

Matthew 17:1-13

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[0:00] This is who died for you. We see that first, especially in verses 1-8. And I want to walk through this first section a little bit backwards with you.

! So first we'll look at the cloud of glory, and then we'll look at the two prophets, Moses and Elijah, and then we will look at Christ transfigured. And so the first thing we see is the awesome glory of God in verses 5-8.

Peter was still speaking, verse 5, 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 to them, came and touched them, saying, Rise and have no fear.

We humans have many problems, but the biggest and most pervasive of all is this, a habitual underappreciation for the glory of God.

[1:12] You see, he isn't simply great. He doesn't simply have glory.

That's far, far too faint of praise for this God. The fury of his glory shakes the earth. When he rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he visited them on Mount Sinai.

We can read about it in Exodus chapter 19. The Lord said to Moses, Behold, I'm coming to you in a thick cloud, remind you of anything, that people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.

On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.

[2:20] The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.

Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. His voice is thunder. The earth is his footstool. The awful majesty of God scorches and shakes the very earth.

And we still haven't even seen him. Not really, right? His glory is wrapped and shrouded in cloud on Mount Sinai, concealed again in cloud in Matthew 17.

The full fury of his majesty is veiled so that we aren't unmade. But even the shroud that conceals him terrifies Israel, terrifies Peter and James and John.

There is no other glory like this that in its veiled state drives grown men to their knees in terror.

[3:33] We must never forget the awesome majesty of God Almighty. It is a fearful thing, Hebrews 10 says.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And Peter, James, and John, well, they felt that fear, verse 6.

And I wonder, do we respect the majesty of God? Do we stand in awe of his boundless glory?

Do we tremble before his limitless holiness? Have you contemplated the vastness of the universe?

How big is your God?

[4:37] This God, the God of the Bible, is immeasurable, boundless, matchless. His holiness is a firestorm.

He comes clothed in a cloud, and even the cloud is too glorious, too terrifying, too magnificent for men to stand before it.

It overwhelms and overshadows them. And this glory belongs to Christ Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

The Son's glory is one with the Father, which is why the Father says, verse 5, listen to him. Peter 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. Even in the presence of Moses, the great lawgiver, even in the presence of Elijah, the great wonder-working prophet, we point our eyes to Christ.

[5:57] Why? Well, because Moses' ministry was about Christ. Elijah was a servant of Christ. Moses spoke of him.

Jesus said in John chapter 5, If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. Elijah hoped for Christ.

1 Peter chapter 1 tells us that the prophets, of whom Elijah is the most prominent, longed to know, not when they'd be vindicated, or when Israel would be politically powerful again, but when Christ would come.

That was the focus and goal of their ministry. The law, the prophets, the writings, all of history was leading, pointing, yearning for Christ Jesus.

So, now that he stands in their midst, look to him, listen to him. Verse 5, call on him. St. Augustine put it this way.

[7:03] Elijah spoke, but hear him. That is Christ. Moses spoke, but hear him. The prophets speak. The law speaks, but hear him who is the voice of the law and the tongue of the prophets.

So, friends, let's look at him. Verse 2. He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

Perhaps the coolest thing about this passage, except for the manifold glory of God, is that the miracle is not what you think it is.

The miracle is not that Jesus is suddenly shining and bright. The Scriptures say that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, forever, Hebrews chapter 13.

And that's a quality he shares, incidentally, with God the Father, who says in Malachi 3, I, the Lord, do not change. In fact, their shared glory, we've already read about that, or at least mentioned it in John 17, right?

[8:21] When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Jesus, God the Son, partakes, shares, cohabits that same burning glory of God the Father from everlasting to everlasting.

So this glory we're seeing in verse 2 is not something new. He's not suddenly getting majesty. He's not becoming glorious.

That's not the miracle. The miracle is not that Jesus is now brilliant. The miracle is this. Jesus possesses a glory that outshines the Son.

Yet, all along, throughout his whole earthly ministry, he has taken on a human nature and concealed that very glory that he has always had.

[9:28] Jesus isn't becoming glorious. He's simply revealing his eternal glory here. He's showing the disciples and us who he is and who he has always been.

The miracle wasn't that Jesus shone like the sun. The miracle was that he didn't burn us with his glory every moment of his earthly ministry.

That his glory didn't blind Mary and Joseph and the shepherds at his birth. That those who sought his healing and his teaching were able to approach him with unveiled face.

That he didn't scorch the soldiers like the sun as they nailed him with all his glory to a cross. The miracle is this.

The Lord of life who dwells in unapproachable life, enthroned in unknowable resplendence, veiled his glory as a peasant to dwell among sinners, was lifted up not on a throne but on a cross to die for unworthy sinners.

[10:41] Friends, this is who died for you. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. That's who died in your place and mine. And this truth leads us to so much.

First, it leads us to an understanding of the weight of our own sin. Consider again his majesty that we've just been talking about.

This is who you sin against. Who I sin against. We have spurned ultimate majesty.

Every time we choose our own sinful will, we choose to dismiss and disregard his righteous will.

Every time we choose to ignore him, we say, this God with this glory is not worth the honor of my obedience.

[11:57] And we turn our backs on him. Every time we say, in effect, sin is better, my will be done, we say, your will, even though your glory, eclipses the very sun, doesn't matter very much.

It's his law we ignore. It's his perfect will we cross. It's his honor we demean. Every sin you have ever committed, are contemplating now, and ever will commit, is against this God and the inferno of his glory.

And it leads us into praise. Because that's who laid down his life that you might live. He is owed your worship because of the immensity of his glory.

But he has also earned your love because he subjected even that glory to shame and death on a cross for you.

Which then leads us into thanksgiving. What's the most that someone has ever given on your behalf? Perhaps you can measure it in dollars.

[13:24] Someone helped me with college tuition, you might say. Perhaps you can measure it in effort or time. Someone tutored me to help me graduate college. Perhaps you can measure it in lost opportunities.

Right? Some might be able to say, my parents gave up their dreams so I could be here today or something of that effect. First, go home and write that person a thank you note.

And second, whatever that gift was, make sure you appreciate it as the second most that someone has ever given on your behalf.

Whatever someone else has given on your behalf, it is nothing, nothing like what Jesus gave. Do you remember last week when in chapter 16, verse 26, we saw that the entire world isn't enough to purchase your soul?

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? What shall a man give, even the whole world, in return for his soul?

[14:39] If your soul is worth more than the world, of what value then is Jesus? If you're made that way, if you're made more valuable than the whole world just by bearing his image, how great is he?

And how great then is his sacrifice? There are no words to express it. There's no number to quantify it. There's no image to convey it.

There's no song to give it voice. The incalculable love of Christ is this, the one who lights the sun in the sky, hung, naked, beaten, mocked, and died alone on a cross to rescue his enemies.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich.

This is who died for you. And because he died for you, we need not fear him.

[16:09] At the outset, we considered the maelstrom of God's glory, majesty, and holiness, how his manifold perfections terrify those who enter his presence. But if we are joined to Christ, he puts his hand on our shoulder, verse 7, and says, have no fear.

How can this be? We need not fear his white-hot holiness and glory, not because we are somehow worthy, not because the Lord, who does not change, has relaxed his standards, but because Jesus united himself to his people.

And in love, he took their sins with him to his cross. And the firestorm, his own boundless fury at sin, fell on him, not us.

We need not fear his awesome holiness, his terrible glory, because for all who have repented and believed, the Son died for us.

And so we turn to him in love and praise and ceaseless thanksgiving forever and ever.

[17:40] love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all. Everything we've said until now is all about this is who died for you.

And that's underscored in the next section, verses 9 through 13. You see, on the basis of Malachi chapter 4, the Jewish people were waiting for an Elijah figure to appear before the Messiah came. And having just seen Elijah himself on the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus in verse 10, what about that whole Elijah thing? And Jesus tells them that the Elijah who was to come had already preceded them, John the Baptist.

And just like John, evil men were about to persecute and kill Jesus, the one to whom John pointed. And so we see here a re-emphasis of our theme. This is who died for you. But I also want to draw out another theme, verse 9.

[19:00] when Jesus says, tell no one the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

Friends, this is who lives for you. Perhaps the most striking thing in a passage where Jesus displays his glory is that command in verse 9 to keep the glory quiet.

Theologians call this the messianic secret. We've seen it several times already in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8, chapter 12. When people came to understand his identity, Jesus often swore them to silence about it.

We saw that most recently in chapter 16. After Peter declared in verse 16, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus replied in verse 20, strictly charging the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Why? Two reasons. The Jewish people didn't understand their Messiah yet. They wanted a Savior from the oppression of Rome.

[20:10] He wanted to rescue them from the tyranny of sin and death. And he was going to Jerusalem to that cross to further express his glory.

His self-giving death as a substitute for sinners is glorious. And so too is his conquering death. And this is going to be the last time in Matthew's gospel that we see him command people to silence about this.

Why? Well, because this glorious king is now on his way to Jerusalem for his crown. Not a regal crown, but an ignoble crown of thorns.

And make no mistake, he is on his way to Jerusalem. This passage is a turning point, a major shift in the gospel of Matthew.

For about three years at this point, he has been ministering in the northern region of Galilee with short excursions to other places. And now he's even further north in the region of Caesarea Philippi.

[21:17] And today, he heads down the mountain, verse 9. And then he's going to go through south through Galilee. We'll see that in chapter 17. He'll go further south to Judea.

We'll see that in chapter 19. And then finally, chapter 20 and 21, he will go to Jerusalem. This is the beginning of his journey to the end.

And so from this mountain peak, he's looking towards another mountain, figuratively. It's known by many names, Golgotha, Calvary, the Mount of Crucifixion.

And so Jesus is saying, keep silent about my glory until I complete my work. And his work wasn't finished until he had made a sacrifice for sins.

And, verse 9, he had trampled death itself under his feet. Friends, this is who died for you, the one who holds authority over death.

[22:26] And, because he holds sway over death, it is also he who lives for you. He said in John 10, for this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

Hallelujah. On the third day, he put death to shame. He rose in victory. He broke the stranglehold of the grave.

It is no longer the final word for those who are in Christ. Because Jesus has spoken, even death must listen and obey.

And this is not in the past tense. Our Savior lives this moment. Present tense.

[23:35] On the third day, he rose from death incorruptible and will never die. After he rose from the grave, he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father.

There, he receives worship, present tense, from the heavenly host. This is who lives for you. There, this moment, he rules and reigns all things, present tense.

He supports the universe, the very laws of physics, by his decree. This is who lives for you. From there, he, with his Father, sends their Holy Spirit to believers, present tense.

There, he makes ceaseless intercession on behalf of his people. And because the Son made this sacrifice, and because he lives, and because he intercedes for us, we who are found in him get to call the Father our Father.

and there, present tense, he prepares. First, he prepares a home for his people, and then he also prepares to return to come and get them.

[24:44] He said in John 14, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

And when we say he prepares, we don't mean that he needs to collect some resources or figure out a plan or build a coalition. He has no weakness.

He can make it happen at any moment of his choosing. When we say he prepares, we mean that he awaits the proper time for his appearing. He was sovereign over death on the first day and on the second, but it was fitting that he rise on the third day, and so too he waits for the appointed time for his return till all his saints are gathered into his church.

Friends, this is who lives for you. Lifted up was he to die. It is finished was his cry.

Now in heaven, exalted high, hallelujah, what a savior. Friends, this is who died for you.

[26:00] And this is who lives for you. What shall we say then? First, do you appreciate the cross?

Is it the greatest gift ever, ever conceived in your eyes? Or is it old news to you? Are you more excited about some other thing?

Does some other thing have your attention? Friends, all else in the universe is lesser than Christ and his cross. So gaze on his glory.

Hear revealed in chapter 17. And recognize the magnitude of your sin. It is against this majesty. recognize the magnitude of his sacrifice.

This glory, even this glory, put to open shame and crucified for you. Fall on your knees. No longer in fear, but in thanksgiving and praise.

[27:10] it also causes us to ask, do we see his glory?

Or is it obscured in our heart's eyes? What obscures our view, your view of Jesus' glory?

Perhaps it's just distraction and you need to be called back to gaze on him. Perhaps it is the moral commitments of our culture that obscure his glory.

Have you bought in to the sexual revolution, to secular humanism, to pluralism? Do you value that which he abhors?

That will obscure your view of his glory. Or perhaps it is your own sin that obscures your view of his glory. Our sin makes us want to avoid Jesus.

[28:17] He himself said in John chapter 3, the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed.

friends, your own sin will make you love Christ's glory less. But even if the world veils it, even if our fickle hearts forget it, even if pain and sickness and trouble divert our thoughts away from it, the cross and the empty tomb of Christ is the story of the universe.

Everything else is a subplot. The story of politics is filler. Just like Pharaoh and like Caesar, the rulers and political squabbles of this age will pass like sand through an hourglass into history and will be no more.

The story of sports and entertainment is but a pleasant distraction and even the story of our sufferings. Sorrow to be sure. But like Christ's grave, it will be shown empty and powerless over Christ and his people on the last day.

Your sufferings will end because Christ's reign won't. Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected is the story of the universe.

[30:10] His rule and reign are forever. His praise is endless. Make your story about his story.

All else is grasping after the wind. And so, friends, we find in him our ultimate hope.

Rest your hope and your comfort on this. Jesus Christ is alive forever. This is who lives for you. And if you are joined to him, no matter what tomorrow brings, your future is with him. Not by your strength, but by his. Though the world condemn you, though friends betray you, though adversity or sickness or poverty plague you, though enemies kill you, Christ is alive forever in all his splendor and love and glory and where he is, there you will be also.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[31:52] This, friends, is who lives for you. The one whose glory shatters mountains has laid hold of you.

No one can take you from his nail scarred and resurrected hand. Let's pray to him.

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Let us admit that we cannot conceive of your glory fully.

So we praise you for who you are. And we can scarcely believe, Lord, that you would subject that glory, even that glory, to open shame and condemnation and death on a cross all out of love for us. God will love for us. And so Lord, you have earned our love. Thank you that Christ, even Christ Jesus, this son, died for us.

[33:20] And thank you that he lives for us. Lord, may we find in him our hope, our very story, and our future, our ultimate comfort in him.

We pray all these things in the matchless name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Amen. Amen.