

Text: Matthew 17:1-13

POINT 1 - THE INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter (16:28) we see the promised glory that some of His disciples would see before they died, and it appears that this text is directly related to the text of 16:28. Imagine being one of the three chosen to go up with Jesus to see this. According to many commentators there are four basic reasons for this. First, they would be reliable witnesses of His manifested glory, and this confirms Deuteronomy 19:15, "on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed." Second, these men were chosen because of the closeness and friendship with Jesus. We all have close and dear friends we share things with we wouldn't with others. Third, as generally the spokesman for the group, these men could relay what happened accurately. Fourth, if all the disciples and followers had seen this, there would have likely been chaos. So a trusted few, chosen by God to see and tell.

There seems to be another important reason for this as well. Remember from chapter 16:21-28 told of the rebuke, cost of discipleship, death, hope and trials. It seems this account on top of the mountain was what they needed. Depression accelerates weariness. They were likely depressed about the suffering and death to come. It's likely the promise Jesus made to them a few days earlier didn't overcome the cost of being a true follower nor of His impending suffering and death. Even though He said He would be raised, they missed it. We miss things too. This moment for these disciples was the hope, joy and encouragement they needed.

POINT 2 - THE TRANSFORMATION (Vs. 2)

When the Bible says He was transfigured, that does not speak of a figurative language. The word is from the Greek word metamorphoo which is where we get the English word metamorphosis. All we have is what is mentioned here in the text. Jesus revealed Himself for who He truly is. The divine glory radiated His face, it illuminated even His garments, which became as white. He was transfigured in some way reflecting His heavenly glory. As with the manifestations in the OT God portrayed Himself to human eyes in a form of light so dazzling and overwhelming that it could barely be withstood. Coming down from the mountain after receiving the ten commandments, "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him" (Exodus 34:29). Revelation 1:16, "In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength."

The light portrayed Jesus' glory and majesty. Peter would later say in 2 Peter 1:17, "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory." John would later testify, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "The light, then, it would seem, shone not upon Him from without, but out of Him from within; He was all irradiated, was in one blaze of celestial glory."¹ Furthermore, Matthew 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the

¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 107.

clouds of the sky with power and great glory." Matthew 25:31, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne."

Dr. John MacArthur says in his sermon, "In His human form Jesus Christ was veiled, but when He comes again to earth He will come in His full divine majesty and glory, a glimpse of what Peter, James and John witnessed on the mountain."²

POINT 3 - THE TESTIMONY (VS. 3)

Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus. My question has been why these two out of all the OT saints? The Logos Bible Commentary notes, "Moses represented 'the law,' Elijah 'the prophets,' and both together the whole testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the Old Testament saints, to Christ."³ Consider this, before the people of Israel had any prophets, Moses was a kind of prophet, bringing them God's word. Before there were formal priests, he was a kind of priest, mediating between them and God. And before they had formal kings, he was kind of king, ruling in God's name. Moses was a great law giver, Elijah was a great defender of the law. He was bold, courageous, zealous and fearless. He had a heart for God, walked with God, and more than any other prophet he had a miracle working power from God.

This of course was a part of the plan of God. It was God's plan for them to see such a miraculous, glorious gathering. It tells much. It tells that Jesus' coming the first time to die, was as much a part of the plan as His glorious return and reign.

POINT 4 - PETER'S RESPONSE (VS. 4)

Of course, Peter was the first one to speak. We can assume that Peter's response was he had no interest in going back down the mountain to see the Lord suffer and die at the hands of His enemies. You remember in vs. 22 of chapter 16 when he was rebuked for not wanting Jesus to go to Jerusalem? Again, here Peter wants his plans not Gods to be in effect.

The suggestion of building the tabernacles was the foolish idea that if he did Jesus would not have to die. Even more so, he was foolish to put Elijah and Moses on the same level as Jesus. Yet with his zeal he had weakness. Moses and Elijah had no need of a tabernacle, they as Matthew Henry notes, "belonged to that blessed world, where they hunger no more, nor doth the sun light upon them."⁴ Peter was for laying hold of this as the prize, though he had not yet fought his fight, nor finished his course. Luke gives us a little more detail when in Luke 9:33, "And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah—not realizing what he was saying."

POINT 5 - THE WORDS OF THE FATHER - THE FEAR OF THE DISCIPLES (VS. 5-6)

² The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew; pp. 64

³ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#), vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 107.

⁴ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Mat/Mat_017.cfm; accessed 9.7.23

While Peter was speaking, God interrupted him. Throughout the wilderness wanderings the Lord manifested Himself through a pillar of cloud by day. There are a few things to note here. First, when God spoke Peter shut up. Second, God calling Jesus His beloved Son was astounding proof of His divine nature. Third, He was well pleased with Him. Fourth, the command to listen to Him. Fifth, they feared the Lord God. I cannot even imagine what this must have been like. But if a man doesn't fear God, he will not serve God in holiness, righteousness and devotion. Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Perhaps God was directly addressing Peter when He said "listen to Him" referring "If My Son says He must go to Jerusalem and die and be raised, believe Him. If He says deny yourself, believe Him."

Note: Sinful men (yes the disciples were sinful) in the presence of a Holy God is fearful. Genesis 3:8, "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." And it was Isaiah that said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

POINT 6 - THE CONCLUSION OF THE SCENE (VS. 7-13)

Something else to consider about this scene is Moses died and Elijah did not. Moses seems to have represented those who have died and Elijah those who won't but will be caught up in the return of Christ. It seemed to be a relief they saw no one but Jesus, and again they were told to tell no one until He had risen from the dead. The reason...the Jews were looking for an earthly king, and He wasn't it. They had tried on other occasions to make Jesus their king here and now. Until after His death, it would now become clear that He didn't come for a political kingdom, nor to conquer the Romans, but to conquer death.

The disciples asked a legitimate question about Elijah coming before Jesus. In the closing verses of the OT in Malachi 4:5-6, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." So the question was honest, why did Elijah not appear before you in ministry? Many of the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus because of this as well. The common teaching of the day is that when Elijah arrived he would bring swift judgment and restoration to Israel.

It's often best interpreted the Elijah prophesied in Malachi isn't a reincarnation, but a forerunner who would come. It was told to Zacharias regarding his son in Luke 1:17, "in the spirit and power of Elijah." And this was speaking of John the Baptist. He would not be Elijah but would minister in much the same style and power as Elijah had. In that way, as Jesus said before in Matthew 11:13-14, "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come."

CONCLUSION

Peter's desire to not come off the mountain, but stay in the glorious, radiating presence of God is understandable. I know he didn't want the suffering, death, pain and all, but neither do we. This is the glorious hope of the redeemed, a future of glory with our God. 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children

of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." This viewing of the transfiguration is hope for us, Jesus isn't dead or in the grave, death has been defeated, and as children of God we will see Him.

Just to get a glimpse of what it is like. Holy is the Lord. I can now see why Paul said he would much rather go and be with Jesus than stay, but it's needful for us to stay to share Christ.

What the disciples had trouble getting, as we do, is apart from the glorious second coming of Christ, it is death that will be the way to glory. Peter didn't want Jesus to suffer and die. He wanted to stay. For us, home, our eternal home is through the dying of this body. I want to say there's a malady that affects some of you today, you are still in your sin. You can't see this. You aren't prepared for death. If you will confess your sin, cf. Romans 10:9, and submit to the authority of Jesus and believe, you can be saved. And you too can see the hope of the glory of God.