



Glory

JESUS FULFILLS GOD’S MESSAGE OF HOPE
FOUND IN THE LAW AND PROPHETS.

MATTHEW 17:1-13

Decision making can be difficult. Often, we seek some sign that this is the right direction and the correct decision to make. Is this the right job to take? Is this the best house to buy? Is she the one for me? How do we know for certain? If we only had a sign! Wouldn’t it be great if someone magically appeared to give you affirmation that what you are doing is correct? How about a sign in the sky, or a voice out of the blue?

 **What kind of sign would you like to receive concerning a decision you need to make?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

MATTHEW 17:1-27

Matthew 16 ends with Jesus’s curious statement that some of the disciples would live to see “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). Most likely, He was referring to the transfiguration event in the opening verses of chapter 17. Following this event, Jesus descended the mountain with Peter, James, and John to where the other disciples were waiting. Jesus found them embroiled in confusion and frustration. This descent from the sublime experience on the mountaintop down to the chaos of the disciples’ dilemma mirrors so much of life for many of us. In fact, partially arising out of this event in Jesus’s life comes the common expression of going from the “mountaintop experience” down into the valley of reality.

The “valley” that the disciples faced was their inability to meet a father’s request for healing his demon-possessed son (17:16). The nine disciples had failed to heal the boy, even though earlier they had been given authority to cast out demons (10:8). Speaking to the crowd as well as the disciples, Jesus condemned their unbelief (17:17). The words of Jesus’s condemnation echo a similar condemnation on the people of Israel in the wilderness (Deut. 32:5). After the healing, the nine disciples questioned Jesus: “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” Jesus’s answer pointed to the little faith of the disciples (Matt. 17:19-20).

Later, as the group was gathering in Galilee for the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus once again predicted His impending death (vv. 22-23). Such a statement brought great grief to the disciples. Now, instead of fighting against the idea of Jesus’s approaching death, they were greatly distressed at the prospect of His death.

Matthew 17 closes with a question to Jesus concerning the temple tax. Jesus answered the question by paying the tax in a most unusual way (vv. 24-27).

 **Read Matthew 17:1-13 and jot down questions you have about the narrative in these verses.**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TRANSFIGURED (MATT. 17:1-3)

¹ After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ² He was transfigured in front of them, and his face shone like the sun; his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.

VERSE 1

The words *after six days* indicate the incident narrated in these verses is linked with what went before. This refers to the statement of Jesus that some of His disciples would not die until they had seen the Son of Man (Matt. 16:28). Now, a week or so later, this declaration by Jesus took place.

Most likely this event was for the benefit of the three disciples, **Peter, James, and John**. These, along with Andrew on occasion, formed Jesus's inner circle. Matthew emphasized the pronoun **them** throughout the narrative (vv. 1,2,3,5,7,9,13). This event served as a visible affirmation of Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16).

The question might be asked, Why take just three disciples? Hebrew law called for the affirmation of two or three reliable witnesses for verification in a court of law. These three would serve as trustworthy witnesses to speak to the other followers of Jesus concerning the glory of Christ. In addition, Peter, along with James and John, appeared to have emerged as leaders in the group of disciples. Again, Jesus wasn't ready for everyone in the region to know of His messianic identity. Three witnesses would be enough for now.

With the three disciples, Jesus climbed a **high mountain**. This would have been a mountain near the location of Caesarea Philippi where they had been the week before. It would have been in Northern Galilee and accessible as Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem. Although the popular tourist attraction of Mount Tabor is promoted as the traditional site, a more likely choice might be Mount Meron that lay northwest of the Sea of Galilee.

VERSES 2-3

Once they reached the mountaintop, Jesus was **transfigured** before the disciples. The word *transfigured* speaks of being

transformed. It is the Greek word from which we get the scientific term *metamorphosis*, which means to change into another form. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the transformation as a change in Jesus's appearance. Suddenly, Jesus shone with incredible brightness. Matthew said that His ***face shone like the sun***. In addition, ***his clothes became as white as the light***. Hebrews 1:3 talks of Jesus as being the radiance of God's glory. Here was that glory shining through. The disciples received a glimpse of Jesus's glory and splendor.

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This transformation was like the Shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament where God appeared in the form of dazzling and blinding light. Peter wrote about this event in his second epistle: "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory. . . . We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet. 1:16b-17a,18). John also wrote of this in John 1:14, "We observed his glory."

Moses and Elijah also appeared with Jesus before the three disciples. What was the significance of their appearance during this confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah?



KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (See Luke 24:44-46; John 5:39.)

Moses, of course, was directly connected to the law given to Israel. He was representative of the unique covenant relationship between God and Israel. Elijah represented all the prophets of Israel that pointed to the coming Messiah. Here were the representatives of the law and the prophets. In the New Testament, the Scriptures were sometimes called "the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 3:21). Their purpose was to point to the coming Messiah. With the presence of Moses and Elijah, the affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah moved to an even higher level in the eyes of the three disciples.



OVERSHADOWED (MATT. 17:4-8)

⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here. If you want, I will set up three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown and were terrified. ⁷ Jesus came up, touched them, and said, “Get up; don’t be afraid.” ⁸ When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus alone.

VERSE 4

Peter’s reaction was to get involved in hosting Moses and Elijah. How Peter, James, and John knew these two men were Moses and Elijah, we are not told. Perhaps Jesus greeted them by name or there was something in the conversation between Jesus and the two that allowed the three disciples to know who they were.

Mark and Luke comment that Peter was at a loss for words and uttered the first thing that came to mind (Mark 9:5-6; Luke 9:33). His declaration was that it was *good for us to be here*. Most likely, Peter was indicating that it was good in the sense that he, James, and John were there to help. He was not content to observe this scene but wanted to be in the scene. Apparently, Peter didn’t grasp the significance of the conversation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah concerning His coming arrest and crucifixion (see Luke 9:31).

Peter thought that such distinguished guests needed shelter from the sun. He probably had in mind the shelters of branches and leaves used at the Feast of Tabernacles. Such a shelter might encourage these visitors to stay longer! Luke 9:33 indicates that Moses and Elijah were starting to leave when Peter spoke. Perhaps Peter hoped such a move would keep them from departing.

VERSE 5

Peter’s suggestion was interrupted by the appearance of a *bright cloud* filled with light. This is reminiscent of several Old Testament appearances of God in a cloud such as during the events of the

exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13:21). The cloud **covered them** or overshadowed them, implying that it produced shade.

Out of the cloud came a **voice**. The word emphasizes that the volume startled the disciples. The Gospels record two other occasions when the voice of God spoke words of affirmation to Jesus. In Matthew 3:17, God spoke at Jesus's baptism. The words given there are almost identical with the words spoken here on the mountain. The voice of God was also heard in John 12:28, as Jesus prayed that God's name would be glorified.

The voice heard on the mount of transfiguration served as another affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah. This verbal endorsement, the visual transformation of Jesus, and the supernatural visitation of Moses and Elijah, served as unmistakable proof that Jesus was the Messiah.

This is my beloved Son. The word *this* signifies that there is only one unique Son and no other. The phrase *beloved Son* speaks of Jesus as being of the same essence and divine nature as God the Father. The phrase *beloved Son* is used in Scripture only of Jesus. By speaking from the cloud, God the Father wanted the three disciples to know of Jesus's uniqueness and superiority over spiritual giants like Moses and Elijah. God instructed the disciples to ***listen*** to Jesus; that is, they were to pay attention and submit to His authority in obedience.

VERSES 6-8

The startling voice from the cloud produced fright and awe in the disciples—***they fell facedown***. They were ***terrified*** at the supernatural sights and sounds of the experience. Mark's Gospel pointed to this fear as the reason Peter spoke without thinking (Mark 9:6).

As the terrified disciples lay with their faces to the ground, Jesus came up and ***touched them***. He told them, ***Get up; don't be afraid***. In the presence of Jesus, there was no reason to be afraid.

***Everyone else was gone,
but they still had Jesus!***

When the disciples stood up, everything had returned to normal. Jesus's appearance was as it used to be. Moses, Elijah, and the bright cloud were gone. They ***saw no one except Jesus alone***. Everyone else was gone, but they still had Jesus!



What hinders our ability to hear and act on Jesus's words? What may hinder a person from taking Jesus's teachings seriously?

INSTRUCTED (MATT. 17:9-13)

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” ¹⁰ So the disciples asked him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹ “Elijah is coming and will restore everything,” he replied. ¹² “But I tell you: Elijah has already come, and they didn’t recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

VERSE 9

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded the disciples to keep what they had seen to themselves. This was the final time that Jesus asked for silence about His miracles and identity. This time, however, He gave a time limit on His prohibition. They were to remain silent until ***the Son of Man is raised from the dead***. The experience that the three disciples had witnessed would be impossible for others to believe. This included even the other disciples. Once the miracle of the resurrection took place, the transfiguration would easily be accepted as fact. Keep in mind that this event on the mountaintop was a foreshadowing of the glory of Jesus’s resurrection and second coming.

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VERSES 10-13

The presence of Elijah raised a question for the disciples. If Jesus was the Messiah, then why didn’t Elijah come first, as ***the scribes*** said? Jesus affirmed the scribes were right about Elijah coming. The problem was that the religious leaders didn’t recognize Elijah when

he came. Jesus was alluding to John the Baptist. Luke 1:17 indicated that John the Baptist would “go before him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Not only did the religious leaders fail to recognize John the Baptist as the promised coming of Elijah, but they treated him harshly. ***In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.*** The ill-treatment of John the Baptist served as a foreshadowing of the Messiah’s own suffering. Jesus pointed to the death of “Elijah”—John the Baptist—as a harbinger of His own death by the Jewish leaders.

The three disciples were able to connect the dots and realize that Jesus was speaking of the coming of ***John the Baptist***. Slowly, the disciples were growing in their understanding of Jesus, His identity, and His mission. Such an understanding, though, only heightened their sadness about the days ahead.

 **How are you making an effort to grow in your understanding of Jesus, His identity, and mission?**



BIBLE SKILL: *Use cross references to gain a better understanding of a biblical concept.*

The New Testament not only records accounts of Jesus’s transfiguration but also teaches that believers likewise will experience transformation. Read the following passages and determine what each says about a believer’s transformation: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Philippians 3:20-21. How and when does this transformation take place in the life of a believer? How is our transformation similar to or different from what Jesus experienced?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Pray that you would see the glory of Jesus.
- + Worship is always the appropriate response to Jesus.
- + Seek to know Jesus better by learning God's Word.



Is it possible for your group to experience the glory of Jesus in its midst? Discuss with your group. What would be the appropriate response if you did?



How have you seen the glory of Jesus in your life? What does it mean for you to reflect His glory?



Memorize Matthew 17:5b-6.

Prayer Needs

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue dashed lines for writing. On the left side, there is a solid teal vertical bar that serves as a margin. The paper is otherwise empty, with no text or other markings.