

1 Transfiguration – Matthew 17

No prophecy was given by private interpreters. It wasn't just one prophet who spoke of Christ. They weren't writing myths or legends. They were eyewitnesses of the various signs and wonders of God, which all pointed forward to his coming in the flesh. This why our Lord chose two of his prophets to appear with him in his glory when he finally came in the flesh. He chose Moses, whose body was buried by God on Mount Nebo in Moab, and Elijah, who was taken into heaven by the chariots of fire. These two men served as witnesses representing all the prophets of God.

The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible. The Holy Spirit testifies of Christ. The Scriptures are therefore about Christ. If all Scripture has the same source, then all Scripture has the same goal. They came from the Spirit of the Father for this purpose – to reveal the Son of the Father. They are united in this one goal, that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you would have life in his name. The books of the Bible all have the same author. And yet, God desires many witnesses. This is why the Holy Spirit did not choose only one prophet to write down and proclaim his words. He chose men like Moses and Elijah. He chose several holy men of God to write and proclaim the saving truth. Yet these many witnesses, while writing at different times and addressing various circumstances, all testify of the same Savior, Jesus Christ.

God does not approve of only one witness. He told Moses that no one should be convicted of a crime without the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15). When God performed his glorious works through Moses he did so for all of the Egyptians to see. When he caused fire to come down on Mount Carmel and consume Elijah's sacrifice, he did it in front of four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, four hundred prophets of Asherah, and all the Israelites in that area. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he appeared to his apostles, the women at the tomb, as well as more than five hundred disciples at one time. God speaks as one, yet he desires at least two or three witnesses. This reflects who he himself is. He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons and one God, three who bear witness yet one witness.

Jesus did not want his disciples to tell anyone about his glory until he had risen from the dead. He took only three of them, Peter, James, and John. But this was enough. He brought them to a high mountain and was transformed right before their eyes, showing what he truly looks like as the Son of God. He caused Moses and Elijah to appear with him, showing himself to be the God of the prophets, the true Lord of Israel in the flesh, shining with the very splendor and majesty of his Father. But he didn't want anyone else to know about this until after he had already suffered, died, buried, and raised from the dead. So he told his disciples not to talk about it. Why was this?

This was because the glory he came to reveal was more than what he revealed in the Old Testament. He wasn't simply proving that the Egyptian gods were false, that the prophets of Baal and Asherah were wrong, or that a particular divinity of this or that nation was made-up. The glory and majesty he revealed to Peter, James, and John on that mountain was greater than the plagues he performed on Egypt, the fire he sent down at Mount Carmel, or the cloud on Mount Sinai. It would fill more than just a tabernacle made with hands. Much more, the glory Jesus revealed in his transfiguration would put to silence all false prophets, overthrow all false gods and the very forces of hell. It was the glory by which he would save all sinners from every nation, taking away the sin of the whole world. This is why he would hide it, for a time.

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Cloaked under weakness and suffering, the Lord of glory would bear the guilt, misery, and condemnation of all people of all time.

Peter says that this isn't a myth. He saw it with his own eyes. Peter records true history, verified by eye-witness testimonies. Peter took history seriously. That's why he reacted the way he did when he saw Jesus showing his divine majesty with Moses and Elijah on either side of him. He recognized that it was good to be there, and then he offered to make three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter knew his history. He knew that Moses built a tabernacle for the Lord. He knew that the Lord had the children of Israel live in tents in the wilderness. And every year, Peter would have lived in a tent for a week to remember this historical fact. He also knew that Abraham took the Lord and his two angels into his home. Peter's request is therefore serious and thoughtful. He desires to show hospitality, longing for Jesus to remain with him and dwell with him.

Peter also understands the importance of witnesses. When Elijah faced off against the prophets of Baal, he made an altar using twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This was a witness to God's promise to his people. Building tabernacles for Jesus and his two prophets would serve as a testament to God's glory. And yet, despite Peter's sincere, pious, and thoughtful efforts, God did not need it. The Lord did not come into the flesh to dwell in a tabernacle made with hands. He has pitched his tabernacle with men in the flesh and blood of his only begotten Son. This and this alone would be the purpose of Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, John, and all the witnesses of God's glory. It is to bear witness to Christ.

That's why the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!" Listen to Jesus. This is what Moses said in Deuteronomy, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. (Deut 18:15)" And look how many times Elijah said, "This is what the LORD God says!" Listen to the Lord. Listen to Christ. Listen to the Son. All the prophets bear witness to him. So when Peter, James, and John looked up after being driven to the ground in fear, all they could see was Jesus only. Moses and Elijah disappeared. Like John the Baptist, the last great prophet, they decreased so that all attention would be put on Christ. No more tabernacles made with hands, no more sacrifices made with animals, no more shadows and figures pointing forward to the Lord's coming. Now, the Lord has appeared. He has shown his glory to these three disciples so that they would be his witnesses. And now he would tell them what he would do.

On the way down the mountain Jesus explained that he would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. They were to tell no one about his glory on the mountain until after all this was accomplished. Six days before this he told them the same thing. The Son of Man was going to be handed over, mistreated, and crucified, and on the third day he would rise. Peter, who loved his Lord and couldn't bear the thought of him facing such a miserable death, rebuked him. But Jesus responded by calling Peter Satan. No amount of pious intention can stand in the face of what the Holy Spirit caused the prophets to predict. As Moses said, God would provide the sacrifice. As Elijah demonstrated, the Lord who consumed the sacrifice with fire is the true God. As Isaiah declared, he would be crushed for our iniquities. As David sang, he would be made lower than the angels and his hands and feet would be pierced. And as Zechariah said, they will look on God whom they pierced.

This is the purpose of God's glory. It is to save sinners, even at the cost of facing the most shameful death and bearing his own fiery wrath. He is the Lord who saves. He is Jesus, the Son

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of the Father. Christ, his cross, and resurrection is alone the sinner's plea. At the throne of God's perfection nothing else can set him free.

Therefore, if we only have Christ, then we have all things. We have eternal life, a new birth, the assurance right now today that our sins are forgiven, that we have peace with God, and that we are blessed beyond all things. This is what the entire Bible is about. It's what the entire Christian life is about. It's why we defend everything the Bible teaches, whether it is that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, or it is that God truly did lead his people out of Egypt, or that he truly did send fire down from heaven, or that he truly did become flesh in the womb of the Virgin, suffer and die under Pontus Pilate, rise from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father. All of it, testified by many witnesses, is verified truth. It all centers on Christ and his work to save you from sin and condemnation. So listen to the Scriptures. Listen to the testimony of the prophets. Listen to the Holy Spirit who speaks through these words. Listen to the voice of your Shepherd in this saving truth. Listen to Jesus. Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Son
Thy Spirit proves what Thou hast won
Through pens of holy sages.
All truth revealed for heart and life –
Each comfort in my time of strife –
Makes known the King of ages.
What cheer
I hear
When Thy Spirit
By Thy Merit
And Thy Favor
Makes me know my God and Savior!

Lord, let me see Thy cross and grace,
Thy resurrection, and Thy face
In Scripture's ev'ry lesson.
The words inscribed by holy seers
Renew my faith to calm my fears,
And answer ev'ry question.
Thy Word,
O Lord,
Dwells within me!
I am in Thee,
To Thee cleaving,
Only in Thy voice believing! Amen.