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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *The Transfiguration of Christ*

*July 21, 2019*

**Sermon Text:** Matt 17:1-13

**Scripture Reading:** 2 Cor 3

Exo 34:29-35 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. (30) Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. (31) But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. (32) Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that

the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. (33) And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. (34) Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, (35) the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

With that Old Testament backdrop, follow now as I read Matthew 17:1-13 which is the account of Jesus' transfiguration:

Mat 17:1-13 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them

Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

(4) And Peter said to Jesus, “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.”

(5) He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed 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 on their faces and were terrified. (7) But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” (8) And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

(9) And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” (10) And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” (11) He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. (12) But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” (13) Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

And again, listen to this portion of our Scripture reading once more:

2Co 3:7-11 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? (9) For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. (10) Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. (11) For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Shining faces. All of these Scriptures are obviously connected, and Jesus' transfiguration cannot be properly understood apart from them. Let's see if we can sort this all out.

### Shining Like the Sun

(2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

Transfigured. A New figure or appearance. The NT Greek word sounds like that caterpillar to butterfly word: *metamorphoo*. To be changed in form. Mountain. Shining. The presence of God. Clearly we are to compare the account of Moses going up on Sinai to

receive the Old Covenant tablets from God and as a result his face shone, with this amazing event. Jesus goes up on a high mountain. He shines like the sun.

And then, even more incredible:

(3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

What is happening? *A New Covenant is being effected by God. But this New Covenant is not something that is in conflict with or disconnected from the Old Covenant given through Moses. No. Jesus, the author of the New Covenant, is here speaking with Moses and Elijah – the Law and the Prophets.*

That is to say, the Law and the Prophets – the Old Testament – pointed to and announced Christ and the New Covenant. The entire Bible is in agreement. The notion that we so often hear today about how the Old Testament was a failure and how we can pretty much disregard it, is absolutely wrong.

Luk 24:26-27 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning

himself.

And again:

Joh 5:39-45 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; **and it is they that bear witness about me,** (40) yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (41) I do not receive glory from people. (42) But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. (43) I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. (44) How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (45) Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. **46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.** (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

When we read in the Bible that salvation is only through Christ by faith alone, absolutely apart from works of the Law, we must realize that *it is not the OT Law itself that is to be rejected. No. Rather, it is the misuse of the Law, through supposed keeping of the Law, by which false religion claims to offer righteousness.*

Rom 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Rom 3:26-28 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (27) Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. (28) For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Beware then of any theological system that claims there is some kind of total disconnect between the Old and New Testament. If you get caught up in such teaching, the Bible will never ever make sense to you. Scripture is a unity from Genesis to Revelation. It is not two separate ways of salvation.

Now, let's come back to the shining transfiguration of Christ:

Mat 17:1-2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2)

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

Do you get bored in church? Or reading your Bible? Or praying? We all battle with this, but can you see that the entire problem rests with us? Try to put yourself in the shoes of Peter, James, or John that day. *His face shone like the sun. His clothes became white as light.* And that's not all:

(5) He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed 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 on their faces and were terrified.

This is the God we serve. Who resides in us. Whose Word we hear. And Who one day we are going to see in that same blinding glory.

What do people think of when they think of Jesus? I suspect that Peter, James and John's thoughts about Him had changed when they came down from that mountain. This blinding light was a vision of God. Only it was different from the shining face of Moses in that Moses' face was *reflecting* the light of God and it faded over time. In Jesus' case, that Light,

that blinding, intense light like the Sun, was who He is! It was a temporary pulling back of the curtain of His incarnate flesh so that His glory shone through.

Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Peter Himself tells us just a bit about that day on the mountain and the glory He saw:

2Pe 1:16-18 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (17) For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” (18) we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

So, why then don't people see Jesus for who He really is? Why do so many people groan when it is Sunday and time to go to church? Well, in many cases it is because a church doesn't know Christ at all. His glory is not present. But often it is because WE

have not seen Christ ourselves. Satan does his best to keep the glory of Christ hidden from us and in the case of those who are still dead in their sins, he has them blinded. So blinded that even if THEY had been with Jesus on that mountain, they still would not have believed Him!

2Co 4:3-6 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.** (5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Understand? You must see Jesus. And the only way that can happen is by faith in Him, so that God pronounces in our case “Let there be Light!” We have to be made a new creation, you see. Christ's light then shines in us and dispels the blinding darkness the devil had us bound in and the result is that we see the light of Christ and are then able to know Him.

[A Good Summary – 2 Cor 3](#)

Let's take another look at that passage in 2 Corinthians. (We will plan to deal with the disciples' question about Elijah next time).

2Co 3:7-11 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, (8) will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? (9) For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. (10) Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. (11) For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

What we have here is a contrast and comparison of the Old and New Covenants:

Old	New
Ministry of death	Ministry of the Spirit
Carved in stone	Written on hearts
Moses face shone	Christ Shone
Ministry of	Ministry of

condemnation	Righteousness
Glory faded	Permanent glory

See it then? Paul is showing us how the Old Testament (Covenant) pointed to the New in Christ. The Old Covenant was temporary. It's purpose was one of condemnation! It was a ministry of death. And it still serves those same purposes today! How? It shows sinners their sin. It convicts them and directs them to Christ. It was given with glory, but a glory that faded.

Where the Jews went wrong is that they believed they could keep Law satisfactorily and thereby make themselves righteous before God:

Php 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

But of course, the Law, the Old Covenant, is a ministry of condemnation! Anyone who is insisting that they are "good enough"

to be accepted by God are in fact under God's curse and condemnation.

No, it is the ministry of the Spirit in Christ, the New Covenant that is written on our hearts when we come to faith in Him and are born again that becomes a "ministry of righteousness" to us. We are justified. Counted righteous by Christ's righteousness.

*And – get this – it is permanent!!* The glory of Christ will never, ever fade. He effects for us an eternal glory, an eternal salvation, an eternal new creation. All of that and more is what the disciples witnessed that day on the mountain.