

Focus Text

“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 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.” 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.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” **(Matthew 17:1-13, ESV)**

Transfigured

When I mentioned that Matthew reports Jesus’ teachings shift, I wasn’t kidding. As we progress in Matthew 17, Jesus takes his three closest disciples—Peter, James, and John, sometimes called the “inner circle”—up to Mount Herman, or what we now know as the Mount of Transfiguration. One commentator suggests this might be the same mountain where Satan tempted Jesus at the start of his ministry, hoping to use his power for domination. But we’ve seen Jesus do the exact opposite, walking a path of healing, fulfillment, and humility, pointing towards the kingdom of God’s fulfillment. Now, it’s time for Peter, James, and John to see what they’ve proclaimed. As the text reminds us, it was just a few days ago that Peter declared Jesus is the Son of God who came into the world. After passing this crucial test of faith, Jesus is about to show them something they’ll never forget. The word “transfigured” in English means transformed, and he becomes his divine self. As John Wesley noted in his notes, his divine splendor was no longer that of a mere servant. This reminds me of Isaiah chapter 6, where Isaiah sees God in the throne room, and his garments flow throughout the entire throne room. It’s clear he’s not just a humble rabbi from the Galilee; they’ve glimpsed a small peak of Jesus’s true form, one being of two natures, fully God and fully man. Secondly, to verify his lineage, two other figures appear: Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets.

If you remember, Jesus said that all the law and the prophets would be fulfilled in his commands. Jesus is showing them that he stands above, even the two highest figures in Hebrew history.

Peter, in this first encounter, surprisingly wants to set up tents and stay put. It's a bit like going back to the Exodus and the tent of meeting. Peter's really drawn to this place. But then, God speaks from the cloud, which would've been terrifying. The disciples fall to their faces, filled with fear, because they recognize the divine voice and know the stories of God speaking from the cloud. They've probably heard the rumors that if the priest wasn't prepared while in the tent of meeting, surrounded by the divine cloud of incense, they would be struck dead instantly. What's interesting is that God's voice doesn't answer Peter's question directly. Instead, it repeats exactly what was said at Jesus's baptism: that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and has pleased the Father. When Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God who would come into the world now, it was clear that he was right.

Jesus responded with compassion, coming over to touch the fallen disciples and telling them to rise. As the disciples lifted their heads, the divine moment was over, sadly for Peter, Moses, and Elijah, who weren't going to take him up on his offer to camp out and have a boys' night out. Instead, almost to their surprise, Jesus was in his human form—the ordinary-looking rabbi from the Galilee. Matthew then shifts the scene as they begin to descend from the mountain after this transformation and divine proclamation. Jesus then tells them that this vision was for them only and to tell no one until after the time of the resurrection. If we remember back, Peter was the one who chastised Jesus for the claim of crucifixion, but God, in his graciousness, revealed to Peter, James, and John not only the crucifixion, but also Jesus's divine nature and mission. However, as is one of Jesus's customs, some acts of ministry are for the crowds in public, and others are to encourage his inner circle to prepare them for everything that will transpire. As those of us who have already seen his death, burial, and resurrection, it's hard to imagine what it would've been like for them to watch him be arrested, beaten, tried unfairly, and then die on a Roman cross. This was an act of grace to help them to trust him and his words, even in the most dire of circumstances, but it was not meant to be for public consumption.

Then the disciples bring up a question that keeps coming back. They’ve been told that Elijah would show up before the Messiah comes again. So, they’re wondering if Elijah’s appearance right now is just a sign of the second coming, or if he’ll come later. Jesus tells them that Elijah has already come, and his name is John. Elijah’s return was supposed to get the way clear for the Messiah. The disciples, like many Jews, thought Elijah would show up in person. But Jesus explains that Elijah’s role as the prophet before the Messiah was already fulfilled because of John. But it gets even more tragic because they not only rejected John the Baptist, they arrested and killed him in a brutal way. And Jesus knows that he’ll face the same fate.

The transfiguration is a mix of grace, beauty, and sadness. It’s Jesus showing his closest friends all that he is. It’s like he’s putting his trust in them. It’s definitely one of the most amazing scenes in the gospels to see Jesus in his pure, divine form. He’s no longer just a humble rabbi from Galilee; he’s showing them his full righteousness, just like we’ll see him in his second coming. But it’s also sad because it shows Jesus getting his disciples ready for his suffering. He knows that soon, their work of healing, feeding, and restoring will be replaced by betrayal, floggings, and ending on a Roman cross. And Jesus wants them to know that he’s in control through all of this terrible process. So, when they see him crucified, they’ll have the most confidence in his resurrection.

Application

Seven-Day Prayer Journal: Growing in Trust with Jesus

Theme: Drawing close to Jesus in prayer so that we can trust Him in every moment.

Day 1: Trusting in His Presence

Scripture: Matthew 17:1–2

Reflection Thought: Jesus revealed His glory to remind His disciples that He is always with them.

Prayer:

“Lord, help me to recognize Your presence in my life today. Even in ordinary moments, let me see Your glory and trust that You are with me.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

What moments today reminded me of God's presence?

Day 2: Listening to His Voice

Scripture: Matthew 17:5

Reflection Thought: The Father commands us to listen to Jesus above all else.

Prayer:

“Father, help me quiet my heart to hear Your voice. Teach me to obey and follow Jesus, even when life feels uncertain.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

What distractions do I need to surrender to hear God more clearly?

Day 3: Overcoming Fear with Faith

Scripture: Matthew 17:6–7

Reflection Thought: Jesus comforts us in our fear and calls us to rise.

Prayer:

“Jesus, when I am afraid, touch my heart with Your peace. Remind me to rise in courage and trust that You are in control.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

Where do I need courage today, and how is God speaking to me about that fear?

Day 4: Trusting Through Suffering

Scripture: Matthew 17:12

Reflection Thought: Jesus teaches that even in suffering, God’s plan is still good.

Prayer:

“Lord, help me trust You even in trial. Give me strength to believe that You are working all things for my good and Your glory.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

How have I seen God bring good through challenging seasons?

Day 5: Fixing My Eyes on Jesus Alone

Scripture: Matthew 17:8

Reflection Thought: The disciples saw Jesus only—He is our focus and hope.

Prayer:

“Jesus, teach me to fix my gaze on You. When distractions and worries crowd in, let me see only You.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

What worries do I need to release so I can focus on Jesus today?

Day 6: Remembering God's Faithfulness

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8

Reflection Thought: God never leaves or forsakes His people.

Prayer:

“Heavenly Father, remind me of Your faithfulness. Strengthen my trust in You as I recall the many ways You have led me before.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

Write down one way God has been faithful to me this week.

Day 7: Living in Hope

Scripture: John 14:1-3

Reflection Thought: Jesus prepares a future for all who trust Him.

Prayer:

“Lord, fill my heart with hope as I wait for Your promises. Help me live each day in the light of eternity, trusting fully in You.”

Personal Notes & Reflections:

How can I live with greater hope and anticipation of God’s promises?

Weekly Reflection:

Take time to journal how the Lord has strengthened your trust this week and note areas where you desire to grow closer to Him.

Additional Notes

“1-10* is clear, where on a high mountain Satan offered world rule to the Son of God.²⁹ Jesus has gone not the Satanic way of world dominance but the way of obedience laid out for him by God.”²

¹ 17 See H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 322.

¹⁸ Cf. further C. L. Blomberg, “Elijah, Election, and the Use of Malachi in the New Testament,” *CTR* 2 (1987): 100-108, and the literature there cited.

Blomberg, Craig. 1992. *Matthew*. Vol. 22. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² * 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;

9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ”

Matthew 4:8-10 (NRSV)

²⁹ *Matthew* 16:23* was already reminiscent of the same section 4:8-10*.

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. *Matthew: A Commentary*. Edited by Helmut Koester. *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

“2. And was transfigured—Or transformed. The indwelling deity darted out its rays through the veil of the flesh: and that with such transcendent splendour, that he no longer bore the form of a servant. His face shone with divine majesty, like the sun in its strength; and all his body was so irradiated by it, that his clothes could not conceal its glory, but became white and glittering as the very light, with which he covered himself as with a garment.”³

“God now interrupts Peter with the cloud of his presence and with his heavenly voice. The cloud reminds us of the one that overshadowed Moses on Sinai, leading to his dazzling splendor when he descended from the mountain (Exod 34:29–35, on which cf. also Paul’s remarks in 2 Cor 3:7–18), the cloud that enveloped the tabernacle when God’s glory filled it (Exod 40:34), and the cloud that followed the Israelites by day throughout their wilderness wanderings (Exod 40:36–38). Second Maccabees 2:8 looks forward to the cloud and glory of the Lord in the days of the Messiah.”⁴

“17:11–13 By way of reply, Jesus will point out that Elijah, as forerunner, did not come to prevent the Messiah’s suffering and death but to foreshadow it. But first Jesus reassures them that Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. The restoration he brought must thus have included his ministry of preaching and the widespread repentance to which it led. Full restoration of course awaits Christ’s return (Acts 1:6; 3:21), leaving open the question whether there is a yet unfulfilled part of the prophecy regarding Elijah. Revelation 11:3–6, in which one of the “two witnesses” has a miracle-working ministry closely parallel to Elijah’s, suggests there may be but is not clear about how literally this text should be taken. The two witnesses could well stand for the entire witnessing community of the people of God in the last days. As for the Jewish leaders, they still look for Elijah because they have rejected John the Baptist (v. 12a). Herod even executed him (v. 12b). And the same fate awaits Christ (v. 12c). In Matthew’s distinctive conclusion, based on his previous pattern of pointing out the disciples’ insight, we learn that these three finally do understand (v. 13).¹⁸”⁵

³ Wesley, John. 1818. Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament. Fourth American Edition. New York: J. Soule and T. Mason.

⁴ * “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34, ESV)
Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ 17 See H. N. Ridderbos, Matthew, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 322.

18 Cf. further C. L. Blomberg, “Elijah, Election, and the Use of Malachi in the New Testament,” CTR 2 (1987): 100–108, and the literature there cited.

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