

Matthew's Gospel, chapter 17 The Glory of Jesus

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

There are five sections in Matthew 17, which I'll introduce and then read the corresponding verses from the ESV as I come to each of them. The first is the glory of Jesus, vv.1-9.

The glory of Jesus, vv.1-9

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He 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.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.””

Last week's talk finished with a stark warning from the Lord Jesus that every person must consider the real value of one's soul because:

“The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (16:27).

Then in v.28, He said:

“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

This happened six days later at what is called the Transfiguration (17:1). The Transfiguration was one of those special events in the Lord's life when He took Peter, James, and John with Him as privileged witnesses.¹ For the Transfiguration, He took them apart from the other nine disciples and up a high mountain, the most suitable position for Him, the King of kings, to display His kingly glory.

The main theme of Matthew's Gospel is that Jesus Christ is Israel's long-promised Messiah, their King. This is demonstrated by the authoritative sayings and miraculous deeds of Jesus. But the Jews refused to accept Him and so He wasn't able to establish His physical kingdom there and then upon earth. However, He will come in power and great glory (24:30). Peter, James, and John were granted the immense privilege of previewing that regal glory. V.2 describes it, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light." At the coronation of King Charles III in May 2023, we saw our king properly dressed in royal robes for the occasion, crowned, and invested with the Orb, the royal ring, and the Sceptre. But Christ's glory at the Transfiguration was intrinsic to His Person. His entire body was transformed.

The Greek word for 'transfigured' is the word from which the English word 'metamorphosis' is derived. The most well-known example of metamorphosis is that of the butterfly, which starts out as a worm-like, leaf-eating caterpillar and transforms into a beautiful flying, nectar-drinking creature. Christ's body was so changed that His was radiant and shone like the sun, from which nothing is hidden from its heat (Ps.19:6c). His clothes became as white as a pure beam of light. Symbols of the beneficent reign of the Sun of righteousness (Malachi 4:2), when "The beauty of the Saviour will dazzle every eye in the crowning day that's coming by and by."² King David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, prophesied about his greater Son:

"The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When [Messiah] rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes the grass to sprout from the earth" (2 Samuel 23:2-4).

This vision of Jesus' kingly glory had a lasting effect upon Peter and characterised his office as the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8). Later in his life, he wrote to his fellow-Jewish believers:

"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. ...For we were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:16 & 18).

In summary, Peter, James, and John had a foretaste of the millennial kingdom, they saw the displayed excellence of the splendour and magnificence of Christ's unique kingship. Peter later testified:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ...received honour 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," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 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 arises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:16-19).

Matthew 17:3 states that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration. Both were revered men in Israel's history. The Jews associated Moses with the Law and Elijah was representative of the Old Testament prophets. It is significant to notice that both, like their Lord, suffered rejection by the nation of Israel. Perhaps they prophetically represent the heavenly saints, who will reign with Christ over the earth in His millennial kingdom: Moses - representative of the dead saints who will be resurrected; Elijah - representative of the living saints at the Lord's coming, whose bodies will be changed. Together they all will be caught away to be forever with the

Lord, as explained by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-53. Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus. Luke's account states that their conversation was about Jesus' exit from this world, that is, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 9:30). [But I'll leave further study of that topic for this time next year, when, God willing, my colleague Brian Donaldson will do a comparative study of the Gospel accounts of The Transfiguration in talk T1374.](#)

From v.4, it seems as though Peter was completely overwhelmed by what was taking place and blurted out his suggestion as to what was an appropriate response from the three disciples:

[“Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”](#)

He may have had in mind that the Feast of Booths in Leviticus 23:33-43 prophesied Israel's cherished blessings under Messiah kingship. However, the main point is that great as they were, neither Moses nor Elijah could be awarded the same honour as Christ. Hence, while Peter was still speaking, God the Father intervened and singled out His chosen One:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”
(v.5b).

God the Father caused the disciples to be enveloped in a haze of brilliance as He spoke to them. The cloud full of bright light was the same cloud that came and filled the Tabernacle during the wilderness journey of the children of Israel to the Promised Land (see Exodus 40:34-35).³ The cloud was the visible manifestation of Jehovah's Presence on earth, His Shekinah glory. The prophecy of Ezekiel commences with visions of this glory of the LORD leaving the Temple in Jerusalem (1:4-28 & ch.10). It finishes with visions of this Shekinah glory returning to fill the new Temple (43:4-5 & 44:4) and culminates with the great proclamation:

“The name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is Here”
(48:35).

Jerusalem is the city of the great King (Matthew 5:35):

“It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne” (Zechariah 6:13).

Psalm 72 exults:

- in the worldwide extent of His dominion, which brings blessings to all nations.
- that His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and shall not be superseded.⁴
- and that the whole earth will be filled with His glory.

Amen and Amen!

The awesome sight and the commanding voice of the Father terrified the disciples causing them to fall prostrate on their faces (v.6). But in grace their Master came to them and touched them. He told them not to have any fear (v.7). So, they raised their eyes and saw no one other than Jesus (v.8). As godly Jews, the disciples hoped to share the kingdom of God with Old Testament worthies such as Abraham, Moses, and Elijah. God the Father wanted them to learn that everything in the kingdom of God is centred in, and focussed on, His Son. True Christianity is also “Jesus only” for the Father has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in which Jesus is Lord (Colossians 1:13 with 3:23-24).

Then as they descended the mountain, they were commanded by the Lord not to tell anyone about the vision of His kingly glory until He, the Son of Man was raised from the dead (v.9). Mark

9:10 states that they were compliant, but thereafter often debated amongst themselves what rising from among the dead actually meant. As godly Jews, they believed in a general resurrection at the end of time. But they didn't appreciate that Jesus would need first to die then rise from the state of being dead to bring in the new order of resurrection life. The presence of Elijah with Jesus at the Transfiguration also puzzled them, which brings us to the next section of Matthew 17, vv.10-13.

The Enigma about Elijah

“And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”

The disciples were trying to sort out in their minds the order of prophetic events. Had scribes correctly interpreted Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes?” If Elijah's second advent preceded Messiah's appearance, how did that fit in with Jesus being the Christ? (16:16). Jesus replied that Elijah had already come. Jesus had previously stated that John the Baptist was in fact Elijah.

“All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:13-14).

Matthew recorded that the disciples understood Jesus' explanation (17:13). But the Jewish rulers refused to accept John as being sent by God (see 21:25-26 & 32). John's righteous ministry was clearly of the same character as Elijah's, as Gabriel had prophesied to his father, Zechariah:

“[Your son] will go before [the Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Luke 1:17 & also v.76).

But prophetically, Elijah will be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13, who minister during the Tribulation. And Jesus also pointed out to the disciples that He himself would suffer the same fate of rejection as John did (v.12), which He wanted them to focus on (see vv. 22-23).

The Boy with the demon

Matthew 17:14-20 relate the story of Jesus healing the demon-possessed boy:

“And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.””

For Peter, James, and John, this was very much a case of down to earth with a bump after their mountain top experiences! For the Lord Jesus it was a continuation of His gracious ministry to

“proclaim liberty to the captives and...to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). The nation of Israel were in spiritual bondage when He came to them. [About Jesus’ early public ministry Matthew recorded:](#)

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan” (4:23-25).

In 17:14, the boy’s father seems to have recognised the seizures were more than just a physical disease for he literally said that his son was moonstruck. In desperate need, he knelt before the Lord and pleaded that He would have compassion on him. The situation was compounded by the disciples’ inability to heal the boy. The Lord’s response to the man’s request must have seemed less than encouraging to him. [“O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?”](#) But it’s in keeping with what we have noted about the nation’s rejection of their promised Messiah. The Jews were marked by blatant unbelief and spiritual corruptness. The Lord despaired for them. [““But to what shall I compare this generation?”](#) He asked in 11:16; and then went on to upbraid the cities where most of His deeds had been done, because they did not repent (vv.20-24).

When the scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign from Him in 12:38-42, He answered that it was an evil and adulterous generation that sought for a sign, and that no sign would be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.⁵ (Jonah’s experience of being three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, signified that the Son of Man would lie dead for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.) Then He stated that they would be judged and condemned by the men of Nineveh (and the queen of the South) because they didn’t recognise that the mighty works He’d done in their cities signified that He was their Messiah and because they didn’t repent. [He then spelt out their spiritual bondage in detail:](#)

[“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation”](#) (vv.43-45).

When the Pharisees and the Sadducees again demanded a sign from Him in 16:1, He simply replied:

[“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times \[that the kingdom of God has come upon you \(12:28\)\]. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah”](#) (vv.3-4).

Then He departed from them. No wonder that in 17:17 He sighed in sorrow, “How long am I to be with you before you change? Until when am I to bear with you all?” But in grace He made the boy an exception for his father cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). The demon was immediately exorcised. However, the crowd remained defiant in unbelief, even though they all were astonished at the majesty of God! (Luke 9:43).

Afterwards, the disciples questioned Jesus as to why they were unable to exorcise the demon (Matthew 17:19). Jesus replied it was because of their own unbelief in the power of God and that they could achieve the impossible with even a tiny amount of genuine faith (v.20). Which raises the question for us today, "Do we believe what Jesus said - that faith can move mountains?"

Vv.22-23, Jesus again foretells His death and resurrection

In vv.22-23, Jesus again foretells His death and resurrection. Luke 9:43 states that it was while everybody was astonished at everything Jesus was doing, that He again turned the disciples' attention to His forthcoming death and resurrection:

"As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed."

He first told them about what would happen to Him in 16:21-23. Even though He added, in 17:22-23, that he would be betrayed, His message still didn't penetrate their ears (Luke 9:44) for they, too, were completely taken up with Jesus' miracles.

Peter and the temple tax

Vv.24-27 form the last section of Matthew 17, about Peter and the temple tax.

"When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. However, not to give offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

It seems that this incident was yet another attempt by the Jews to find fault with Jesus. The half shekel, or two drachmas, tax had been introduced as a national tax for the upkeep of Herod's temple and its services. When the tax collectors approached and asked Peter, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?", Peter confidently replied in the affirmative. But Jesus was greater than the Temple (cp. 12:5-6), because He is both God's Son and the King of kings and therefore He was exempt from this tax. But as we have already noticed, these facts were not accepted by the Jews, especially their religious rulers. Later, when the opportunity arose, Jesus asked Peter from whom earthly kings receive toll or taxes. When Peter replied it was from those other than their sons, Jesus stated that He himself was free of any levy because He is great David's greater son.

However, in order not to cause anyone to stumble, He told Peter to catch a fish from the Sea of Galilee with a hook, which Peter did and miraculously found a shekel in its mouth. The shekel provided the necessary tax for both the Lord and Peter. This is an instructive way to conclude today's talk on Matthew 17 - the Lord is able to overrule our blunders, which potentially would mar our testimony of Him.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Matthew 17 entitled 'The glory of Jesus', talk No. T1319.

Footnotes

1. The other occasions are recorded in Mark 5:37 and Matthew 26:37. The number 3 is fullness of witness (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28).
2. “The crowning day is coming!” Daniel W. Whittle, aka El Nathan (1840 – 1901).
3. See Darby’s footnote at v.5 on the use of the Greek word “overshadowed” in the Septuagint.
4. That is, it endures until the end of time (cp. Daniel 2:44; 4:34-35; 6:26; 7:13-14, 27 with 2 Peter 1:11).
5. The nation of Israel will continue as “this generation”, that is, in unbelief and spiritual adultery (and suffer for it) until Christ’s second coming (see Matthew 23:36 & 24:29-34).

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.