



Unit .24

Session .04

Jesus Is Transfigured

Scripture



Matthew 17:1-13

1 After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. **2** He was transfigured in front of them, and his face shone like the sun; his clothes became as white as the light. **3** Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. **4** Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good for us to be here. If you want, I will set up three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” **5** While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown and were terrified. **7** Jesus came

up, touched them, and said, “Get up; don’t be afraid.” **8** When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus alone. **9** As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” **10** So the disciples asked him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” **11** “Elijah is coming and will restore everything,” he replied. **12** “But I tell you: Elijah has already come, and they didn’t recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” **13** Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

Intro Options



Main Point:
One day Jesus' full
glory will be displayed
for all to see.

Option 1

Ask each student to consider the best plan they have ever seen executed (or heard of executed). To spur their thinking, you might give them some categories:

- Sports: it could be the best-executed play they've seen or heard of;
- Movies: it could be the best-hatched plot;
- Romance: it could be the best planned-out proposal;
- Music: it could be the best orchestrated song they've heard;
- Arts: it could be the best collaborated work of art they've seen in dance or composition
- History: it could be the best-executed coup or military strategy or trade agreement

If you like, you could assign individual students individual categories, or you could make it a contest to see who can think of, find, or come up with the best plan.

Give students time to think of or research their plans (if they have the Internet via computers or phones, they could use it for their research), and then have them share what they found. Discuss how these excellent plans also show the glory of the planner. In today's lesson, we'll catch a glimpse of Jesus' glory and see how even His suffering and death are part His plan to bring about incredible glory.

Option 2

As a large group, come up with a list of potential places a middle school student might be at any given time in an average week. The more diverse possibilities, the better. You can have a very broad definition of places; for example, using Snapchat might qualify as a "place." Some examples might be:

- In their bedroom
- In a restaurant
- In a classroom
- At the kitchen table
- In an online multiplayer game
- Interacting on social media

Once you have a good-sized list, ask students to form small groups to make skits. Each group should choose one of the places from your list. They should then show an example of what it might look like to show or to experience God's grace in that place. If they want to go for a bonus round, they could also show how one might experience or show God's glory in that place.

Let them prepare and show their skits. See what their perceptions are. In today's lesson, we'll see Jesus show God's glory at the Transfiguration; He will also show God's grace when He tells His disciples not to be afraid in the midst of this glorious scene.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 17:1-5.



This remarkable story appears in each of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew's version is the longest of the three. Jesus and three disciples went up a high mountain and none of the disciples could have imagined what they were about to see. When they reached the peak of the mountain, Jesus was “transfigured in front of them” (v. 2). While we can't know every detail about this significant moment, the passage states that “his face shone like the sun” and “his clothes became as white as light.” We can permanently damage our eyes if we look at the sun directly, and it is almost ninety-three million miles away. Here, directly in front of the disciples, Jesus' face was shining like the burning star that brightens our days.

- **What do you imagine the three disciples were thinking and feeling as they witnessed this event before their eyes?**

There are a number of parallels and allusions to Moses in this passage. First, Jesus took the disciples and ascended the mountain, as did Moses when he traveled up Mount Sinai to receive the law. Second, during Jesus' transfiguration, Jesus' face was illumined like the sun. Similarly, after Moses had received the law from God in Exodus 34, verses 29-30 described his face as shining as well.

But aside from these allusions to Moses, the Book of Hebrews states explicitly that Jesus is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:3). Ultimately, we will see that Jesus is greater than Moses since Moses brought the law of the Lord, but Jesus embodied and fulfilled the law of the Lord on our behalf. Moreover, Moses couldn't lead his people to rest because he died in disobedience before entering the promised land, but Jesus will successfully deliver His followers to rest because He is fully obedient on their behalf.

- **How does the fact that Moses died before reaching the promised land demonstrate that Jesus is greater than Moses?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Christ's Exaltation

Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ's exaltation. Christ was exalted when God raised Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He ascended to the Father's right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He returns. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing sinners.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Matthew 17

1-5. As if that was not enough, the disciples then saw Moses and Elijah next to Jesus as the three began to converse. For these disciples with a Jewish background, this kind of company would have been remarkable. Peter, James, and John would have spent much of their lives hearing and reading about these figures—and there they were right in front of their eyes! However, the importance of these figures is greater than just the men themselves, for they signify something crucial. Moses and Elijah stand here as figures representing the Law and the Prophets, a twofold way of referring to the entirety of what we now call the Old Testament. These two representatives were significant because they bore witness that what Jesus has said throughout His ministry is true—that He is the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets. We will see in turn how Jesus is greater than each of these figures.

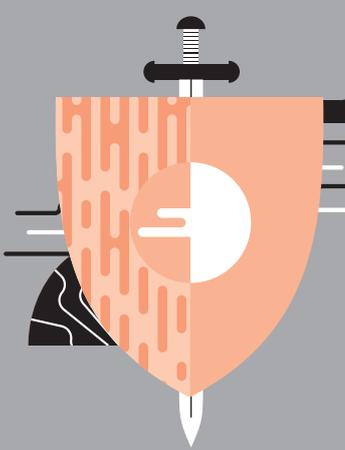
Moses and Elijah were perhaps the two most esteemed prophets of the Old Testament, Moses being regarded as the prototypical prophet of Israel (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:5-8; Deut. 18:15-22) and Elijah being perceived as a “new Moses” and forerunner to the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). Given the comparatively large amount of signs and wonders that occurred during their ministries, these two prophets were especially associated with God’s miraculous activity. Furthermore, both of these men had their own special encounters with God on a mountain (Ex. 34:1-9; 1 Kings 19:8-18). Credentials such as these make them well suited to be present at the event of Jesus’ transfiguration.

6. Terror is often the reaction when humans come into contact with God. We can see this all throughout the Bible; God’s presence is incomprehensibly glorious such that we can’t even bear to be around Him without aid.

- In Exodus 33–34, God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock so that he wouldn’t die (Ex. 33:19-23).
- During his vision of God’s being seated in the temple as the seraphim proclaimed His supreme holiness, the prophet Isaiah confessed himself as being ruined (Isa. 6:1-5).
- John records his response to Jesus’ majestic appearing as the Son of Man by saying he fell at his feet like a dead man (Rev. 1:17).

The reality is that God is glorious and grand, and in His presence we become intensely aware of our frailty and fragility. Yet, in His glorious grace, God calls us to not be afraid. Jesus speaks to the disciples in their frightened state following His transfiguration by saying get up and don’t be afraid. Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, when walking on water, Jesus told His fearful disciples to have courage and not be afraid.

In Defense (p. 106, DDG)



“When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.’ Had the story been made up by the disciples in order to convince the early Christians that Jesus was really God, it is unlikely that they would have portrayed themselves in such a negative light! The importance of this incident should not be underrated, because years later, Peter referred to it as a key moment in Jesus’ self-revelation [in 2 Peter 1:16-18].”¹

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 17:6-8.



God is different than us; we are the creature and He is the Creator. It isn't the case that God is like us, just bigger—as if we have knowledge and He just has more of it or as if we have power and He just has more of it. No, He isn't just a bigger version of us. He is altogether different; He is incomprehensible. We can see this incomprehensible God in full display in verse 6. When the disciples heard the thunderous voice of God from a bright cloud, Matthew tells us that they fell face down and were terrified.

▪ In what ways is it good news that God is different than us?

Not only is His grace and glory the foundation of our courage, it is the foundation of our salvation. The only way the disciples were going to move out of terror at the thunderous voice from the clouds is if God Himself stepped in to invoke their courage.

When the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead, His presence is going to have a similar effect on mankind as the voice of God did to the disciples here. Many will fall in fear as Jesus returns as a judge; yet, others will rejoice at the same event as they see Jesus. What separates those who will meet Jesus as Judge and those who will meet Him as Savior is union with Christ. Those who have been united to Christ by faith and are found “in Him” will meet Him with the greatest rejoicing imaginable. On the last day, those who are in Christ will not have to fear the wrath of God, for God's wrath has already been poured out toward them at the cross.

▪ Do you look forward to Jesus' return? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 17:9-13.



In this passage, we see a connection between John the Baptist and Elijah. Elijah did come, but they didn't recognize him. On the contrary, they did whatever they pleased to him (v. 12). Jesus here referred to the beheading of John the Baptist in Matthew 14. Jesus stated that the way people abused and mistreated John the Baptist was a foretelling of how they would treat Him shortly after that since He knew He was soon to head toward the cross.

Not only is Jesus greater than Moses, He is also greater than Elijah. When Jesus asked his disciples in Matthew 16 who the people thought He was (v. 13), the disciples replied with a host of possibilities, one of which was “Elijah.” However, as Peter pointed out, Jesus is greater than Elijah, for He is the “Messiah, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Elijah prophesied; Jesus is the one prophesied about. John's coming as a second Elijah set the stage for people to recognize Jesus not merely as another in the successive line of prophets, like Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, but as the prophet. 

▪ How does hearing Jesus' connection between Elijah and John the Baptist help you to see that Jesus is the central character of the Bible's storyline?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Matthew 17

10-11. “Jesus answers that question in Matthew 17:12 by pointing out that John the Baptist, the Elijah to come, had already come. But that simply leads to a deeper theological question: How is John the Elijah who would restore all things if John had been beheaded? John didn't usher in a great restoration, or so the disciples thought. Jesus had to help the disciples understand that the kingdom of God was not being ushered in the way they thought it would be. They expected a messianic forerunner and then a Messiah who would together usher in a kingdom on this earth marked by triumph and power. However, God's kingdom was coming in a very different way.”²

Activity

To make the glorious reality of the Transfiguration missional, you students will perform an activity called “What-So-What.”

Each student should get a sheet of paper and fold it in half. On each half of the paper, they should label, “What” at the top. On the crease in the middle, they should write “So”.

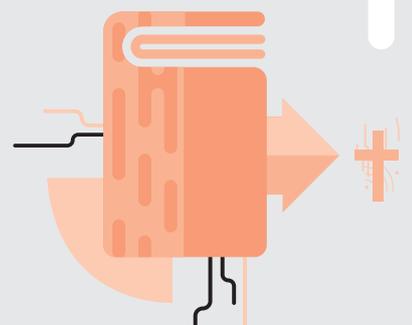
On the left, they should draw the Transfiguration as described in today's text. Their drawing should focus on one of the three points from the lesson: glory, grace, or plan. Whichever point they choose, they should write it under the “What” at the top.

On the right side of their paper, they should draw a real-world application for today that corresponds to the aspect of the Transfiguration. This right side is the “So what” that follows from the Transfiguration on the left side. If possible, they should try to make their “So what” side missional. For example, if their left drawing focused on Jesus' grace, their right side might show a Christian forgiving someone who spoke poorly of her on social media. If their left drawing focused on Jesus' plan, the right side might show someone sharing the good news of Jesus with someone because Jesus' return could happen any time. If students are having some trouble coming up with ideas, you could also them to make their drawings particular to specific people: for example, a football player, a gamer, an artist, a sibling, etc.

Let them make their What-So-What drawings and then share them. How do they show missional living? How do they show us experiencing God's grace, glory, or plan today?

(p. 105, DDG) Christ Connection

At the Transfiguration, the Son of God's glory was revealed more fully to Peter, James, and John. The Transfiguration foreshadowed Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension (Luke 9:31) when He would depart and return to His place of glory. We live with the hope that one day Jesus will return in full glory to make all things new.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



How would you summarize some of the biblical insights from this account?

How could you use this account when explaining to a friend how the Old Testament points to Jesus?

Heart



Why should Matthew 17:7 be a comfort for us today?

What are some fears you are struggling with today? How does it affect you knowing that Jesus is near?

Hands



Why should this account motivate us towards missions?

Who are you actively sharing the gospel with in your life now? If you aren't, why not?

Main Point: One day Jesus' full glory will be displayed for all to see.



Head

The scene of Jesus' transfiguration is one of glory and might. In it, we get a peek at just how incomprehensible Jesus really is. However, though we can't comprehend everything about Jesus, we can learn at least three things about Him from the transfiguration. First, we see that Jesus is better than both Moses and Elijah because He fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets. Second, we have reason for encouragement as the same God at work in the transfiguration has touched us with His grace and has commanded us not to be afraid. Third, we learn that this glorious Son of God revealed in the transfiguration was heading toward His own suffering, one day to come in glory on a permanent basis.



Heart

It is easy to glance past the significance of verse 7 when it says Jesus came up and touched them, then instructed them to not be afraid. It is significant because the source of courage and the ability to not fear and instead stand in God's presence is because Jesus has drawn near to us. Among other things, this means that whatever fear or doubt we face in this life, we can overcome them simply because Jesus is close by with His secure embrace, giving us the courage to stand and move on.



Hands

While Jesus told the disciples to get up and not to be afraid during this fearful experience, there is a day coming in which He will utter the same exhortation and mean it for all eternity. Those who have trusted in Jesus alone—through faith alone by grace alone—for their salvation will enter into a rest in which fear will be no more. In this way, the fear of the Lord is the death of the fear of anything else.

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