

Matthew 16.28-17.13 | Going to the Mountain with Jesus

## Introduction | Coming in His Kingdom

**Jesus is our motivation, means, and model for living and dying for God.** As we saw last week, professing that truth is easier than walking in it. This is no more evident than the first disciples Jesus called. 12 disciples walked with Jesus for three years. Their strange questions, rash words, and foolish decisions make it clear that they were redeemed works in progress. They didn't understand (or even listen) to every word Jesus said, they didn't remember every promise He made, and they didn't obey every command he gave. In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus admonishes his best disciples as men "of little faith" and accuses one of his best friends as acting like Satan. But despite all the confusing words and the hard words from Jesus—they keep their eyes on Jesus. Eyes set on Jesus is what changes foolish men to faithful martyrs. As Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 3:18** *18 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.*

As we follow Jesus, we will encounter difficult things, costly things. Jesus words will challenge our intellect, offend our emotions, even conflict with our experience. There will be times when our faith fails, times when we are captivated by sin, or times when we declare rash things. **All disciples experience this; it does not surprise Jesus and He is committed to completing the work he began in us.** As we follow Jesus, we will be shaped not only by hardship, but also by 'moments of grace'. These are those times when God's grace is tangible, when his realness is palpable, or when His presence is overwhelming. These moments become our monuments to God's glory; the pillars that help us grow when we are most desperate or doubt-filled; when our world comes crashing down around us—they help us remember who Jesus is and what is true.

In chapter 17, three of the disciples, Peter, James, and John experience such a moment. After Jesus blessed Peter for rightly identifying him as the King, Jesus declares that His kingdom will be established through His execution. The disciples, as represented by Peter, reject the idea of a suffering King. Jesus warns them that death awaits all who follow Him, but ends by promising a preview of coming attractions: *"[T]here are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."* **Why does Jesus say this?** Because, having declared what He is going to do, Jesus wants to reveal who He is. **We may not always understand what God is doing, but He has revealed more than enough about Himself, in Christ, to trust the one who is doing it.**

## V. 2 Preparing to be with Jesus | EXPECT JESUS

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.* Both Matthew and Mark make a point to say "after six days", while Luke says about 8—Greek for 'a week'. The number alludes to the experience of Moses whom God called up to Mount Sinai to receive the law. *Exodus 24.15-16* *15 Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.* More than likely it also alludes to the Prophet Elijah's experience, on the same mountain, where the LORD met him in his fear (1Kings 19.9ff). In the Gospel of Luke indicates that Jesus took them up the mountain to pray, meaning, He was taking them up to commune with God.

Since the seven days of creation, six days had always been understood to mean the amount of time required to PREPARE for a holy event in Israel. Friends and I have often employed the phrase of "go to the mountain" in order to prepare to preach, teach, or serve. It is a simple way to remind ourselves the

importance not only as a means of PREPARATION but of EXPECTATION. As we “go to the mountain” in prayer, we commune with God’s presence in a unique and intimate way. But, in a sense, we “go to the mountain” when we gather corporately. We believe the presence of the Spirit of God uniquely, not exclusively, dwells in the gathering of His people. This truth begs several questions: **1) How do we prepare to meet Jesus on Sunday mornings? 2) What am I preparing for? What am I expecting?** At any point during the six days, prior to this day, are we looking forward to communing with God and His people? Are we building into our relationship with Jesus during the week so that our “big date” on Sunday is meaningful? **There are many things we can come expect from a “Sunday date with Jesus”, most of which are to be satisfied with the music, the sermon, or the fellowship.** Do we come to the mountain expecting to see Jesus or see a show? Do we come to the mountain expecting to hear from Jesus regardless of who or what is being preached? Do we come to the mountain expecting to experience Jesus’ love or tingles?

### **V. 3-4 We should expect to ADORE Jesus the King | WORSHIP JESUS**

The first thing we must come expecting is to ADORE Jesus the King. In his final prayer in John 17, Jesus asks God: **<sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.** Atop the mountain, with Peter, James, and John, this is the one and only time Jesus reveals His glory. **<sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> 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.”**

Fulfilling his promise in 16.28, Jesus is transformed and the glorious King that He is, is revealed. In describing this moment, Peter writes: **2Peter 1.16,18 -<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> 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,” <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.** This is the second time the Father has spoken in honor of Jesus. The first time was at his baptism where the SINLESS man received the baptism of repentance. In doing so, he perfectly identifies with man and takes the role of a suffering Savior. But Jesus is not only a suffering savior, He is the glorious King. Unlike Moses whose face reflected God’s glory after speaking with God, Jesus’ entire being possesses it.

As Paul writes in **Colossians 2.9 <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,** or as Jesus says in **John 14.9 “whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Jesus is not simply godlike; God is Christ-like. If God is Christ-like, then our response to Him should be Isaiah-like. Isaiah 6.5 <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”** Peter, though more careful about His words, responds differently. Instead of just BEHOLDING JESUS glory, Peter is SEARCHING FOR A TASK. Peter wrongly feels like he needs to do something other than worship Jesus. Jesus does not want us to DO anything; He wants us to ENJOY Him. **Seeing Jesus will lead to enjoying Jesus; enjoying Jesus will lead to loving Jesus; and loving Jesus will lead to serving Jesus.**

### **V. 5 We should expect to HEAR Jesus the Teacher | LISTEN TO JESUS**

Not only should we expect, and prepare, to ADORE Jesus the KING, we should expect to LEARN from Jesus the teacher. **<sup>5</sup> 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.” Before Peter can finish his sentence, the presence of the Father overshadows the mountain with a cloud as He did when He spoke to Moses. Similar to His baptism, the voice declares: **This is my Son, with whom I am pleased.** But unlike the baptism, the voice adds: **LISTEN TO HIM.** Moses and Elijah represent all that God has said and done in history up to that point; they are the LAW and the PROPHETS. Jesus has already taught that: **Matthew 5.17** <sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. After his resurrection: **Luke 24.27** ...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. The Father’s command to LISTEN to HIM in the presence of Moses and Elijah reveals that: Jesus is a CONTINUATION of the Old Testament, but also a CESSATION of the Old Covenant.

The Father wants his church to revere Jesus more than any other person, organization, or cause in the world. The voice does not say **listen to me** or **listen to Jesus also, as if they have different things to say.** God directs all of our attention to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Father is not concerned about being eclipsed by Jesus, for it is **through Jesus that the person and will of the Father is revealed.** We are to listen to Jesus. As a community, we are to listen to Jesus more than ourselves. We are to listen to Jesus more than the culture. We are to listen to Jesus more than we listen to the law.

Without grace, all we have is condemnation. The only thing the law by itself can do is show you how sinful you are. **The gospel of Jesus is placed above a law because it was designed to point to Jesus! Romans 8.1-4** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. As we listen to Jesus, this does not mean we become lawless. On the contrary, **the gospel of grace does not merely change "have to" to "don't have to."** **The gospel of grace changes "have to" to "want to."** But even if I want to listen to Jesus...I fail.

#### **V. 6 We should expect to REST in Jesus the Savior | DEPEND ON JESUS**

Ironically, when we ignore the law and listen to Jesus, Jesus calls us to a life MORE demanding than the law. Do we remember the Sermon on the Mount? When we shut our mouths and begin to adore Jesus and listen to Jesus, we will FEAR because we recognize how far we fall short. <sup>6</sup> **When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.** <sup>7</sup> **But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”** <sup>8</sup> **And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.**

As we gather on the mountain, we not only *prepare* and *expect* to ADORE Jesus as King and to LISTEN to Jesus as teacher, **but to REST in Jesus as Savior.**

Jesus is the VOICE of God made tangible. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. His response to his terrified disciples is a picture of the gospel. The Son of God, humbly empties himself of all position, all glory, all power, and dwells with men. Jesus does not simply come down to “glow” before His disciples to impress them; He does not intend to scare us into obedience by revealing His glory; **Jesus comes down to take away fear; to LIFT our eyes, and ENABLE us to STAND so that we can endure, enjoy, and obey.** Matthew writes that, when Jesus touches them, men who were told they would have their own crosses to carry now ONLY SEE JESUS. **Hebrews 12.1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is

set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

### Conclusion | SOMETHING BETTER

In conclusion, many of us may be tempted to argue that: “If I had an experience with Jesus like they did...of course I’d believe, of course I’d obey, of course I wouldn’t fear.” In reflecting about that very experience, Peter tells us we have something better: <sup>19</sup> And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Peter argues from what HIS OWN EYES saw...but he also says we have something more trustworthy than our sense—the word. God has given us his prophetic Word, produced by the Holy Spirit, to guide us until the living Word returns. **The powerful transfiguration did not add something new; it merely confirmed the power that already existed in Scripture.** We may not have a “mountain-top” experience with Jesus, but we can go to the mountain every time we open His Word. And until we behold His glory face to face, we behold the Glory of Jesus as powerfully as the transfiguration itself through His Word.

- It is through the WORD, by the Spirit, that we shall see Jesus and know why we must worship Him;
- It is through the WORD, by the Spirit, that we shall hear Jesus know how we should obey Him
- It is through the WORD, by the Spirit, that we shall love Jesus and know what it means to rest in Him.