

“Jesus Uses His Transfiguration to Deepen Peter’s Faith”

Matthew 17:1–13

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We will be reading from Matthew 17. This is God’s holy, inspired Word. Pay careful attention. Matthew 17:1–13 says *[1] And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. [2] And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. [3] And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. [4] 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.” [5] 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.” [6] When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. [7] But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” [8] And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

[9] 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.” [10] And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” [11] He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. [12] 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.” [13] Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

The grass withers, the flower fades but the Word of our Lord endures forever and by His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

I can’t imagine Holy Week being any more significant or greater even if we were to celebrate it in Jerusalem itself. I don’t think it would overshadow what God does here at Easter at Briarwood Christian Church. Then Pastor Reeder challenges us to live a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship so that it becomes the ‘norm’ for us and that as we are living our daily lives we are taking advantage of the opportunities God gives for us to share the Good News that we can find peace in Jesus Christ. We can come along side each other, encourage each other, grow together in grace as we disciple one another and bring new believers into this congregation as we help ground them in God’s Word.

You are probably wondering who I am and I have been on staff with Briarwood for about six months. I came from Colorado Springs where I served as a senior pastor at a church there in the PCA. God has a way of messing with your plans. We didn’t see that He was going to direct our paths but we are so excited that He called us here. He has knit our hearts to this congregation where I now get the opportunity to serve as pastor of the board directed ministries, but as we are about to look at God’s Word I want to start by asking you a question to get your minds thinking a little bit.

Have you ever been in a situation where something so exciting and perhaps so out of the ordinary was taking place that you just about forgot what was most important? I have a friend from Australia who came here a few years ago with his wife to do all the touristy things here in America and when they got to the Grand Canyon they were just so overwhelmed with its beauty and grandeur that they got their camera out and just started clicking away. Then a man stepped up and said ‘Hey would you like for me to take a picture of you and your wife together right at

the edge of the canyon?' Of course, they said 'yes.' He took quite a few pictures of them and after a few minutes he handed the camera back, which I think to them was a great relief because they didn't trust all these Americans, but they looked at the pictures and they were amazed. The pictures really were quite good.

They shook the man's hand, thanked him and went on their way only to find a few minutes later that strangers kept coming up to them saying 'did you get his autograph, did you get a picture with him.' My friend said to them 'I don't know much about what is going on here so you're going to have to help me out.' They said 'That was one of the most famous producers and directors in all of Hollywood. That was Steven Spielberg.' Yeah, one of those moments, right? I think my friends missed out because they were still caught up in the wonder of the moment that they missed the importance of the person standing before them.

Here in Matthew 17 I think Peter, James and John are in a very similar situation. A wonderful event is about to take place but they are at risk of missing out on the Person who was most important. Before we get into this text I would like to give some context to this passage. Just before this Jesus has been teaching His Disciples and taking them deeper into their faith and understanding of who He was and what He came to do. He asked them a series of questions and one being 'who do people say that I am?' Then He made it far more personal by saying 'who do you say that I am? Do you see Me as just a prophet, maybe on par with Elijah or Jeremiah or do you see Me as the Christ, the Messiah?' With just those few questions Jesus brought the Disciples where Peter could express so clearly saying 'You are the Christ, Son of the Most High God' and they were starting to understand. This is the backdrop to where we pick up in Matthew 17.

Matthew 17:1 says [1] *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.* So six days after this series of questions this is what happened. I think it's important to see what is not only in Scripture but also to see what is not there. Here Jesus basically tells Peter, James and John they are going to go up on the mountain but He doesn't tell them why. They have no idea what is going to happen but we do because we have the story on the backside. Jesus knows what He is about to show them and why it is important for them to see it now.

So here are Peter, James and John. Sometimes they are referred to as the inner circle of the Disciples. Next we see what happens in Matthew 17:2 which says, [2] *And he (Jesus) was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.* I like this word 'transfigured' in the Greek which is *metamorphoó* and even if you have never studied Greek you can identify with that word because of the word metamorphosis. My wife and I recently sent a few chrysalises to our grandkids so that they could go through the metamorphosis process, which is the change in the look of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly.

Something changed in Jesus' appearance. We are told that His face shone like a noon day sun and His clothes became whiter than any bleach could possibly get a piece of cloth. What are we to make of this? I had to think back to August 21, 2017 when we had that solar eclipse that was such a big deal. Everyone wanted to look at it but if you didn't have the special glasses it was not safe to look at it. I remembered getting the glasses but I also remembered wanting to peak without using them. I took pictures of the shadows that it cast on the ground. There were crescents everywhere and it was just so eerie.

Can you imagine here? For here was Jesus who up until this point looked like some ordinary person like you or me and now these Disciples are looking Him in the face as if they are staring at the noon day sun. His clothes are brilliant white. I can't help but see J. R. R. Tolkien's

character, Gandalf the Gray coming back as Gandalf the White on the mountain to set everything right for all the hobbits and the humans. But here are the Disciples amazed at what's before them and yet what is before them isn't all they're going to get to see.

Matthew 17:3 says [3] *And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.* So there is Jesus with two of the Old Testament saints and Peter, James and John all on top of the mountain and they are having a conversation. Peter, James and John just get to listen in. The Gospel of Luke tells us Jesus had pulled Moses and Elijah down to talk about His crucifixion. He was talking with them about His departure, His lifting up at Jerusalem. Luke 9:30–31 says [30] *And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, [31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* Here was the epitome of the Law (Moses) and of the Prophets (Elijah). Everything Moses wrote, did and spoke had to do with the Law and pointed to this moment, the moment when Jesus would start turning His face toward Calvary where He would lay down His life in payment for our sin.

I love Peter begin here. He is the man we can all identify with. Here Peter reveals his character. Mark tells us about Peter in Mark 9:5–6, [5] *And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."* [6] **For he (Peter) did not know what to say, for they were terrified.** Peter not knowing what to say is out of character, but spoke anyhow, now that's in his character.

Matthew records in 17:4, [4] *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."* Peter was so excited. Before we start ragging Peter too hard let's put ourselves in Peter's Jewish mindset. Why did he go there? Jesus has just displayed His glory and let's make sure we understand what that means. Jesus for two years now has been teaching, doing miracles and these men have been traveling with Him but we know that familiarity can bred contempt or at least we can start to think of things as common place.

Here was Jesus knowing that the cross was not far away and knowing it would rock the Apostles' worlds. He is preparing them for something they do not know and could not know how to process by showing them who He was. Chili con carne is chili with meat in it. I want chili with meat in it and not just the sauce. Here is God in carne – Jesus with skin and bones on but the same skin and bones for 30 years had concealed the glory that had been His with God before the beginning of time, now His glory is revealed. It's as if He pulls back the shade from heaven itself so that the glory that is inherent within Him can be seen by mere mortal man.

Peter basically responds by saying 'can we stay a little longer?' Why did he want to build tents? Again, Peter is a Jew and every year they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. There the people would go outside the walls of Jerusalem and erect these temporary shelters made of palm branches and palm leaves. They would live there for seven days to remember and commemorate what God had done when He brought them out of captivity and also to declare anew their dependence on Him. So it would make sense that Peter would want to build something. If he had, had the right materials Peter probably would have wanted to build a monument or a memorial that would stand the test of time.

Do you remember Joshua? Joshua was to take 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan River and pile them up as a memorial. He was to take 12 more and build them on the side of the banks and pile them up as a memorial. Why? It was so that when the children came and the generations after them came and they asked 'Father, what does this mean?' they could remember

the story of God's great deliverance. So it makes sense that Peter would want to build something to commemorate, to memorialize and that he would want to linger a little bit longer.

But there is a danger here. If Peter got caught up in the extraordinary moments he might miss out on how God wanted to use him in ordinary days. God uses extraordinary moments with Him. He reveals Himself to us in extraordinary ways but He does it with a purpose and a reason. He does it with a purpose of helping us or preparing us to live for Him every day. So Peter is running a risk here. God sees that as we continue on in the text.

Matthew 17:5 says [5] *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."* The Disciples knew what this meant. In Israel's history as they wandered in the wilderness we see the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

Whenever Moses would go into the tabernacle the cloud would come and consume the tabernacle showing the people not to come near because God is here meeting with Moses, as friend with friend, almost as if with a man. The cloud is what would envelop Mount Sinai as Moses would go up to receive the Law, even before he would come back down. When Moses came down he didn't realize that his face was aglow but the people saw it and they were so afraid that they wouldn't even go near Moses unless Moses called them to come.

Moses' shining face was just a reflection as if the sunlight was off of the moon that we see at night and it would diminish so he would cover his face until he would go back in. Then he would come back out and he would cover it again but Jesus's shining came from within for here was God in flesh revealing His glory. Now we have Moses, Elijah, the Shekinah glory (the glory of God), and the audible voice from heaven who says 'This is My Son, I am pleased with Him, listen to Him!'

There is more to listening to Him than what we might think. The word listen in the Greek is *hupakouo*. It almost sounds like hyper. Have you ever been around a hyperactive child? Some of us are still that. *Akouo* sounds like acoustics – how we hear. If we're going to listen to Jesus as God tells us to listen to Him we are going to hyper listen. We're going to give Him every bit of our attention with the goal of doing whatever He says. How do you think the Disciples should respond when God says 'Listen to Him'?

Matthew 17:6 says [6] *When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.* These Disciples were scared spitless. They knew the story of Moses. Moses had asked God to show him His glory. God told Moses that no sinful creature can see God's glory and withstand it for they would be destroyed. So God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock and God passed by. God let Moses see the shadow of His backside. Yet here are three weak, sinful, frail men on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the presence of God in flesh, Jesus Christ, with Moses and Elijah, with the Shekinah glory of God engulfing them and they hear a voice from heaven who is God. Would you not be terrified? But I love the next two verses.

Matthew 17:7–8 says [7] *But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."* [8] *And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.* Have no fear. The Disciples saw Him as they were used to seeing Him. They saw Him in a way that brought them comfort and peace. They realized that the very reason that they did not perish was because Jesus was there.

In our lives we have to come to grips with this reality. There is one of two ways we can react to Jesus Christ. We can either embrace the glory of Jesus Christ by faith as we recognize that He is God who has come to pay for our sins and by doing that He has made the way for us to have peace with God and we find ourselves protected from His glory, by His glory or we can

remain enemies of God. Have you ever noticed how frail we are when we are trying to stiff arm God and hold Him at bay? We can actually resist Him and we can bring the wrath of God upon ourselves, eternal destruction by refusing the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now in the text this extraordinary, mountain top experience has come to an end. Here is where we see that God takes our extraordinary moments with Him and He uses them to give us the strength that we need for the ordinary moments that we live from day to day.

Matthew 17:9 says *[9] 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."* After what they had just experienced, can you imagine Peter at that moment? I have to keep all of this quiet?! This is really an important takeaway even for us. Often those extraordinary moments in our life are simply when we are studying God's Word where we are reading a very familiar passage that we've read so many times before but suddenly you see something of God you've never quite understood before in a way that changes you forever. Those are extraordinary moments of God and He gives us those so that we'll be prepared for the ordinary moments in life.

A friend of mine taught me this years ago. He said the better part of wisdom is to be silent. It's interesting to note the silent and listen are made of the exact same letters. We need to listen! We need to take what we have learned from God and make sure what we have learned of God is really so. I can get so caught up in the emotion of the moment that as I get something from God I can go and run in 20 different directions and every one of them might be the wrong way.

Here God says 'Slow down Peter. You're not going to tell this story yet. After My resurrection and the Holy Spirit has come upon you then you will tell the story.' We are so glad about this because now we have this recorded for us in Matthew, Mark and Luke. All were able to tell the story but at first they did not. So now they are pondering trying to figure all this out – what does this mean.

Then we see in the next verses how Jesus loving explains this. Matthew 17:10–13 says *[10] And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" [11] He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. [12] 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." [13] Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*

The scribes almost had it right. They literally thought Elijah was going to come back and minister again. By the way, Peter, James and John just saw Elijah and he could have come back but could it possibly be that the way they understood this fulfilling of prophecy was just going to be before the three of them? No, for Jesus tells them that Elijah has come. There was one who came in the spirit of Elijah and cried out in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' He preached to Jews and called them to repentance and to show that repentance by being baptized.

In other words, they were to completely identify with something other than what their trust had been in. Their trust had always been in the fact of their pedigree – I'm a son of Abraham therefore I'm okay with God so it doesn't matter how I live. Then John the Baptist came saying 'repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' You don't need to be a son of Abraham in the physical sense for you need to be a son of Abraham spiritually – the same believing faith.

Jesus is helping them understand that one came in the spirit of Elijah and they did with him as they pleased. Do you remember Herod? His wife's name was Herodias, how original is

that? These two were together because of sin. John the Baptist kept wagging his pointy finger at them telling them this ought not to be and finally Herodias was fed up with what John was saying about this. She rejected the truth and off came John's head.

Jesus basically said 'They are going to do the same to Me.' The Jews are going to reject the Truth. The Jews are from every tribe and nation on this planet so people from all over this planet are going to reject the Truth because they don't want to submit to Me as King but the Jews in particular are going to reject Me and they are going to take My life which I willingly lay down. According to the text the Disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist.

So what is our life takeaway? For me, the life takeaway is all about getting something concrete that I can pray about, think through and ask the Holy Spirit to apply deep within my life. The life takeaway from this study is simply this; Jesus uses extraordinary events to deepen our relationship with Him which leads to a renewed purpose of sharing our faith with others.

As the Disciples are going down the mountain and beginning to understand as Jesus is still teaching them, do you know who is waiting for them at the bottom of the mountain? It is more people with needs. Heal me. Feed me. Touch me. Encourage me. Do ministry with me. They were going back to the mundane, daily walk called life and for almost another year this extraordinary mountain top experience would give them the strength that they would need for daily ministry and daily life.

As a pastor it always concerns me when I ask someone to tell me what God is doing in their life at the moment and they light up as they begin to tell me this story with all this enthusiasm where you would think it happened yesterday and then they say 'And that was twelve years ago.' It's easy for us to take those extraordinary moments with God and rest there as if that's all there is. That was never the purpose. Those extraordinary moments God gives you or where He does something through you that are out of the ordinary, are moments that are designed to strengthen you to live for Him today.

I am so new to this church right now that all the shine is still on the apple for me. I look around and see incredible Kingdom sized effort, activity, and ministry that is going on from right here. I can't help but put together all the facts from this study with the reality of what I see and I believe this church has been used so greatly of God from the earliest days with Dr. Frank Barker, all the way through our days with Pastor Harry Reeder and all the way through with someone else 50 years from now, because this church chooses to move beyond the extraordinary and right back to the ordinary as this brings us full circle back to L.E.A.D. – a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship.

It's our default mechanism at this church – to live for Jesus Christ every day, sharing His glory and the truth that He loves you enough that He came and paid for your sins. He will draw you to Himself and by faith you can receive Him. This also plays out in discipleship where we get to come into each other's lives and they are messy. Church would be really easy if we didn't have people but we do.

As we come into each other's lives we get to grow together in grace. I get to encourage you and you get to encourage me. We get to speak truth in love to help each other make sure we take the blinders off that keeps us from seeing what God wants us to see, from doing what He is calling us to do and we get to cheer each other on. That is what a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship looks like. That is the ordinary moment that Jesus is calling us to today. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, help us for we do need to understand how You take the extraordinary moments that You give us and we rejoice and welcome those but we don't hone in on those to see them not as an end in and of themselves but as a means to the end that we might be strong to live for you every day. Please continue to raise us up. Strengthen us as your people that we might be used of You to take the Truth of Jesus Christ into the furthest most parts of Birmingham in such a way that we are drawing others to Christ in this area and so far beyond. Let us find the strength we need for our ordinary days in your extraordinary blessing and the strength that You give and we will praise You in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

I. God Shows Us Who He Is in Extraordinary Ways (vv. 1–8)

II. God Uses the Extraordinary to Equip Us to Live for Him in Our Ordinary Days (vv. 9–13)

Life Takeaway

Jesus uses extraordinary events to deepen our relationship with Him which leads to a renewed purpose of sharing our faith with others.