

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Preview of the Second Coming, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 17:1–6

Code: 2323

Christ Displays His Glory

[A Preview of the Second Coming, Part 2](#)

Matthew 17:1-4

REVIEW

I. THE PRINCIPLE (16:24)

II. THE PARADOX (16:25-26)

III. THE PAROUSIA (16:27)

The disciples needed to hear about Christ's future return because it balanced what Christ taught them about dying to self, taking up a cross, and living in obedience (Matt. 16:24). Suffering would be a way of life for them, but it would be wonderfully compensated by Christ's coming in glory.

Matthew: The Presentation of the King

It was Matthew's purpose to present Christ as King. When the King first came into the world, He was rejected. But when He returns He will be royally acclaimed and crowned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The fact of the Second Coming is an important truth in Matthew's gospel (24:29-31, 25:31, and 26:63-64).

The Second Coming of Christ is mentioned in 1,527 passages in the Old Testament and 319 in the New Testament (Ren[ac]e Pache, *The Return of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1955] p. 5). The Second Coming of Christ is not a message restricted to the New Testament, but is well grounded in the Old Testament as well.

The disciples should have understood that the Messiah would suffer first and then be glorified. But they didn't, so the Lord gave them the promise of verse 27. To insure they would grasp the importance of that promise, the Lord went beyond the prophecy and promised a preview.

IV. THE PREVIEW (16:28; 17:13)

A. The Promise of the Preview (16:28)

The Lord didn't want the disciples to ever doubt the reality of the Second Coming, so He gave them a glimpse of its glory. It served to balance their understanding of sharing in Christ's sorrows by affirming their participation in His glory. They were encouraged because they now knew that humiliation meant ultimate glory. Romans 8:17 says, "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him." The disciples' hearts were filled with assurance and hope in the midst of great despair.

The Preview Principle

Some people find it difficult to relate the actual transfiguration to the promise given in Matthew 16:28. Another passage of Scripture gives us an example of a similar situation: Acts 2 records the events of the day of Pentecost when the church had its formal birth. On that day, 120 of Christ's followers were gathered in an upper room. In the midst of their time of fellowship and prayer, the Spirit of God came upon them with cloven tongues of fire resting upon each individual (vv. 2-3). They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak languages they did not know (v. 4). The words they spoke told of the wonderful works of God (v. 11). All those things served to announce the arrival of the Spirit of God as He gave official birth to the church.

The people of Jerusalem didn't understand what was happening. Verse 12 says, "They were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" Some of them decided they were drunk (v. 13). But in verse 16 Peter says, "This is that which was spoken through the prophet, Joel." Then from verses 17-21 he quotes from Joel 2:28-32--a passage still to be fulfilled at the Second Coming: "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great notable day of the Lord to come; and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:17-21).

Joel's prophecy is related to the Second Coming. Notice that everything promised in the prophecy did not happen on the day of Pentecost. What happened in Acts 2:1-13 was a preview of final Kingdom events. The people had a taste of what will happen when Jesus returns. Peter wasn't claiming that all the elements of Joel's prophecy were fulfilled that day, but he was confirming it was a glimpse of final glory. In fact, everything Jesus did in His ministry--all His signs, wonders, and miracles (and those performed by the apostles)--was a taste of His Second Coming. That's why the writer of Hebrews said the law is "a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1).

The Near and Far of Prophecy

In the Old Testament, it was common for a prophet to couple a prophecy for the near future with a prophecy for the distant future. The near fulfillment enabled the prophets to verify their prophetic role and bolster the people's faith that the distant prophecy would one day come to pass. I believe Jesus was showing Himself to be a trustworthy prophet by predicting His future return in the last days. To prove it, He predicted that some of the disciples wouldn't die until they saw Him in His regal majesty.

Thus, when the near prophecy happened, they could trust Him for His future return.

B. The Particulars of the Scene (17:1)

1. The time (v. 1a)

"After six days"

Luke 9:28 says it was about eight days. Matthew was probably referring to the exact time while Luke was speaking in general terms. Matthew may have been referring to the number of days between the promise and its fulfillment, while Luke may have been including the day of the promise and the day of the fulfillment. There is no contradiction between the two gospels.

2. The people (v. 1b)

"Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, his brother"

Those three disciples were the most intimate with our Lord. Along with Andrew, they were the first to be gathered to His side (Matt. 4:18-22; John 1:40-42). Jesus drew the three of them away from the rest of the disciples. But why did He do that?

a) The positive reasons

(1) They were to be witnesses

Jesus needed witnesses to see His glory. Deuteronomy 19:15 established the principle that any testimony was to be confirmed by two or three witnesses. The Lord wanted the display of His glory confirmed by trustworthy witnesses.

(2) They were closest with Christ

Peter, James, and John were Christ's closest disciples. Perhaps they frequently accompanied Him into intimate times of prayer. I don't believe they would have been surprised that Christ asked them along. Mark 5:37 says they were with Him when he raised a young girl from the dead. They accompanied Him into the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He agonized over His coming death (Mark 14:33). It seems proper that those who most intimately knew His sorrow and suffering should share in His glory. And suffer they did: Peter was crucified upside down, James was beheaded, and John was exiled. Certainly they deserved to see His glory.

(3) They were trustworthy leaders

They were men of great spiritual report. When it came time to articulate what happened, they would be trusted. They could convince and influence the other disciples.

b) The negative reason

If all the disciples and the crowd had seen the transfiguration, there would have been no way to prevent widespread chaos. The people would have had even a greater desire to see Jesus as their political and military Messiah. To prevent that from happening, Jesus restricted the preview to Peter, James, and John.

3. The place (v. 1c)

"[Jesus] bringeth them up into an high mountain privately."

We don't know which mountain they went up, but it was located somewhere in upper Galilee south of Caesarea, Philippi.

After they arrived at their destination, the disciples were soon sleeping (Luke 9:32). While they were sleeping, Jesus was praying (Luke 9:28). We this same scenario when the Lord poured out His heart to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples were asleep on that occasion also. Jesus rebuked them and said, "Couldst not thou watch one hour?" (Mark 14:37). Luke 22:45 tells us they

were "sleeping for sorrow." When people are depressed they often find they want to sleep. Unfortunately, some people become so depressed that they want to sleep for good, so they take their lives. Some people take sleeping pills so they can escape from their problems. Perhaps the disciples slept because it was the only way to deal with their sorrow. The same thing might have been true on the mount of transfiguration. Only a few days before, Jesus predicted He would be killed, and that they would follow Him by taking up their cross (Matt. 16:21, 24). They often viewed their circumstances in the worst light. On one occasion Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16).

When the three disciples came out of their sleep, an incredible thing happened--unlike anything that has ever happened in the history of the world.

C. The Proofs of Christ's Deity (17:2-13)

In the events that follow are five proofs that Jesus is the King of glory, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. The disciples needed this affirmation, and so do we.

1. The transformation of the Son (v. 2)

"[Jesus] was transfigured [Gk., metamorpho[ma]o] before them; and his face did shine like the sun, and his raiment was as white as the light."

Jesus was totally changed before the three disciples. The Greek root of metamorpho[ma]o is morph[ma]e, which refers to form. His form was totally changed. The glory of God was unveiled, radiating from the inside of Christ outward. He was like a supernatural light bulb. The light from within Him was as brilliant as the sun.

The scene leaves little doubt regarding who Christ is. Whenever God, who is spirit (John 4:24), chose to manifest His invisible essence in the Old Testament, He did so as light. In Exodus He manifested Himself in a pillar of fire and a cloud.

a) 2 Peter 1:16--"We have not followed cunningly designed fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." b) John 1:14--"We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

c) Matthew 24:30--"They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (cf. Matt. 25:30). d) Revelation 1:14-16--The apostle John gave the following description of Jesus Christ in his vision: "His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were like a flame of fire; and his feet like fine bronze, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice like the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength."

When Christ came into the world, He used the veil of humanity to cloak His divine nature. The body is a wall that veils one's inner nature. But when Christ pulled back the veil, the blazing glory of God became visible. That's what the three disciples saw, and that's what we see in this text. The transfiguration leaves no doubt about who Christ is. So don't let anyone tell you Jesus isn't God.

2. The testimony of the saints (vv. 3-4)

a) The verification by the Old Testament saints (v. 3)

"Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him."

Luke 9:31 says Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory." They were encompassed by Christ's glory. Why did Moses and Elijah appear?

(1) Depicting the representatives

(a) Moses--the giver of the law

Moses is synonymous with the Old Testament. In fact, the Old Testament sometimes is referred to as Moses and the prophets. The law is called the law of Moses. This great man of God was raised in the court of the king of Egypt. He was exiled to the fields and flocks of Midian, and there learned how to be a humble servant of God. God chose him to confront the Egyptians and lead the people of Israel out of that land through the Sinai wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. Moses was perhaps the greatest leader who ever lived. He coordinated two million people in a forty-year trek in the desert. At a time when Israel had no king, he was their authority. At a time when they had no prophets, he spoke for God. At a time when they had no priest, he led them to God. Moses served Israel as king, priest, and prophet. He was a leader among leaders. Beyond that, Moses was the agent of the Ten Commandments--the instrument through whom God gave the law, which expressed His will and revealed His character.

(b) Elijah--the guardian of the law

Only one man in the Old Testament could stand with Moses, and that is Elijah, who fought against the nation's idolatry. Moses gave the law; Elijah guarded the law. He was zeal personified. He had courage--he spoke words of bold and profound judgment. He had a heart for God. He had miraculous power (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 1:2). Every prophet should be like Elijah.

Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, which is the Old Testament. Their presence at the transfiguration of Christ is the affirmation of the law and the prophets to the deity of Christ. Jesus said He came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17). The presence of Moses and Elijah confirm that He did.

(2) Discussing the plan

Matthew 17:3 says Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus. Luke 9:31 tells us what they were talking about: They "spoke of his decease [departure] which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." They were talking about Christ's death.

(a) Christ's final outcome

The Greek word translated "decease" (exodos) means "final outcome." They were talking about His death on the cross as an exodos--a departure. Just as the exodus under Moses delivered the people from the bondage of Egypt, so the exodus of Christ's death would deliver His people from the bondage of sin.

(b) The disciples' eventual understanding

The one element the disciples couldn't understand about the Messianic program was the death of Christ. But the presence of Moses and Elijah as representatives of the law and the prophets showed that God's plan was still on schedule--that Christ's eventual death in Jerusalem was part of that plan. What an important conversation for the disciples to hear! That enabled Peter to declare on the day of Pentecost that the Lord was "delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

Christ didn't die as a well-meaning patriot who got in over His head; He was ordained to die before the foundation of the world. His death was as much a part of God's plan as His Second Coming, and it was vital for the disciples to know that.

The disciples were frightened by what they saw (Mark 9:6). Yet their fear was mingled with a sense of awe--they couldn't help but be thrilled. Often in a state of great emotion we don't know what to say, and such was the case for Peter.

b) The conclusion of the New Testament saints (v. 4)

"Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three booths; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

(1) The fervency of Peter's conclusion

Peter didn't want this experience to end. The phrase "Lord, it is good" means Peter perceived being there as excellent. It was the best thing that ever happened to him. It is hard to know what the motive was for Peter's request, but he loved what he was experiencing. In the ambivalence of his thrill and

terror, he made the suggestion. Luke 9:33 says he made the statement not knowing what he was saying.

(2) The foolishness of Peter's conclusion

Matthew 17:5 says, "While [Peter] yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." God was telling Peter to keep quiet--it was not the right time for stupid suggestions. But what was wrong with what Peter said? His attitude wasn't wrong, but there was something foolish about his request. Peter didn't understand two things: first, he didn't realize that he had experienced a preview only. He still had to go down the mountain and live through suffering and hardship. The Messiah still had to suffer and die. Second, Peter didn't understand that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah can't be given equal treatment. When Peter offered his suggestion, Moses and Elijah were departing from Jesus (Luke 9:33). The appearance of Moses and Elijah was temporary because their purpose was to salute their divine successor--the One who fulfilled the law and the prophets--and then to leave Him alone in the glory of unchallenged supremacy. To build booths for all three didn't fit God's plan. Peter simply didn't know what he was talking about.

3. The terror of the Father (vv. 5-6)

a) The cloud of the Father's presence (v. 5a)

"While he yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them"

The Bible has many references to white clouds, and invariably God is present in them. In Revelation 14:14-16 John says, "I looked and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat, like the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped." That's a picture of Jesus coming in glory on a white cloud to judge the earth.

The cloud descended and a voice came out of it saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were very much afraid" (Matt. 17:5-6). God was there. In addition to the testimony of the Old Testament saints and the transformed Son is the testimony of the Father: "This is my beloved Son."

Conclusion

Do you have any doubt about who Jesus Christ is? I hope not. Our response should be like that of Peter, James, and John. We should be thrilled beyond words to be in His presence, yet at the same time be very much afraid. That divine tension ought to exist in every Christian's life. We delight in His mercy and grace, and are in awe of His holiness and judgment. As we walk in obedience, we know the excellence of His presence. When we walk in disobedience, we experience the terror of it.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was Matthew's purpose for his gospel?
2. How does Acts 2:1-13 relate to Matthew 16:28[en]17:13?
3. Explain the significance of near and future fulfillment in prophecy.

4. Why did Jesus take only Peter, James, and John with Him up into the mountain?
5. Why might the disciples have fallen asleep while Jesus prayed (Luke 22:45)?
6. Explain what is meant by transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).
7. How did God often manifest His essence in the Old Testament?
8. What does the revealed glory of Christ prove about Him ?
9. Give a brief description of the life and ministry of both Moses and Elijah.
10. Why did Moses and Elijah appear with Christ in His glory? What do they represent?
11. What did Moses and Elijah talk about with Christ? What is significant about that conversation?
12. What did the conversation teach the disciples about God's plan?
13. Why was Peter's request in Matthew 17:4 considered foolish ?
14. Why was the appearance of Moses and Elijah temporary?
15. What is the biblical significance of the presence of white clouds?
16. What is the divine tension that ought to exist in every Christian's life?

Pondering the Principles

1. The disciples had difficulty in understanding that Christ's death was an integral part of God's redemptive plan. Through various means and situations, God continued to teach them about it until they finally understood it. How do you view God's plan as it relates to you? Do you see yourself as an important tool in God's hands, or do you merely thank God for your salvation and continue living your own life without considering how He wants you to serve Him? Read Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. How do you fit into God's redemptive plan? Be honest in your appraisal. You may not be called to train people for evangelism or to be an evangelistic speaker, but you can have an impact in bringing people to Christ in more ways than you think. Be sensitive to the opportunities the Lord gives you to participate in His redemptive plan for the world.
2. When the three disciples experienced the glory of Christ on the mountain, Peter failed to realize that he needed to return to the valley of daily life and the hardships it can involve. Perhaps you have attended a retreat or special seminar that left you with that mountaintop "high." Yet when you returned to your daily routine, you left behind much of what you learned. Review Matthew 16:24. As

a believer you must be realistic about what Christ has called you to do. As you examine that verse, determine what practical steps you need to take to die to self, take up your cross, and live in obedience to Christ. Prayerfully consider how God wants you to start implementing those things in your life.

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