



**Defining Moments in the Life of Jesus: Revealing**  
**Matthew 17:1-5**  
**Dr. Jeff Reynolds**  
**Sunday, March 21, 2021**  
**Sermon Link: <https://bit.ly/3s94DKb>**

Billy Graham wasn't supposed to be Billy Graham. Charles Templeton was. His name was the one many prominent Christians thought might become a household name for preaching the gospel. Charles Templeton professed faith in Jesus Christ in 1936, and that same year, he became an evangelist. He was a smooth preacher, and he immediately took audiences captive with his rhetorical abilities. He met Billy Graham in 1945, and the two young men labored alongside one another in evangelistic campaigns, even preaching throughout Europe together. Both men were renowned for their abilities, but Templeton often outshined Graham. All that changed when Templeton decided to go to seminary.

When Charles Templeton went to Princeton Theological Seminary, he was taught that so much of what he had believed was simply not true. The Bible, theology, creationism, miracles, the goodness of God—all were to be questioned, doubted, and ultimately abandoned by thinking people. Templeton became convinced of Princeton's anti-biblical worldview, and he sought to convince Graham to jettison his biblical faith, too.

Billy was deeply troubled. He believed the Bible to be God's Word, and he had found that whenever he used his characteristic phrase, "The Bible says..." there was power in his preaching that just wasn't there otherwise. He also valued Templeton's thoughts and opinions, so he struggled. One night at the Forest Home retreat center near Los Angeles, Billy went for a moonlit walk in the woods. He left the main trail to sit down on a rock, and he spread his Bible open on a tree stump before him. He prayed and prayed, and then he came to a powerful resolution: "Oh God, I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck is raising and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this Book by faith as the Word of God" (William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*, 115). Billy went on to gospel impact the world has never seen, eventually preaching the gospel to more people than anyone in history; Templeton became an agnostic and eventually wrote his memoir entitled *Farewell to God* before his death in 2001.

What's the difference between Billy Graham and Charles Templeton? As it turns out, faith. God revealed Himself to both men. One chose to receive God's revelation by faith; the other chose to reject it in skeptical doubt. One led many to peace with God; the other abandoned his calling altogether. How would you respond?

Today, we will see Jesus reveal Himself in a powerful way, and we will see how His disciples responded. More importantly, we will see how God the Father calls us to respond. We will see that Jesus reveals His glory to us, so that we might trust and follow Him. I pray we will respond in faith and help others do the same.

## 1. Jesus became like us (17:1).

<sup>1</sup> *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves (Matthew 17:1).*

I am deeply indebted to the Bowling Green Cumberland Presbyterian Church, because they introduced me to Jesus. When I was three years old, I started attending Sunday School and Worship there, and I can vividly remember seeing pictures of Jesus in storybook Bibles and on lesson worksheets they gave us. Jesus was always pictured wearing a bright white robe with a blue sash. In Baptist literature, He's often pictured with a red sash. I'm not sure why there's a difference, but it was noticeable to me.

One other thing was noticeable to me: although Jesus' robe was always stark, bright white, everyone else's clothing was always more dingy. It was as if everyone else's clothes collected dust from living in the desert, but Jesus' didn't. I guess that made sense. After all, Jesus was the Son of God. Renaissance art often pictured Jesus with a halo of light around His head that no one else had, so why shouldn't His clothing be more naturally clean than everyone else's?

But that's not what the Bible teaches about Jesus. Isaiah prophesied that "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). The writer of Hebrews tells us that "he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus became like us in every way—except He was without sin—so He didn't walk around with a glowing halo or a pristine robe. He got dirty, tired, sick, hungry, and thirsty. He needed rest and refreshing, just like everybody else. He was a person.

The theological term for God the Son descending from Heaven to take on human flesh is the Incarnation. The Apostle John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul writes to the churches of Galatia that "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). We can't forget Paul's quotation of that majestic early Christian hymn:

**Philippians 2:5-11** - <sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In order to redeem us, Jesus came to us and became like us. He descended from Heaven's throne as the eternal Son of God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity (see John 17:5), took on flesh, and entered human history through the womb of the virgin Mary. Remaining what He always was (God), He became what He had not been (man). He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52 NIV). He lived a life without sin, and then "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

## 2. Jesus is God over all (17:2-3).

<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 (Matthew 17:2-3).

Jesus, who looked just like Peter, James, and John, took these three men with Him to the mountain to pray, and then something remarkable happened. Luke tells us that “as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white” (Luke 9:29). The word translated “dazzling” (Greek *εξαστραπτω*) literally means “to flash or gleam like lightning.” Mark tells us that “his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9:3). Jesus’ appearance is changed drastically, to the degree that the men likely had to shield their eyes from the radiance of His intrinsic glory. What Peter, James, and John are seeing is the revelation of the glory that Jesus had “before the world existed” (John 17:5) and a glimpse of the glory that He will have forevermore.

As these men’s eyes adjust to the brilliance of Jesus’ glory, they see two men appear with Him. Moses and Elijah are there before Jesus, and they talk with Him. Matthew doesn’t tell us what they discuss, but Luke does: “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30-31). Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus about His approaching cross, resurrection, and ascension. What a conversation; what a moment!

Moses and Elijah are deeply significant figures in biblical history. Moses is the grand figure through whom God delivered His Law, and Elijah is the great prophet that God promised would come before the great day of the Lord (see Malachi 4:5-6). Together, these two men represent the Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets), so their presence is further validation that God had been preparing to send Jesus throughout all of human history. Moses had told Israel that God had told him, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18), and the New Testament confirms that this new and final prophet is Jesus (see Acts 3:22-26).

It’s worthwhile to note that Moses and Elijah had both been privileged to see God’s glory during their lifetimes. When Moses had interceded for the people after the golden calf incident, he asked the Lord to show him His glory. God obliged Moses’ request (see Exodus 33:18-23 and Exodus 34:5-8), and when Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the new tablets, he “did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (Exodus 34:29). After Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal and fled from Jezebel (see 1 Kings 18-19), the Lord appeared to him on Mt. Horeb (which is a different name for Mt. Sinai). Both of these great figures in biblical history had been called by God to a mountain where they beheld, in veiled form, the glory of God. They reflected that glory as they carried out their subsequent callings. Now, God has once again sent them to a mountain where He reveals His glory before them—in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not reflect the glory of God; His glory emanates from within Him, for He *is* God.

When Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John, they are seeing that He truly is what Peter had confessed just days before—that He is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus is further revealing to them that He is, as Paul would write to the church at Rome, “the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever” (Romans 9:5). They are seeing that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and that “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3).

### 3. God calls us to become like Jesus (17:4-5).

<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.” <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” (Matthew 17:4-5).

Peter begins speaking, offering to build three tents for these great heroes of the faith. Mark tells us that Peter “did not know what to say, for they were terrified” (Mark 9:6), but he felt the need to say something. That’s so Peter. Don’t do that.

Anyway, as Peter is speaking to say something, something else miraculous happens. A bright cloud overshadows them all, and God the Father speaks: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5). In the presence of Moses and Elijah, listen to Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is God’s beloved Son—“the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 KJV). God is conforming us to the image of His Son (see Romans 8:29), and in order to be conformed to the image of Jesus, we have to listen to Jesus. The word God the Father uses here (Greek ακουω) means in this sense to “hear and obey.” As we consider the record of Christ we have in the Bible, there are three ways in which we need to “hear and obey” Jesus:

First, we need to hear and obey Jesus’ word. What is Jesus’ word? Some would say that Jesus’ words are simply the red letters in the Bible, and we need to focus solely on those. Remember, however, what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19). The Word of Christ is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, from Genesis to Revelation. The same Holy Spirit who inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to record the words of Jesus also inspired the other biblical writers to write what they wrote—both on the Old and New Testaments. We must hear and obey God’s Word.

Second, we need to hear and obey Jesus’ tone. Our world has become so marred by social media, keyboard boldness, and cancel culture that we seem no longer to be able to hold a conversation with someone who might see things differently than we do. Jesus met people with whom He disagreed in every single moment of His earthly life. We were His enemies, after all—all of us (see Romans 5:10). What was His tone as He dealt with people? When He spoke to the woman at the well, He didn’t relax God’s scriptural sexual ethic, but He made such an impression on her that she went and brought others to Him. When He called the rich young ruler to repentance, the young man went away sad—not mad—because of the way Jesus addressed Him. Of course there were times when Jesus was sharp in His rebuke—most often toward the self-righteous—but His tone was overwhelmingly kind. What if we who trust and follow Jesus trusted Him enough to emulate His kindness?

Third, we need to hear and obey Jesus’ example. The Apostle John makes this point clear in his first epistle when he says, “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). Paul tells us to “have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 NASB). As we are guided by His Word, and as we mimic His tone, we ought to live as He lived. As cliché as it may have become, we must ask, “What Would Jesus Do?,” but we can’t stop there. We must do what He would do.

## Final Challenge

The disciples whom Jesus led to the mountain for this miraculous experience were deeply impacted by this encounter. Peter specifically referenced it in his second letter, which was written “to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Consider Peter’s words:

**2 Peter 1:16-21** - <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. <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’s statement here is amazing. He’s saying that although you and I didn’t get to see Jesus transfigured before our very eyes, we have something “more fully confirmed” (2 Peter 1:19) even than Peter, James, and John’s eyewitness experience – we have the Scriptures. The Bible is truly the Word of God, penned by human authors who were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Peter tells us that we would do well to pay as much attention to God’s Word as to a lamp that illuminates the darkness as we await the rising of the sun, which we will experience when the Son rises before us and returns to receive us unto Himself. God’s Word must be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105) as we navigate a world darkened by sin.

What would you do if Jesus materialized in His resplendent glory before you today and told you to do something? No matter what He said to do, I have a feeling that you—like me—would do whatever He said to do immediately, even if it made no sense to you at the time. Even if what He said completely contradicted your best logic, reasoning, and thought, if Jesus appeared and said to do it, I bet you and I would do what He said.

Why don’t we treat God’s Word with the same degree of respect and obedience? Peter said we have God’s prophetic word more fully confirmed than even the audible voice of God they heard from the mountain of transfiguration. They listened. Billy Graham listened. They trusted and followed Jesus and helped others do the same. Will we?