

## The Majestic Preview of the Second Coming

Matt. 17:1-9

**Intro.** This morning we come to a wonderful passage in God's Word that is so rich, we can't begin to scratch the surface of its impact. I'd like to have you find **Matt.17**. As you're finding your place, let me read a passage from Isaiah.

Frustrated by the sin and unbelief of his people and the fact that justice, morality and all else around him was upside down, the prophet Isaiah prayed this way: **Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. - Isa. 64:1-3**

Isaiah wished God would show Himself in all His majestic omnipotence. He longed for a visible demonstration. He wanted God to flex His muscles and show His Divine power in a way so dramatic and unexpected it would cause the nations to tremble. Maybe there have been moments when you've felt like Isaiah... moments when it seems evil could never be worse. Moments when you said, "**Even so come Lord Jesus**"...*today would be great!* And no worries, a day of ultimate vindication is coming! That day is described in **Rev. 6-19** in the period known as The Great Tribulation. When Heaven is opened and men see God seated on His throne, they'll cry out for the rocks to hide them.

But this morning we come to a special appearance of God's glory that was given for the benefit of Jesus / three disciples / and all who believe God's Word. We might call it a preview of coming attractions. It was given at a pivotal moment...just after Jesus told His disciples he would suffer and die at the hands the nation's leaders...a moment when they needed encouragement and confirmation. The Transfiguration is recorded in 3 of the 4 Gospels...Matthew / Mark / and Luke. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each Gospel writer adds details that complete the picture.

The Transfiguration happened as Jesus was praying and in direct response to the promise Jesus made at the end of **chap. 16**. In **vs. 27, 28** Jesus said, "**For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**" After His death and resurrection, Jesus promised He would return to earth in the glory of His Father. Before these disciples died, He said some of them would see something spectacular. They would see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.

Some have interpreted Christ's promise to mean that some of these men would actually see the Kingdom established before they died. But that didn't happen. What Jesus meant was this...several of His disciples would be shown a preview of the kingdom's coming. The words, **some who are standing here**, referred to Peter, James and John who were eyewitnesses of His Transfiguration.

**1. The Setting - v. 1 - After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.**

There seems to be significance in the fact that this Kingdom preview happened 6 days after the promise made in **chap. 16**. 6 is the number of man. In six days God finished all His creative work. He then rested on the 7th day. Many believe the 6 days of creation prefigure the first 6,000 yrs. of human history which will be followed by the 1,000 yr. rest of the Millennial Kingdom. In other words, man's day will last 6 days or 6,000 years. After that, the day of the Lord will come. According to the Usher's chronology, history is at the very end of earth's first 6,000 years. At any rate, this preview of the Kingdom happened on the 6th day after the promise was given.

The high mountain was probably Mt. Hermon near Caesarea Philippi in the northern parts of Israel. Mt. Hermon rises to a height of 9,400 feet and can be seen from as far away as the Dead Sea 100 miles to the south. The event probably took place in the evening since **Lk. 9:32** says the disciples were very sleepy. This is conjecture, but at this point it seems possible the disciple's hearts were heavy. People suffering depression tend to feel sleepy and run down. Yet we can be certain of this...the supernatural event that happened that night helped to resolve their depression. The gloom and darkness of despair was overcome by the incredible brilliance of God's glory!

**2. The visible revelation - v. 2 - There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.** The word **transfigured** means to change in form. It comes from the *metamorphoo*, the Greek word from which we get metamorphosis. Like the caterpillar that changes form to become a beautiful butterfly, the outward form of Jesus changed before their eyes. His ruddy complexion shone like the sun. The garments of a working man became as white as light. The disciples were privileged to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Try to imagine the scene. The first thought that comes to my mind is the brilliant light given off when magnesium and water are combined. They saw white light...light too bright to look at directly. And the light emanating from Jesus was not reflected light. It was light that emanated from inside His being. What they saw was His glory. The radiance emanated from His face and garments. The Bible says the face of Moses shone when He came down from Mt. Sinai. Because Moses had been in the presence of God, God's glory was reflected from his face. But the transfiguration wasn't like that. The light emanating from Jesus came from inside His being. This is affirmed in **Heb 1:1-3 - In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.**

For however long the Transfiguration lasted, what was inwardly true about Jesus became outwardly visible. The glory that Jesus had in His Father's presence from eternity past...the glory that was hidden for our benefit...was now revealed in all of its radiance.

**3. Scriptural confirmation - v. 3, 4 - Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.**

Just then Moses and Elijah appeared in some visible and glorified form. We presume these men stood on either side of Jesus as they talked with Him. **Lk. 9:30, 31** says, **Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. They spoke about His departure.** The word is **exodus**. The conversation initiated by these heavenly visitors centered around the suffering and death Jesus would endure and followed by His resurrection, and ascension. These events would finish God's redemption plan before the exodus when Jesus would rejoin His Father in Heaven.

According to **Mal. 4:5, 6**, the Jews believed Elijah would be forerunner and herald of the Messiah. Some Jewish teachers also believed that when the Messiah came, he would be accompanied by Moses. Moses was Israel's great lawgiver. Elijah was Israel's great prophet...a man who brought the voice of God to men with unique directness. Moses and Elijah were like twin peaks in Israel's history. The appearance of these men from Israel's past confirmed the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment and focal point of God's revelation...the fulfillment of all that is written in the law and the prophets. Their appearance confirmed that Jesus is the One.

It may be that Moses, Elijah and the disciples represent the 3 categories of people who will take part in Christ's coming kingdom. The disciples represent believing people who will enter the Kingdom in physical bodies. Moses represents saved people who have died or will die...the dead in Christ. Elijah then represents saved people who will not experience death but like he was, will be airlifted to Heaven alive. These 3 groups will be center stage when Christ sets up His Kingdom on earth. And just as it was that night, Jesus will reign in glory as the Kingdom runs its course on earth.

**v. 4 - Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** Have you ever known someone like Peter? Peter can't keep quiet for two minutes! His mind was always in gear thinking up the next dumb thing to say. He said, *"Lord, this is good. I like this. Let's stay here and sunbathe in the experience. I'll build a couple of shelters. This is so much better than all that talk about a cross and suffering."* Dr. Luke adds a humorous editorial comment in **Lk. 9:33 - (He did not know what he was saying.)**

But to Peter's credit, he seems to have understood something about the meaning of what he was witnessing. He believes the Transfiguration signaled the arrival of Christ's Kingdom because he wants to build 3 shelters...one for Jesus / one for Moses / and one for Elijah. He's sure he was witnessing the start of the Kingdom celebrated by the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. Tabernacles looks back to Israel's wilderness wanderings but it also looks ahead to Israel's Kingdom. Peter understood what he saw, but his timing was way off. Like the signs given on the Day of Pentecost, the Transfiguration was merely a preview, not the actual thing!

**4. The audio-visual revelation - v. 5 - While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

First, there appeared the visible revelation...Jesus was transfigured. The Scriptures were then confirmed by the presence of Moses and Elijah. Then suddenly, mid-sentence, a bright cloud enveloped Jesus, Moses and Elijah. More visual evidence was added. All through Israel's history, this luminous glory cloud was known as the Shekinah...the glory of Almighty God. This glory cloud led Israel out of Egypt. It filled the Tabernacle and later the Temple. This visible manifestation of God's presence and glory eventually left the Temple in the days of Ezekiel. This is what Jesus meant when He said, **Look, your house is left to you desolate. - Matt. 23:38** God's glory was no longer there.

Now remember, the glory of Jesus has already appeared. His face was radiant...His garments were glowing with supernatural illumination. Then the glory cloud descended just as did the night Jesus was born and just as it did when Jesus ascended. The glory cloud will descend again when Jesus returns. **(Acts 1:9-11)** When the glory cloud descended it engulfed Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. As the disciples looked on they were able to recognize something. They were able to see that the glory of God was not more brilliant in degree than the glory of the Jesus...the glories were the same. I'm sure you've seen mismatched light bulbs in a chandelier where some were obviously brighter than others. The Shekinah glory and the radiance of Jesus were of the exact same intensity and brilliance. And why was that? Because as Jesus said, **I and My Father are One.** Jesus is God. He is equal to God in power and glory. That's what John meant when he wrote, **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only...** This too is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he wrote, **The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...**

But this amazing preview didn't end with the visual display. There was an audible part...a voice speaking from the cloud said, **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** These words constituted authentication of God the Son by the voice of God the Father.

The Israelites heard God's voice thunder from Mt. Sinai. That same thunderous voice spoke from Heaven when Jesus was baptized about 3 years earlier. On that occasion, the Father said, "**This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.**" This time, when speaking to disciples, God the Father adds 3 simple words of instruction...**Listen to Him.** This is the essence of discipleship. Discipleship begins as we determine to listen to and obey the words of Jesus. **Heb. 1:1, 2 - In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.**

As you might imagine, these supernatural sights and the sound of God's voice had a tremendous impact on the disciples. It would work for me...how about you? God had torn aside the Heavens and come down. For these ordinary men, seeing Jesus in His glory was like seeing Him for the first time. Up to this moment, they had not seen Jesus as He really is. They had not seen Him as the Lord of glory. They couldn't begin to imagine what Jesus meant when He said He would come **in His Father's glory. - 16:27**

Yet the same will be true for us when we see Jesus for the first time...when we see Him as He really is. Every limit we placed on Him will vanish. Every small thought about His majesty and glory will be overwhelmed by amazement and wonder. We will be dumbfounded and completely awestruck...I'm sure of it! In Phillip Yancy's book, The Jesus I Never Knew he describes the situation as only a gifted writer can. Though Jesus appears on every page of our Bibles, **1 Cor. 13:12** says, **Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.**

#### **5. The Reaction and Response - vs. 6-9**

**v. 6 - When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified.** The voice these men heard was so terrifying, the disciples did what others did in the presence of Almighty God...they fell flat on their faces and didn't dare to look up. Theirs was a knee-jerk, auto-reaction...the reaction of sinful men when they see God seated on His throne...the posture and confession of every human being when Jesus returns. - **Phil. 2:9-11 - Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

**vs.7, 8 - But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.** A couple of thoughts come to mind. Jesus often said, **don't be afraid.** The sinner has every reason to fear God in a trembling, terrified way. **Heb. 10:31** says, **It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.** But the saved are delivered from that kind of fear. There's no need to tremble before God when your sins are forgiven. Like Adam and Eve after they sinned, our sinfulness makes us want to run and hide from the presence of God. Fear is the natural response in God's presence. But Jesus said, **don't be afraid.** His words conveyed love and grace and acceptance. With a gentle touch, Jesus came to them, touched them, said **"get up...don't be afraid."** That's a beautiful picture of God condescending to our situation / forgiving our sin / restoring our damaged emotions / and lifting us to Himself. To believers today, Jesus continues to say, **Don't be afraid. 1 Jn. 4:18 - There is no fear in love. But perfect love (the kind God extends to us) drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.**

But notice **v.8.** When they got up, they saw no one except Jesus. This detail is critical for a time such as ours. God's plan involves men in supporting roles, but His plan doesn't hinge on any of them. The focal point of God's redemption is His Son Jesus Christ. Not Jesus plus Muhammed or Confucius...not Jesus plus philosophy or pop psychology...not even Jesus plus Moses or Elijah.

**Rom.5:15b - For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!**  
**Heb. 2:9 - But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.** Because Jesus is the focal point of everything, **Heb.12:2** says, **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Aside from timing off by about 2,000 years, Peter's other mistake was his booth making idea. When he suggested this, he failed to acknowledge the uniqueness of Jesus. Jesus isn't on the same level with other men...even though these men were great prophets or lawgivers. Jesus is unique...in a class by Himself. The great lie of our times reduces Jesus to the level of a prophet, great teacher and moralist, but nothing more. But this event confirmed the Deity and absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The noted lawgiver and prophet exited stage left and Jesus remained alone...the focal point of redemption. As Peter said after Pentecost, **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** Acts 4:12

**v. 9 - As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."** This spectacular revelation of glory was for their eyes only. Against the plan of God, some had already tried to forcibly make Jesus king. Just imagine the excitement and hysteria generated by news of a supernatural event like this! I think this also explains why Jesus limited the witnesses to just 3...Peter, James and John and why He didn't include the Twelve or the larger group of followers.

As we finish this morning, let me suggest what the Transfiguration means and what it accomplished.

**1. *The Transfiguration confirmed the identity of Jesus.*** Just 6 days earlier, Peter spoke on behalf of the disciples and confessed that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. - Matt.16:13-16.** Then in a dramatic and convincing way, God confirmed their statement of faith. For 3 disciples, faith was turned to sight. The Transfiguration confirmed that Jesus is everything Peter confessed Him to be and more. 30 years later, Peter wrote, **For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** Peter said, Jesus, You are the Son of God. By the Transfiguration, God the Father said, "Disciples, you're absolutely right!...This is my Son!"

**2. *The Transfiguration confirmed the certainty of the cross*** Jesus had spoken of earlier. Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His exodus...His departure. They weren't sent to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem. They didn't rebuke Jesus as Peter had done. They didn't say, **"This will never happen to you."** Moses and Elijah had the inside track. They understood God's redemptive plan and the fact that Jesus had to suffer and die. God had taken them into His counsels and they understood there was no other way. Apart from the cross, humanity would perish.

**3. *The Transfiguration confirmed the coming Kingdom.*** Remember the promise of **16:28.** As we said at the start of the message, the Transfiguration was a preview of the power and glory of God that will usher in the Kingdom promised by the prophets. For just a brief moment, God showed 3 disciples the luminous glory that will appear when Jesus comes to earth the second time. **Matt. 24:29, 30** say, **"Immediately after the distress of those days ""the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. God will turn off the house lights just before His Son appears in glory!**

**4. The Transfiguration confirmed the reality of eternal life.** Moses and Elijah, who lived thousands of years before Jesus came the first time, appeared alive in some glorified bodily form. They were seen conversing with Jesus. They weren't ghosts or apparitions. They were real and very much alive. Their life after life confirms our hope in the life to come.

**5. The Transfiguration confirms the change that will happen to believers when Jesus returns.** The word **transfigured**, is used only in the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration and in one other connection. It's used to describe the change that happens in the life of the believer. In **Rom.12:1, 2** it refers to gradual change that happens as we yield our lives to the Lord and allow Him to make us like His Son. **Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.** The word *metamorphoo* appears in the same connection in **II Cor.3:18 - And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.** Little by little, God is working to dispel the darkness of ignorance in our lives, exchanging it for the light of His truth and righteousness.

But what is a process now, will be instantly completed when Jesus returns. **I Jn.3:1 - How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.**

Henry Clay Trumbull *was a great American pastor, author and pioneer of the Sunday School Movement. Here's what he wrote about Christ's Transfiguration. "In the time of Jesus, the Mount of Transfiguration was on the way to the cross. In our day, the cross is on the way to the Mt. of Transfiguration. If you would be on the mountain, you must consent to pass over the road to it."*

But rising above these 5 confirmations, is the fact that Jesus stands alone as the key man and focal point of God's redemptive plan. **Matt.17:8 says, when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.** Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Transfiguration revealed the Majesty of Jesus Christ. It is the Father's pleasure for us to worship His Son whom He has appointed heir of all things.

The prophet Isaiah longed for God to come out of the shadows and show Himself in all of His power and glory. He wished God would vindicate His holiness and display His awesome majesty. Isaiah's wish was granted one night long ago. God did it on the slopes of Mt. Hermon when Jesus was transfigured. He did it at as Jesus was praying and at a moment when those who believed Him were in despair. And friends listen...it won't be long until this same God pierces the darkness of this world with the inapproachable light of His presence. Ground zero will be the Mt. of Olives just outside Jerusalem. First, Jesus will come for His Church, His bride...the rapture. Then following the Great Tribulation, **Zech. 14:4 says, On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.**

Living in a world of trouble like the world of Isaiah's day...and blessed with the hope of the Apostle John we say, **Even so come Lord Jesus.** But until He comes, we must trust Him and faithfully obey His Word, telling others of His grace.