

Matthew 17 • The Kingdom, The Power & The Glory

Introduction

What is the greater purpose why God provides a supernatural vision from time to time? A common feature of all such occurrences in Scripture is that it reveals something previously unknown, at least to the person experiencing it. The experience of Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration is stipulated as being a “vision” (v.9), but this event is bounded on either side by teachings and events which place it into a proper and specific context. Just as Peter’s vision of the angel sends him to Cornelius (Acts 10:3) or when Paul was urged to Macedonia (Acts 16:9), such occurrences are not some kind of supernatural “fireworks show”, but a powerful communication of God’s will working for His glory in the life of those experiencing them. In this instance, what was originally shown to just a small, restricted inner circle of the Apostles has multiple meanings not just for them personally, but for all subsequent generations thereafter.

¹Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. ²And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. ³And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

⁴Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. ⁷And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.” ⁸And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

¹⁰And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

¹¹And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; ¹²but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

[Read v.1-13]

Q: What took place six days earlier?

A: In Matthew 16:16, For the first time the Apostles confessed their belief Jesus was the Messiah, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” It was immediately followed by Jesus’ first of many warnings to come of what was going to happen to Him personally in the immediate future.

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. (Mt. 16:21)

Point: Jesus begins to teach His followers the concept of “one Messiah, two comings”, in contrast to the presupposition held by Judaism that the Messiah would fulfill every prophecy concerning Him in a single visit. We now know that He came the first time in the character of the “Suffering Servant” to atone for sin and will return in the Second Coming as the “Conquering King” to establish His Millennial Kingdom. However, without the work of the First Coming, there can be no participation on our part in the work of His Second Coming.

Q: What did Peter think was taking place? How do we know this for sure?

A: Peter thinks this is the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom. The tabernacles which Peter offers to construct is a key feature of the Hebrew Feast of Tabernacles, which not just at that time, but even to this day, is the event on the Jewish festal calendar which represents the Millennial Kingdom. Ezekiel tells us that this is something which will be continued to be celebrated by everyone in the Millennial Reign of the Messiah. (Eze. 45:25)

Q: Why might all the figures present also vividly depict the Millennial Kingdom?

A: The Apostles represent Israel, Moses represents all those who will be resurrected, and Elijah (who never died) all those who will be raptured just as he was raptured. What may be implied is all those gathered at the base of the mountain as representing all the nations.

Q: How do we know for sure that although there is much symbolism for the Second Coming, the issue of the First Coming is on prominent display with the presence of Moses and Elijah?

A: Moses predicted, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him” (Dt. 18:15), and the Prophet Malachi that Elijah’s return would accompany the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4: 5-6) so that their joint presence would be a very powerful confirmation for the Apostles. But we also know from the parallel account of

this event in Luke that it was the specific topic of conversation Moses and Elijah were engaged in with Jesus.

And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

Q: Considering the fact that Jesus is directly described in Scripture as “The Word”, what might be another related representation of all those present at this time?

A: Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the Prophets would combine to embody the Old Testament, and the Apostles the New Testament to come. Together they would depict the entire Word.

Q: How might that make God’s statement even more powerful as to its meaning?

A: God is stipulating that His entire Word is both subject to and fulfilled in Jesus.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

“Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

Q: How is this lesson probably being reinforced in Jesus’ transfiguration?

A: Moses himself stipulated, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him” (Dt. 18:15). One of the unique features of Moses is that he spoke directly with God, (Ex. 33:11) each time transfigured himself. (Ex. 34:35) Here we see Jesus likewise experiencing the same, but with Moses present and in subordination to Christ.

Point: *In Judaism, even to this day, two of the most revered figures are Moses and Elijah. One of the problems, even at times with Jews who come to faith in Jesus, is improperly elevating these two figures above Him, or at least using them to diminish Him to some degree. Elements of so-called Messianic Judaism will assert that one must first fulfill the “Law of Moses” before attaining to the New Testament writings, and things assigned to Elijah within Judaism not overtly stated in Scripture can border not just on the fantastic but lean toward something more like legend. God Himself establishes the correct hierarchy as Peter would later testify in his own writings.*

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pe. 1:16-18)

Q: How does Jesus define this experience? What actually took place?

A: “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead”. (v.9)
In other words, even if other people had been present, they would not have seen or heard what took place unless they were divinely included.

Q: Since visions in Scripture are most often employed to reveal something previously unknown to those experiencing them, what might be the purpose of this particular vision?

1. Jesus had promised that some would see Him like this; it was a literal fulfillment of that promise. (Jn. 1:51)
2. It mirrors the Old Testament requirement of the need to confirm something with at least two witnesses, which would especially be powerfully received by the Jewish Apostles seeing this fulfilled in the representatives of the Law and the Prophets, the whole Word of God as given to that point.
3. It teaches "one Messiah, two comings".
4. It reveals the true nature and authority of Christ as the Word in whom both Testaments seamlessly come together as a single whole.
5. It is a promise of the Second Coming and the ultimate fulfillment of all Scripture in Jesus as the Messiah.
6. It is a depiction of the "episunagoge"—our "gathering" together with Him (1 Th. 4:13-18), showing both the resurrected and the raptured meeting Jesus "caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" in these figures all found together on the highest point in Israel (in the sky, so to speak) which is regularly above the cloud line.

Q: Why is the question about Elijah especially important at this time? How does it provide the proper interpretation of all that is taking place?

A: Jesus specifies that it is not this appearance of Elijah which fulfills prophecy, but that it was actually carried out already by John the Baptist, something already previously stated by Christ. (Mt. 11:13-14) But because Jesus stipulates it is going to happen again, that there will be a second appearance of someone in the character of Elijah in the same manner as John, this specifically established "one Messiah, two comings" and Christ's own prediction of His Second Coming.

"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. (Mt. 11:13-14)

Point: This is an example that prophecy is not necessarily fulfilled in a single instance, but more often a pattern which repeats to teach about the final, ultimate fulfillment to come.

Application: Every prophetic fulfillment for Christ's First Coming came about according to God's will, not man's wishes; the fulfillment of God's entire Word is embodied in Christ, not in individual events. Likewise it shall be for the Second Coming.

¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, ¹⁵"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."

¹⁷And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." ¹⁸And Jesus rebuked him, and

[Read v.14-21]

Q: While Jesus was away with Peter, James and John, who remained behind waiting for Jesus to return?

A: The term "Your disciples" would indicate that it was not just the other nine Apostles, but the others who followed Him as well. It is recorded that Jesus not only sent out the twelve Apostles, but on a second occasion at least seventy disciples.

[Continued on next page.]

the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?"

²⁰And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. ²¹But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

²²And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; ²³and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.

²⁴When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?"

²⁵He said, "Yes."

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?"

²⁶When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. ²⁷However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in 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 you and Me."

Q: Did Jesus not already give them the kind of authority to do this kind of thing? Had they not already performed this very same kind of work? What was the problem?

A: Yes, they are recorded as already having performed this kind of miracle themselves, but in Jesus' absence, they seemed to have stopped living a life of prayer and faith.

Q: How do we know this to be the case?

A: This is the meaning of Jesus' statement, "You unbelieving and perverted generation" in combination with, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting".

Q: How does the illustration of the mustard seed relate to this as well?

A: It tells us that "faith" is an all or nothing situation, that you either have it or you don't. The mustard seed is the cheapest and easiest thing to obtain, so it is always within everybody's grasp. Also, it is continually in transition as it grows from a seed, to seedling, to young plant on into a mature tree, ever growing.

Application: We are expected to live in the interim while Christ is away in the very same manner as if He were with us, in faith accompanied by prayer and fasting.

[Read v.22-23]

Q: Why is this actually an extension of the problem just previously documented by Matthew?

A: They have not understood this statement by Jesus made **after** the Mt. of Transfiguration, identical to the one made **before** the Mt. of Transfiguration. Lacking faith to take Jesus at His word that the future kingdom they longed for on the Mt. of Transfiguration is only going to come about by His first going to the cross, their lack of faith causes them to be "deeply grieved".

Application: Participation in the Second Coming is impossible without first experiencing the First Coming.

[Read v.24-27]

Q: There are at least four unique aspects of this miracle setting it apart from all the other miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospel. Identify and discuss each:

1. **This is the only time Christ performed a miracle to meet His own needs.** The temple tax was required of every Jewish male (Ex. 30:11-16), yet Jesus was so poor that He did not have this amount on hand. (Philip. 2:5-8)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philip. 2:5-8)

2. **This is the most complicated miracle.** Matthew's theme focused on Christ's kingship. This is a very complicated miracle in that the coin had to be lost at sea, swallowed by a fish, and then hooked just by Peter—it shows all things to be under His subjection both spiritually and physically, in both nature at large and with man specifically.

YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. (Heb. 2:8)

3. **This is the only miracle which uses money.** Although the tax was a reminder of the Jews’ redemption, it was not the silver which redeemed them but the blood of the Passover lamb. Peter would come to understand this lesson very well.

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:17–19)

4. **This miracle was performed for just Peter.**

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6–7)

Application: *All the needs of this life will be properly addressed in the pursuit of a life of faith in Christ.*

Overall Application

The Mount of Transfiguration is a glimpse of our future assurance, while in the mean time we faithfully await the fulfillment of that vision by a life of faith accompanied by prayer and fasting in the meantime. However, we must avoid being so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.