

## Matthew 17B

- When we last joined the disciples and Jesus, they were on a high mountain somewhere in northern Judea witnessing the Lord in His glory

**Matt. 17:1** Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

**Matt. 17:2** And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

**Matt. 17:3** And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

**Matt. 17:4** 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.”

**Matt. 17:5** 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!”

**Matt. 17:6** When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

**Matt. 17:7** And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.”

**Matt. 17:8** And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

**Matt. 17:9** 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.”

- A week earlier Jesus had promised that some of His disciples would not die without having seen the glory of His reign
  - So Peter, James and John were given a special opportunity to see Jesus in glory as He will appear in the Kingdom
  - Jesus was transfigured from His lowly earthly form into a totally different appearance, a glorified Heavenly form
  - This is the form He will possess in the Kingdom to come
  - And to see the King in His glory is to see the glory of the Kingdom, at least as much as one can before it comes to earth
- Their opportunity came as a result of a terse exchange a week early between Jesus and Peter

- Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to die, and Jesus responded by rebuking Peter for his misplaced priorities
- Peter had been trying to hold on to the world he knew while Jesus was speaking of the world to come
- Jesus' death was necessary to bring many sons to glory in the Kingdom, but Peter couldn't see past this world
- So the only way the disciples were going to gain an eternal point of view was if they got a glimpse of what was coming
- This may be the single greatest challenge facing every Christian as we seek to follow Jesus
  - Trying to live with an eternal perspective, one that appreciates that this world is passing away but the next one is the one that matters
    - In effect, it's trying to live in the next world and according to its values and priorities even while we still exist in this fallen world
    - But the enemy and our flesh and the world conspire to direct our attention to here and now
    - And if we're not focused in our walk with Christ, those conspirators will weaken our walk with Jesus
  - They cause us to focus on making this life into our "heaven"
    - We will spend our time on earth trying to make the most of this life, trying to gain the most, to experience the most
    - The world tells us we need the right house, the right job, the right spouse, the healthiest body, the best retirement fund
    - Before we know it, we're living as if this world is the only world that matters and the only one that we will ever know
  - That was the instinct driving Peter in that earlier moment...he was reacting in his flesh to oppose Jesus' plan to die on a cross
    - He wasn't expressing an eternal perspective that places this world above the next
    - Peter was making a poor choice to favor preserving earthly life over serving eternal goals

- And when we operate with that upside down perspective, we make short-sighted choices
- As Jesus said, if your goal is saving your life (here), you put at risk the life you will receive in the Kingdom
- If Peter had an eternal perspective, he would have embraced God's plan for Jesus' death on the cross knowing it would produce so much good
  - Certainly, Peter wouldn't have been any happier seeing Jesus suffer and die...emotions are what they are
  - But intellectually, Peter could accept and support the plan if he saw it the way God saw it...if he had eyes for eternity
- That's why we must place so much emphasis on studying our Bible
  - Understanding the Bible is a process of gaining the mind of Christ, so as we study, our eternal perspective grows as well
    - The more our minds are saturated with the truth of God's word, the more we will come to see the world as Jesus does
    - And the more we will anticipate the Kingdom, and in that anticipation we will adopt its priorities and values now
  - So studying is key to seeing the Kingdom as a more present reality than the world around us
    - As I like to say, the more "real" the future Kingdom becomes for you, the less "real" this world will seem
    - And that's a good thing, because the more real the Kingdom becomes for you, the more your life decisions will be made based on Kingdom priorities rather than on the priorities of this world
  - That's why Jesus showed these men this vision...He was moving their perspective to Kingdom concerns
    - He gave them a taste of the Kingdom, so that that future world would be more real for them
    - And then they would carry that new perspective with them into the world and into their Kingdom work
    - As we saw last week, Peter misunderstood the significance of the moment at the time, but eventually he appreciated its purpose

- In fact, just listen to Peter's eternal perspective as he writes to the church

[1Pet. 1:13](#) Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[1Pet. 1:14](#) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,

[1Pet. 1:15](#) but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;

[1Pet. 1:16](#) because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

[1Pet. 1:17](#) 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;

- That's a man who understood that this world was passing
- So he teaches the rest of us to fix our hope on the coming of Jesus and to conduct ourselves in fear during our time here
- So after the voice of God was heard, the vision immediately ceased and the disciples found themselves again with just Jesus in His normal appearance
  - And then they began to descend the mountain, but as they walked, Jesus tells the men they are not allowed to share what they saw
    - They could only speak of it *after* Jesus had been raised from the dead
    - Matthew doesn't give us any more than that, but in Luke we learn that these men did as they were told
    - They shared nothing of what they saw that day until after Jesus resurrected
  - If this vision was so important for preparing these men for future ministry, why did Jesus only share it with three of His disciples?
    - Well, we know these men did eventually share it, because we have it written for our benefit here in Scripture
    - And Jesus didn't say *never* share it, He just told them not to share it *before* He resurrected
  - And this makes perfect sense given the struggle all the disciples were having in understanding that Jesus was going to die

- Jesus was planting seeds for the future
- He knew that sharing the story with the others now wouldn't have benefitted them
- The disciples who didn't witness it firsthand wouldn't have understood nor likely even received it
- But after Jesus died and resurrected, those same disciples would both need and welcome an explanation for what was happening
  - But Jesus wouldn't be around to explain it Himself, and the Spirit of God wasn't coming for another 50 days following Jesus' death
  - But in that moment, these three men would have a vision to reassure the disciples that all was well
  - So Jesus selected Peter, James and John to lead the church and explain the Kingdom plan to the rest of the disciples in the early days
- On the other hand, Jesus *didn't* select Peter, James and John because they were better than the rest of the disciples
  - They were just fisherman, and the Gospels say nothing about their qualifications
    - The only qualification they had to serve Jesus was that Jesus selected them
    - And that's a fact we can all take heart in...no one serves Jesus because we are qualified
    - We serve Jesus because He qualifies us
  - Jesus takes unqualified men and women, giving us a new heart by faith, and then He equips us to serve Him in that new heart
    - And though He calls us when we are unqualified, He won't leave us untrained or unprepared
    - He bestows upon us spiritual gifts, builds our knowledge by His word, corrects our sinful behaviors, and rewards our obedience
  - And there were some Jesus calls to even greater service and to these He grants an even greater investment of His grace

- Jesus pulled aside twelve men, His apostles, and gave these men instruction and experiences the crowds never received
- He empowered them to conduct ministry in ways that the others never would
- And He also granted these three men even greater privilege to see Jesus in His glory
- Jesus poured into these three the most because they were given the most responsibility to serve Him in the early Church
  - Peter was the chief Apostle, the man with the keys to the Kingdom, the one who opened the Church for all peoples
  - James was the leader of the first church in Jerusalem, and one of the earliest martyrs
  - And John was the last Apostle, the longest living who carried the leadership of the church to the end of the first century
  - So to whom much is given, much is expected
- They began walking down the mountain to rejoin the rest of the disciples, and as they reflect on what they've experienced, a question comes to mind

**Matt. 17:10** And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

**Matt. 17:11** And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things;

**Matt. 17:12** 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."

**Matt. 17:13** Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

- The two men who appeared besides Jesus in the vision were Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets
  - Elijah is unique among prophets in that his life pictures Jesus' life in several ways
    - He raises a widow's son in Nain from the dead just as Jesus does
    - Elijah's life on earth ends without a body undergoing decay in the grave just as Jesus' body didn't decay

- And Elijah is the only prophet (besides Jesus) who is foretold to return to the earth one day
  - Specifically, in Malachi 4 we're told this:

**Mal. 4:1** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

**Mal. 4:2** “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

**Mal. 4:3** “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.

**Mal. 4:4** “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

**Mal. 4:5** “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

**Mal. 4:6** “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.”

- In what are the final words of the Old Testament, Malachi prepares Israel for what will come next in God's plan
  - First, he told Israel that a day of judgment is coming for the earth and all evil doers
  - And at that time, Malachi says those who are God-fearing (believing) will enter the dawning of a new age
  - It will be an age of righteousness where all are healed and restored to perfect health and joy
  - Obviously, this is a reference to the coming Kingdom and it's the future for all believers in Israel and everywhere
- But in the meantime, the Lord reminds Israel of their obligations to Him while they await for the revealing of the Messiah
  - They must continue to observe the Law of Moses, because the law was their custodian guarding Israel until the Messiah's arrival
  - And secondly, the people of Israel were told to watch for the return of the prophet Elijah in those last days

- This is the promise that came to the disciples' minds when they saw the vision of Elijah
- So they ask Jesus why the prophet Elijah must return to Israel before the fulfillment of the age and the arrival of the Kingdom
  - Jesus responds, but His response only hints at the full explanation
    - He says Elijah is coming to restore all things, but I doubt the disciples understood the restoration Jesus was speaking about
    - Because these men could not have anticipated just how far Israel would fall in the future
  - Jesus was speaking about restoring Israel to observing the Law of Moses
    - Malachi told Israel to continue keeping the Law of Moses, yet that's exactly what Israel fails to do
    - In the centuries after the temple was destroyed in AD 70, the people scattered and Jewish observance of the Law waned
  - Keeping the Law fully became impossible without a temple, but that change also prompted a steady shift away from orthodoxy in general
    - Today, a typical Jew only observes traditional holidays or perhaps attends synagogue occasionally
    - Many live entirely secular lives with no thought given to the Law
    - That's a far cry from the religious life in Jesus' day, when Jewish life was centered around the temple and the Law
  - The apostasy of Israel in the last days poses a threat to the Lord's plan for His people
    - Observing the Law will be crucial to Israel receiving their Messiah in the last days
    - Because the Law isn't just for the purpose of guarding Israel from corruption or giving God's people a common identity
    - It also taught them important principles about sin and holiness, about sacrifice and atonement, about judgment and forgiveness
    - And they need to understand these principles before they will anticipate and receive their Messiah when He comes for them

- But what if Israel isn't looking for a Messiah? What if they are so far from the Lord that when He arrives, His arrival is met with a shrug of indifference?
  - That's why the Lord prepares the hearts of His people to receive Jesus
    - In both His first coming and His Second Coming, the Lord will bring Israel a forerunner to announce the Messiah's arrival
    - Jesus confirms this plan when he compares Elijah's role to that of John the Baptist
  - In v.12 Jesus says "I say to you that Elijah already came..." and at first, it sounds like Jesus is saying that Malachi 4 has already been fulfilled
    - But in v.13 Matthew quickly clarifies that Jesus was actually speaking of John the Baptist, not the literal Elijah
    - Moreover, we know John the Baptist couldn't be the literal Elijah since John himself denied it in the Gospel of John 1:21
  - Instead, Jesus was saying that John was a type or example of "Elijah" who has already come serving a similar purpose
    - John the Baptist was the man who prepared Israel to receive the Messiah in His first coming
    - John the Baptist called the nation to a heart of repentance knowing their Messiah was soon to appear
    - And when Jesus was revealed, John the Baptist announced him to those who were ready to receive Him
  - But as Jesus points out, the effect of Elijah's ministry was not national conversion and acceptance of Jesus
    - Far from it, they rejected Elijah's testimony and abused him, and ultimately, they killed him
    - And if they kill the one who announced the Messiah, you can be sure they will do the same to Jesus
    - John the Baptist's circumstances reflected the heart of the people and so it predicted the result for Jesus
  - So John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus' first coming, and in that way he was a type or example of Elijah

- But the real Elijah is still yet to return and when he does, he will be the forerunner for the Lord's Second Coming
- So just as Jesus' first coming is a lesser event compared to Jesus' Second Coming, so is John's ministry a lesser to Elijah's great ministry
- But when Elijah comes to Israel, the effect of his appearing will be very different than the effect of John's ministry
  - Malachi 4:6 says that Elijah's return to the people of God will result in the hearts of the fathers being restored
    - The literal Hebrew reads he will restore the hearts of fathers "to sons"
    - In other words, the fathers of Israel (the leaders in that day) will find their hearts become like sons' hearts with child-like faith
  - And these soft hearts will turn back to the fathers, which is a reference to the patriarchs of Israel in times past
    - As a result of Elijah's appearing, those future Jewish leaders turn their attention to the fathers like Moses and David and others who followed the Law faithfully
    - And as a result, they will be restored to orthodoxy, returning to following the traditions of the fathers and of the Law
  - So as a result of Elijah's ministry, the Jewish people of the last days will return in large number to keeping the Law of Moses as Malachi said
    - That restoration will prompt them to return to worship and sacrifice in a temple in Jerusalem
    - And ultimately, it will prepare Israel for the Messiah's return at the end of this age
- That's what Jesus was describing when he answered the disciples, but of course the disciples only understood that Jesus was speaking of John
  - They didn't understand the big picture, that Jesus would depart soon and that Israel would be scattered again
    - And they didn't understand how long it would be before Jesus' return

- Nor could they appreciate how far Israel would drift away from the Law and their traditions
- So naturally, they didn't understand the necessity for a prophet to return to Israel to re-establish orthodoxy in the nation
- And do you notice how Jesus moved past this question so quickly to change the subject?
  - His answer was barely an answer, and only because we have the rest of Scripture can we understand it ourselves
  - But Jesus wanted to emphasize more immediate concerns for them, that they would understand His future death
  - It was more important for them to understand what would happen in their days than what would happen in distant times to come
- And that's the lesson I want to leave us with too...that there are things to come described in the Bible which we can and should understand
  - But like these disciples, there are others truths – more present concerns – that we should be focused on in our walk with Jesus
  - Our concerns center on the return of Christ for the Church, not on the Second Coming of Christ
  - And on being ready for that moment today by living a life that pleases Jesus
- So the chief thing we need to consider even as we learn about the events of the end is how will Jesus find us serving Him when He comes

**Luke 18:7** now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

**Luke 18:8** "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

- Jesus said in Luke that when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?
  - In other words, Jesus asks what will be the report of our faithfulness to Him?

- You see, Jesus is saying the Lord will remain faithful to us in His promises
- And one of His promises is that He will return, and when He returns for His Church, He comes to reward us for our faithfulness

[Mark 13:33](#) "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.

[Mark 13:34](#) "It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.

[Mark 13:35](#) "Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning –

[Mark 13:36](#) in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.

[Mark 13:37](#) "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

- This is the ever-present expectation for every believer, that Jesus may return for us at any time and when He does, will he find faith?
  - Or will He find us sleeping, lulled into a pursuit of this world, oblivious to the reality of the next
  - We study these things so that we may be prepared for that moment, so don't miss the lesson
- Seek to make whatever changes in your life are necessary to ensure you are living for the world to come and not for the one today
  - Be ready for Jesus, because He's coming to you soon
  - And we pray, come quickly Lord Jesus!