

Text: Matthew 17:1-13

Title: The Transfiguration

Truth: Jesus gives a preview of coming kingdom glory, and God speaks.

Date/Location: Sunday April 17, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

So that we do not belabor the point we made earlier, let us just stipulate that the opening verses of chapter describe the fulfillment of Jesus's words in 16:28:

Matthew 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."

I. Jesus Transformed, v. 1-3

Six days after the saying in 16:28. The time marker seems clearly to link the two narratives. Some of the disciples did not die until they saw the coming kingdom glory of the Son of Man.

Peter, James, John: the three inner-circle disciples.

Transformation is the word metamorphize, which means to be changed in either a way that can be seen (this verse and Mark 9:2), or inwardly in a way that is only seen by extension of behavior sourced in a changed life (2 Cor. 3:18, Rom. 12:2). These are the only four passages (really three distinct ones) where this word is used in the Greek New Testament.

The transformation of Jesus before them is described thusly:

1. Face shining like the sun.
2. Clothing as white as light.
3. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. This has always struck me as a bit strange. First of all, how did they know it was Moses and Elijah? Perhaps the Lord told them or he addressed them in the hearing of the disciples. Second, Luke 9:31 tells us the main topic of conversation: that Jesus would be departing from the world from Jerusalem not too many days in the future.

So that by his physical appearance, his vestments, and his company, it is evident that He is far more glorious than what was seen in all of his earthly sojourn up to this point. We can take the words and try to imagine for a few moments this glorious appearance, the eye-hurting brightness, the awe of seeing two famous Old Testament figures accompanying Jesus, how the clothing could have changed color.

This calls to mind another appearance of Christ accompanied by such bright light (Acts 9:3, 9). And another with more details given in Revelation 1:10-16, which was likely even more glorious since Christ has at this point been in heaven for some time and is returned to his *full* pre-incarnation glory.

1. Voice like a trumpet and like many waters
2. Like the Son of Man
3. Garment down to the feet and a golden band about his chest.
4. White hair.
5. Eyes a flame of fire.
6. Feet like fire-refined brass.
7. Seven stars and a two-edged sword.
8. Face shining like the sun at full strength, not a hazy sun glancing off at an angle.

John 12:41 indicates that Isaiah also saw the glory of Christ in the temple. Review in Isaiah 6:1-5 for this accounting of the Lord's glorious appearance—which matches His inherent radiance.

II. Peter's Idea, v. 4

- A. Peter's estimation was that it was good for them to be there.
- B. Peter desired to make three small dwellings for them, so that they could dwell there for a long time. These tabernacles or booths call to mind the Feast of Tabernacles. It was easy to hastily construct some of these. A nice gesture, to be sure.

- C. This was not at all to be, again because the Lord had a mission to accomplish which neither Peter nor Satan could swerve him from (16:22-23).

III. Heavenly Interruption, v. 5-7

You might have heard it said: “Stop talking while I’m interrupting!”

Well, here God interrupts Peter’s speech, and God can do that whenever He pleases!

- A. Moses and Elijah are significant persons in the Old Testament era who represent the Law and the Prophets, respectively. There is no question that they are important. But one stands there greater than both of them, and to whom they pointed the people of Israel—to a greater prophet, to a great Messiah, to a coming King, etc.
- B. While Peter was speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed the six of them. Usually clouds are not bright unless they are thin and the sun is behind them. They are often less bright than the sky around them. This was a special cloud, for out of it came a voice from Heaven.
- C. Message Part 1: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17 records the other similar statement, this one at the baptism of Jesus.
- D. Message Part 2: “Hear Him!” There can be no mistaking the message here. Moses and Elijah were “hearing worthy” in their day. But Jesus far surpasses them because He is Son of God, not a mere man. It is time to turn attention to the Lord Jesus Christ instead of Moses and Elijah. He brings the fulfillment of what *they* spoke about centuries earlier—about 1400 years before, and 800 years before, respectively. See Hebrews 1:1-2.
- E. The three disciples became very afraid at that point. Why they were not afraid earlier is beyond me, but clearly the voice from the clouds was too much for them.
- F. Suddenly the heavenly guests were gone, and the transfiguration was over. The Lord told them to not be afraid anymore.

IV. Tell No One, and a Question about Elijah, v. 9-13

- A. Jesus commands the disciples to not tell what they saw to anyone. This helped to reduce the chances that there would be a premature move to make Jesus king which happened already once after the feeding of 5000 (John 6:15).
- B. Having just seen Elijah, they probably wondered if this was the coming of Elijah before the Messiah comes. They were a bit confused about the timing of everything—a problem we do not have because we have a fuller picture than they did.
- C. Jesus answered their inquiry by saying that Elijah is going to come first and get things straightened out before the coming of Christ.
- D. Actually, Jesus says, “Elijah” did come, but he was not recognized. Because of related passages, we know that He is not saying that Elijah actually came, but that one in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17) already came. John 1:21 has John explicitly saying that he is *not* Elijah. He went unrecognized by the authorities, blind as they were to spiritual reality, and they abused him and killed him. Jesus foretells that He Himself is also about to suffer because of their depravity.
- E. The disciples were pretty fast on the uptake with this one, because they quickly understood that Jesus was speaking to them about John the Baptist.

Conclusion

The Lord may have shown them this vision to not only confirm the prophetic word in 16:28, but also as an encouragement for when the future disciples undergo persecution. They would be able to remember that the Lord showed a glorious future kingdom.

A very important point to take away is that God said to “hear him.” This means that Christ supersedes Moses and Elijah. It may sound wrong to your ears if you are focused on the Hebrew Bible, but this is the God of Moses and Elijah speaking. We must hear Jesus Christ. His message is critical.