First of all then, in verses 1 through 5, We have majesty, majesty. The story of the transfiguration seems on first inspection to be very much out of place.

The last portions of chapter 16 are taken up with the sufferings of Christ and his disciples, Of self-denial, of taking up our crosses, Of losing our lives for his sake.

[3 : 35] They are pictures, they are prophecies of humiliation, Of suffering and death. There could be no greater contrast between the humiliated Christ of Matthew 16, And the exalted Christ of the Mount of Transfiguration in chapter 17.

Between the mockery of those to whom Jesus was talking in chapter 16, And the majestic voice which came from the cloud on top of the Mount of Transfiguration.

The contrast is so dramatic, And yet for as deep as the misery of Christ, Prophesied in chapter 16, As high as the majesty of Christ, Displayed in chapter 17.

But it's the whole episode, Not just the majesty of the Christ in verse 2, Not just the majesty of the conversation in verse 3, But also the majesty of the cloud in verse 5.

The Mount of Transfiguration is the Mount of Majesty. And together with Peter, James and John, We're going to ascend and experience the post-resurrection, Post-ascension glory of Christ.

[4 : 52] We have in the first instance in verse 2, The majesty of the Christ, He was transfigured before them. The word Matthew uses to describe the transformation of Christ's appearance in verse

2, Is that from which we get our English word, Metamorphosis.

A change in form. The morphe, the form, Becomes other than what it was. We talk of a caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly.

That form which is so ugly and ungainly, Is transformed into the beauty of a red admiral. And then we read, He that is Jesus, Was transfigured before them.

In Philippians chapter 2, We read of the humble descent of Jesus, That he who being in the form, The morphe of God, Did not consider equality with God something to be held on to, But made himself nothing, Taking the form, the morphe of a servant.

Thus far in the gospel of Matthew, All we're able to see, Is Jesus in servant form. But now here in chapter 17, He undergoes a metamorphosis, And we see him in the form of his majesty.

[6 : 13] The veil of his misery is removed, And we see the form of his majesty. His face shines like the sun, And his clothes become as white as the light.

It's just so much like the vision of the glorified Christ, Which John had some 60 years later, Which he records in Revelation chapter 1. It's this vision of light and brightness, The sun shining in all the force of its brilliance.

There's danger in looking directly into the sun, And it is terrifyingly awesome, To look at the transfigured Christ, In all his majesty.

This is the form of the post-resurrection, Post-ascension, Christ, Doubtless the form the Pharisees and scribes, Wanted to see, But didn't and couldn't.

And before him, The Christ of majestic form, We all bow today, Do we not? In humble adoration, And we say, He is my Christ, He is my Lord, He is my King.

[7 : 26] We have the majesty of the Christ in verse 2, We have the majesty of the conversation in verse 3, And behold, There appeared to them Moses and Elijah, Talking with them.

Before the three disciples had processed what they were seeing, Moses and Elijah appeared before them. How they knew it was Moses and Elijah, I don't know, And the text doesn't tell us.

And they're talking with Jesus. Now Moses and Elijah, Are the two towering figures of the Old Testament, Most associated with mountains. Moses with Mount Sinai.

Elijah with Mount Carmel. They're associated with great revelations of the majesty of God. But more importantly, Moses and Elijah are Old Testament prophets, Whose final days are steeped in mystery.

According to scripture, Moses died, And God buried him in an undisclosed location. Elijah, we know, Was taken up to heaven in fiery, glorious chariots, And he never saw death.

[8 : 31] These last days of these two great Old Testament prophets, Are shrouded in mystery. Both in tragedy, And in triumph. And that's what they're talking about here.

The last days of Christ on earth. The manner in which Christ will depart. His body risen, And ascended to heaven. He, the Christ, For whom Moses and Elijah, Had been pointing in their ministries, And for whom they had waited, So patiently, They now appeared, With their Christ. These two men, So humbly clothed in life, Moses like a shepherd, Elijah like a vagrant, Are now transformed into glory, With Jesus.

And Jesus, Clothed in the humility, Humility of our broken humanity, Has been given a foretaste, Of the glory which shall be his, Is after the humiliation of the cross.

And it's a majestic conversation. A conversation and company so wonderful, That Peter says, Master, It's good for us to be here. Good for those Jewish Christians, To whom Matthew was writing this gospel, To be there also.

[9 : 49] Good for them to see Jesus, With the two cardinal figures of Judaism, Elijah and Moses, And hear them giving their seal of approval, To Jesus. It's good for us in 21st century, Point, To be there also, With the transfigured Christ, It's good for us to meditate, On the post resurrection, Glory, Of Christ, The Christ we worship today, Who now is.

It's good for us. It gives us hope. We also have in verse 5, Not just the majesty of the Christ, Not just the majesty of the conversation, We have in verse 5, The majesty of the cloud.

Literally we read, While he, That's Peter, Was yet speaking, A cloud of brightness, Overshadowed them. Picture this, The cloud was filled with lights, Glimpses of the hidden glory, Of the father.

It's that same cloud, Which enveloped, The summit of Mount Sinai, When Moses received the law, The same cloud, Which guided the Israelites, Through the wilderness, The same cloud, Which filled the temple, When God's presence, Descended upon it.

In other words, The Lord of heaven, Has come down. A greater than Moses, And Elijah is here, And the mountain, Is wreathed, In the majesty of the father.

[11:08] I wonder, What this must have been like, With this great cloud, Of bright lights. I've been caught, In dense clouds, To the top, Of a Monroe, In the western highlands, But never a cloud, Filled with bright lights.

The father has come. The one of whom, The old testament says, He rides, Upon the clouds, Of the heavens. But it's the voice, Which thunders from the cloud, Which arrests, Which arrests our attention.

This is my son, Whom I love. With him, I am well pleased. Listen to him. The father, He can't stop speaking, About his son.

Jesus, The son of his father. The religious leaders, Of Israel, Were used to interpreting, Those passages, Of the old testament, Which referred, To God's son, As referring to the nation, Of Israel. But now God calls Jesus, My son. We could make reference, To the illusion, God draws between Jesus, And Isaac. My son whom I love.

[12:18] The illusion that, God draws between Jesus, And the suffering servant, Of Isaiah 42. My son with whom, I am well pleased. The point is, God is not pleased, With the blindness, Of the leaders of Israel.

He's pleased, With his son, Jesus Christ, And he can't stop, Talking about him. And the voice of God, Thunders from this cloud, He says, Listen to him. The Jesus who says, He who has ears, Let him hear, Is the Christ, To whom we must listen.

Now Matthew was writing, In the mid, 50's AD, 50's AD, To beleaguered, And persecuted, Jewish Christians, Who were mocked, For their faith in Jesus, By their fellow Jews.

They were mocked, For believing in a crucified, Rabbi called Jesus. But just in case, Any of these, Under pressure Christians, Should be uncertain, Of Jesus.

Matthew relates, The episode of the transfiguration, Where the God of Israel, Descends, Is in a Sinai type cloud, And wants to talk, Not about the nation of Israel, He wants to talk about, The son he loves, The son with whom, He is well pleased.

[13:32] In other words, Those who are following Christ, Are those who are following God, From Mount Sinai, To Mount Carmel, With Elijah, To the Mount of Olives, To Golgotha, It's almost like God is saying, Don't listen to the Pharisees, Don't listen to the Sadducees, Listen to Christ, He's a greater prophet, Than even Moses or Elijah.

You know we could talk about, The transfiguration of Christ all day, We really could. We could talk about, The impact of God's coming upon Jesus, Own psychology, As he begins to see the cross, In the distance.

We could talk about, Our own future transfigurations, And our metamorphosis. Metamorphosis. But what we need to know, Is that the Christ, Who was crucified, Dead, And buried.

That Christ, Whose face, Was covered in blood, And his body in bruises. Is the Christ, Who was worshipped, And exalted, Enthroned, And glorified, And his face today, Shines like the sun, In all its brilliance, And his clothes, And as white as the light, And God still says to us, Listen to him, Because he is the truth, And he speaks the truth.

The majesty of Christ, Is beyond our ability to imagine, Sheer glory, And before him we bow down, In worship, And in him we trust.

[15:07] Do you trust in Jesus? Do you have faith in him? Will you worship this Jesus with us? Will this be the, Last, Image, Of Christ, To cross your mind, In death?

Because it sure will be, The first, Image, Of Christ, To flash before your eye, In eternity. Majesty. Secondly, And more briefly, In verses 6 through 9, We have, Meekness, Meekness. What would we have done, Had we been in Jesus' position?

So recently, He has prophesied, His own death, And just then, He's been transfigured, Into the brightness of the light. Would we not have turned, In upon ourselves, Perhaps, In self-pity, And self-glory?

In a, Poor me, Look at me. But what strikes us, As we pass into the latter stages, Of our Lord's public ministry, Is his utter selflessness.

[16:17] The lack of messianic pity party, Or enthronement ceremony. In fact, He's always, Intentionally drawing attention, Away from himself, And devoting himself, To showing mercy to, And loving his people.

And that meekness of Jesus, Is entirely as awe-inspiring, As the majesty of Jesus. And in verses 6 through 9, We have that meekness, Trained in two directions.

First of all, In verses 6 and 8, We have meekness, In compassion. Meekness and compassion. Look at verse 6. It's that voice from the clouds, That did it.

The disciples, Fell to the ground, And they are, Utterly terrified. And I'm not surprised, I'm pretty sure that, If we had any spiritual sense, We would have reacted, In the same way.

They're in the presence, Of divine, Splendor and holiness, And their mortal minds, And bodies just can't deal with it. They are crushed, Under the weight, Of the voice, Of the glory, Of God.

[17:26] Such power and might, On top of this mountain, That even these, Three self-confident young men, Are broken before it. But how wonderful in verse 7, Jesus leaves Moses and Elijah behind, Jesus turns away, From his own transfigured glory, And he comes near to these, Three broken men.

He refuses to grasp, Or hold on, To his transfigured majesty, Rather he returns, To the form, To the morphe, Of the servant.

And then with such feeling, And compassion, We read, He touched them. Those hands, Those hands, Which had so recently, Been clothed in light, Are now reaching down, To reassure, And encourage, These terrified men.

And that voice, Which had so recently, Been speaking with Moses and Elijah, Now speaks to them, And says, Arise, Do not be afraid.

Such compassion, Such condescension. The mighty Christ, Worshipped by the angels, And loved by the Father, He touches these three, Terrified, Broken men, And says to them, Arise, And don't be afraid.

[18:52] And you know, This episode is a, Microcosm of the entire, Incarnation of the Son of God. The majesty, Of heaven, Confined to a, Span the incomprehensible, Made man.

The one of whom, The Nicene father said, Who fought us men, In our salvation, Became man. And these, The words, On his lips, As he speaks to a terrified humanity, Ourselves included, Arise, And do not be afraid.

And I wonder, Whether the only, Proper application, We can take from this, Is no more, Or no less than this. Worship Christ, And adore Christ, For his compassionate condescension, And let him touch you, Saying, Arise, And don't be afraid.

We have the meekness of compassion, But we also have, Meekness in command, In verse 9, Meekness in command, Our wonderful Lord, So filled with intentionality, And compassion, Says to his disciples, To come down the mountain, He says, Don't tell anyone, What you have seen, Until the son of man, Has been raised from the dead.

You see, The people knew, What the disciples, Had seen on top of, Mount of Transfiguration, That have come, And made Jesus king, By force, That have staged, A military and political rebellion, Against the Romans, With the puppet Christ, At its head, They'd want Jesus, To perform, Exodus type miracles, And achieve, The freedom, Of Israel, But Jesus wasn't then, And isn't now, In the business, Of earthly power, He knows, The cross lies before him, That cross, Which is the scene, Of a greater victory, Than anything, That can be achieved, On the field of battle, The path you see, To the heavenly glory, Into which Jesus, Was transfigured, On top of the mountain, Lies not through applause, But suffering, Not the clapping, Of the crowds, But the cross of Calvary, And it's really so vital, For us to understand this, That suffering,

[21:08] For Jesus, Comes before glory, And the cross, Comes before the crown, And what's true for Jesus, It's true for his followers, Many years later, The apostle Peter wrote, In 1 Peter 5 verse 10, May the God of all grace, Who called you, To his eternal glory, After you have suffered, A little while, May he restore you, And make you strong, Firm, And steadfast, Redemption, Comes before reward, Cross-bathing, Before crown waiting, Perhaps some of us here, Have been laboring, Under the illusion, That the Christian life, Is a bed of roses, Where every tear we shed, Will be a tear of happiness, And joy, And because it's not like that, For us right now, We're wondering, Am I doing something wrong, Am I really a Christian at all, Have we forgotten, That the cross, Crumbs before the crown, And that it will not be, Until we also, Have been raised from the dead, That we shall enjoy,

The tearless day, And the nightless light, Following in Christ's footsteps, Putting ourselves in his place, Means sharing in his sufferings, And denying ourselves, Taking up our cross, And going into the meekness, Of his self-giving death, Majesty, Meekness, And then lastly, In verses 10 through

13, And quite briefly, Mission, Mission, For all the clarity, Of the disciples, As they proclaim Jesus, As the Christ, The son of the living God, As they did in Matthew chapter 16, They're still in the dark, About what it means for Jesus, To be the Christ, How that majesty, And meekness of Jesus, Fit together into one, Immediately after the revelation, Of Jesus as the Christ, And how as the Christ, He will die and rise again, Back in chapter 16, Peter displays, His own lack of understanding, Never Lord, Never will you die, And now, As they come down, The mount of transfiguration, Once again, The disciples show, Their lack of clarity, As to what being the Christ, Means for Jesus, This time, Their confusion, Is couched in terms, Which are perhaps, Not so obvious to us, Because they're Jewish questions, But it gives Jesus, An opportunity, To reinforce to them, That being the Christ, Means, Laying aside his glory, Emptying himself, So that he may place his glory, Upon us, And fill us with his spirit, Through the cross and resurrection, The issue, The disciples raise, Is brought about, By seeing Elijah, Talking with Jesus, On top of that mountain, They're confused, Because in their understanding, What they've been taught, The coming of Elijah, Should mean the restoration, Of all things, In preparation for the final glory, Of the Messiah, Elijah comes to make straight,

The ways of the Lord, And to prepare his road, But now that, Transfigured Lord, That transfigured Messiah, He's laid his glory aside, Once again, He's assumed the humility, Of the form of a servant, Surely Elijah, Coming in power, On top of that mountain, Should mean that Jesus, Will now forever stay, In this majestic, Glorious form, And not be this, Rather plain man, Walking down the mountain, Alongside them, Commanding them not to tell, Anyone about what had happened, They're still thinking, You see, That the mission of Jesus, Is all about light, And splendor, About worldly comfort, And earthly thrones, And military conquest, They want Jesus, To always remain, Transfigured, Never to go back, To the normality, Of humanity, And suffering, And pain, The idea, Of the Jesus, Of the mount of transfiguration, Suffering,

Was anathema to them, They just couldn't, Work it out, It's the same confusion, Peter showed, By rebuking Jesus, When he spoke about, Suffering and dying, Jesus responds, By reminding, The three disciples here, Elijah has already come, But the way he prepared, For the Christ, Was not the way of sovereignty, But the way of suffering, Not the way of coronation, But the way of the cross, The disciples quickly realized, That the Elijah, Of whom Jesus is speaking, Is John the Baptist, The John so recently, Executed by Herod, And Jesus pointed, All of this, Is this, If John the Baptist, Suffered, So will I, The majesty, And the meekness, Of Jesus, Are going to meet, On a small hillock, Just outside, The city walls, Of Jerusalem, They call Golgotha, Where the Christ, The son of man, Will fulfill the mission, His father gave him,

[26 : 15] And like his predecessor, John the Baptist, Give up his life, It's hard to believe, Is it not, That within the space, Of a few months, The Jesus, Who was transfigured, In glory, On the mount of transfiguration, Will be humiliated, In abject torture, On the mount of Golgotha, Lifted up on a cross, Dying for us, You know, If the majesty of Jesus, Isn't enough to impress us, That majesty, With which he has been exalted, By his father, That majesty, Of which we see a glimpse, On top of the mount of transfiguration, If the meekness of Jesus, Is not sufficient, To make us bow down, Before him, Then surely, The mission of Jesus, To suffer and die, For us, And for our salvation, Surely, That must be enough, For us to respond, In faith and gratitude, Surely, It must not, Be enough, To know,

That the highest, And the most glorious, Of all, Christ, To whom, And of whom, His father spoke, From the cloud, Suffered, And died, For us, Surely, It requires more, Yes, Surely, He deserves, Our faith, Our worship, Our repentance, Our lives, Our loyalty, Is Jesus, Really that important, To us, That we'll see him, In the flashback moments, Of our lives, That the majesty, Of Jesus, Shall be one of the last things, We see in this life, Because this is for sure, The majesty, Of this Jesus, The Jesus of the mount, Of transfiguration, Will be the first thing, We see when our eyes, Open in heaven, And there we will worship him, With no terror, At all, Let that be your hope today, Let Jesus be your trust today,

How wonderful, The Jesus of majesty, Of meekness, And of mission, Let us,