

GLIMPING GLORY  
From Matthew 17:1-13  
08/23/2020

## INTRODUCTION

1. Illustration: Have you ever experienced a dream that felt so real, you woke up convinced it had actually happened?
2. Transition: Rather than experiencing a dream that felt real, Jesus' inner circle experienced something so real that it felt like a dream. They witnessed ancient heroes of the faith in their exalted state, they saw the Son in all his heavenly glory, and they heard the Father in the fullness of His terrible majesty.

But why? This is a unique moment in the life ministry of Jesus - one which is recorded every synoptic Gospel (Matt, Mark, Luke). But what does it mean? And why is it here in chapter 17? Equally important, what does this have to do with us today?

Let me begin to unpack these questions by stating the big idea at the heart of this morning's passage:

3. Proposition: Since Jesus is the eternally chosen and beloved Son of God, listen to Him and long for His appearing.

## JESUS' GLORY DOUBTED, REVEALED, CONFIRMED, CONCEALED

1. Jesus' glory doubted [Matt. 16:21-28]

If you've been following along with our Family Read-Thru series OR have an impeccable memory, you know that in

the previous chapter, Peter had just attested to Jesus' messianic identity. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). While Peter got the messianic title right, he got the messianic role very wrong. Peter refused to accept Jesus' imminent persecution and death – and he was harshly rebuked for it.

Jesus goes on to unpack for his disciples the truth about what it means to follow Him. The way of the Messiah is not easy. It's hard and costly. And the same is true for anyone who wishes to follow him. The difficulty of discipleship won't last forever, however. Soon the Son of Man will come in glory.

If chapter 16:21-28 is about the grittiness of the way of the Messiah, chapter 17:1-13 is about its glory.

The disciples know that Jesus is the Messiah. They also know, according to both the OT and Jewish tradition, that the Messiah will usher in a new era and set up a glorious kingdom for the Jewish people. The expectation was that this new Messianic Kingdom would be spiritual, yes, but it would also be tangible and political.

From the disciple's point of view, Jesus is the Messiah – that much is clear in chapter 16. And yet, John the Baptist is dead, the religious elite are opposed to the very Messiah that's supposed to lead them, and now this Messiah is saying that he will continue to be persecuted, endure suffering, and eventually succumb to death.

Where's the glory in that? Enter chapter 17.

2. Jesus' glory revealed [Matt. 17:1-4]

[READ v. 1] - The former events of chapter 16 take place in the Gentile region of Caesarea Philippi, some 25 miles north of Galilee. Six days pass and Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a 'high mountain'. Scholars disagree about the mountain's exact location, but it seems that the most likely option is Mt Miron in Galilee. Of course, the point is not on which mountain these events happened, but that they took place in remote setting precisely where one would expect divine revelation to occur (cf. Gen. 22; Ex. 19; 24).

Peter, James, and John comprised Jesus' inner circle. These were the men that had the closest relationship with Jesus and had prominent roles throughout Jesus' ministry as well as in the early church. These were the men whom Jesus chose to glimpse his true glory.

[Read v. 2-3] - All at once, Jesus' appearance changed from that of an ordinary man (cf. Is. 53:2) into something extraordinary. But this transfiguration was not one in which Jesus became someone he was not, but one in which he revealed who he truly is. It was a visual display of the fullness of his preincarnate glory.

What's interesting is that the transfiguration of Jesus echoes the events of Ex. 34:29-30 where, after meeting with the LORD, Moses' face is also said to have shone brightly. But there's one important difference: the shining of Moses' face was a derivative glory. Moses' glory came from meeting with the LORD. Jesus' glory comes from himself!

The exalted Christ wasn't the only person the disciples witnessed, however. Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with Jesus.

Why? That's a good question. It's not explicitly clear in the text. Given the context, a strong case can be made that the appearance of these men serve to authenticate Jesus' messianic identity by connecting Jesus' ministry with their legacies.

According to D.A. Carson, both Moses and Elijah were men who (1) ministered during transitional seasons in the life of Israel, both men (2) encountered a vision of God on a high mountain, both men (3) suffered various forms of rejection. And taken together, both men (4) represent the Law and the Prophets which point forward to the messianic age.<sup>1</sup>

These men were sign posts. And in this passage, both are pointing at the glorified messiah. "Our legacies are all about Him!"

[Read v. 4] - I'm not sure what I would have done if I saw all this happening, but apparently Peter thought what made the most sense was offering to build some tents. Here again scholars disagree about what motivated Peter at this point. Perhaps he had the Feast of Tabernacles in mind; maybe he was just being practical.

In either case, Peter doesn't really grasp what's happening. In part because he seems to be putting Moses, Elijah, and Jesus on the same level (building one

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, "Matthew" in EBC, vol. 8, ed. Frank Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 385.

tent for each person) - as though Jesus belongs to the same category as Moses and Elijah.

And you can sympathize with Peter here. Moses is the OT's greatest prophet and Elijah never died. These guys were super prophets. Maybe that's what the Messiah is like.

Wrong. If there was any doubt, the revealed glory of Christ is unequivocally confirmed by the Father in verse 5

### 3. Jesus' glory confirmed [v. 5-6]

[Read v. 5] - Again it's hard to imagine being Peter here, being interrupted by the Almighty. Mid sentence. Boom! Bright cloud. Loud voice. "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased."

"Get it right, Peter. Don't miss it... again. Jesus is his own category. He's no mere prophet or super prophet. He's my Son. I love him and I am totally pleased by him and what he's doing – grit and all."

The Father makes it abundantly clear that not only who Jesus is (as He did during Jesus' baptism), but how we are to respond to him: "Listen to him!"

There were a lot of important voices in the OT. And there are a lot of important voices in our lives today. But none compare with the voice of God's Word incarnate: Jesus Christ. He is the gold standard. It's by his words that all other voices will one day be judged. And it's by his words that we are called interpret and judge the world around us.

Do you know Jesus' voice? Are you listening to him?

The disciples doubted Jesus' glory, witnessed it revealed, and have now heard it confirmed by the Father himself.

They respond the same way anyone else who has experienced the majestic presence of God responds: lying prostrate, face-down in abject terror.

[Read v. 6]

And as suddenly as this extraordinary encounter begins, it ends.

### 4. Jesus' glory concealed [v. 7-13]

[Read v. 7-8] - in the midst of their trembling fear, Jesus touches them and tells them not to be afraid. Of course, by oneself, it is perfectly reasonable and fitting to be totally overtaken with fear when the presence of the Holy One.

But these men were not by themselves. And neither are we. Looking up, the disciples saw that Jesus was all that was left – and he alone was all they needed.

[Read vv. 9-13] - As they begin their journey back to the grit and grind of the messianic mission, Jesus instructs them what they're supposed to do with the glory they just encountered: "Tell the vision to no one." Can you hear their collective sigh?

The time wasn't right for others to know. If they did, it would compromise Jesus' mission. And so his glory is

concealed - for now. Glory would come, but not before some serious grit.

Ok, but there's a problem. The disciples knew their Bibles. They knew Mal. 4:5-6:

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*

According to OT prophecy, Elijah's return and ministry of restoration had to precede the coming of the Messiah. "How is the Messiah supposed to be crucified *after* Elijah's restoration takes place?"

This was their pressing question.

[Read v.10-13] - Jesus answers by affirming the scribes' interpretation (Elijah -> Messiah) while clarifying that the ministry of Elijah has already been fulfilled by none other than John the Baptist.

John's ministry, as prophesied by Malachi, was a restorative one, just not exactly in the way anyone thought. It wasn't glorious. It was gritty. And it eventually led to his death. And so it will be for the Messiah.

The way of the Messiah is gritty, but that fact should never cast doubt on his glory.

None of us have seen (with our eyes) the glory of the Messiah. And I think we can be led to believe that if we had seen Jesus like the disciples had or hear the voice of God as they did, we'd be better Christians. But we'd be mistaken to believe that. Not to keep picking on Peter, but what happened to him when Jesus was arrested? He didn't want anything to do with Jesus. The same Jesus he saw in glory!

Our sensory experience is fleeting. We need to build our faith on something more sure. We need to lead our hearts with God's Word.

#### 1. Listen to Him

*16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

*17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"*

*18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

*19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,*

*20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*

*21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1)*

## CONCLUSION

## 2. Long for his appearing

We not only need to listen to Jesus' voice confirmed through the NT, we also need to long for Jesus' appearing.

*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:8)*

The story of the transfiguration should awaken in us a sense of awe and wonderment. It should get us thinking about heaven and what it'll be like to see the fullness of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. No other vision can motivate the believer unto good works in a world of grit and grief.

Friends, make no mistake. Jesus is no mere prophet. He's no mere martyr, good teacher, revolutionary, or liberator.

Jesus is the eternally chosen and beloved Son of God; listen to Him and long for His appearing.