

Matthew, chapter 17 Seeing the Kingdom

Even as Jesus begins to urgently emphasize His impending death at Jerusalem, He then displays His Glory to them—in His transfiguration—as confirmation that His sufferings and death are the inauguration of His Kingdom Glory.

CONTEXT & MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

1 / We are all familiar with the story of the Transfiguration event. And, we are probably also all convinced that the Transfiguration manifests and displays the Deity of Jesus Christ and His Father's delight and approval of Him and His ministry. BUT, we should also dig deeper to understand how His Transfiguration fits into the contexts of the flow of Matthew's narrative.

2 / The first thing we need to see as we begin this study here in **Matthew 17**, is that the Transfiguration narrative is in no way a stand-alone event. We all know that our chapter and verse divisions were added much later in the transmissions of Scripture, around the 1200s A.D. While they help us navigate our reading of the Bible and cite and find references more easily, they can also distract us from making the contextual connections that will help us get the intended messages that the Bible's authors certainly meant for us to see—not only to keep our minds on track and in the flow of the narrative, but also to help us interpret the what and why of the message of a particular passage. ***There is no hard break between ch 16.28 and ch 17! Ch 17 follows and fulfills the promised beatific 'seeing' of ch 16.28!***

3 / So, having said that, "Why was Jesus transfigured before them? How does the Transfiguration fit into the contexts that Jesus was impressing on His disciples [and us]?" ***It was that He was on His way to Jerusalem to suffer many things, be killed, and then be raised again!*** But, this was the Father's covenant purpose and plan from the beginning—and THIS would inaugurate His Kingdom of Glory that would be finally fulfilled at the end of this age! The disciples were all gung-ho for the Kingdom and Glory aspect of His message...but the suffering and death part of it, not so much.

4 / So, with that in mind, let's just connect all the just-previous conversations that led up to the Transfiguration experience:

[1] **ch 16.13-20:** Jesus takes them to Caesarea-Philippi, the heart of the pagan 'kingdom of darkness' in their place and time, and clearly establishes with them His Messianic identity as 'the Son of Man' [**Daniel 7.13-14**] and 'the Christ'; AND He declares that His invincible church and its invasion and assault mission against 'the gates of Hades' will be advanced by that Gospel message. And that His Gospel message would be **"the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"**;

[2] **ch 16.21-23:** Jesus begins to earnestly, urgently press upon His disciples what was impending upon Him—His foreordained crucifixion and resurrection. Peter disagrees with Him and rebukes Him, only to receive the sound rebuke he was actually siding with Satan;

[3] **ch 16.24-27:** Jesus 'makes disciples' by instructing them that if they follow Him, they must be willing to walk themselves in the same steps He is walking—but that He will reward them in His Kingdom: **"For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the Glory of His Father..."**

[4] **ch 16.28:** But then, Jesus foretells this personal experience they will soon have, ***and what they should learn and take away from it: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom!"*** So, what does that mean? He means that some of those very disciples who were standing in His Presence would not die until they personally and visually witnessed His victorious 'coming' in His Kingdom of Glory! That's why I'm titling this lesson 'Seeing the Kingdom.' They would see with their own eyes—before they died—a 'preview' of the Glorious Kingdom He will bring to the earth *when He comes again in His Second Coming ...* and that this Glorious Kingdom will be secured and established *by His death and resurrection!*

I | ch 17.1-13 | Jesus reveals the coming Kingdom to His disciples—along with some of its essential elements—by being transfigured [metamorphosed] before them; and then more fully explains to them the significance of what they had just witnessed...

1 / It appears they are still in the same regions of Caesarea-Philippi where Jesus had taken His disciples to prepare them for His impending crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Matthew records that **“after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John His brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves...”** This was **six days after** His intense, hard conversations about His upcoming death in Jerusalem AND His promise that if they follow Him in His steps, He is coming again **with His angels in the Glory of His Father** to reward them for their faithfulness **in His Kingdom**. In other words, He is Who He says He is and Who they have confessed He is; His death and resurrection will secure, establish, and inaugurate His Glorious Kingdom yet to come; and He will share this Kingdom with them!

2 / This Transfiguration experience will both encourage Him [Jesus] and give them an earnest ‘preview’ of that promise.

3 / The **high mountain** is probably the well-known, often-referenced Mount Hermon. AND **Luke 9.28** tells us that Jesus **went up on the mountain to pray. And as He was praying,** this Transfiguration began to manifest itself. The word **transfigured** is from the Greek verb *meta-morph-ah-ow* which means ‘to change from one form to another.’ We often use the metamorphosis from a cocoon to a beautiful butterfly [and all the other uses of the word]. In Jesus’ *metamorphosis*, His innate, inherent **Glory**. In fact, Luke’s account uses this word **Glory** two times: **“...they saw His Glory.”** This is the **God-Glory** that Jesus is, the **Glory** He had with the Father from eternity, before the world existed [**John 17.5**]. Luke says **the appearance of His face was altered**. Matthew records **His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light**. All of these appearances refer to the physical, visible manifestations of the Presence of God—the ways He revealed Himself in human history, and even in the creation of the world itself: **And God said, “Let there be light...and there was light.”** It is the **Glory** of the Shekinah Presence of God! It is the **Glory** that will accompany His Second Coming and His Kingdom [**Revelation 21.9-14, 22-26; et. al.**]. **THIS** is the **Glory** that He is, and the **Glory** He will receive by His death and resurrection, and the **Glory** He will share with us in His Kingdom!

4 / BUT Jesus does not appear alone. **And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him**. Both Moses and Elijah represent all the **Law and the Prophets** who presented the Kingdom in the OT and prophesied Jesus’ coming—both His first and second comings. And what were they talking about? Again, **Luke 9.30** tells us they **spoke of His departure [exodus] which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem**. So, even though the disciples wouldn’t grasp the full import of this vision [seeing] or conversation until *after* Jesus’ resurrection, still Jesus is giving them visual, experiential confirmation that what He was foretelling to them is what He will **accomplish** by His death and resurrection. **THIS IS THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN!** AND, if you read Peter’s account in **2 Peter 1.16-18**, he reflects on this very experience later and gives us the confirmation of what they learned from Jesus and about Jesus that day.

5 / Yet, in spite of this stupendous and awesome display of Christ’s **Glory**, somehow the disciples couldn’t stay awake. They were **heavy with sleep [Luke 9.32]**—and, it had been a very intense and exhausting few days of stressful conversations and processing what Jesus was telling them and what it all meant. And, it also seems that Jesus’ transfiguration, the appearances of Moses and Elijah, and Jesus’ conversations with them had transpired while they were slumbering in their tiredness. Then, they woke up to see all this! **“...but when they became fully awake they saw His Glory and the two men who stood with Him.”**

6 / As Peter and the other two disciples woke up to this appearance of **Glory**, they knew they should memorialize the occasion! They may have thought that the long-promised, long-awaited-for Kingdom had finally come! After all, they were hoping and waiting for Elijah to come to announce the restoration of the Kingdom back to its former, intended **Glory** just as he had done during his prophetic ministry. The very last words of promise and hope in the OT told them to look for Elijah to come. **Malachi 4.5-6: “Behold,**

I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of The LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” Maybe this was that day! So Peter proposed that they build three memorial ‘tents’—to establish a kind of Kingdom ‘headquarters’ or staging site here. 7 / That’s 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!**’” Again, this cloud of Glory is the physical, visible manifestation of the Presence and Glory of God—just like He appeared to them at Sinai; and as He accompanied and led them through the wilderness; and as He filled the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple; and as He will manifest His Presence in the New Jerusalem and the New Heaven and earth.

8 / This was God’s testimony also to focus all of their attention—not on Moses and Elijah, but—on the Kingdom Authority of Jesus Christ and what He was urging them to hear and understand—His death and resurrection. “**Listen to Him!**” Moses had given ancient Israel the promise in **Deuteronomy 18.15 & 18: “The LORD your God will raise up for a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen—...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.”** That Prophet is Jesus! So now, Yahweh says, “**Listen to Him!**” [Maybe we’re hoping that Peter has begun to more seriously re-consider his previously rebuking Jesus for telling them about His impending death at Jerusalem with “**Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You!**” [ch 16.22]. Yahweh says from Heaven—audibly—“*My Son knows what He’s talking about and what we’re doing here! Don’t second-guess Him! No suffering and dying...and rising again...—no Glory and no Kingdom! Listen to Him!*” As they were cowering in fear with their faces on the ground in the Presence of God’s **Glory**, Jesus tenderly touches them to bring them back around to their pre-transfiguration company: “**Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.**

9 / Well, of course, this brings up a lot of questions begging for a lot of answers. Jesus, though, gives them a preemptive ‘gag order’: “**Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.**” The reason being, even the disciples have yet to fully understand how Jesus’ death and resurrection will be the essential anchor and catalyst for the inauguration of the Kingdom. They will after His resurrection—but not till then. They can’t truthfully proclaim Christ’s Gospel and The Kingdom of Heaven until they fully understand how He must **die and be raised again according to the Scriptures.** And all of this must transpire in God’s time and God’s way—as Jesus is fulfilling it.

10 / And then, there’s the Elijah question: “**Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?**” This again is the **Malachi 4.5-6** prophecy and promise. Jesus’ reply: “**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.** So, yes, they had seen the OT Elijah in his brief appearance with Jesus as they spoke of Jesus’ impending *exodus*, but the Messianic appearance of Elijah and announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven had been fulfilled in John the Baptist. The Kingdom of Heaven had come in the announced appearing of Christ as prophesied and promised. And the Transfiguration they had just witnessed was the confirmation and affirmation that it would be fully and finally brought to consummation in God’s purpose and time! *And that is still our Hope!*

II | ch 17.14-20 | When Jesus [again] heals and delivers this young son from his demon oppression, Jesus demonstrates [again] one of the most essential missions of His Kingdom—to destroy and dismantle the kingdom of Satan, the Evil One, and deliver his former captives into the Kingdom of Heaven ... and that His power is the only power that can accomplish this mission...

1 / The significance of this event that is transpiring at the base of mountain is also so emblematic of one of the core missions of The Kingdom of Heaven. Even as Jesus is manifesting His Glory and the sure advancement of The Kingdom of Heaven up on the mountain, the disciples are struggling with a demon exorcism down at the base of the mountain. A desperate father has brought his young son to Jesus’ waiting

disciples so they could cast out the demon. The boy was suffering a two-fold affliction: the physical episodes of seizures, plus it appears the demon had taken the advantage of the opportunity to possess the boy to harm himself. **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” [John 10.10].** This is just another case example of the spiritual warfare that has waged since the Garden of Eden as Satan, the Serpent, has sought all means and occasions to usurp and thwart the Kingdom of Christ.

2 / However, one of the core missions of Christ and The Kingdom of Heaven is to invade, conquer, and plunder Satan’s kingdom of sin, darkness, destruction, and death—and deliver God’s people from his dominion into eternal life and liberty. [see ch 12.22-30; John 12.31] Jesus will do so here again...

3 / Jesus—along with the three disciples—descended from the mount of Transfiguration to encounter this scene of chaos, frustration, and anger. The disciples had attempted to cast out the demon, but failed—even though they had done so numerous other times on their previous short-term mission journeys. Why couldn’t they do so now, this time? Jesus will demonstrate to them that it was because they thought they could cast out the demon—or any other act of Gospel power—by their own power. But Jesus had given them what power they exercised ONLY as they exercised it in His Name, wholly dependent upon Him and His Presence and purpose. The disciples hadn’t learned that yet. But they will—both now and also later on...

III | ch 17.22-23 | Jesus again, for the second time in this immediate context and time-frame, foretells to His disciples that ‘the Son of Man’ must first be delivered into the hands of His enemies, they will kill Him, and He will be raised again on the third day...

1 / Jesus returns with His disciples once again to Galilee—after previously spending some days farther north in the regions of Caesarea-Philippi. And once again, Jesus takes the opportunity for some intense and urgent personal conversations with His disciples, pressing upon them the impending experiences awaiting Him in Jerusalem.

2 / This is now the second such focused conversation He’s had with them just in the past few days [see Lesson 11]. The first one is recorded in ch 16.21-23; now this one; and yet a third such conversation will take place in ch 20.17-19. Jesus is feeling the weight of the seriousness of the times and events. His disciples still do not seem to grasp just how real and impending everything is...and the weight of the burden on Jesus’ soul.

IV | ch 17.24-27 | In this confrontation over the ‘temple tax,’ Jesus again asserts His priority over the Jerusalem temple [because He is greater than that temple...and IS the True Temple of God], and miraculously provides the voluntary payment He doesn’t have to render—but does...

1 / This encounter in Capernaum in Galilee may appear to be a little disconnected and unrelated to the previous settings and contexts, but it isn’t. [1] For one thing, it accentuates again the escalating hostilities between Jesus and the religious elites. These **collectors of the tax** would be representing the Jerusalem leaders [see ch 15.1]; [2] and also it gives Jesus the opportunity to express to His disciples His ‘greater-than-ness’ to their temple.

2 / This ‘temple tax’ [‘tribute money’ KJV] was a voluntary assessment from the Jewish populace for the support of the temple activities. It was not their prescribed tithes or customs/tolls they would pay at checkpoints along their roadways. AND, the relatives of their religious officials and rabbis were exempted from paying it at all. The tax was roughly equivalent to a two days’ wages for a common laborer. So, when they approach Peter to ask him if Jesus paid the tax, Peter brings the confrontation to Jesus.

3 / In short, Jesus declares to Peter that since He is ‘greater than the temple’ anyway [see ch 12.6], He and His followers are not obligated to pay it. BUT, to avoid any unnecessary confrontation over it, He told Peter to go to the sea, cast in a *hook [not a net]*, and the first fish he caught would have the necessary tax payment for Him and Peter. ***Just another demonstration of His miraculous Kingdom Authority!***

4 / Now, this will set the stage for Jesus’ fourth major teaching discourse in **Matthew 18—next lesson...**