

Matthew 17 - The Transfiguration

THEME: The Transfiguration; the demon–possessed boy and the faithless disciples; Jesus pays taxes by performing a miracle.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

As we noted at the conclusion of chapter 16, the final verse belongs to this chapter because it explains what our Lord meant when He made this statement:

Mat 16:28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

This was fulfilled for the apostles in the transfiguration of Jesus. The Transfiguration is that picture of the Son of man coming in His Kingdom. Someone may say, "Can you be sure that the Lord Jesus had reference to His coming Transfiguration?" Well, Simon Peter was one of the apostles who was present at the Transfiguration, and in his second epistle he wrote of that experience: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2Pe_1:16-18). How was Jesus' statement fulfilled for the apostles in that day? When the Lord Jesus Christ was glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration with three of His disciples present, this statement was fulfilled. The Transfiguration was a miniature picture of the Kingdom, and Simon Peter confirmed this for us.

The other Gospels give the account of the Transfiguration, with the exception of the Gospel of John. This leads me to say something that may startle you. The Transfiguration does not prove, nor set forth, the deity of Christ. It sets forth the humanity of Christ. The Gospel of John emphasizes the deity of Christ and therefore omits the account of the Transfiguration, although the other three Gospels record it.

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ is, in my judgment, not only the proof of His humanity but the hope of humanity. The Man whom you see glorified there, transfigured, is the kind of person that you, my friend, will be someday if you are a child of God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1Jn_3:2). The glorious prospect of being like Christ is before every man.

The Lord Jesus Christ was glorified before His death and resurrection, and this is the picture which is given to us here. You will find that the Gospel of Luke presents details which neither Matthew nor Mark include, because Dr. Luke is the one who sets forth the perfect humanity of Jesus. - McGee

Mat 17:1-2 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

Six days after the incident at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain, somewhere in Galilee. Many commentators attach significance to the six days. Gaebelein, for instance, says: "Six is a man's number, the number signifying the days of work. After six days—after work and man's day is run out then the day of the Lord, the Kingdom."

When Luke says that the Transfiguration occurred "about eight days" later (Mat_9:28), he obviously includes the terminal days as well as the intervening days. Since eight is the number of resurrection and of a new beginning, it is fitting that Luke should identify the kingdom with a new beginning.

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Peter, James, and John, who seem to have occupied a place of special nearness to the Savior, were privileged to see Him transfigured. Up to now His glory had been veiled in a body of flesh. But now His face and clothes became radiant like the sun and dazzling bright, a visible manifestation of His deity, just as the glory cloud or Shekinah in the OT symbolized the presence of God. The scene was a preview of what the Lord Jesus will be like when He comes back to set up His kingdom. He will no longer appear as the sacrificial Lamb but as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. All who see Him will recognize Him immediately as God the Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords. – Believers' Bible Commentary

The word *transfigured* is a very interesting word. It is the word *metamorphosis*, which means "a change of form or structure." The little woolly caterpillar will someday become a beautiful butterfly by the process of metamorphosis. This body that I have today, filled with infirmity and cancer, will someday be transfigured, and even those who are alive at the coming of Christ will be changed, transfigured. This is the hope of humanity. - McGee

Mat 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount and discussed His approaching death at Jerusalem (Luk_9:30-31). Moses and Elijah may represent OT saints. Or, if we take Moses as representing the Law, and Elijah representing the Prophets, then here we see both sections of the OT pointing forward to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. A third possibility is that Moses, who went to heaven by way of death, depicts all who will be raised from the dead to enter the Millennium, while Elijah, who was translated to heaven, pictures those who will reach the kingdom by the route of translation.

The disciples Peter, James, and John may represent NT saints in general. They could also foreshadow the faithful Jewish remnant who will be alive at the Second Advent and will enter the kingdom with Christ.

The multitude at the base of the mountain (v. 14, compare Luk_9:37) has been likened to the Gentile nations which will also share in the blessings of Christ's thousand-year reign. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Mat 17:4-5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Peter was deeply moved by the occasion; he had a real sense of history. Wanting to capture the splendor, he rashly suggested erecting three memorial tabernacles or booths—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was right in putting Jesus first, but wrong in not giving Him the preeminence. Jesus is not one among equals but Lord overall. In order to teach this lesson, God the Father covered them all with a brightly glowing cloud, then announced, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" In the Kingdom, Christ will be the peerless One, the supreme Monarch whose word will be the final authority. Thus, it should be in the hearts of His followers at the present time. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Mat 17:6-8 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Stunned by the glory cloud and by the voice of God, the disciples fell on their faces. But Jesus told them to get up and not to be afraid. As they rose, they saw no one but Jesus only. So, it will be in the Kingdom—the Lord Jesus will be "all the glory in Immanuel's land." - Believers' Bible Commentary

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Do you want a good motto for your life? I suggest these two words: *Jesus only*. He is the One who is the authority. I hope you will mark those two words, *Jesus only*, in your Bible. They provide a good motto for all of us. – McGee

Mat 17:9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

Descending from the mountain, Jesus commanded the disciples to be silent about what they had seen until He had risen from the dead. The Jews, overanxious for anyone who might liberate them from the Roman yoke, would have welcomed Him to save them from Rome, but did not want Him as a Savior from sin. For all practical purposes, Israel had rejected her Messiah, and it was useless to tell the Jews of this vision of Messianic glory. After the resurrection, the message would be proclaimed worldwide. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Mat 17:10-13 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

The disciples had just seen a preview of Christ's coming in power and glory. But His forerunner had not appeared. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah must come prior to Messiah's advent (Mal_4:5-6), so His disciples asked Jesus about this. The Lord agreed that indeed Elijah had to come first as a reformer but explained that Elijah had already come. Obviously, He was referring to John the Baptist (see v. 13). John was not Elijah (Joh_1:21) but had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luk_1:17). Had Israel accepted John and his message, he would have fulfilled the role prophesied of Elijah (Mat_11:14). But the nation did not recognize the significance of John's mission and treated him as it pleased. John's death was an advance token of what they would do to the Son of Man. They rejected the forerunner; they would also reject the King. When Jesus explained this, the disciples realized He was referring to John the Baptist.

There is every reason to believe that before Christ's Second Advent, a prophet will arise to prepare Israel for the coming King. Whether it will be Elijah personally or someone with a similar ministry is almost impossible to say. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

Mat 17:14-16 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So, I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

This was probably the worst case which had been brought to the attention of Jesus. It was also a sad situation because the disciples were impotent. This is a picture of the church today in a world that is demon-possessed and has gone crazy. Why is the church impotent in this crazy world? Because it doesn't have enough psychology or enough methods or enough money? It has all of those things, but they are not what the church really needs.

This man had to say to Jesus, "I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him." – McGee

How are we like the Disciples today? If you are praying God's will, how do you approach it?

Mat 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

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“O faithless and perverse generation” would be His word to the church in our day and probably individually to you and to me. “Bring him hither to me.” Jesus is the Great Physician. Take your case to Him, my friend. – McGee

What would Jesus say about our generation today?

Mat 17:18-19 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So, Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon and heal the boy?

The nine disciples were perhaps jealous because they had not been called to go to the mountaintop with Jesus. During the Lord's absence, they began to grow self-indulgent. They neglected prayer; their faith weakened. Then, when the crisis came, they were unprepared. Like Samson, they went out to battle without realizing that their power was gone (Judg. 16:20). From their example, we see the importance of staying spiritually healthy. - Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 62.

Mat 17:21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

This verse is not in the early manuscripts.

Jesus Again Foretells Death, Resurrection

Mat 17:22-23 Now, while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

For a second time, Jesus mentioned His death and resurrection. The disciples were deeply grieved and were afraid to ask Him about it. In fact, His disciples did not believe the reports of His resurrection because they had forgotten His promises (Mark 16:14). But the enemy remembered what He said (John 2:19) and acted accordingly (Matt. 27:62–66). - Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 63.

The Temple Tax

Mat 17:24-26 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter said to Him, "From strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free.

In Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax asked Peter if his Teacher paid the half-shekel used for carrying on the costly temple service. Peter answered, “Yes.” Perhaps the misguided disciple wanted to save Christ from embarrassment.

The omniscience of the Lord is seen in what follows. When Peter came home, Jesus spoke to him first—before Peter had a chance to tell what had happened. “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs and taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” The question must be understood in the light of those days. A ruler taxed his subjects for the support of his kingdom and his family, but he didn't tax his own family. Under our form of government, everyone is taxed, including the ruler and his household.

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Peter correctly answered that rulers collected tribute from strangers. Jesus then pointed out that the sons are free. The point was that the temple was God's house. For Jesus, the Son of God, to pay tribute for the support of this temple would be equivalent to paying tribute to Himself. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Mat 17:27 Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

His method of getting the tax money was certainly novel, to say the least. Now our Lord demonstrates that He has recovered all that Adam lost. The creatures were obedient to Him. The fish as well as Peter followed His command. I believe that God had given to Adam the same dominion over all creation, but he lost it at the Fall. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen_1:26).

In the Transfiguration we see man restored to his original purpose. In the episode of the tribute money, we see man restored to his original performance. – McGee

Did Jesus restore what we lost at the fall as far as our dominion in the earth? If so, did he do it just for the apostles or is it available for all of us?

Are you a faithful steward in all things, even your money?

Now every Christian must cherish the idea, and act upon the recognized principle that God has right of property in all of ours as well as of ourselves, and that we are but agents to distribute, as God wills, what He has placed us in charge of as stewards. (W. H. Anderson, D. D.) – Biblical Illustrator