

The King of Glory
 Matthew 17:1-8
 Tampa Covenant Church
 15 March 2026

Proposition: Because the Transfiguration reveals the true glory of Christ, we must listen to him and follow him where he leads; knowing that his glory will one day be revealed in us.

FCF: We struggle to trust and obey Christ when his path leads through suffering rather than immediate glory.

RHF: The Transfiguration reveals Jesus as the glorious Son who's superior to the Law and the Prophets and whose sacrificial death and resurrection leads to the redemption and future glory of God's people.

(#1) Introduction:

I'm sure they've been times in our Bible reading that we've read passages and when finished we're not quite sure what we've just read. Might walk away a little confused, or completely unfazed or maybe somewhere in between. The story of Jesus' Transfiguration can feel like that at first. The account itself is brief: Jesus and his disciples ascend a mountain; his appearance suddenly changes, Moses and Elijah appear, the Father speaks from heaven, the disciples fall on their faces in fear, Jesus tells them to rise, have no fear, they open their eyes and there's Jesus.

That's all pretty straightforward but when we step back and read this moment in light of the rest of Scripture, we'll see that it's a pretty big deal in Jesus' earthly ministry. It's recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels; In fact, Lou and I have a little shorthand way of remembering where it appears: 17-9-9. Matt 17, Mk 9, and Lk 9. Each gospel writer highlights differing details but overall, they bear witness to the same reality.

Recall last week, Peter made that great confession: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* And now what Peter confessed with his lips, he along with James and John are about to behold with their eyes. But the Transfiguration wasn't only a moment of revelation for the disciples. It's also a preview of what awaits those who belong to Christ. And at the same time, it teaches us what it means to walk in the way of the king as we live now for the world to come. As we walk through this passage together, we'll see three things: the glory of the King revealed, the superiority of the King established, and finally what it means for us to walk the way of the King.

The Glory of the King Revealed: (vv.1-2)

(#2) We look at vv.1-2 and we're told after six days, Jesus led his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James and John up a high mountain. If you're familiar with scripture, you know that mountains often serve as places of divine encounter where God reveals himself to his people. During his earthly ministry, Jesus resorted to mountains, to be alone, to pray, and to teach.¹ And here Matthew wastes no time in telling us that atop this particular mountain², Jesus was transfigured³ before these men. The verb used for "transfigured" is where we get our English word *"metamorphosis;"* Literally meaning a visible change in form. We usually use that word in describing the wonder of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly; it's fascinating how

that works. But it's nothing compared to what's happening here. Matthew gives us two features of this change:

While Luke tells us Jesus' face was "altered," Matthew says "*his face shone like the sun*"; so we know what kind of radiance we're talking about. The sun sits nearly ninety-three million miles away, and a few hours under its radiance is sure to burn our flesh. Next, Matthew tells us, "*his clothes became white as light*." Mark helps us conceptualize this by saying, "*his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.*"⁴ In other words, no human effort could create a whiteness like this. And the brightness of Jesus' clothes wasn't the result of light shining on him but the glory shining out of him. What the disciples were witnessing wasn't reflected light but the glory of Christ breaking through the veil of his flesh.

(#3) In the OT, the Hebrew word for glory is "*kabod*"⁵, a word that literally means *weight* or *heaviness* of the presence of God; the word captures everything we've just described concerning Jesus' appearance. And herein lies the challenge for us because unlike the disciples, we've never literally stood atop a mountain and experienced the weighty presence of God in this manner. But the truth is the glory of Christ revealed on that mountain so long ago still shines brightly in our lives and in the world today. **(#4)** And yet, oftentimes we miss it. Nineteenth-century preacher Alexander MacLaren said in a sermon: "*Offer men the smaller gifts, and they will run over one another in their scramble for them; but offer them the highest, and they will scarcely hold out a languid hand to take them.*" Do you see what he's getting at? He's acknowledging the reality of our human condition. We eagerly chase after smaller gifts; things that are temporary, fleeting, and ultimately unsatisfying while the greatest gift of all, the glory of God in Christ, is often met with a half-hearted response. Why is that? Because apart from the grace of God, our hearts turn inward. We're far too easily satisfied with the lesser glories of this world when the weightier reality of our King's glory is being offered to us.

Which is why we must learn again and again to behold the glory of Christ; not with our physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith. **(#5) Our meditation passage** exhorted us to, "*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.*" This is the primary means God has given to us in apprehending his glory, worship. It's singing about the glory of God, praying about the glory of God, reading about the glory of God and exhorting one another to give glory to God. **(#6) And at times** it can all feel ordinary. But the Christian life isn't governed by feelings; it's a life lived by faith. And it's these ordinary rhythms of corporate, family and personal worship that enable us to spiritually ascend the mountain of God and experience the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Think of a dimly lit room that's suddenly flooded with light. The room itself remains the same but once the light fills the space, we're able to see more clearly. In a similar way, when we gather before the Lord in worship, the Holy Spirit serves as the floodlight that shines the glory of Christ into our hearts. And when that light shines, we're able to see more clearly. In the sense that we're seeing things not from our perspective but from God's: We see his holiness in light of our sinfulness, but we also behold Christ and the wonder of his redeeming grace. We see our trials in relation to God's plan and purpose for our lives. And we affirm that our citizenship is in heaven where righteousness and glory dwells. Thus, the glory we apprehend is not something we manufacture; rather, it's revealed to us when our hearts and minds are

oriented toward God's transcendent majesty in worship.⁶ This is what's taking place on the mountain. For a brief moment the veil is pulled back, and the disciples behold the glory of Christ with their own eyes. But the revelation doesn't end there.

The Superiority of the King Established: *Over the Law and Prophets (vv.3-6)*

(#7) Here in v.3 Matthew writes, "*Behold!*" *there appeared to them Moses and Elijah.* These men were no strangers to mountaintop encounters with God. Moses stood atop Mount Sinai where he received the law, and when he came down his face was shining with the reflected glory of God. Elijah stood on Mount Horeb where the Lord passed by in wind, fire, and earthquake before speaking to him in a still small voice. These were men who experienced the glorious presence in their lives and now here they are on this mountain talking with Jesus. Matthew doesn't let us in on the discussion, but Luke **(#8) tells us it** concerned Jesus' "*departure (his death), which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.*"⁷

And before we can take in the significance of what's happening; Peter speaks up again. But this time he isn't rebuking Jesus, rather he wants to savor **the moment (#9)**; "*Lord it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*" On the surface, this is a well-meaning gesture but once again Peter is missing the big picture. He's putting Jesus on par with Moses and Elijah; there's no distinction between the tents. **(#10 Blank) In his mind,** all three deserve a tent. But there should be a distinction because as great as Moses and Elijah were they endured setbacks as servants of God: Moses succumbed to anger at the waters of Meribah and disobeyed the Lord. And after his great victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled into the wilderness in fear when Jezebel threatened his life.

But in Jesus we see a completely different story. He remained perfectly obedient to the will of the Father in all things. At this stage of his earthly ministry, he knew the cross stood before him, and yet he didn't run from it rather he continued to walk the path set before him. And that's what makes this moment so significant. Moses and Elijah were towering figures in redemptive history. Moses represented the Law, the covenant through which God first revealed his will to his people. Elijah represented the prophets, those whom God raised up to call his people back to faithfulness. Both were not an end to themselves rather they pointed to something far greater. The Law mediated by Moses pointed to the new and better covenant that would be mediated through the person and work of Christ. And the prophetic ministry represented by Elijah ultimately pointed to the greater prophet who would reveal to us by his Word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation.⁸

Which means Peter didn't need to waste time setting up three tents; only one tent was needed. Because the Scriptures make it clear: "*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" See, Moses could give the Law, but he couldn't remove the guilt from the lawbreaker. Elijah could call people to repentance, but he couldn't forgive their sin. But through his perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection from the dead; Jesus accomplished what the Law could never secure and what the prophets could only anticipate: the full forgiveness of sins and the removal of our guilt before a Holy God. And before Peter can finish explaining his plan, a divine interruption takes place.

Our Obedience to the King Commanded: *Listening and following the king*

(#11) In v.5, Matthew hits us with another: *“Behold.” a bright cloud overshadowed them.* And this should remind us of that *“Kabod”*... the weighty presence of God dwelling with his people. And from that cloud, we hear the same words, declared at Jesus’ baptism: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Meaning, he’s the King; the beloved Son of the Father; the one most glorious who would become the Suffering Servant in bringing us into the family of God. And because this is now a reality in our lives, we must *“listen to him.”* This is how we walk the way of the King; we listen to his voice and follow him wherever he leads. And notice, it isn’t a suggestion; it’s a command from the Father that calls us to hear, obey, and conform our lives to the word of his Son.⁹ And these words weren’t just meant for Peter, James, and John; they’re also meant for us. (#12 Blank) So, the question before us this morning is this: What truly motivates you to listen to him and follow where he leads?

On Feb 18th, we gathered in community to observe Ash Wednesday. In the presence of God, we corporately confessed our sins. We were reminded that we’ve come from dust and it is to dust we shall return. And as a sign of our mortality, ashes were imposed on our foreheads, and (#13) we heard the words *“turn from sin and live into the gospel.”* This is the sum total of the Christian life, continually returning to and living out the good news of the gospel that has saved us, is saving us, and will ultimately save us from sin and eternal death. And the chief motivation that propels us to live this way is not fear, not guilt; not duty but love for the one who sacrificially first loved us. Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is a life marked by learning and growing in listening to and following Christ where he leads. And sometimes that path will lead through hardship in this broken world. But we follow him with a sure hope, that even in the suffering we endure and witness around us, there is a day coming when his glory will be fully revealed in us.

Years later, the same Peter who was atop that mountain trying to savor the moment, would write to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, who were in throes of suffering. And as he encouraged them to stand firm, he reminded them that their suffering wasn’t meaningless. (#14) He wrote: *“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”* In saying “a little while,” Peter wasn’t promising that our suffering will be brief in this life. But the good news is that the hardship, loss, grief and pain we contend with in this broken world will never have the final victory. Because even now, God’s grace is working in us for his glory; restoring, confirming, strengthening, and establishing us in the reality that we belong to Christ.

Conclusion:

And because we belong to Christ we’re never alone. After hearing the Father’s voice, the disciples fell on their faces in terror. (#15) But Jesus came, touched them and said, *“Rise, and have no fear.”* Matthew tells us, *“And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”* Amen, how wonderful is it to know that when all is said and done, no matter what we face in this life; the faithful presence of our Savior remains. (#16 Blank) And through the power of his Holy Spirit, he’s always near, he touches us and speaks words of comfort over us and that’s enough.

Because he's the one who promises to bring us into the glory that the disciples glimpsed on that mountain. But until that day comes, by God's amazing grace, we listen to him and follow him where he leads. And we press on in hope; knowing the glory that awaits us is far greater than anything we'll endure along the way. So, come what may; let us glory in him now as we live for the world to come. Because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the King of glory and most worthy of our worship, thanksgiving and praise, both now and forevermore. Amen.

¹ Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 573.

² This mountain is not identified. Mount Tabor has been favored by much of church tradition. It is only six miles from Nazareth and twelve miles from the Sea of Galilee, but few today contend for this as the site, primarily because we now know that it was occupied by a Roman garrison during Jesus' time. Moreover, since Matthew seems to imply the mountain is outside of Galilee (cf. 17:22), most scholars favor Mount Hermon. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 590.

³ μεταμορφόμαι (metamorphoomai), μεταμορφώω (metamorphoō): vb.; change, transform the essential nature of something (Ro 12:2; 2Co 3:18+); 2. change appearance, be transfigured (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2+).

⁴ See Mark 9:3.

⁵ קְבוֹד (*kābôd*). n. masc. glory, honor, divine presence. *Often refers to manifestations of the presence of God in the tabernacle or temple; can also refer to the reputation or character of God or, occasionally, men.* The term *kābôd* very often occurs together with the divine name (יהוה, *YHWH*); God's *kābôd* is sometimes framed as an attribute that God possesses, while at other times it is framed as his actual presence.

⁶ Tim Gibson, *Imagining the Church: Keeping Faith in a Fragmented World* (Durham, UK: Sacristy Press, 2021), 91–93.

⁷ See Luke 9:30–31.

⁸ WSC #24- “How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?”

⁹ The verb ἀκούω (*akouō*) carries 10 sense meanings; according the Dictionary of Biblical Languages (DBL): in this instance the applicable sense meaning conveys the meaning of obedience and conforming to what is heard (*DBL, Logos Software*).