

“A Glimpse of Glory” | Matthew 17:1-27
Preached on November 26, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 17, as we look at God’s Word this morning. *[pause]*

We have been working through the gospel of Matthew, seeing especially how Jesus is described and what it means to be one of His disciples.

And now we are up to Matthew chapter 17, and we will be looking at the whole chapter this morning.

So I’ll read it for you to get it fresh on our minds. *[READ the chapter]*

I want you to imagine a young child named Johnny, and his parents owned a theater that put on amazing plays.

But everytime that his parents took him to the theater, the curtain would be closed, so the child didn’t think much about the theater because all he could think about was that big, red closed curtain. *[pause]*

What’s so exciting about that?

In his mind, the theater seemed like a boring place because it was just chairs and a big curtain to him. *[pause]*

But a year later, his father took him to the theater and on this day, the father said, “Johnny, I want you to see something.

Today, I will show you a glimpse of what’s behind the curtain.” *[pause]*

So Johnny and his father walk into the theater, and they approach the big, red curtain until they finally reach it.

His father starts to pull back the curtain and all of a sudden Johnny’s eyes get big and his jaw starts to drop, as he gets a glimpse of what’s behind the curtain.

For there behind the curtain was what the theater was all about, was what the theater actually looked like. *[pause]*

He saw a spectacular set filled with mountain scenes, buildings, amazing colors, and props.

He even got to see the actors and actresses all dressed up in their costumes, and the animals, too, who were in the play.

It was absolutely wonderful, and completely changed little Johnny’s view and understanding of the theater. *[pause]*

No longer was the theater simply a boring place with a big, red curtain - but it was a glorious set filled with beauty and wonder. *[pauseeee]*

That's a little like what the Transfiguration does in us.

It's like it's opening up the curtain for us to see who Jesus truly is in all of His glory. *[pause]*

We get to see a glimpse of His glory, and it's meant for us to never be the same.

Like little Johnny's view of the theater was drastically altered after that day, may our view of Jesus drastically change today after we read of His glory.

May our view of Him deepen today. *[pause]*

Because the truth is that...

I. We often have a low view of Jesus.

Peter, James, and John go up on the mountain with Jesus, where He is transfigured before them.

And when this happens, Moses and Elijah are seen talking with Jesus. *[pause]*

But did you notice what Peter says?

He says, "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." *[pauseeee]*

Now we don't know why Peter had this idea, but we do know that he didn't really think it through, for in the accounts from Mark and Luke, it tells us that, "he did not know what to say."¹
[pause]

You ever do that?

You just say something because you don't know what to say, but you feel like you need to say something. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe he was thinking that they could set up these tents as memorials to honor each of them, but either way, we see that this wasn't a good idea.

For as he's still saying this, God the Father appears in a cloud and tells them to listen to Jesus.
[pauseeee]

Peter's blunder here is that He tried to put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah, and by doing so, He was minimizing Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Can't we do the same?

¹ Mark 9:6 (See also Luke 9:33).

Don't we ever try to put other things on the same level as Christ? *[pauseeee]*

For some, they act like Jesus is just a mere man - but God the Father's voice booms out and declares, "Listen to my Son!" *[pause]*

For some, they think of Jesus as merely a timid, passive teacher, yet the transfiguration screams for our attention, showing us His inherent glory through His shining face. *[pauseeee]*

We need to understand that if we elevate anything to the level of Christ, we are essentially lowering Christ down to a place lower than He belongs.

No, Christ must be above everything, for He *is* above everything. *[pauseeee]*

Where is Christ at in your mind?

Do you ever elevate anything up to His level that shouldn't be there?

Or do you ever lower Him down in your estimation? *[pauseeee]*

You see, we may not want to make 3 tents like Peter, but what "tents" are we trying to put alongside Jesus?

Is it our thoughts and wants? Is it some other person, who we respect? *[pause]*

May God help us to see that we cannot and should not do this to Jesus, for He is the very Son of God, who God the Father says to listen to. *[pauseeee]*

Did you see that in this story?

God the Father says to listen to Jesus, and as they lift up their eyes, only Jesus is there.

That's who they are to listen to and value highest of all. *[pauseeee]*

Many times, we don't listen to Christ alone.

Instead, we put the opinions, thoughts, and ideas of others on the same level as Him. *[pause]*

Ponder this searching question...

When you face some sort of difficult situation, where do you turn?

Do you believe that Christ's Word is sufficient, or do you go everywhere else, and use His Word as a last resort? *[pause]*

Do you truly 'listen to him' with eagerness, submission, and receptivity, knowing that He has what you need? *[pauseeee]*

So many times, we are looking for the answers in other people, or even through the world around us, while neglecting the One who we are called to listen to! *[pauseeee]*

Another incorrect way to view Jesus' word is to think that He's just there to listen to *me* and do my bidding, when I want. *[pause]*

We think, "If I ask for something, I want Jesus to do it."

And then we get mad when He doesn't do what we want.

But by doing this, we are acting like God said that Jesus must listen to *us* instead of the other way around! *[pauseeee]*

Now certainly we pray and ask for things, but those are to be requests in line with His will, not commands.

No, we are to "listen to him!"

We do His bidding, for He is the beloved Son. *[pauseeee]*

So as you can see, we cannot take His words lightly.

We can't just pick and choose which things we feel like listening to, depending on how we feel.

No, we listen and heed what He says. *[pauseeeee]*

In this chapter, there's another instance of a low view of Jesus and it's in verses 14-20. *[pause]*

The disciples are unable to cast out a demon, and they ask Jesus why this is.

And in verse 20, He gives the reason, "Because of your little faith." *[pauseeee]*

They couldn't do the miracle because they didn't trust Him, but most likely were relying on themselves. *[pause]*

You see, our lack of faith shows something about our view of Jesus - it's way too small. *[pause]*

We sometimes doubt.

We sometimes think that He won't be able to do something, and it just goes to show our low view of Him.

We may not outright say it, but our lack of faith is indicating our low view of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Have you been doubting that Jesus can do something?

Have you been doubting that He will provide, that He can save that person that you are burdened about, or that He will work in your situation?

Think what that shows about your view of Him. *[pause]*

May the Lord help our unbelief,² so that we trust Him more, as we see Him for who He is more!
[pauseeee]

As you can see, our low view of Jesus can be seen in various ways, but they are all wrong views of Jesus. [pause]

We put things on the same level as Him, when He is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.”³

We don’t listen to Him, when God the Father says, “Listen to *him*”!

And we don’t trust Him at times, and Jesus calls out our “little faith”. [pauseeee]

In what way is your low view of Jesus showing itself? [pauseeee]

Don’t despair fellow believer: God wants to use His Word this morning to raise our view of His Son.

So will you let the Word do its work today?

Let’s let His Word transform our minds⁴, as we see the Christ who was transformed on the mountain. [pauseeeee]

For though we often have a low view of Jesus...

II. We should view Jesus as He really is: the glorious Son.

Peter, James, and John go on a high mountain with Jesus, and they see something amazing.

Jesus is said to be “transfigured before them”. [pause]

The word means to be ‘transformed’ or ‘changed’.

What they were used to seeing in Jesus’ face and clothes was altered so that now “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” [pauseeee]

In the past, these three disciples had seen Jesus’ glory in that He powerfully did miracles, which pointed to His glory, but now they got a behind-the-scenes look at Jesus’ inherent glory. [pause]

This means that in some way, as Jesus conducted His earthly ministry, His glory was somewhat veiled, but now they got a special viewing to witness a fuller picture of His glory. [pause]

² An allusion to Mark 9:24, where the father in this story says that to Jesus.

³ Ephesians 1:21a.

⁴ The same Greek word for “transformed” in Romans 12:2 is used here of what happens to Jesus in verse 2.

It's no coincidence that John, who was one of those on the mountain for this experience, talks about how Jesus is the light, and says, "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."⁵ [pauseeee]

They got a glimpse of His glory, and saw that He was the glorious Son of God.

Talk about a "mountaintop experience"! [pauseeee]

You see, the disciples needed this experience.

Jesus just shared with them that He would suffer and die, but now He showed them that though that is true, He is also the glorious Christ that they could trust.

So even if it was hard to fathom that He would suffer and die, they needed to remember who He truly was. [pauseeee]

The same is true for us!

Jesus shares with us that there will be suffering for us, as we "take up our cross and follow Him", yet we must remember that the One who said that is also the glorious Son of God on the mountain.

So we can trust what He said, and we can trust Him as we walk the path set before us. [pauseeee]

When you read what God commands you to do, some of them are really hard...

It's not easy loving your enemy, it's not easy witnessing to others, it's not easy facing potential mockery for Christ.

It's not always easy loving your wife or submitting to your husband.

It's not easy obeying your boss at work or praying for wicked governmental leaders.

Yet as you think about those commands, remember *who* commanded them: the glorious Son!

And if He has commanded them, then we can remember that they are not only commands to be obeyed, but commands that are good, and commands that He will help us to do. [pauseeeee]

Jesus' appearance here also showed *His importance*. [pause]

There He was standing with Moses and Elijah, who were well-known, important Old Testament figures.

And this demonstrated that He wasn't just some ordinary teacher, and definitely wasn't a false teacher, but can stand with Moses and Elijah. [pause]

⁵ John 1:14.

But though He can stand with Moses and Elijah, He's actually better and more important than them...

...As is seen when Peter's triple tent idea is interrupted by God the Father, as He says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to *him*." [pauseeee]

Talk about Jesus' importance!

If God the Father appears to affirm and highlight your importance, then you are important!
[pause]

And think about what He says about Jesus.

He is His beloved Son - so there's this loving, intimate relationship that they have, which is unique. [pause]

Not only that, but He is well pleased with Jesus, showing God the Father's complete delight and approval of Him. [pause]

Now that's amazing, and yet He adds one more thing, for He says, "Listen to him." [pause]

If God the Father tells you to listen to someone, you better take heed.

If God the Father tells you to listen to someone, it shows their authority and importance.

God doesn't just let anyone speak for Him or put His stamp of approval on someone's words, unless they are speaking *His* Word. [pauseeeee]

Do you fully remember that *this* is Jesus?

He is the beloved Son of God, who the Father is well-pleased with.

He is the glorious Son, whose face and clothes shine bright with glory.

And He is the One we must listen to. [pauseeee]

Jesus is not someone who you can disregard without consequences.

Jesus is not weak and incapable, like we are.

No, He is the glorious, beloved Son of God, who we should follow and obey with our lives!
[pauseeee]

Even the disciples' discussion about Elijah shows His importance. [pause]

They ask about Elijah, for Elijah was said to be the forerunner before the Messiah, and Jesus explains that Elijah has come, but he was persecuted.

So by saying this, and the disciples understanding that this was John the Baptist, He was proving that He was truly the Messiah, for Elijah “has already come”. *[pause]*

Then in the middle of the chapter, Jesus does that spectacular miracle of healing the boy with a demon, who the disciples couldn’t help.

That showed His immense power. *[pause]*

None can compare to Him, for He is the all-powerful, glorious Son of God.

And yet, this glorious, powerful, and authoritative Christ tenderly calls us to not fear. *[pause]*

Notice what He does for the disciples, after they fall down terrified on the mountain...

He “came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’” *[pauseeee]*

Think about what Jesus *could have done* here.

He could have just let them remain in fear, for if it was us, we would want people to be utterly taken back by our glory and power.

If it was us, we may have deemed ourselves too high up to reach down and touch them.

Yet that’s not Christ! *[pause]*

Instead, the glorious Christ is also the gracious Christ.

He comes to us: the needy.

He reaches down and touches us in love.

And He seeks to comfort us with His word, saying, “Have no fear.” *[pauseeee]*

Jesus wants us to know that we *must* see Him as the glorious Christ, but He also wants us to know that we *must* see Him as the gracious Christ. *[pause]*

He is the Christ, who could be anywhere, yet He came to us in His incarnation.

He is the Christ, who could touch a mountain and make it split it two,⁶ yet He touches us in love and care.

He is the Christ, who could instill fear in every being of the universe if He wanted to, yet He says to us, “Have no fear.” *[pauseeeeeee]*

In this chapter, not only is His glory displayed, but so is His *merciful patience*.

⁶ An allusion to Zechariah 14:4 of what He will do when He returns.

Though He's the Christ on the mountain, He shows merciful patience to the faithless and needy.
[pauseeee]

Just think of His patience in telling Peter, James, and John not to tell what happened to anyone until the resurrection. [pause]

We would want everyone right away to know about our glory, yet Jesus patiently held back this news from getting out until later. [pause]

He knew that this vision would cause a political frenzy and great misunderstanding before He could go through with the Cross and Resurrection.

So it was His merciful patience that led him to go to the Cross for us, so that He could accomplish His mission of redemption.

And we can't help but rejoice in His merciful patience, for it means He successfully died for us, so that we could be forgiven and free. [pauseeee]

His merciful patience also bears with our failures.

When Peter had the rash, foolish idea of the 3 tents, Jesus didn't disown him for this idea.
[pause]

He didn't say, "Don't you know who I am?! How dare you come up with that idea?!"

No, He was mercifully patient with Peter's 3 tent proposal, even all the while knowing that someday Peter would deny Him 3 times. [pauseeee]

Think also of how Jesus was mercifully patient with the disciples' lack of faith to do the miracle here in this chapter. [pause]

Yes, He showed emotions of frustration, as He says, "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"

Yet He did this without sin.

And though He was frustrated to some degree, He didn't give up on the disciples, but stayed with them and taught them through this.

Now that's being mercifully patient! [pause]

We would probably have given up on the disciples by this point and thought, "OK, I need to find a new batch of disciples."

But not Jesus, He is incredibly merciful and patient. [pauseeeee]

Think about how merciful and patient Christ is with you.

Think about how many times you have failed; how many times you haven't "gotten it". *[pause]*

Think about how much farther along you *should* be, but you are still struggling over the same things, over and over again.

Yet through all of your failures, blunders, struggles, clumsiness, and ineptitude - He hasn't left you or disowned you.

But He patiently teaches you and stretches you to trust Him more, so that your faith grows.

And if we had faith even the size of a mustard seed, God could do great, impossible-seeming things through us. *[pauseeee]*

This glorious Christ we see in the Transfiguration graciously calms our fears and is mercifully patient with us.

That right there would be enough, right? *[pause]*

Yet there's more, for this glorious Son *relinquished His rights for others, too.* *[pause]*

Look at verses 22 and 23.

Jesus explains that He is going to be delivered over, killed, and then rise on the third day. *[pause]*

So though He is glorious, and though He didn't have to, He would willingly suffer, die, and rise again for us.

Talk about humility and love!

He relinquished His rights for us! *[pause]*

As Philippians says, "[He] emptied himself...and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."⁷ *[pause]*

Now that's love and grace towards sinners like us. *[pause]*

We didn't deserve the glorious Son to be the suffering Son or the dying Son, yet He was, and now He's the risen, glorious Son for us.

And only because He suffered, died, and rose can we be saved!

Praise Him that He relinquished His rights for us out of love!

That's who He is! *[pause]*

He is so gracious that He willingly does that for others.

⁷ Philippians 2:7-8.

In fact, even at the end of this chapter in verses 24-27, we see Him relinquishing His rights for others out of love. *[pause]*

Some temple tax collectors ask if Jesus pays the temple tax, and Jesus essentially tells Peter that as the Son of the King, he doesn't have to pay the tax, but is free from it.

Yet out of love, so as not to give offense, He sends Peter to get some shekels out of a fish to pay the tax. *[pause]*

He didn't have to pay it, yet He relinquished that right so that He didn't cause others to stumble over this. *[pause]*

It would only distract people away from what He desired for them to know about Himself, so He was willing to do something that He didn't have to do. *[pause]*

That's Jesus for you!

The great and glorious Jesus, who shone in splendor on the high mountain, stooped to pay a tax that He didn't have to pay, out of love. *[pauseeee]*

There's truly no one like Jesus! And so we see here...

Jesus is the glorious Son of God, who we are called to listen to and trust!

Like the disciples only saw Christ at the end of the Transfiguration, so also, when we see Him for who He truly is, we can't help, but only see Him.

He alone stands high up, glorious, powerful, and authoritative. *[pause]*

So let's quit it with our low views of Christ.

Let's throw our low views of Christ out the window, and embrace who He truly is.

He is the Christ on the mountain, ever glorious, yet also, ever gracious. *[pause]*

The same Christ here is the same Christ in Revelation where it says of Him: "His face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore."⁸ *[pause]*

Sounds a lot like what we learned this morning, right?

You see, the One who went to the Cross and hung there for us in love and humility, will also return someday, stand on the Mount of Olives, and split it in two.⁹ *[pause]*

⁸ Revelation 1:16b-18a.

⁹ Zechariah 14:4.

This is the Christ we serve and follow, so let's "listen to him" and trust Him more! *[pause]*

What fears do you need to lay at His feet?

What low view of Him do you need to discard?

What situation are you lacking faith in that you need to trust Him with? *[pause]*

Let's not fear, but rise, cast our cares on Him,¹⁰ listen to His Word, and walk by faith,¹¹ following Him to the end of our days, for He is with us always.¹²

¹⁰ A reference to 1 Peter 5:7.

¹¹ A reference to 2 Corinthians 5:7.

¹² A reference to Matthew 28:20.