

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

April 13, 2025

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 17:1-13**, Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. [2] And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. [3] And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. [4] Peter 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." [5] While 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!" [6] When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. [7] And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." [8] And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. [9] As 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." [10] And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [11] And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; [12] but 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." [13] Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

B. Pray

II. The Transfiguration

A. [1] Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

1. Jesus had twelve disciples, yet He only took three with Him when He went up on the mountain.
 - a. He did the same when He went to Jairus' house to heal his daughter – who, by the time Jesus got there, needed raising from the dead because she had died.
 - b. On the night He was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He told the rest of the disciples to "sit here until I have prayed," and then took Peter, James, and John to the place where He earnestly prayed for a way other than the cross.

2. Why did Jesus give these three disciples this kind of preferential treatment? And what does that mean for us? The four Gospels do not tell us why, but if we look at other statements and stories in the Bible, we can figure it out.
 - a. For example, we read in **Matthew 25:14-15**, “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. [15] To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, **each according to his own ability**; and he went on his journey.”
 - b. The point here is that God gives us responsibilities and positions according to our abilities – that is, what we are able to handle, or carry out given the abilities we have.
3. When we add a portion like **Romans 12:6-8** to **Matthew 25**, we see that some of the responsibilities God entrusts us with are spiritual gifts. **Romans 12:6-8**, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; [7] if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; [8] or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”
4. Regardless of what God entrusts us with, He expects us to carry out what He has given in a way that is equal to, or at least comes close to being equal to our ability to do so.
 - a. Jesus affirms this in **Luke 12:48b**, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”
 - b. Putting this principle together with Jesus’ words in **Matthew 25**, we can conclude that (1) those who are given much, are given much because God deems them able to handle much, which infers that (2) those who are given less are given less because that is what they are able to handle.
5. In applying this to the disciples, we can conclude that Peter, James, and John had the ability to handle these unique or special times – whereas the other disciples did not. In other words, Jesus was not showing favoritism or cheating the other nine disciples, He was acting according to each one’s ability, and doing so for their good, God’s good, and the good of the coming church.
6. It is the same today. God gives more responsibility to some and less to others – but always on the basis of each one’s ability to handle that responsibility. What matters is doing what we have been given to do.

- a. To look with envy on someone God has given more than you is foolish. To look down on someone who God has given less than you is arrogant. And to think you deserve more than God has given is conceit.
 - b. Like the folks in the parable of the talents, it is not the amount, or the position, or the task, but using what God has given according to our abilities. When each of us does according to our ability what God has given us to do, we fulfill God's expectations of us and accomplish what He wants accomplished for His kingdom.
 - 7. Two final thoughts
 - a. Beware of thinking more highly of your ability than you ought, or seeking positions and responsibilities for some kind of personal gain. Both you and the church will pay a price for such foolishness.
 - b. But also beware of hiding your ability, or thinking less of it than you ought, for even if you are acting out of humility, it will result in a loss of what God wants to do through you for His good, the church's good, and your good.
- B. [2] And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.
- 1. In this situation, the word transfigured means that Jesus' outward appearance was changed to something exalted and glorious, that is, to a form more according to who He really was.
 - 2. Imagine being there and unexpectedly seeing this sight just a few feet from where you are standing. How might this effect you?
 - 3. In this life, we may never see Jesus in this way, but the more fully we live according to God's will and word, the more we experience Him in this up close and personal way.
- C. [3] And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him (*mostly about what He would face in Jerusalem, **Luke 9:30-31***).
- 1. It is my opinion that God sent Moses and Elijah to Jesus because they knew what was required to maintain unwavering faith in the face of being misunderstood, falsely accused, and opposed and mistreated by the religious leaders, the national leaders, and the common people who God had sent them to serve.
 - 2. There is comfort and encouragement in weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice, in sitting silently with someone who is suffering, and in standing with someone who is standing alone for the cause of God, truth, justice, and love. May we be such

comforters and encouragers to one another. And remember, if Jesus had need of such comfort and encouragement, then those around us who need it, need it even more.

D. [4] Peter 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.”

1. In this moment, Peter was free to say anything he wanted, and it appears he wanted to do something good. Yet the way he said it makes it sound as if Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are fortunate or lucky that the three disciples are there to do something good for them.
 - a. The point is, Peter’s words, which are a reflection of what is in his heart, got the “who is important here” wrong.
 - b. Doing something good doesn’t make us more important than those for whom we are doing it.
 - c. In fact, even if we are more important, the teachings of Jesus, coupled with humility, lead us to see ourselves as servants.
2. For example, Jesus said, (1) “The one who is the greatest among you must become (*see themselves and humbly act*) like the youngest, and the leader (*must humbly act*) like the servant.” And, (2) “When you do all the things which [God] commands, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” And, (3) “I am among you as the one who serves.” And to this Paul adds, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”
3. When we place our importance above God and what He is doing, or when we think God needs us because without us what needs doing won’t get done, or when we force our will, wants, and ways on the adults around us, we are acting from a mindset of pride that believes God and those around us are fortunate or lucky to have us.
4. Is there an area where you make yourself or want to be seen as the important one? Are there times when you feel as if those around you are lucky to have you in their lives? May we think and live with a humility that makes God and others the important ones.

E. [5] While 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!” [6] When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

1. God said three things: Jesus is My beloved Son, I am well-pleased with Him, and Listen to Him! We will focus on the “listen to Him” part.

- a. I know that Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude, and whoever wrote Hebrews were God's servants and were led by the Holy Spirit in writing what they wrote.
 - b. Yet Jesus was Immanuel – God with us, and He only spoke what God told Him to speak, and God says here in **vs 5** that we are to listen to Him. Surely this means giving His speaking and His teaching at least equal weight to everything else that is written in the Bible – and this includes the Epistles.
 2. In light of the three disciples seeing a form of God's presence and hearing His voice, I want to read Peter's words in **2 Peter 1:16-19**, "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. [17] For when He received honor and glory from God the Father (*on the mountain*), such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— [18] and **we ourselves heard** this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. [19] So we have the prophetic word (*OT prophecies*) made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."
- F. [7] And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid" (*this demonstrates Jesus' tender compassion*). [8] And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. [9] As 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."
1. **Mark 9:10** says, "They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant." In other words, they did not understand how what Jesus said would happen fit into their ideas of what they expected to happen.
- G. [10] And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [11] And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; [12] but 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." [13] Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.
1. Jesus said Elijah **is** coming, and Elijah **already** came. Which is it? I believe both are true based on my understanding of other scriptures.

- a. **Malachi 4:4-6**, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD (*most probably the return of Christ and the final judgment*). [6] He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”
- b. **Luke 1:17** (*Angel’s words to Zacharias about John the Baptist*), “It is he who will go as a forerunner before [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” *John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah in his unwavering faith, his boldness, and in preparing the way for Jesus. See also Matthew 11:13-14.*

III. Conclusion

- A. We may never be as humble as Moses, as powerful in prayer as Elijah, as unwavering in our faith and courage as were Moses and Elijah in the face of opposition, and as faithful to the will of God as Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, but we can hold them before ourselves as examples of what we want to be, and then do what we can to head in that direction.
- B. God may not entrust us with as much as He has given to others, but we can live up to our ability by doing what we are able with what God has given.
- C. In this life, we will never see Jesus transfigured, and we may never see the cloud of God’s presence or hear God’s voice out of a cloud, but we can persevere in pursuing God and living according to God’s word so that as we continue to grow and mature we experience God and His presence in increasingly up close and personal ways.
- D. It is not what we have been given, or where we are along the path of godliness, or how many people we are helping, or how much of the world we are changing, but what we are doing with what we have been given to serve God and further His purposes in us and in our world.