

A Glimpse of Glory

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Date: 12 February 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, I thought I'd start this morning with a joke that I told the Ladies Guild last year. So if you were there, you might have heard this before, but there were three men traveling on a plane, a scientist, a pastor, and a young backpacker.

And suddenly there was engine failure. The pilot turned to the three men on the plane and said, men, we're going to crash. The good news is we have some parachutes.

The bad news is I have one and there's only two left for you three. And with that, the pilot jumped from the plane. The scientist then grabbed the parachute and said, I am one of the greatest minds the world has ever known.

I must survive for the sake of humanity. And with that, he jumped from the plane. The pastor then said to the young backpacker, son, I've lived a long life and I know where I'm going, so you can take the last parachute.

But the young backpacker replied, no, no, it's okay. That bright spark scientist actually took my backpack instead. Now the point of the joke, there is a point, is this, getting the real deal matters.

[1 : 13] And in some cases, it's a difference between life and death. Well, today, as we return to Matthew's gospel, which will take us through to Easter and the end of Matthew's gospel, as Andre said, we come to chapter 17.

And I should mention that for the last couple of years, I've chosen to kick off each year with Matthew's gospel because it's good to begin each new year seeing afresh the person we follow.

Because sometimes following Jesus is not always easy, is it? Especially when suffering comes our way and we don't know why. Or our prayers are not answered the way we would like.

Or persecution comes and we are shown contempt by the world for being Christian or having Christian values. I mean, just take the hot topic of same-sex marriage. It seems in the media today, it's okay to support it, but if you want to disagree or uphold the biblical view of marriage, then you are shouted down and shown contempt.

It happened just last week on Facebook where some parents who upheld God's view of marriage were called, these are just the polite words, I can't mention the other ones, disgusting and bigots and much worse.

[2 : 24] You should have seen all the comments. It seems like the world is tolerant of every view except the Christian view. And so given the fact that we still suffer, that our prayers are not always answered the way we'd like and that, well, the world takes every opportunity to attack Christians, it's easy to think that we're not on the winning team.

It's easy to wonder if Jesus is actually the real deal and worth following. Well, as we come to chapter 17 today, I suspect that the disciples were wondering something like this.

You see, verse 1 of chapter 17 begins with the words, after six days, which immediately begs the question, what happened six days ago? You see, Matthew seems to deliberately connect this episode in chapter 17 with what has just happened in chapter 16.

And so we need to look back at chapter 16 for a moment to see the context. And if you do that in your Bibles, chapter 16, verse 16, Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

But then if you come to verse 21 of chapter 16, Jesus then tells his disciples what it means for him to be the Messiah, the King, the Son of the living God. He says, No sooner has Peter just declared Jesus to be God's King, the Messiah, the Christ, they all mean the same thing, that Jesus says, well, actually, you know what it means for me?

[4 : 10] It means I must suffer and die. Needless to say, this is not what they were expecting. Peter's response is, you're going to what? Never, Lord, he says.

You see, the Jews expected that God's King would come to judge and rule over the nations, to show forth God's glory and put things right. He's not supposed to be killed by the nations.

And in case that's not hard enough for them to accept, Jesus continues in verse 24 of chapter 16, this time talking about what it means for them to follow him.

He says, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their own cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

What good is it will be for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward or repay each person according to what they have done, he says.

[5 : 21] Just as Jesus must suffer and die on a cross before being raised to glory, so those who follow him must take up their own cross.

We must die to ourselves and follow Jesus before sharing in his glory. And this will sometimes mean suffering for his sake, whether through persecution or missing out on things in this life because we choose to follow Jesus instead.

Now, I suspect this would have been hard for those disciples to hear. I mean, given Peter's response, I think it's pretty clear. And it's also hard for us to hear. And so I wonder if they began to think, have we actually got the right guy here?

Because God's Messiah is not supposed to die, is he? And if he does, then how can we show he'll be raised and return in glory? Have we got the real deal? And so six days later, they're given a glimpse of that glory so that they might know Jesus is the real deal.

So at point one in your outlines, verse one of chapter 17 in your Bibles. After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them.

[6 : 33] His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Jesus takes the three leaders of the disciples up a mountain and his body, his figure is transformed, hence transfiguration.

And this included his face shining like the sun, which is pretty bright, really, when you think about it. I mean, have you ever looked up at the sun accidentally? You can't look for very long, can you? It is so bright.

That was Christ's face. And his clothes were as white as the light. I mean, no matter how much nappy sand or Omo I use in the washing, actually, I don't do the washing.

So no matter how much nappy sand or Omo Michelle uses in the washing, our clothes are never that white. And the point is, this is a supernatural appearance. This is a glimpse of Jesus's true glory, that they might know he is the real deal.

Recently, one of our members at church, at 1030 Church, met Roger Federer at the Australian Open. In fact, he got the boar boy for the grand final.

[7 : 42] I've got permission to show you a photo on the next slide. So he's the one. That's Aidan Chu, Rob Chu's son, in the white circle there after the final. Very, very exciting for him. Now, in the lead up to this match, in fact, all through the tournament, there were many doubts over Roger's ability, whether he would go very far because of his injuries and time off.

But after seeing the amazing shots by Roger and seeing him winning, seeing his glory, so to speak, I remember a commentator shouting, he's still the king.

That's the point here. The disciples see Jesus's true glory, that they might know he really is the true king.

That although he must suffer and die, he will come back in glory, the glory that they've glimpsed here. But wait, there's more. These three disciples then see two Old Testament figures, point two, verse three.

Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

[8 : 56] And now on the next slide, I think is an artist's interpretation of this scene. You've got Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus and the disciples in the foreground overwhelmed. Now, I don't know how Peter worked out that it was Moses and Elijah.

After all, Peter had never seen them before. I doubt they were wearing name tags, which said Moses on it. So I wonder, name tags are good, by the way. So I wonder whether this is an indication of what it will be like for us in heaven, that we'll somehow just recognise people we haven't seen for a long time, just know who they are, just a thought.

Either way, Peter suggests that they build some shelters. And commentators have suggested all sorts of reasons for Peter's suggestion. But the best explanation is one that Peter himself gave to Mark.

And so on the next slide, from Mark chapter 9, Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us build three shelters. And then Mark includes, he did not know what to say.

They were so frightened. That's why he said what he said. It's overwhelming experience to see Jesus' glory and the appearance of these men who were supposed to be dead. But what's the significance of these men, Moses and Elijah?

[10 : 07] Why do they turn up? Well, both Moses and Elijah had their own mountaintop experiences with God as well. And so it's kind of fitting. Moses had an experience with God on Mount Sinai and Elijah on Mount Carmel.

And both pointed to someone in the future. And so on the next slide, God told Moses that he would raise up another prophet like him. And as we heard in our first reading, God also promised that Elijah would prepare the way for God himself to appear.

In fact, both Moses and Elijah are mentioned in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, as we wait for the Christ to turn up. And so I suspect that Moses and Elijah here are really pointing.

They're really summarizing the Old Testament and pointing to the time that the Christ would appear. I mean, they were both key prophets in the Old Testament. Moses gave the law to the people and Elijah tried to turn the hearts of the people back to God.

And so, as I said, they, in a sense, represent the law and the prophets, which is the Bible's way of saying the whole Old Testament, which people were to listen to. But now, if you look at the end of verse five in your Bibles, notice what God says about Jesus.

[11 : 20] God says, listen to, not Moses, who gave you the law, not Elijah, who tried to turn your hearts back, but to him, Jesus.

And so I suspect the significance of Moses and Elijah turning up is to show that the whole Old Testament, the law and the prophets pointed to this Jesus. The whole Old Testament finds fulfillment in him.

He is the real deal. He is the one Israel had been waiting for. And because he is the real deal, Jesus now is the one they had to listen to when it comes to understanding the Old Testament.

Jesus is now the one they had to listen to when it comes to understanding the Messiah and what he must do, that he must first suffer and die before coming in glory.

And this is the very thing that the disciples are struggling with the most. It's the thing that Jesus needs to reiterate in verse 12, actually, that he must suffer. But the point here is the appearance of Moses and Elijah signals that Jesus is the one that the law and the prophets both promised and pointed to.

[12 : 29] He is the real deal. But wait, there's still even more. Not only do they glimpse the glory of Jesus, not only do they see the great Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus, they also hear God himself speak.

So verse five. And while he was still speaking, that is, Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them. And a voice from the cloud said, this is my son whom I love with him.

I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. Get up, he said.

Don't be afraid. And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. The disciples hear God himself speak. And they know it's God because they fall flat on their faces.

A little reminder for us, I think, that we ought not to get too cavalier with God, but keep revering him, not taking for granted. But notice what God says. He says, this is my son whom I love with him.

[13 : 31] I am well pleased. Take that last phrase for a moment with whom I am well pleased. This is not just a comment about Jesus being a good son. I mean, the other day I asked my son to do something and he did it straight away.

It was fantastic. And so I said in a deep voice, you are my son whom I love with you. I am well pleased. He didn't get the reference. He just gave me this weird look. What are you talking about? And so no doubt there is truth that God really does love his son.

Of course, that's true. And no doubt God is well pleased with him. But this phrase, in whom I am well pleased, is also used for the servant of the Lord in the Old Testament. And so on the next slide is Isaiah 42, which uses a very similar phrase.

My chosen one, in whom I delight or am well pleased. And in the Old Testament, the servant of the Lord would die to save his people from their sins. Isaiah 53, for example. You see, God is affirming not only that he is well pleased with Jesus, but that he is the servant of the Lord who really must die.

But God also affirms that Jesus really is the Messiah, the King, the Son of the living God. You see, God also says to Jesus, you are my son.

[14 : 49] And this means, firstly, that Jesus really is God's promised King. Because, again, the Old Testament said that the Messiah, the King, would be called God's Son.

For example, Psalm 2, or the next slide, from 2 Samuel 7. God says to David, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he will be my son.

The Davidic King, God's Son. By calling Jesus his son, God affirms that Jesus really is the Messiah, the promised King, the real deal.

But, of course, by calling him his son, he also secondly means that Jesus is also God, divine. Jesus shares the same divinity as the Father.

Jesus is not only the Son of God, the King, he's also God, the Son. And this is important because, if you remember from our first reading, Malachi promised that Elijah would come first before the day of the Lord God.

[15 : 55] And so, by calling Jesus his son, God affirms that that day has come. God, the Son, has arrived. But, Christians, what about Elijah? If Jesus is the King and God, then wasn't Elijah supposed to come first?

That's what Malachi said. And that's the question the disciples then ask. At point 4, verse 9. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

The disciples asked him, Why then do the teachers of the law, and the prophets like Malachi, say that Elijah must come first? Jesus replied, To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.

But I tell you, Elijah has already come. And they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.

Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. Jesus says, You're right. The prophets do say Elijah will come first.

[17 : 01] To restore right relationships in Israel. To turn the hearts back in repentance. But, verse 12. Elijah has already come and done that.

In the person of John the Baptist. John the Baptist dressed like Elijah, and he did the work of Elijah. He did a baptism of repentance. He called people back and turned their hearts back.

And so, in a sense, Elijah has already come. And if Elijah has already come, then God has arrived. In the person of Jesus.

That's his point. Are you beginning to see, I know we've covered a lot quite quickly, but are you beginning to see how these four points all help identify Jesus as the real deal?

The Christ. The King. When I first came to Melbourne, to meet with Andrew Reid all those years ago, I'd never met him before. And he was picking me up from the airport.

[17 : 59] And so, to make sure I got the real Andrew Reid, the real deal, I asked for some tips on how to recognise him. And this is what he said. He says, I'll be waiting for you by the gate.

Okay, that's one tip. Good. I'll have a grey backpack on. Okay, that's good. Another tip. I'm short. Okay, that's all right. And then I remembered, I've actually got a commentary of his on my bookshelf.

And so, I thought I'd have a look at the picture on the back. And here it is on the next slide. There he is. It's a little bit different today. This is just because I knew he was coming today. And so, I thought, well, I've got a picture of what he might look like.

I've got all these clues. And sure enough, those clues helped me to identify him and get the real Andrew Reid. And that's what's happening here in Matthew 17. Only these four points are not clues.

They are massive billboards for the disciples so that they might know Jesus is the real deal. It's all done for them. Did you notice? I mean, verse one, Jesus led them up a high mountain.

[19 : 04] Verse two, Jesus was transfigured before them. Verse three, Moses and Elijah appeared before them, the disciples, and so on. The event in chapter 17 was all for them so that they might glimpse Christ's glory and know he really is the king.

That they might listen to him when he says he must suffer and die to pay for our sins, but that he will return in glory to judge all people and save us, indeed bring us into glory if we trust in him.

And so can I ask you this morning, have you done that? Have you put your trust in Jesus? Have you handed over the steering wheel of life to him, so to speak?

Denied yourself and followed him instead? Because he is the real deal. He is the right parachute who saves those who trust in him.

For Jesus will return in his father's glory to judge those who reject him, but to save all who trust in him. So have you done that? That's the first question. And for us who do, then we need to remember that Jesus is the real deal, the Messiah, the King.

[20 : 15] And this will help us do three things. First, it will help us to keep listening to him, to keep trusting in him, to keep following him, even if we don't understand why things happen to us.

The disciples did not understand why Jesus had to die. For us, we don't understand why our loved ones have to die or get sick or remain unbelievers.

And as the disciples found what Jesus said hard to accept, so we find what God says in the Bible sometimes hard to accept. But we are to remember that Jesus is the real deal.

We are following the right person. And so we are to keep listening to him, keep trusting him, keep following him, even if we don't understand. Second, remembering Jesus is the real deal will help us realize that sometimes suffering and sometimes feeling like we're on the losing team is part of living in this broken world.

I mean, if Jesus' path to glory meant rejection and suffering in this life, then can we really expect anything different for us who follow? After all, Jesus said, if the world hated me, it's going to hate you too.

[21 : 30] And so down at Coles at Tunstall Square, there's a sign up on the next slide which was encouraging people to mark no religion on the census. Now that census was done last September and the signs, not just one, there's two of them, are still up in the car park today.

Now, let me just, can you imagine Christians trying to put up a sign to say, tick Christian on the census because Jesus is the life all the way or something? Can you imagine the hoo-ha that would be raised if that sign was put up?

And do you think that that sign, a Christian sign, would still be here today? No. While I find this kind of double standards infuriating, we shouldn't find it surprising because Jesus said it would come.

But thirdly, since Jesus is the real deal, then we can be certain there is glory to come which will far outweigh anything we face in this life. Because Jesus is the real deal, we are actually, despite appearances, on the winning team.

We can be certain that Jesus will come again in his Father's glory because he's already given us a glimpse of that glory through these eyewitnesses in chapter 17.

[22 : 48] It's like when Michelle cooks a glorious lamb roast, when I glimpse that roast being prepared and smell it cooking, I know what's coming, a glorious lamb roast for us to share in and enjoy.

So also with Jesus, because the disciples glimpsed his glory, they knew Jesus is the real deal and would come again in glory. Fully, for us all to share in and enjoy.

And so while we may suffer, while we may sometimes wonder whether it's worth following Jesus or whether we got the right person, while we may sometimes feel like we're on the losing team, we're not. We're on the winning team because we're following the real deal.

We have the right parachute. Jesus is the King who died for us and will come again in glory for us to share in and enjoy. Michelle and I used to attend a church in Sydney in a suburb called Janelli and there is a minister there whose son, 16-year-old son Nathan, died from cancer last November.

Some people in the world might think that he was on the losing team. Yet he knew Jesus was the real deal and continued to trust in him, looking forward to glory to heaven.

[23 : 57] Before he died, he recorded this video. Have a listen, especially to the end bit. Thanks. Thanks. Hey everyone, let me start off by saying I would be doing this live, but I'm in hospital at the moment having scans, which obviously isn't ideal, but it's how it's going to have to be.

Sorry about that. So for a bit of background information on me, my name is Nathan Mark Phillip Barry. I love basketball, hanging out with mates, watching movies, you know, regular sort of stuff.

But I've got a fair few cancerous tumors around my body. One in the heart, a few in the brain, and just others around the body. Today I want to share the story of how I became a Christian, and the struggles I've had this year, and how I've dealt with them.

So my dad is a minister at Janelli Anglican Church. So we went to church weekly, and they sent us to youth group too. I've always loved youth group, and I've heard these Bible stories so many times.

I can't pick a moment like other testimonies, but eventually it just made sense to me that I was a sinner, and the story of Jesus actually dying on the cross for us became so clear that becoming a Christian is what I should do, because eternal life with Jesus, who loved us, and he died for us, sounded great.

[25 : 25] Especially compared to the alternative, eternal suffering and hell. So shortly after this, I became a follower of Jesus. A verse that made this clear to me is 1 Peter 3.18, For Christ also suffered once the sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

To this day, this verse reminds me that Jesus died for our sins, for us, the unrighteous, to bring us to God in heaven. To this day, this is the first time we were to die for our sins, and we were to die for our sins.

This news, you may not know. I don't think I really told anyone, but earlier this year I was told I was probably going to die. Hearing this news shocked me, and I started to really think and worry about death, and what it means, and what's next.

I remember after hearing this news, me and my parents just bowed our heads and prayed, and gave all our worries and thoughts to God. After this, we did what we thought was important, and we opened up God's word.

We read Isaiah 40, which says, I just felt refreshed and amazed that even when we go through hard times and have problems in this world, if we trust in God, we will spend eternal life in heaven with Jesus.

[26 : 50] And we won't have these problems or hard times. It will be perfect. I hope my story has encouraged you. No matter what happens in the last, the only thing that really matters is trusting in Jesus.

He's a 16-year-old kid who knew Jesus was the real deal, and so despite his cancer, despite his impending death, he knew where he was going, to glory.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning of who the Lord Jesus really is, that he is the real deal.

He is the king. But the king who died for us, so that we who believe might share in glory in heaven. And so far, we pray that you would help us to keep listening to him, keep following him, knowing that we have the real deal.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.