

Glory

JESUS FULFILLS GOD'S MESSAGE OF HOPE FOUND
IN THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 17:1-13 Memory Verse: Matthew 17:5b-6

Matthew 17:1-13 records the account of Jesus's transfiguration. The episode is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36), each with their own various emphases. The event fulfilled Jesus's statement in Caesarea Philippi that some of His apostles wouldn't die before seeing the Son of Man's glory (Matt. 16:28). Peter, James, and John—Jesus's inner circle—witnessed this majestic event.

During Jesus's transfiguration God's divine voice repeated the words He had proclaimed at Jesus's baptism. Then God added, "Listen to him!" (17:5). After Moses, Elijah, and the cloud disappeared, the three disciples "saw no one except Jesus alone" (17:8).

Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets. They also served as a vivid reminder that Jesus fulfilled every detail of God's message and God's plan perfectly. As you prepare to lead this session from Matthew 17, reflect on the reliability and validity of Jesus's ministry. Examine your life for areas where you might not be seeing His work and glory fully. Prayerfully seek ways to lead adults toward an absolute focus on Jesus.



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Decision making can be difficult. Often, we seek some sign that this is the right direction and the correct decision to make. Is this the right job to take? Is this the best house to buy? Is she the one for me? How do we know for certain? If we only had a sign! Wouldn't it be great if someone magically appeared to give you affirmation that what you are doing is correct? How about a sign in the sky, or a voice out of the blue? (PSG, p. 36)

What sign would you like to receive concerning a decision you need to make?



Understand the Context (Matthew 17:1-27)

The specific reference in Matthew 17:1 dates Jesus's transformation six days after Peter's great confession of Him as Messiah in Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16). At that time, Jesus predicted that some of His disciples "will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (16:28). Chapter 17 clearly is connected to the event of chapter 16 by a number of close links. Elijah is mentioned in 16:14 and appears in 17:3,10-12. John the Baptist is mentioned in both episodes (16:14; 17:13). Jesus's resurrection is addressed in both stories (16:21; 17:9). Peter served as the spokesman in both accounts (16:16; 17:4); and, in both accounts, he demonstrated a messianic misunderstanding (16:22; 17:4).

In addition, Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man in both chapters (16:13,27-28; 17:9,12), and He is called God's Son in both stories (16:16; 17:5). In both episodes, Peter addressed Jesus as Lord (16:22; 17:4). In both stories Jesus predicted His suffering (16:21; 17:12). Both accounts end with Jesus's injunction to silence (16:20; 17:9). In all these ways chapter 16 provides the near context for the account of Jesus's transfiguration in chapter 17.

The more distant context and background of chapter 17 harks back to the early history of Israel at Mount Sinai. Matthew presented Jesus as the new Israel and the new Moses. Like Israel's twelve tribes, Jesus had twelve apostles. Like Israel's forty years in the wilderness, Jesus

spent forty days in the wilderness. Like Moses at Mount Sinai, Jesus ascended "a high mountain" (Ex. 19:3; Matt. 17:1) and descended again (Ex. 19:14; 32:15; Matt. 17:9). Like Moses, the event took place "after six days" (Ex. 24:16; Matt. 17:1). Like Moses, Jesus took three named companions with Him (Ex. 24:1,9; Matt. 17:1). Like with Moses, a "cloud covered them" (Ex. 24:15-18; 34:5; Matt. 17:5). Also, just as Moses encountered a consuming fire cloud, Jesus experienced "a bright cloud" (Ex. 19:16; 24:17; Matt. 17:5).

Like with Moses, the divine voice spoke "from the cloud" (Ex. 24:16; Matt. 17:5). And as with Moses's companions, Jesus's disciples reacted in fear (Ex. 34:29-30; Matt. 17:6). Just as Moses's skin shone, Jesus's "face shone like the sun" (Ex. 34:29-30; Matt. 17:2). Moses was on Mount Sinai, and he was on the mount of transfiguration. But as great as Moses was, Jesus deserves "more glory than Moses" (Heb. 3:3). There can be no equal shelters built for them because only Jesus is God's beloved Son (Matt. 17:5). He alone is the one to whom Moses pointed the Israelites to thousands of years earlier (Deut. 18:15). Indeed, that is exactly what the divine voice proclaimed in Matthew 17:5.

Read Matthew 17:1-13 and jot down questions you have about the narrative in these verses. (PSG, p. 37)

Transfigured (Matt. 17:1-3)

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.

(v. 1) *After six days* is found in both Matthew and Mark 9:2. Luke used “about eight days after” (Luke 9:28). The time references suggest approximately a week interval between this event and chapter 16. The time reference also links the transfiguration to Jesus’s announcement that some of His disciples would see His glory revealed in Matthew 16:28.

From other Scriptures we know that **Peter**, **James**, and **John**, made up the inner circle of Jesus’s disciples (Matt. 26:37; Mark 5:37; 13:3). That John is referred to as James’s **brother** (as in Matt. 10:2) hints that James had more prominence at this point than John. Most likely, Peter is mentioned first because of what Jesus said about him in Matthew 16:18. Taking the three disciples up the mountain recalls when Moses took Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu up Sinai with him (Ex. 24:1,9).

Many have tried to identify the **high mountain**. Mount Tabor in southern Galilee is the traditional site of the transfiguration. It stands at 1,900 feet and could have been reached in a six-day walk from Caesarea Philippi. However, the Romans occupied a fort on this mountain’s peak, making it harder for Jesus and His disciples to be **by themselves**.

Mount Hermon stands just northeast of Caesarea Philippi and is the highest mountain in the region at 9,232 feet. The high mountain could have been one of Mount Hermon’s foothills. However, when Jesus and the three apostles came down the mountain, they met a Jewish crowd, which would not be expected near Mount Hermon.

Others have suggested Mount Meron, the highest mountain in Galilee at 3,926 feet. The specific mountain on which Jesus’s transfiguration occurred is not important. What happened there is important.

(v. 2) *Transfigured* comes from the same Greek word from which we get our word *metamorphosis*. Another possible translation is “transformed.” Matthew described how this affected Jesus’s **face** and **his clothes**. Jesus’s **face shone like the sun** and **his clothes**

became as white as the light. Mark added that His garments were “dazzling,” purer than any earthly launderer could make them (Mark 9:3). When God or heavenly angelic beings appear in the Bible, they often appear bright as lightning and in white clothes (Dan. 7:9; 10:5-6; 12:3; Matt. 28:3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). The risen Christ appeared this way in Revelation 1:13-16. God Himself “wraps himself in light” (Ps. 104:2), and believers one day will be dressed in white clothes (Rev. 3:4-5) that “shine like the sun” (Matt. 13:43; see also Dan. 12:3).

The whole image is one of brilliance and purity. Unlike Moses’s face after his encounter with God at Sinai (Ex. 34:29-35), Jesus’s transfiguration was not a temporary, external radiance. It was the intrinsic, divine glory of the eternal Son of God bursting through the veil of His human flesh (see John 17:4-5; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9; Heb. 1:1-4; Rev. 5:6-14).

(v. 3) Matthew used the Greek word translated **suddenly** three times in this passage (including twice in the original language of v. 5) to grab the reader’s attention. **Moses**, the great Old Testament lawgiver, and **Elijah**, the great Old Testament prophet, **appeared** and were **talking with** Christ. Both of these Old Testament figures had previous mountaintop experiences with God (Ex. 19:20; 24:15-18; 33:18-23; 1 Kings 19:8-14). Matthew did not record the topic of their conversation, but Luke stated that they spoke “of his departure” (Luke 9:31). Jesus’s death would serve as the defining moment of His journey to Jerusalem and His ministry.

Key Doctrine

The Scriptures

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. (See Luke 24:44-46; John 5:39.)



APPLICATION POINT: Pray that you would see the glory of Jesus.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 17:1-3** as the group imagines what the disciples felt walking up the mountain.

ASK:

How do you imagine Peter, James, and John reacting to Jesus’s transfigured appearance?

DISCUSS:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: The Mount of Transfiguration*). Encourage adults to scan the article. Along with the article, use the information for Matthew 17:1 in the Leader Guide (p. 48) to lead a brief discussion about the location of the mountain. Highlight Matthew’s description of how Jesus’s appearance changed. Note that Jesus had said some of His disciples would experience His glory (Matt. 16:28).

CLARIFY:

Point out that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Summarize this content from page 39 of the PSG to explain their presence:

“Moses, of course, was directly connected to the law given to Israel. He was representative of the unique covenant relationship between God and Israel. Elijah represented all the prophets of Israel that pointed to the coming Messiah. Here were the representatives of the law and the prophets. In the New Testament, the Scriptures were sometimes called ‘the Law and the Prophets’ (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 3:21). Their purpose was to point to the coming Messiah. With the presence of Moses and Elijah, the affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah moved to an even higher level in the eyes of the three disciples.”

ASK:

Where do we see Jesus’s glory revealed each day?
(PSG, p. 40)



Group Activity Option

Eyewitness Testimony

Invite a volunteer to read John 1:14 and 2 Peter 1:16-18 aloud, pointing out that John and Peter wrote these words specifically pointing to the transfiguration. Say: *Peter and John wrote about how Jesus revealed Himself to them.* Emphasize the power and authority of an eyewitness account. Invite a few volunteers to share one memorable “mountain-top” moment with Jesus. Say: *Just like Peter and John, we’re called to share how Jesus has revealed Himself to us. He has called us to be eyewitnesses to His saving and sanctifying work in our lives.*

Overshadowed (Matt. 17:4-8)

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.

(v. 4) As usual, **Peter** was the one to speak up. Mark and Luke each share that Peter spoke without really knowing what to say (Mark 9:6; Luke 9:33). He really had nothing meaningful to add to the experience, but he still felt the need to speak.

Peter addressed Jesus as **Lord**, as in Matthew 16:22. While **it’s good for us to be here** could refer to a great privilege, it probably served as an affirmation of the idea Peter was about to present. He suggested that he could **set up three shelters**. Most likely, he was including James and John in his plan.

Shelters is the word for “tents” and was used of both the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temporary booths Israelites set up to live in during the Feast of Tabernacles. Peter probably was referring to shelters or lean-tos to protect them from the sun, much like Jonah built for himself (Jonah 4:5-8).

The sentence construction (**if you want**) may hint that Peter thought his suggestion would be what Jesus would desire. Matthew doesn’t tell us how Peter recognized **Moses** and **Elijah**.

(v. 5) Peter hadn’t finished what he was saying before a **bright cloud** of God’s presence enveloped everyone. This was the cloud that manifested God’s presence on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16; 24:15-18) and guided the Israelites in the wilderness (13:21-22; 40:36-38).

Them probably refers to Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. As in Exodus, the **voice** belonged to God the Father (19:9; 24:16; 34:5); and, as at Jesus’s baptism, He affirmed He was **well-pleased** with His **Son** (see Matt. 3:17). The Father’s declaration also highlighted the favored status of Jesus over Moses and Elijah.

Son stresses Jesus’s deity and relationship to God the Father. **Well-pleased** means God takes great delight in Jesus—especially as He carried out the Father’s will (John 5:30; 6:38).

God’s final exhortation of **listen to him** is based on Deuteronomy 18:15,19 where Moses demanded that the people listen to the prophet who would come. This command does not refer merely to passively hearing what Jesus said, but to heeding His words intentionally.

(vv. 6-8) **Terrified** recalls how the Israelites reacted when God spoke at Sinai (Ex. 20:18-21). To fall **facedown** is a common reaction to God’s appearing to a human being (Ezek. 1:28; 44:4; Dan. 8:17; 10:9,15; John 18:6) and indicates humility and submission.

Then Jesus did three things: He **came** to them, **touched them**, and encouraged them to not **be afraid**. A caring person with a familiar voice can reassure those who are terrified. Human contact also offers comfort. The exhortation to stop being afraid reestablishes normality.

When the disciples looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone. Only Jesus was there. **Alone** is emphatic and puts the emphasis on Jesus. His singular presence reinforced God’s command to listen to Him alone.

Bible Skill

Use cross references to gain a better understanding of a biblical concept.

The New Testament not only records Jesus’s transfiguration, but it also teaches that believers likewise will experience transformation. Read the following passages and determine what each says about a believer’s transformation: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Philippians 3:20-21. *How and when does this transformation take place in the life of a believer? How is our transformation similar to or different from what Jesus experienced?*



APPLICATION POINT: **Worship is always the appropriate response to Jesus.**

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 17:4-8 aloud as the group underlines words that stick out to them from the verses. Allow a few volunteers to share the words they highlighted and to explain why those words resonate with them.

ENGAGE:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Peter in Matthew's Gospel*). Point out Peter's role in previous sessions. Note that he once again played a role in this account.

ASK:

What was Peter suggesting in verse 4? Why do you think he spoke up?

RECAP:

Discuss responses and provide more insight into Peter's words:

Mark and Luke comment that Peter was at a loss for words and uttered the first thing that came to mind (Mark 9:5-6; Luke 9:33). His declaration was that it was “good for us to be here.” Most likely, Peter was indicating that it was “good” in the sense that he, James, and John were there to help. He was not content to observe this scene but wanted to be in the scene. Apparently, Peter didn't grasp the significance of the conversation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah concerning His coming arrest and crucifixion (see Luke 9:31). (PSG, p. 40)

SAY:

As Peter talked, God stepped into the conversation. In a scene reminiscent of His actions at Mount Sinai, the Father spoke from a bright cloud. And, as He had at Jesus's baptism, God affirmed Christ as both His Son and as One in whom He was pleased. His final command was to listen to Jesus. Instead of talking without thinking, the disciples were challenged to see Jesus for who He really is and to respond appropriately.

ASK:

What hinders our ability to hear and act on Jesus's words? What may hinder a person from taking Jesus's teachings seriously? (PSG, p. 42)

CHALLENGE:

Note that once the cloud moved away, the disciples saw only Jesus standing there. Emphasize that while the experience made a huge impact on their lives, the presence of Jesus is really what mattered. Urge adults to consider changes they might need to make to focus on Jesus first and foremost in their lives each day.



Instructed (Matt. 17:9-13)

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.

(v. 9) In Exodus, after Moses ascended the mountain, he descended the mountain (Ex. 19:13-14; 32:15). Likewise, Matthew noted that Jesus and the disciples *were coming down the mountain*. As in Matthew 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; and 16:20, Jesus *commanded* the three apostles not to *tell anyone*, including the other apostles waiting at the bottom of the mountain. *Anyone* is placed first for emphasis. Jesus left no room for exceptions.

However, He did place one limit on the injunction. The disciples would be able to share their story once *the Son of Man is raised from the dead*. After Jesus was resurrected by the Father (a divine passive), His identity as the Son of God and Messiah would be clear, along with the significance of what the disciples had seen.

This is exactly what Peter and John, two of the three witnesses, did. In his Gospel, John wrote that Jesus had revealed His glory as the “one and only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). Likewise, Peter testified that he had been among the “eyewitnesses of his majesty” on the mountain, hearing the voice of God as He affirmed His Son (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

(v. 10) Having just seen Elijah talking with Jesus, the disciples recalled that *the scribes* taught *that Elijah must come first* before the Messiah’s arrival. These experts of the Mosaic law based their beliefs on Malachi’s prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6). According to Malachi, Elijah would help usher the day of the Lord when evil would be judged and proper order would be restored.

Since Elijah had just appeared on the mountain, Peter, James, and John may have wondered if they were on the cusp of the Messianic Age. If that was so, they also may have questioned the need for Jesus to die in Jerusalem as He recently had told them (Matt. 16:21).

(vv. 11-13) Jesus’s response noted three things about Elijah. First, He affirmed that Malachi’s prophecy was correct. Using future tense (as Malachi did), Jesus agreed that Elijah would come to *restore everything*. *Restore* refers to bringing things back into their proper state (Acts 1:6; 3:21). *Everything* emphasizes that the restoration prompted by Elijah will be thorough and complete. Some scholars also relate this to John’s vision in Revelation 11:3-6.

Second, Elijah had *already come*. Jesus’s words *but I tell you* are a strong adversative and place emphasis on this second item. In other words, it sets Jesus’s statement above whatever the scribes were teaching.

Jesus had identified His forerunner, John the Baptist, with Elijah in Matthew 11:14. John had preached repentance and drawn many back toward God. In that, he brought a measure of restoration in anticipation of the Messiah’s ministry. So, as Jesus noted, “Elijah” had come through John’s work, but the prophetic role would not be complete until the Messiah’s return (Rev. 11:3-6).

Thanks to their hardness toward John, the leaders had failed to *recognize him*. Most likely, the word *they* included both Jewish leaders and the people in general. Those who did not accept John *did whatever they pleased to him*, even to the point of executing him (Matt. 14:6-12).

Third, Jesus’s veiled reference to John’s death allowed Him to connect John’s suffering and His own coming suffering: *In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands*. Jesus already predicted this in Matthew 16:21. *Is going to suffer* expressed the absolute nature of the suffering. In the same way as John’s life was taken from him, so will Jesus’s life be taken from Him.

Only Matthew included the comment that *the disciples understood* that Jesus identified the “Elijah who was to come” as *John the Baptist*, who had already come.



APPLICATION POINT: Seek to know Jesus better by learning God's Word.

READ:

Direct the group to read Matthew 17:9-13 silently, carefully noting the discussion between Jesus and His disciples.

ASK:

Why do you think Jesus instructed His disciples to remain silent about the transfiguration until after His resurrection?

EXPLAIN:

Point out that the other disciples almost certainly would not believe the account; however, after He was raised from the dead, this story would be easier to accept and would help them see God's plan to send His only Son.

RECAP:

Draw attention to the disciples' question about Elijah. Explain the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist.

Jesus affirmed the scribes were right about Elijah coming. The problem was that the religious leaders didn't recognize Elijah when he came. . . . Not only did the religious leaders fail to recognize John the Baptist as the promised coming of Elijah, but they treated him harshly. "In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." The ill-treatment of John the Baptist served as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's own suffering. Jesus pointed to the death of "Elijah"—John the Baptist—as a harbinger of His own death by the Jewish leaders. (PSG, pp. 42-43)

SHARE:

Read Matthew 17:13 again for the group. Emphasize that the disciples were beginning to grasp some important things Jesus was trying to teach them. Encourage adults to consider how they can grow in their knowledge of Jesus.

ASK:

How are you making an effort to grow in your understanding of Jesus, His identity, and mission? (PSG, p. 43)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Stones of Remembrance

Give each adult a small stone. Say: *We know that both Peter and John referred back to the transfiguration in their New Testament writings. We can be certain that they never forgot this event.* Challenge adults to reflect on their own "mountaintop experiences" with God, symbolized by the rocks in their hands. Challenge them to keep the rock in a visible place this week, remembering times they worshiped God and considering how that experience shaped them.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:	Review these points from Apply the Text on page 44 of the <i>Personal Study Guide</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Pray that you would see the glory of Jesus.</i>• <i>Worship is always the appropriate response to Jesus.</i>• <i>Seek to know Jesus better by learning God's Word.</i>
REFLECT:	Invite adults to determine which of these statements will be the greatest challenge for them this week.
ASK:	Have you ever prayed to see God's glory? How do you feel about asking that of God?
DISCUSS:	Read aloud the first set of questions from page 44 of the PSG. Encourage volunteers to share where they have seen God's glory revealed in their lives. Lead a brief discussion about how God's glory should lead us to know Him better and to worship Him more.
CHALLENGE:	Urge adults to read and respond to the second set of questions on page 44 of the PSG during the week. Suggest they write their responses in a journal and compose a prayer that specifically asks God to reveal His glory through them this week.
PRAY:	Close in prayer, asking Jesus to show His glory in the lives of each adult. Invite God to speak through times in His Word and through our corporate worship experiences.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group an email or text during the week. Prompt them to engage with God's truth on their own even outside of the group time. Encourage individuals to share any truths that are revealed through their quiet times this week. Remind them that Peter, James, and John were called to listen to Jesus's voice and to focus on His presence.

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