

The Path To The Cross, Part 2
Matthew 17:1-13, 22-23
March 22, 2020
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Good morning, CenterPoint Church! Last week's sermon was broadcast from the church sanctuary, this one is from a quiet corner of my house. I hope you all are well. My family and I spent some time after dinner the other night talking about God's will and His providence, and how it relates to this virus and the quarantine and so many people getting sick, and our fears.. I read the Heidelberg Catechism #28, let me read that now:

Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence? A. We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love; for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.

In the midst of difficult, uncertain times, it is a great reminder that God has ordained everything in our lives, that He is in complete control, and that nothing can separate us from His love. Read Romans chapter 8 for more encouragement and reassurance.

Read Matthew 17:1-13, 22-23.

Intro: Kings Who Go Incognito

The great writer and humor columnist, Dave Barry, tells the story of when he went to a baseball game with a couple of other writers. Just before the game started, the actor David Birney sat two rows in front of them. If you've never heard of him, that's OK, that just probably means you're under 50 years old. "Anyways, the woman sitting behind him wanted to get his autograph but didn't have a pen. So she turned around, all excited, and asked if anybody had a pen. She borrowed one, used it to get David Birney's autograph, then handed the pen back to: Stephen King."¹ Probably the most famous and recognizable horror fiction writer of all time; but with a baseball cap on, almost unrecognizable.

In *The Lord of the Rings* books, we first meet a ranger named Strider in a pub with his hood covering his face, smoking a pipe. He joins the fellowship of the ring to help keep Frodo safe on his journey to destroy the ring of power. His name is Aragorn, and only later do we find out that he is actually the heir of Isildur, the rightful king of Gondor.

Sometimes Kings have to go incognito, in disguise, and not be recognized for who they are, whether it's Middle Earth kings or Stephen Kings. I guess I could have thrown princes in there as well and talked about Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, where Prince Edward in London changes places with a common boy that he meets that looks just like him; and spends time outside the castle in disguise. As we come to the Gospels, we find the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings has been spending most of His life incognito among His people, who for the most part don't recognize who He truly is. But in today's passage, He drops the disguise and is shown for who He truly is. The theme of the passage is Jesus' glory, and so my three points today are: Glory Revealed, Glory Explained, and Glory That Comes After Suffering.

¹ Dave Barry, *I'll Mature When I'm Dead* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2010), p. 66

The first 3 verses describe one of the great high points of the Gospel narratives, the Transfiguration.

I. Glory Revealed (vv. 1-3)

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.

When Jesus became a human being and lived for 30 some years as a man, His glory was veiled. Philippians 2:7 talks about Jesus emptying Himself, making Himself nothing and taking the form of a servant, a human being. But we know that Jesus existed from before the foundation of the world; one part of the Trinity who was and is and will always be the eternal God in all splendor and majesty. But for His time on earth, Jesus blended in to be like us; people did not recognize Him as God until He performed a miracle, or God opened their eyes to His true identity. This account of the Transfiguration sees the veil being lifted and Jesus shines forth like He normally would have. Perhaps His glory is still a little veiled, since Peter, James, and John don't instantly die when they look at Him.

And Jesus is joined by two men who have been dead for hundreds of years. Moses, the great Law-giver, represents the law and Elijah represents the Prophets. So the impact of their communing with Jesus and then having Him stand alone after they leave is that Jesus is the continuing revelation, the culmination, and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

->Side note: If all goes according to plan, CenterPoint Church, we will be studying both the lives of Moses and Elijah this year. My preaching plan is to take us to Exodus right after Easter to the end of the summer, and then the life of Elijah this Fall. So if you don't know much about Moses or Elijah, just come on back and we'll dive deep together.

Do you remember a story of Moses in Exodus chapter 33? Moses asks God to show him His glory. God says, OK but you'll die if you see My face, so I'll just pass by and you'll see my back after I've passed. And after Moses saw God and he came down from the mountain to the Israelites, do you remember what happened? His face shone, he radiated glory from being in communion with God. The people were afraid to come near him, he had to hide his face behind a veil. And there's a story about Elijah having God whisper to him while he is in hiding on a mountain. So both men who join Jesus have already had an amazing encounter with God on a mountain at a critical point in time of their lives. I don't know if that was the qualification for being included in this encounter with Jesus, or if they were just two of the great men that Jesus wanted to spend some time with. These are three old friends reunited; Jesus had already spent hundreds of years with each of them in heaven.

I don't know if God sent these two because Jesus needed encouragement; that they were ministering to Him like the angels had when He was fasting in the wilderness. But can you imagine what their conversation must have been like? Luke records that they were talking about Jesus' coming death. Moses must have remarked that the Exodus he took the Israelite people on would pale in comparison to the Exodus when Jesus would lead His people to freedom through the cross.

How fascinating that Jesus took His closest three men with Him to witness this. The next ten verses see

II. Glory Explained to the Disciples (vv. 4-13)

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.

This encounter certainly made an impression on these three disciples. John alluded to it at the beginning of his gospel, John 1:14: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* And Peter wrote about it in his second epistle, 1:16a-18: *“...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, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”* I imagine that if you or I had been there that day, it’s something we would never have forgotten. Jesus in His full radiance, a glimpse of glory, God the Father speaking to us from heaven, a day that maybe you have to ask yourself, “Did I really see that? That was amazing!”

Peter is so excited, he doesn’t know exactly what’s going on here, so he just does the most Peter thing he can think to do: he starts talking and trying to impose his ideas on the situation, something about camping out and making this great time last. And God the Father just cuts him off, and says the exact same words that He spoke at Jesus’ baptism, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”* except that He adds, *“listen to Him.”* I think that can be understood in the short-term as: “Stop talking, Peter, because you don’t know what you’re saying. Jesus will explain everything.” But also, long-term, “Everyone should listen to Jesus, He has the words of eternal life and is teaching you the ways of the kingdom.”

Of course, the voice of God doesn’t calm the three disciples down and give them warm fuzzies; the text says they fell on their faces and were terrified. That’s an interesting detail, isn’t it? They were already experiencing some crazy things – Jesus shining forth in splendor, two long-dead men hanging out talking with Him, but it takes God’s voice to terrify them. Jesus calms them down, touching them and telling them not to fear. And they all look up and it’s over, Moses and Elijah are gone.

They head back down, Jesus says, “don’t talk about this until after I’m resurrected.” Now I would have asked a ton of questions there, but the disciples ask about one of the men they saw: Elijah. Why does everyone say that Elijah must come? At the very end of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6, had talked about Elijah returning before the Messiah came: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”* I didn’t know this, but I read that Jewish people still keep an empty chair when they celebrate the Passover in case Elijah comes, a practice that stretches back before Jesus’ day.² They take very seriously this idea that Elijah is coming back.

² R.C. Sproul, *Matthew* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), p. 510.

So is this moment on the mountain that time referred to? No, Jesus says, “*Elijah has already come.*” as we pass from the Old to the New Testament, that is one of the first fulfilled prophecies! Elijah came in the person of John the Baptist, but people didn’t realize that’s what happened. We’re so used to saying that Jesus is the 2nd Adam, or the new Moses, or the greater David, that we forget that other people can fulfill those kinds of roles. John the Baptist was the new Elijah, the prophet in the wilderness, the one who spoke truth to power, the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy. Jesus had already said this actually in Matthew 11:14 – “*For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.*” Jesus says that the new Elijah’s treatment was awful (remember John’s beheading by Herod) and that His own end will also involve suffering.

It’s very possible that the disciples asked about Elijah because they thought that maybe Jesus’ life would end in the same way Elijah’s did: taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). I had never thought about that before I read it in a commentary,³ that’s an interesting thought. The disciples were perhaps wondering why Jesus is talking about rising from the dead when surely He wouldn’t be dying, right? He’ll get an escort to heaven, just like Elijah. But if they continued to think that, Jesus keeps talking about His upcoming death. Skip down to verses 22 and 23.

III. Glory Comes After Suffering (vv. 22-23)

²²As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about 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 greatly distressed.

This is the 2nd of 3 times when Jesus explains to the disciples that He is going to the cross to die. Jesus adds the element that He will be “delivered” into the hands of men. Some translations use the word “betrayed” into the hands of men. And Matthew says that they were greatly distressed, or sorrowful.

Thomas Long talks about some of the parallels, that are actually contrasts between the Transfiguration and Jesus’ Crucifixion:⁴

- 1) In the Transfiguration, Jesus clothes shine vs. before the Crucifixion, his clothes are gambled away
- 2) Here, Jesus is surrounded by two pillars of faith; on the cross, He is surrounded by criminals
- 3) Here, God calls Him “My Son” as high praise; at Calvary, the crowd calls Him “God’s son” as a taunt

Perhaps we are to read the two accounts in light of each other, seeing the glory of Jesus against the backdrop of His suffering. Jesus experiences glory on the mountain, but then He will have great suffering alone on the cross. But, of course, that’s not the end of the story: He’s said twice just in these verses that He will be raised back to life. His resurrection and then ascension into heaven brings Him to glory again. And always remember that one day we will behold Christ’s glory and it will light up the heavens for all eternity: Revelation 21:23 tells us that, “*And the city (the New Jerusalem) has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*”

Conclusion:

I want to go back to this idea of being transfigured. Jesus was transfigured, or transformed, or metamorphosized. It was a change of form, He was transformed in substance. What happened to Jesus was not just a change of appearance, as though the disciples just saw something different when they

³ R.V.G. Tasker, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 164.

⁴ Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster, 1997), p. 194.

looked at Him. But He was shown to be who He actually is - His heavenly glory shone forth; it stopped being veiled for a short time.

The Greek word translated “transfigured” in verse 2, *metemophōthē*, is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 3:18,⁵ and this time it’s talking about us, about believers: “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*”

And so the parallel to us is that we don’t just get a different image, we are changed in form. We are transformed, not to our original state, as if we were gods before we came to earth. Certainly not. But we are given a new form, actually transformed into the image of Jesus! When does that transformation start? It starts when the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts and gives us a new heart and a new identity; we pass from the old creation and become new creations in Christ. A chapter later in 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “*Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*” This is part of the “already, but not yet” dynamic of the Christian life: we are being transformed, but it’s not until we pass into glory that we will feel the fullness of our transformation, as 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 says, “*For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*” We will experience our full transfiguration, and have our resurrection bodies for all of eternity.

I want to go back to two points:

We cannot underestimate the impact of the idea that God the Father was “well-pleased” with His Son. We teach that the three persons of the Trinity are equal in power and glory, and we know that they are 3 persons but just 1 God, an amazing mystery. But Jesus has submitted Himself to the plan of salvation, and so throughout the Gospels He speaks of doing His Father’s will, of accomplishing what the Father sent Him to do. And God says at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (at His baptism) that He is well-pleased with His Son, and He says it again here. And He will continue to be well-pleased with His Son, who submits to being tortured, unjustly convicted and condemned, and then put to death on a cross. And God is so pleased by His Son that He raises Him to life after He was put in the grave. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus offers salvation and forgiveness of sins to all who will call Him Lord.

So Listen to Him. Listen to Jesus no matter what you’re facing.

Do you wonder if living a life of integrity is really worth it? Listen to Him. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” (Matthew 5:8)

Unsure of your role in society? Listen to Him: “*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.*” (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Are you afraid of being persecuted for your beliefs? Listen to Him: “*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:11-12a)

Are you having a hard time forgiving those who hurt you? Listen to Him: “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:44-45a)

Do you find yourself accumulating and hoarding things? Listen to Him: “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:19-20a)

⁵ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), p. 224.

Are you anxious, scared of what might happen to you in the future? Listen to Him: *“But even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not.”* (Matthew 10:30-31a)

Do you fear death? Do you wonder if you will be punished or rewarded in the afterlife? Listen to Him: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me... I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”* (John 14:6, 11:25)

Listen to Jesus and know the Truth. Let's pray.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

“For what we proclaim is not ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”