

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 20: The Transfiguration -- Matthew 17:1-27

Six days earlier, Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and then almost immediately stumbled when Jesus began to speak of a cross. Now Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain, away from the crowds, away from the noise. And there, on the quiet height, something happens that none of them will ever forget. “He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (v. 2). For one staggering moment, the veil is pulled back, and the disciples see the hidden glory of the One who had been walking dusty roads beside them.

And then they are not alone. Moses appears, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the towering prophet, the very embodiments of the Law and the Prophets, standing there talking with Jesus. Peter, overwhelmed and unsure what to say, blurts out a plan: three tents, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, as if the three belonged on the same level. But while he is still speaking, a bright cloud descends, and a voice comes out of it, the voice of the Father Himself: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (v. 5).

Listen to him. Not to him among equals, but to Him alone. When the cloud lifts, Moses and Elijah are gone, “and they saw no one but Jesus only” (v. 8). The Law and the Prophets had pointed forward for centuries; now the One they pointed to has come, and the Father commands that we fix our ears on Him. The disciples fall on their faces in terror, and Jesus, ever tender, touches them and says, “Rise, and have no fear” (v. 7).

But the mountain is not the end of the story. They come down, and immediately they are plunged back into a world of real need: a desperate father, a suffering boy the disciples could not heal, a crowd, an argument, the ache of faith too small. Jesus heals the child and teaches them about faith like a mustard seed. And the chapter ends, surprisingly, with a question about the temple tax, and a quiet miracle that shows Jesus is both the Son who is free and the Savior who graciously stoops. Glory on the mountain, mercy in the valley, and through it all, the unmistakable voice of the Father: this is My Son. Listen to Him.

Group Discussion: On the mountain the Father interrupts Peter’s well-meaning plan with a single command: “Listen to him.” Why do you think it matters so much that, after Moses and Elijah appear, the disciples are left seeing “no one but Jesus only,” and what does that tell us about where our attention belongs?

Personal Reflection: After the glory of the mountaintop, Jesus leads the disciples straight back down into a valley of real need and small faith. Where in your life are you living in the valley right now, and what would it look like to bring your “little faith” honestly to Jesus rather than hiding it?

Read Matthew 17:1-27

Study Questions

1. On the mountain Jesus is transfigured so that “his face shone like the sun” (17:2). What does this brief unveiling reveal about who Jesus truly is, and why would the disciples need to see His glory before walking with Him toward the cross?
2. The disciples got one rare glimpse of Christ’s glory and then had to walk by faith again. Where do you need to remember a time God made Himself real to you, so you can keep trusting Him now when His glory is hidden?
3. Moses and Elijah, who represent the Law and the Prophets, appear and then disappear, leaving “Jesus only” (17:3, 8). What is God teaching about the relationship between the Old Testament and Christ, in whom the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled?
4. The Father commands, “listen to him” (17:5). In practice, what does it look like for you to actually listen to Jesus this week, and where are you currently listening to other voices instead?
5. When the disciples fall down in terror, Jesus touches them and says, “Rise, and have no fear” (17:7). What does this reveal about how the glorious Son of God relates to frightened, failing people?
6. Peter wanted to stay on the mountain and build three tents, but Jesus led them back down to a suffering boy and a needy crowd. Where are you tempted to seek spiritual “mountaintop” experiences while avoiding the ordinary, costly work of love in the valley?

7. The disciples could not cast out the demon, and Jesus points to their “little faith,” saying faith like a grain of mustard seed can move mountains (17:19–20). What is Jesus teaching here about the nature and power of genuine faith?
8. Jesus says this kind of faith is exercised through dependence on God. Where in your life is your faith currently small, and what would it look like to take one real step of trusting and depending on God there?
9. Read 17:1–8 together with the Father’s words, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” What does the Transfiguration reveal about the unique glory and authority of Christ over Moses and Elijah, over the Law and the Prophets, and what does it mean for us today that the Father has commanded us to listen to His Son above every other voice?
10. Look back over the whole chapter, from the blazing glory on the mountain to the temple tax in the valley. Name one specific way the Father’s command, “listen to him,” is calling you to follow and trust Jesus more fully this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses’ promise of a prophet like himself whom the people must listen to; 2 Peter 1:16–18, Peter’s eyewitness memory of the voice on the holy mountain; Hebrews 1:1–3, God speaking finally in His Son who radiates the glory of God; Colossians 2:14–17, the Law as a shadow with the substance belonging to Christ; Mark 9:24, the father’s honest cry, “I believe; help my unbelief.”