



Sermon – 02/19/2023
Daniel Patterson

Verses Covered

Matthew 17:1 - 8

Matthew 16:24, 27

Psalms 2:7

Isaiah 42:1

2 Corinthians 3:7, 8, 12, 18

Well, good morning. Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Matthew 17. Matthew chapter 17. We'll be in verses 1 through 8 this morning. And if you're new to Central, if you've been here every week, for a long time, I want to say welcome. We're so glad you're here.

We've been working week by week, chapter by chapter, through the book of Genesis. We're in the middle of that series and we're right before the near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis chapter 22. But we want to come alongside that text this week, before we get to that next week because there's another picture of something else that happens on another mountain where God gives us a vision into what the future looks like. And we'll be seeing that right here in this passage in Matthew chapter 17. So, let's take a look at this text and hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to us. Holy Spirit says,

¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴And 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." ⁵And 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." ⁶And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and they were terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

This is God's word for us today.

So I've got a bit of a complicated relationship with groceries. And I wonder if any of the men in the room are the same as me. There are basically two ways that I'm involved with the groceries at our house. Way number 1 is taking them inside from the car when they get home. And when I open the back of our van and I see a back seat of bags, I see a chore but I also see a challenge. And for some reason, I feel that it is my duty as a man to take every single one of those bags in on a single trip. No matter the cost. Now, have I broken a few eggs in the process? Yes. Have I flattened a few loaves of bread by heaving them up onto the counter like I'm some sort of an Olympic power lifter? Yes. Have I irritated my wife, Molly, in the process? Maybe. But can you really put a price on accomplishment? Yes, you can, Molly says. Because eggs are \$5 a dozen right now. But that's just way number 1. Way number 2 I'm involved is sometimes Molly will ask me to pick something up at the store for her. We've got a little shared list on our phone. "Yeah, sure. That's fine. I'll go get there." The problem is, I'm, my talent level is very different in different parts of the grocery. In the meat section, I'm a pro. Identify the brisket with the thickest fat from 100 yards. The ribeye with the best marbling. Easy. But the closer you get to the middle of the grocery that has like the cooking oils and the baking stuff, my talent just kind of takes a nose dive. And sometimes there will be things on the list. And I look at it and I think, "I don't even know what this is." Almond paste. That sounds gross. Is that a peanut butter alternative? Is it an environmentally friendly toothpaste? I still don't know. And when that happens, I have to call home and, you know, "Hey! What is this?" And, you know, "Are you just joking or is this a real thing?" But there was one time she put something on the list. This happened over and over and over again. I was thinking, "OK. This one is too obvious. You're just messing with me now." Because the list says, evaporated milk. Yeah, I'll go look for the evaporated milk right beside the invisible apple juice. Obviously, this is fake. Plot twist. It's real. What's the problem here? For one, it may just be that I'm not very sophisticated and I can live with that. But on a more basic level, it's a lack of understanding. Because if you don't understand what something is, you'll never know where to find it. And you might just give up all together.

And what we find when we come to this text is something remarkable happens. Jesus is held up in His glory and the apostles are observing something they don't even understand. They think they know what they're looking for, but they're looking in all of the wrong places. And God comes in with this vision that astounds them with this dazzling picture of God's glory and then it confounds them with a picture of a future that they don't yet understand. And what I want us to see is that this passage, this text is designed to be a magnet that pulls us out of the hard places of the Christian life. Because the glory that we see before us in this text is designed to create perseverance within us. But for it to function that way, there are three things that we need to do. And the first is we need to behold Christ in the fullness of His glory. Behold Christ in the fullness of His glory. So what we see is that there are two aspects of that in the text here. We start with this glory presentation and we also see a glory prediction.

So let's start first with that glory. Because what does the text say? It took, Jesus took the three closest disciples, His inner circle, up the mountain and then His face begins to shine. His clothes become dazzling white. So, it's not that Jesus is just catching the light well in a certain way. It's not that Jesus is being turned into something new, like God is sending some sort of heavenly spotlight down on Him to say, "This is the guy you ought to be looking at." No, the language that we're seeing is not something new, it's something that has always been present, something that's been veiled and something that is being revealed. And what we're seeing is exactly what

Jesus said in John 8. I am the light of the world. And some of that light that is hidden within Jesus and His earthly ministry is starting to burst forth and the apostles are seeing it up close. The picture that we have is of a brilliant, blinding light. And the light is telling the apostles something. Jesus is who you think He is. He is the Messiah. He is the One who is coming. His clothes are seen as white and that indicates purity. Jesus is righteous. Jesus is holy. But it also says that Jesus shines. And that's pointing us back to the book of Exodus when Moses went up to the mountain of Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments. Standing in the presence of God. And He came down and His face was shining because He had soaked in the glory of God. But Jesus here isn't reflecting the glory of God; He's radiating it. Because He is God Himself. Hebrews 1 says, He is the radiance of the glory of God. And you're seeing it right here. So what's happening is that God is peeling back the layers so the apostles can see Jesus for who He really is. Because He wants this moment to be etched into their minds forever making an impression that never leaves them.

We all have, on a lesser level, some kind of moment like that in our life, don't we. I remember one of those moments for me that I will just never forget. I was 13-years-old and I got to go to my very first major league baseball game to see the Cubs and the Braves play in Fulton County Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia. And I remember walking into this big stadium and walking through the tunnel into the seating area into this place that was bigger than I had ever seen. With more chairs in the stadium. Three times the number of chairs than there were people in my home town. The outfield grass looked like a carpet. The players looked like giants. And that stuck with me when I played whiffle ball or hit balls off a tee. It was places like that that I was imagining. We all have something like that. It may be a time that you heard a particular band live for the first time. It might be the first time that You stood at the edge of the Grand Canyon. You'll never forget it. Maybe you're like my kids. I think for them, the most awe-inspiring moment was when we were moving to Texas and they stepped into a Bucees for a first time. What is this place? It's huge. It sticks with you. And what's going on in this moment in the transfiguration is God is giving them a glimpse of something that they're going to need in the future. Because this glory presentation is related to a gory prediction. And what do I mean by that?

It's so easy to overlook. But I want us to just look at verse 1. How does this passage start? It's very intentional by Matthew. It starts with, after six days. That looks like it's just an extraneous detail. But Matthew is very intentional. And what he's doing with this language is saying, "What I'm showing you with the transfiguration is connected to what just happened in Matthew 16. I'm trying to connect these and draw a tight connection." So, what happened in Matthew 16? Look up just a few verses, or we may also have this on the screen. What does Jesus say?

²¹From that time Jesus began to show the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And what does He say to His disciples after that?

²⁴"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

²⁷For the Son of God is going to come with his angels in the glory of his father.

The glory is related to the gore. And what we see is that Matthew is linking these two things. Jesus is saying, "I'm going to come in the glory of the Father." And He's given them a glimpse into this vision that is going to fuel them with a zeal and an energy that's ready for them to take on hell with a water pistol. But what comes with that? Why do the apostles need that? Because the path to following Jesus is taking up a cross. The way of triumph in the Christian life comes with self-denial. Victory in the Christian life comes when you're willing to be seen by the world as a loser. And Jesus is showing the apostles and showing you and me that the path to this kind of glory only comes through the gore of the cross. And you'll never be willing to follow Jesus down that path unless you're first fueled by His presence. And that's a word that some of us may need to hear. Because the picture that Matthew is presenting here is of a Jesus who's righteous. And there are some in this room who may be struggling with a secret addiction. And what Jesus is showing you right here is, "I am the holy, pure, and righteous One that can impart that holiness and that power to you if you will cling to Me." And that's a word we need to hear because the picture that Matthew is holding up is of a Jesus who is beautiful in all of His glorious and radiant splendor. And there are some in this room who may just feel numb or cold or tired. And what this picture is designed to do is to stir your soul and awaken life in those places where you may feel lethargic this morning. But Matthew's also giving us a picture of Jesus who is powerful. And what we see is that there may be people in this room who are wracked with grief over a friend or family member or a child who feels far from you and far from Jesus. And what we see in this text is that the glory of God is powerful enough to penetrate the heart of any prodigal. So keep hoping, keep praying, keep pressing on. Because sinful hearts may run deep into the shadow of sin, but there is no corner of that darkness that the brightness of the light of the glory of Jesus cannot outrun. That is what we're seeing right here in this text.

But for this passage to work in us, we need to behold Jesus in all of His fullness, the glory, and the gore. The victory coming at a cost. But that's not all we need to do. We drink all of this in. But we also, secondly, embrace Christ in the fullness of His mission. Embrace Him in the fullness of His mission. And what we see in the next verses, verses 3 through 5, are two reactions to what happens. First of all, we see a mistaken reverence and then we see from God this multi-layered response. But this mistaken reverence comes from Peter. And before we can look at Peter, we need to see what he's reacting to. Look at verse 3. Who shows up on the scene? Moses and Elijah. What we see is that Moses and Elijah from long long ago in the chapter are here physically with Jesus in this moment. It is massively symbolic because these are two of the titans of the story of the people of God. When you think about God's law, the quintessential person that comes to mind is Moses. When you think about God's prophet, the quintessential person that comes to mind is Elijah calling down fire from heaven. And they're standing right here. What is going on? That's what Peter's responding to. And Peter does what Peter always does. He just blurts something out. I love when I have friends like this. This bold, bulldog-like figure. And what is Peter doing? All through his life, Jesus says, "I'm going to die." Peter says, "I'm going to rebuke you, Jesus." There's a guard that shows up in Gethsemane. Peter slices his ear off. Peter's the kind of guy I want on my church security team but not on my communications team. Quick to speak. Quick to slice. And we see it, true to form, he just blurts something out. God, I'm going to make three tents for You, for Moses, for Elijah. And this is not a first century camping invitation, to be clear. Tent, the language here is Old Testament language. The same word that we have for tabernacle. The tabernacle was the

place where the glory of God was contained. Also called the Tent of Meeting. And Peter's right to recognize this has something to do with glory. This has something to do with the last day. So, "I'm going to build a tent. I'm going to offer this to God." What's the problem with that? Peter is missing the significance of the moment and he's missing the source of the glory. Because the source of the glory is not these two titans of old standing behind Jesus. The source of the glory is Jesus Himself standing before them. And the significance of this moment is the supremacy of Jesus. Moses and Elijah are present because they represent the fullness of the law and the prophets. And appearing in this moment, God is showing Jesus to be the thing that the law and the prophets point to. And he's showing in this moment what Jesus is. God is showing Jesus to be the one who supersedes the law and the prophets. So, when Moses is saying, "I'll make three tents." The problem is, that he is denying Jesus' rank. He's denying Jesus' supremacy which is the very thing that this moment is designed to show. And in a single word, I think this is hilarious, Matthew throws a little shade at Peter, insulting him with the use of a single word. Because he points out what is the first word that Peter says to Jesus. He calls Him, Lord. Why is that important? Again, because Matthew 17 and Matthew 16 are connected. What just happened in Matthew 16? Peter confesses Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He says, "You are Lord." And Matthew is saying here, "You're calling Him Lord and you don't even understand what you're talking about." The loose translation of this word from the Greek is, "Peter, bless your heart." But Peter doesn't have the last word here. God speaks and He brings this multi-layered response, just shot through with symbolism that speaks on lots of different levels. And the first thing that we see is a voice comes from heaven in the midst of a bright, dazzling cloud. And to any Jew in the first century, this would have been unmistakable. Because it's the Shekinah glory, it is the pillar of fire that followed the people of Exodus out from the land of Egypt that lit for them the path that God was taking them on. But here, that cloud appears, once again with Moses, like it did in the exodus. But at this point, it's not saying, "Listen to my prophet Moses." It's saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." This glory is declaring the one to whom we are to follow. And don't miss this. Because what language is God using here? The same language that He used at Jesus' baptism. Behold, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And that's not just a repetition. It's not just that God can't think of anything original or new to say. God is using this language to tell the disciples something that they don't yet understand. Because this single sentence coming from the cloud isn't just a proclamation, it's a mashup of two different verses across the Old Testament. The first part of the sentence is an allusion Psalm 2. And I think we may have this up on the screen where David writes of a prediction,

⁷I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me, "You are my Son."

This is a royal prediction of a coming Son who would triumph over the power of satan who would bring victory for the people of God. This is who Israel wanted. This kind of king. But what's the second part of the sentence? For whom I am well pleased. With whom I'm well pleased is alluding to Isaiah chapter 42. Where it says:

¹Behold my servant, whom I uphold, in whom my soul delights;

Is well pleased. And why is that important? Because that section of Scripture is talking about a servant of God who would come and would suffer. We call Him the suffering servant. And what we see is that this line, this is my Son with whom I am well pleased, came as an

endorsement of Jesus at His baptism, saying, “What you’re about to do in your earthly ministry I approve of.” And it’s coming again right here as Jesus starts down the road to Calvary in an even more dramatic fashion to say, “I endorse this plan to die.” And what is God through this statement telling the disciples? Precisely what they don’t understand and refuse to admit. They don’t have a category for a Messiah who will die. They don’t understand victory that comes about through death. But this is what God is speaking from the heavens, saying, that the Son will suffer. He’s putting this in that same sentence and He’s saying, “Listen to Jesus because He just told you the same thing.” He’s telling the apostles that He must die and they must take up a cross. And both of these messages are coming to you too. Because God is saying, “Listen to Jesus.” And Jesus is saying, “Take up a cross.” And what we see is that the apostles wanted the exaltation the Messiah would bring but they didn’t realize the exaltation comes through the humiliation of the cross.

And what we see is that they didn’t want that and neither do you and I. And that’s important because the question before us is at a time in our life in a nation where it increasingly does not benefit you to be a Christian, but it costs you to be a Christian. Are you willing to embrace that? At a time, in a culture, that says you can be a good Christian and ignore what Jesus says about God’s design for sexuality, for gender, for life, or His command to love one another in the church. To turn the other cheek when wronged. To not be quarrelsome. Are you willing to listen to Jesus? This passage and God’s grace is designed to stir and strengthen you but only if you embrace Christ in the fullness of His mission. Not just taking shelter in His glory, but taking up a cross.

And that’s why the third thing that we need to see, to do after we embrace Christ in the fullness of His mission, is that we need to walk with Christ into the fullness of our future. Walk with Jesus into the fullness of what He has planned into our future. And we see, once again, in these last verses another pair of reactions. We see the disciples, and they have rightful terror. And we have Jesus who reassures triumph. So starting with the disciples, you see this in verse 6, Matthew writes that, at the voice from heaven, the disciples fell on their faces with fear. They heard this voice from God and hit the ground. You see this in Daniel 10, for example, where Daniel hears the voice from God. And what does he say?

⁸I was left alone and I saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength.

We can walk around with our chests puffed out and our heads held high. But when the voice of God speaks, it will leave us undone. And that is what we’re seeing here. The word of God does not return void. It is sharp and powerful and a double-edged sword. And the word of God has a name: Jesus Christ. And what we see is that He is about to speak another word to these apostles who are face down in fear. And what does Jesus say? He reassures them of triumph. He says, “Rise and have no fear.” And verse 8 says, when they did they looked up and they saw only Jesus. Jesus speaks a word that imparts life to these apostles. Jesus speaks a word that instills courage into those who feel terror. The word of God reassures them and tells them to have no fear. And it tells them to rise. And the apostles glimpse the glory. They hear the voice. They fall in fear and they hear Jesus’ voice when He tells them to rise and they obey. And we see them leave this moment forever changed. Peter writes about it. John writes about it. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and we beheld His glory. Glory full of

grace and truth. This is imbedded deep down in who they are. Because there is something about seeing Jesus that's filled in all of His glory that fills them with courage and instills them with resolve in a way that makes the pain of this life and the uncertainty of the future, none of it seems to matter anymore. It's like they're saying, because I know You, because I saw You, I've been changed for good, forever. Because the glimpse of that glory creates within them the perseverance that they will need in the future. And they will need it. Because think about what happens with these three men. John goes on to be exiled to the island of Patmos. Imprisoned for his faith. James, his brother, we know from the book of Acts, is killed by the sword for his faith by Herod Agrippa. And Peter, bulldog, bold, convictional Peter, dies for his faith. And the Bible doesn't tell us this, but most of history and tradition says that the Roman emperor Nero crucified Peter for his faith. But Peter refused to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. I'm not worthy to die in such a way. He said, "I want to be crucified upside down." And I can only imagine that that kind of conviction, that kind of courage, that kind of resolve only comes when you see Jesus in all of His risen glory and He says, "Have no fear. Rise." Because fundamentally that is the future of the Christian, isn't it. You rise in resurrection. That is our hope. That's the destiny of all those who are in Christ. You will be resurrected and fearlessness is the gift of all those who hear the voice of Christ.

But you may not feel very fearless this morning. You may feel more like the apostles when they were face down than the apostle who was so bold he was willing to be crucified upside down. And that's why I want us to see one final text. I want us to look at 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Because Paul is referencing Moses going up onto the mountain, receiving the 10 Commandments, soaking in the glory of God, and radiating it himself, reflecting it, when he comes down off the mountain. And it seems that Paul has this moment in mind too. This transfiguration of Jesus when he writes to the church in Corinth, starting in verse 7,

⁷Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?

Now look at verse 12.

¹²Since we have such a hope, we are very bold,

And look how this ends in verse 18.

¹⁸We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

If you want to know the reason why you should walk with Christ into the fullness of your future. If you want to know why you can have a boldness and a fearlessness, it's right here. It's because the glory radiating out from Jesus, you have a share in it. What we are seeing is that the glory of God coming out of Jesus, you are seeing your own future right there. This passage is designed to be like a one-two punch. We get this glimpse at the overwhelming, white-hot, dazzling glory of God that is designed to stun you, punch you right in the face. But coming behind that is the realization that you, according to the New Testament, are being transformed into that very same majesty, that very same glory giving you the perspective that you can live your life knowing

your true status. A son of God and brother of Jesus, an heir of the entire universe. And you can walk around right now knowing your true future: resurrected from the dead. Life death come at me. I've got a trillion years and a resurrected glorified body because of what we see right here in this text. And that's important because there are some in here who may struggle with disenchantment. You've been hurt by people in the church and you're fed up with hypocrisy. This text gives us an alternative. It gives us an answer to that. How? Because it shows you that you can envision your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ around you. Not as they are, but how they will be. They will be resurrected. They will be glorified. If you imagine them in their fully redeemed, fully glorified state, you can remember that is their true identity. And it's yours too. So you don't need to be worried about the dumb thing they said on Facebook as much as you need to picture them radiating the glory and the face of Jesus Christ. That can be a way that we can move through life relating to them in light of what God will make true. In light of what will be in their future. But it may be that there are some of you in here who struggle with feelings of insecurity. You're fearful. You wonder if you're valued. You wonder if you're seen. You wonder if you're worthy. This text answers that question for you. You are worthy because Jesus Christ is worthy of all. And what this text tells you is that just beneath the surface of your pain and your fear, you are brimming with the glory of God as you are being transformed into the image of the risen, resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ. And the way this text, the way we all ought to apply this text to our hearts is by listening to the commands of this text. God is saying, listen to Jesus and He's saying rise. Rise and have no fear. The heaven booms out, listen. And Jesus lovingly says, "Rise. Have no fear." Because the wonder and the awe of the glory of God captured before us is actually working in us. And that's what we see when we grasp the fullness of what the glory of God is. We'll know where to find it in Jesus Christ. And that's leads not to evaporated dreams, but resurrected hope.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to you in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, and we ask that You would turn our eyes upon Jesus, to let us look full in His wonderful face, that the things of the earth would grow strangely dim. And Father, we come to You as a people in need of Your mercy. And we ask that the Spirit would speak through what You've spoken. Use this text like a chisel to chip away at our sin and transform us more into the image of Christ. And we ask on behalf of those in this room who don't yet know Christ, we pray that they would hear Your invitation: "Rise, and have no fear," because of Your promise that anyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Christ will be welcomed with open arms. And for those of us that do know Christ, we pray that the cry of our hearts would echo the cry of Revelation 4: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power." And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.