

Preview of the Second Coming, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 17:7–13

Code: 2324

INTRODUCTION

A. The Light of God

God is spirit, and is therefore invisible. Luke 24:39 says, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones." God has no form. When God revealed Himself in the Old Testament, He chose to reveal Himself as a blazing light. In Exodus 33:18 Moses says, "Show me thy glory," and God allowed him to see in part His glory, which had a visible effect on Moses' face (Ex. 34:29-35). When the Tabernacle, the symbol of God's presence, was built, "a cloud covered the tent of of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon" (Ex. 40:34-35). When it was time for the people to travel in the wilderness, the glory of God would go up into the sky as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (vv. 36-38). When the people came into the Promised Land and built the Temple, "the glory of the Lord ... filled the house of the Lord" (1 Ki. 8:11).

B. The Light of Christ

In the gospels, God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ as light veiled by human flesh. Jesus Christ was the Shekinah of God. Scripture tells us that when Jesus returns He will come in glory (Matt. 24:30). Jesus Christ is revealed as light. He even said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

C. The Light of Heaven

Revelation 21 gives us the details of the eternal heaven and the holy city--the new Jerusalem, the eternal habitation of the saints. Verse 23 says, "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did light it, and the Lamb is the lamp of it." In heaven Jesus is the lamp containing the light of the glory of God.

When Jesus lived on the earth, His glory was veiled within Him. But in heaven it will be unveiled. When Jesus wanted to reveal Himself as He really is, He pulled back the veil of His flesh and revealed the Shekinah of God.

REVIEW

I. THE PRINCIPLE (16:24)

II. THE PARADOX (16:25-26)

III. THE PAROUSIA (16:27)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1) The fervency of Peter's conclusion.

(2) The foolishness of Peter's conclusion.

LESSON

(3) The framework of Peter's conclusion

In the midst of the testimony from Moses and Elijah in Matthew 17:3, Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to here; if thou wilt, let us make here three booths; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (v. 4). I believe Peter had some reasons for making that suggestion.

(a) Anticipating the Kingdom

As Peter and the rest of the disciples followed Jesus, they anticipated the coming of the Kingdom. After all, when you follow the King you expect to see His Kingdom. The Old Testament said the Messiah would come, make things right, and then reign in the Kingdom. After Christ's resurrection, they still anticipated its immediate establishment, asking, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). To them, every moment might be the right time. On one occasion James and John sent their mother to make this request: "Grant that these, my two sons, may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Matt. 20:21).

(b) Seeing the glory

Peter had just heard an amazing prophecy. In Matthew 16:27-28 Jesus said, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father There are some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." When you combine that prophecy, Peter's anticipation, and the transfiguration he just witnessed, what is the logical conclusion? That prophecy would soon come to pass. But Peter didn't understand that what he saw was only a preview of something that has yet to occur.

(c) Redeeming the people

Peter heard Moses and Elijah having a conversation with Jesus about His impending death (Gk., exodos, "departure". Moses led an exodus, and in Deuteronomy 18:15 he said, "The Lord God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me." Moses was referring to another Prophet who would lead another exodus. The people of Israel, including the disciples, were looking for another deliverer, but He was different from what they expected. As Moses led the people out of Egypt into the Promised Land, the Jews of Jesus' time were looking for a deliverer to lead them out from under Roman bondage into freedom. But God had planned a deliverance out of sin into righteousness--from death to life. When Peter heard Jesus talking about His exodus, I'm sure he thought Christ was the greater prophet who would lead them out from under

Roman bondage. Peter also knew that Elijah was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. So when both Elijah and Moses were talking about Christ's exodus, he must have thought that deliverance was going to occur right then.

(d) Commemorating the wandering

It is thought that the transfiguration of Christ occurred in the month of Tishri, which is six months from Passover. Jesus was crucified at Passover. During the month of Tishri the Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. At the time of the transfiguration, it is likely the people were celebrating the feast in Jerusalem. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the wandering in the wilderness. After God delivered His people out of Egypt, they lived in tabernacles until God led them into the Promised Land. The feast is a memorial to God for preserving His redeemed people in the wilderness. But Peter, James, John, and Jesus weren't at the feast. Peter knew the importance of attending the Feast of Tabernacles--all male Jews were required to go every year. Perhaps Peter thought they ought to have their own feast, especially since Moses was present and could give them the best insight into it. After all, the feast did commemorate the exodus, and they were about to enter into another exodus. In Peter's mind, the timing was perfect.

(e) Fulfilling the prophecy

Zechariah 14 tells us about Jesus' return to set up His Kingdom. Verse 9 says, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." Verse 16 adds this: "It shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." There will be a thousand years in the millennial kingdom, which means they will keep the feast a thousand times. Verses 18-19 say, "The Lord will smite the nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles."

Only one of the traditional week-long feasts will be kept in the Kingdom, and that's the Feast of Tabernacles. Passover and Communion will also be remembered (Luke 22:16, 18) but they didn't last all week). Those three celebrations are pictures of redemption. Because Peter assumed the millennium was beginning on account of the transfiguration, he thought they should keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

In spite of all the reasons Peter may have had for wanting to build booths and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, Luke 9:33 says he didn't know what he was saying. He didn't realize that what he saw was only a preview of the Kingdom--he had not yet understood the need to suffer first. According to 1 Peter 1:11, even the prophets did not understand why the Messiah had to suffer before being glorified. Peter obviously didn't listen to the specifics of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. If he had, he would have heard that Christ's exodus would occur at Jerusalem--the same place our Lord previously predicted as the location for His death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21). I don't believe Peter listened to that prophecy either--he heard only the part about Christ's death and not the part about His resurrection. In both cases, his reasoning was wrong.

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

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

"While he [Peter] yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them."

b) The context of the disciples' fear (v. 6)

"When the disciples heard it [God's voice], they fell on their face, and were very much afraid."

(1) The reason for fear

Why are people afraid in the presence of God? Because He is infinitely holy and men are hopelessly sinful. We feel naked when exposed to His holiness. Genesis 3:7-10 tells us that when Adam and Eve sinned, "they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the

day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Adam and Eve experienced shame because they knew their sin had been exposed. In the presence of holy God sinners will always feel like they need to hide. And that is how the disciples felt when they fell flat on the ground after hearing God's voice.

(2) The examples of fear

(a) Gideon--When Gideon perceived that he was having a conversation with the angel of the Lord (probably Christ in a preincarnate appearance), he said, "Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen [the] angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die" (Jud. 6:22-23). He thought he would die having seen God.

(b) Manoah--After watching the angel of the Lord ascend into heaven, Manoah told his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Jud. 13:22).

(c) Isaiah--When Isaiah saw God he said, "Woe is me! For I am undone ... for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

(d) Daniel--When Daniel saw a vision of the glory of God, he said, "My comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength When I heard the voice of his words, then was ... my face toward the ground" (Dan. 10:8-9).

(e) Habakkuk--After hearing God, the prophet said, "My belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones, and I trembled in myself" (Hab. 3:16).

c) The contents of the Father's testimony (v. 5b)

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

(1) The essence of the relationship

When God said, "This is my Son," he was referring to the essence of their relationship. Christ is God's Son in the sense that a son is of the same essence as his father--like produces like.

(2) The love of the relationship

God also called Christ his "beloved Son." There is not only an essential relationship between them, but also a love relationship.

(3) The obedience of the relationship

God then said, "In whom I am well pleased." Everything Jesus did was according to the divine plan. That was important for Peter to hear because he often second-guessed the Lord on many of His decisions. Christ is obedient and faithful to God. He went to Jerusalem to suffer and die because that was God's plan. God was well pleased with Christ for His obedience.

(4) The authority of the relationship

At the end of verse 5 God says, "Hear ye him." God was confirming that when Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24), the disciples should listen and obey Him. God not only confirmed the deity of Jesus Christ, but also testified to the authority of His words.

4. The tapestry of the scene (vv. 7-9)

a) The purpose of the transfiguration

In Matthew 16:28 Jesus tells the disciples that some of them would see "the Son of man coming in his kingdom." How did the transfiguration fulfill that? By providing us with a miniature picture of the Second Coming.

(1) The subject

Christ is the center of this picture, and He will be the center of the Second Coming. When Christ comes, He will come in power and glory (Matt. 24:30). We see Him in power and glory in His transfiguration.

(2) The backdrop

Zechariah 14:4 says Christ's "feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives." Jesus took the three disciples up into a high mountain to witness the transfiguration. The preview happened on a mountain, and so will the real thing.

(3) The audience

When Jesus returns in glory, He will come to gather together His people. Peter, James, and John were present with Christ when He was glorified. They represent the saints who will be on earth when Christ returns. But there's another dimension: when Christ returns, He will be accompanied by saints who previously were gathered together to be with Christ. They are represented by Moses and Elijah, who appeared with Christ in His glory. Further, we know Moses died because there was a dispute over his body (Jude 9). But Elijah never died--God took him up into heaven in a divine chariot. So Moses represents saints who have already died, and Elijah represents the saints who will be raptured.

All the parts of the Second Coming were present at the preview. No wonder Peter said, "We have not followed cunningly designed fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitness of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

b) The end of the transfiguration (vv. 7-8)

"Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, except Jesus only."

The preview was over. The Kingdom wasn't beginning--it was just a preview. The three disciples had seen the Son of man in His royal majesty. They were so traumatized by it that they never would forget. Years later when people questioned the reality of Christ's return, Peter could say, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (2 Pet. 3:10). The transfiguration was an indelible experience. But it ended because it wasn't yet time for glory. Before glory there must be suffering.

c) The response to the transfiguration (v. 9)

What would your reaction be to that scene? I know I probably would have said, "I've got to get down to the valley and tell Andrew and the others. We'll be the only people who can say we have met Moses and Elijah!"

(1) The delay of declaration (v. 9a)

"As they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision [Gk., horama, "spectacle"] to no man"

That command rivals Zacharias's problem. When the angel Gabriel predicted the birth of John the Baptist, Zacharias didn't believe him (Luke 1:18). As a result, the Lord struck him dumb so he couldn't tell anyone he was going to have a son (v. 20). That would be hard on any father, and it was hard for the three disciples.

Jesus told people not to tell anyone about something He did more than once (e.g., Matt. 16:20). That's because the people of Israel wanted a political Messiah who would defeat the Romans. Their misguided intentions and expectations would have only confused the scene. If the three disciples were to announce that they had seen the majesty of Christ, the people would have tried to get Jesus to overthrow the Romans. They had done so at least once before (John 6:15).

(2) The day of declaration (v. 9b)

"Until the Son of man is raised again from the dead."

If the disciples waited until after the resurrection, the people would know Christ didn't come to conquer the Romans, but to conquer death. Jesus is not involved in politics--He is involved in conquering death, sin, and hell. After the resurrection the people could better understand the spiritual reality of Christ's ministry.

5. The truth about the forerunner (vv. 10-13)

a) The request (v. 10)

"His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?"

The disciples had just seen Elijah, so he was on their mind. They knew him to be the forerunner of the Messiah because Malachi 4:5-6 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Knowing that, they didn't understand why Elijah hadn't come as the forerunner to Christ's ministry. I'm convinced the Jews must have questioned the disciples on this very subject: how could Jesus be the Messiah when there had been no appearance of Elijah?

There were some people who thought Jesus was Elijah. Matthew 16:13-14 says Jesus "asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art ... Elijah." Those people thought He could be Elijah preparing for the Messiah, but that He couldn't be the Messiah since Elijah hadn't come before Him.

The Scribal Elijah

The scribes didn't just say Elijah had to come first; they embellished the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6. They believed Elijah would be a great and terrible reformer who would bring holiness out of unholiness and order out of chaos. They believed He would destroy all evil and make everything right so that all the Messiah had to do was take control of what Elijah had accomplished. They saw Elijah as the true restorer.

The disciples wanted to know who and where Elijah was if Christ was the Messiah.

b) The restoration (v. 11)

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things."

Christ declared that Elijah indeed would come and restore all things before the establishment of the Kingdom.

c) The rejection (vv. 12-13)

(1) Of John the Baptist (vv. 12a, 13)

"But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they desired.... Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist."

(a) The spirit of Elijah's appearance

John the Baptist is Elijah in the manner prophesied by Malachi the prophet. Malachi wasn't referring to the actual Elijah; he was referring to one who would come in the same manner, style, and mode of operation as Elijah.

The Jews were looking for the literal Elijah. The chief priests asked John the Baptist, "Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not" (John 1:21). Some people have a hard time reconciling that with Christ's statement in Matthew 17:12. However, the point is John was not Elijah himself, but he did come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). But the people rejected John so he couldn't be the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. There yet will be another who will come in the spirit and power of Elijah in fulfillment of that prophecy before Christ's Second Coming.

(b) The significance of the people's rejection

If the people had received John the Baptist and believed his message, and if they had received the Messiah and allowed Him to set up His Kingdom, John the Baptist would have been the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6. But when the people refused him by cutting his head off, they eliminated any chance of the immediate fulfillment of that prophecy. As a result, John the Baptist was not the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, and another must still come to fulfill it. Luke 1:17 says, "He [John the Baptist] shall go before him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Matthew 11:13-14 says, "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah, who was to come." But they didn't receive him.

(c) The support of Christ's deity

The Jews claimed Christ couldn't have been the Messiah because Elijah didn't precede Him, but

Jesus said Elijah did precede Him. That is yet another proof that Jesus is the Messiah because Elijah did come before Him. When Christ comes again, He will be preceded by another Elijah.

(2) Of Christ (v. 12b)

"Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them."

Suffering before the glory is the message of Matthew 16:21; 17:13. In Matthew 16:21 Jesus tells the disciples He must suffer and die. In verse 24 He tells them they must deny themselves--die to their desires and sins--and take up a cross. They were going to bear reproach. Christians have been mocked, scorned, and martyred throughout the history of the church. That's the way life often is for true disciples of Christ, but in the future there will be glory. Christ told the disciples He would suffer (Matt. 16:24-25) and concluded on that note (Matt. 17:12). But in between He gave them a glimpse of His future glory. We would do well to remember the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). That's our great hope. What small measure of suffering we endure in this life is not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us in Christ (2 Cor. 4:17).

Focusing on the Facts

1. How did God manifest Himself in the Old Testament?
2. What will be the light in heaven (Rev. 21:23)?
3. What motivated Peter to want to put up booths at the transfiguration of Christ? Explain each reason.
4. What did Peter misunderstand about the type of deliverance God planned to accomplish through Christ?
5. What does the Feast of Tabernacles commemorate?
6. What part of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah did Peter fail to understand? What prophecy did that conversation relate to?
7. Why are people afraid when in the presence of God?
8. Describe how certain Old Testament saints behaved when confronted with the presence of God.
9. In Matthew 17:5 God says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Explain the significance of that statement.
10. Explain how the transfiguration pictures the Second Coming.
11. Why did Christ command the three disciples not to tell anyone about what they had seen on the mountain?
12. When did Christ want the disciples to announce what they had seen on the mountain? Why (Matt. 17:9)?

13. What did the scribes believe Elijah would accomplish as the forerunner to the Messiah? Why did the disciples ask the question in Matthew 17:10?
14. In what way can John the Baptist be described as Elijah?
15. What would have happened had the people received John the Baptist and believed his message? What happened as a result of their rejecting him?
16. How does the appearance of John the Baptist as Christ's forerunner support the deity of Christ?

Pondering the Principles

1. What kind of sensitivity do you have toward your sin? Do you see it as something that offends God, or do you see it merely as something you need to confess but don't really try to eliminate? When the disciples were in the presence of the Lord, they fell to the ground. What is your reaction when you are convicted of your sin? Remember, God sees all we think, say, and do. Take this time to humble yourself before our holy God. Ask Him to show you your sin. Confess it and ask Him to help you eliminate it from your life. Repent from that sin and covenant with God to be obedient to Him in all areas of your life.
2. At the end of Matthew 17:5 God told the three disciples to listen to Jesus. Do you listen to Jesus? Do you study the words of our Lord in Scripture with the intent of obeying them, or do you listen just for the purpose of learning? Read James 1:22-25. What kind of hearer are you? What kind of hearer should you be? The next time you read or study God's Word, determine what God wants you to do. Then do it. Make sure you apply something to your life each time you open the Bible.

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