

Matthew 17:1-13 part 2

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[0 : 0 0] So we're back in Matthew's Gospel this morning. And it's so long ago since we were in Matthew's Gospel that I'm going to have to do a bit of a recap. Otherwise, we'll never work out where we were.

So if you turn to Matthew 17, and you may recall that we got halfway through the study on the transfiguration.

And I seem to remember that one of the things that I didn't get to was the bit at the end of the chapter about John the Baptist. Because I think Keith at the time said, you are going to do that, aren't you?

I think it was just because you were keen to understand it better, just as we all are, especially me. But we did the first 13 verses and we need to read them again so that I can kind of carry on from where we left off.

Because I'm kind of jumping in the middle otherwise, and it seems a bit disjointed. So let's read Matthew chapter 17. We say this. Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

[1 : 0 9] And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun. His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with them.

Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will make three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them. And behold, a voice out of the cloud said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.

When the disciples heard this, they fell face to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came up to them and touched them and said, get up and do not be afraid.

And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, tell the vision to no one until the son of man has risen from the dead.

[2 : 0 7] And his disciples asked him, why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things.

But I say to you that Elijah already came and they did not recognize him. But did to him whatever they wished. So also the son of man is going to suffer at their hands.

Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist. So that's the passage. We got roughly halfway through it. And just to recap.

So. Six days earlier, Jesus had been with his disciples at his place called Banyas. And. He had said the last thing he had said in the last verse of chapter 16.

Truly, I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. And of course, this gives a lot of people some brain ache because it seems as if Jesus was saying he would be returning.

[3 : 21] During the lifetime of the people present. And yet here we are 2000 years later and we're still waiting. And so he didn't return in the lifetime. But you see the.

This passage doesn't say he will return. It says you'll see him coming in his kingdom. So it's only a problem to those who misinterpret the scripture.

What the people who were there. Some of the people who were there, namely James and John and Peter. What they did was they went with him up this mountain and they saw him transfigured.

And the word transfigured, if you remember, is the word metamorph. Metamorph. Metamorph. Which is the word from which we get our word metamorphosis. So he was completely transformed.

A metamorphosis is a complete transformation. Into something new and often unrecognizable. Although in this case, they could still recognize Jesus. Metamorphosis.

[4 : 18] But metamorphosis is what you get when the caterpillar goes through its pupil state and then comes out as a moth. And the eventual moth contained far more glory than the original caterpillar.

In fact, in that particular instance, there is nothing of the caterpillar in the moth. It's a complete transformation. So Jesus was transformed before them.

And I believe this fulfills that scripture, that they saw Jesus in his glory. They didn't see the Jewish man that wandered about that had been with them all this time, but they saw the Lord in all his glory.

And as for coming in his kingdom, well, he is still coming in his kingdom. It's still being prepared. We have this interim period, the church age, where God has put the whole of the plan for Israel on hold while the church age passes.

But there will be a time of great tribulation at the end of which God will reestablish his kingdom and all Israel will be saved. That's another Bible study entirely.

[5 : 36] We could spend an hour just on that. In fact, we could spend an hour arguing over that, but we won't. So they were people who were alive at that time, were with Jesus and witnessed this transformation into something regal and glorious and godly.

I just wanted to take a quick thought about if you turn to 2 Chronicles 5.14. 2 Chronicles 5.14.

See, the point that I'm trying to get to here is when you encounter the glory of God, it has a profound effect.

And in 2 Chronicles 5.14, if we start reading at verse 11, actually, when the priests came forth from the holy place, for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves without regard to divisions.

And all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Haman, Juduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen with cymbals and harps and lyres standing east of the altar, and with them 120 priests blowing trumpets in unison, when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord.

[7 : 03] And when they lifted up their voices, accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord, saying, He is indeed good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.

Then the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

For a sinful man to stand in the presence of the glory of God is firstly an exception, and secondly, it's only with His permission.

And I look at a little description like this and I think, what would it be like if the presence of God came on one of our praise meetings like that? I mean, they were having a praise party, and this cloud descends and the presence of God is thick and rich in the room, and it's so intense they can't stand in its presence.

In Exodus 19, verse 18, the glory of God descends as fire on Mount Sinai. The glory of God is pretty impressive.

[8 : 10] Mount Sinai to this day is still burnt. It's one of the bits of archaeology that they produce. If you go looking at Bible archaeology, they will raise up the fact that this mountain is still to this day burnt.

Oh, you don't believe in myths like that, do you? The mountain is burnt, folks. It's still burnt to this day. It's never recovered from the glory of the Lord descending on that mountain.

And it clearly had a profound effect on these disciples. Second Peter was written very close to the time of Peter's death, and he's still affected by the experience.

Turn to Second Peter. I did my usual and forgot to write down the chapter and verse, but we'll find it. So chapter 1, verse 18 is what we're looking for.

But we'll start at verse 16. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 16] For we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. Now, of course, we, to some extent, we can't say that today because we don't have this opportunity to be with him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But for Peter, here he is somewhere close to his own death. Peter always got other people to write for him. Peter was only semi-literate. So Mark's gospel is actually Peter's gospel, and Mark was his amanuensis or his ghost writer.

First Peter wasn't written by Peter. It was Peter's input, but somebody wrote it for him. Second Peter is the only one he wrote for himself, and apparently it's the worst Greek in the New Testament.

But this was close to his death, and it was, I don't know, I picture this, and this might be completely wrong, but I haven't got anybody to write this for me, and it's urgent, so I need to get it down kind of scenario.

And he says, They were afraid.

[10 : 35] They fell on their faces. Jesus touched them and said, You don't need to be afraid. You can stand up. Do you know, this made me think, what must it be like in the day when Jesus appears, and you are on your face before him because you cannot stand in his presence, and he doesn't touch you on the shoulder and say, You can get up.

There's nothing to fear. Awful. But praise God for those of us who have walked into salvation. He will say there's nothing to fear.

We have a similar description of what happened to John. In Revelation, he said that the presence of God came to him, and he fell on his face as though dead, and the Lord touched him and said, Do not fear.

Boy, do I want to be among those who don't need to fear. So what we need to get to is, what about Elijah and Moses? And we touched on it last time, but I'm going to refresh it a little bit.

And we said that Elijah and Moses represent the law and the prophets. Now, Elijah represents the whole of prophetic utterance in the scriptures.

[11 : 45] He's just a figurehead. But Elijah was probably the best known of the prophets, the most famous and the one who had the most miracles recorded.

Whether he was the one who did the most miracles, we'll never know. But he had more recorded than anybody else. And he did Christ-like things, like he changed the weather.

You know, he brought on a drought, and then he brought on the rain. So the prophets are the ones who have provided us with over 300 very, very detailed prophecies.

Somebody recently did a count and said there's 356. I haven't checked his sums. But there's over 300 very specific prophetic utterances that are about Jesus.

And he had to fulfill all of them when he came. And the statistical likelihood of any man, any one man doing that just through pure accident are ridiculously infinitesimally small.

[12 : 46] This was God's design. It was God's way. God used the prophets to show us Messiah when he arrived. Because if he didn't fulfill even one of these prophetic things, there are one or two, by the way, that relate to his second coming, so he hasn't fulfilled those yet.

But all the ones that relate to his first coming, if he doesn't fulfill even one, he wasn't Messiah. But he fulfilled all of them. And then the law coming through Moses.

So you had quite a few years. I think something like 1,400 years, was it? Before Moses brought the law. That might be incorrect, that figure.

Don't hold me to task on the sums. I don't do sums. But for many, many, many years, decades, even centuries, we didn't have a written law. And God gave the law to Moses for the purpose of revealing our sin to us.

We read in Romans that God gave the law so that our sin would be revealed because God puts a law in place. And everybody finds they can't keep the law.

[14 : 00] And so because they can't keep the law, they know they're sinners. And therefore, a just God can come and hold you to account for your sin and can also say, because of this sin, you cannot enter heaven unless the price of that sin, which is death, is paid.

So what I'm going to do is pay it for you, which is the entire purpose of the crucifixion, the entire purpose of Jesus coming to earth in Matthew 1, verse 21, to save his people from their sins.

So that's why Elijah and Moses are significant, because Jesus has got these disciples together on a mountain, and he brings with him the law and the prophets. Moses also wrote and provided us with, writing on behalf of God, the Jewish feasts.

And the Jewish feasts also speak of the coming Messiah, or at least four of them do. I think the other three are for the second coming. But you've got the Feast of Atonement, you've got the Feast of Passover, you've got the Feast of Firstfruits.

The other feast was the Sabbath, and Jesus came and fulfilled the Sabbath. So you've got four of the Jewish feasts that were all looking back to God's deliverance in the past, but looking forward to what he was going to do when he came.

[15 : 25] So this is why it was important for the disciples to say, wow, we've seen the transfigured Jesus, and oh, Moses, and oh, Elijah. The law and the prophets are still very much alive, and still very much matter to God.

But the other great comfort we can take from this is these people were recognisable human beings, and they came with Jesus to the transfiguration, which means that in terms of a destiny, we can believe that we too will walk with him at some point.

We will be resurrected, and we will live with him and walk alongside him. And Job had this revelation that he said that he believed that he would stand with him on the earth in that day when he returned.

The first book ever written in Scripture was Job. So it was an important thing to make the experience for the disciples complete.

And they were terrified, and Jesus did say, don't be afraid. But the thing that made them fear was the sudden descent of this cloud, the glory of God, and this booming voice, which I won't try and imitate because Joe will have trouble with the recording if I do, but I can imagine it being almost deafening, this voice saying, this is my beloved son.

[16 : 46] Listen to him. The word used is the word Shema. And Shema doesn't just mean, oh, I heard a noise, that kind of hearing.

It means hear and respond when it's used in the Bible in the Shema. Shema, Israel, and you can carry on. Right. Shema, Elohim, Adonai, Eloheinu, Adonai, Echad.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is oneness or one. Right. We know that there is a Trinity, but the Trinity is one.

We'll do that another day. But the command was here, not just, oh, yeah, it's God, he's talking again. But hear, as in pay attention and respond, is what was being asked of these disciples by God in this cloud.

And, of course, at this point, when they're all terrified, the cloud goes away. The glory switches off and they're left with just Jesus. Elijah and Moses disappear and they're left with just Jesus.

[17 : 56] God in all his glory.

And then suddenly back in human form. It must have played with their minds. And so to continue then, what we have as we read on down in Matthew, go back to Matthew 17.

He says they should tell no one. This is verse 9. But we just finished with verse 8. They're lifting up their eyes. They saw no one except Jesus alone. So Elijah and Moses have gone.

The cloud's gone. The glory's gone. And they're with Jesus alone. And, of course, then they're making their way down the mountain. And Jesus said, tell no one of the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.

Now, Matthew's gospel doesn't say any more about that. But Mark and Luke talk about the fact that they were baffled about what he meant by being raised from the dead.

[19 : 02] Now, why Matthew doesn't mention it, I'm not sure. But they were, he says he's going to be raised from the dead. We don't get this. What does he mean by being raised from the dead?

Now, just to clarify a little, the Jews had a background belief from their own study of the scriptures in what we would call a general resurrection.

That one day everyone will be raised. And they get that from Daniel chapter 2. Sorry, Daniel chapter 12, verse 2. I need to check that now so we'll read it.

I don't want to lead you up the garden path. I think it's Daniel 12, chapter 2, which says this. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

So they're all aware of this day when there will be a general resurrection and some will be raised to blessing and some will be raised to absolute horror, really. So they have this awareness of the possibility of an individual resurrection.

[20 : 13] Now, they should have because it's there in the scripture. You have Psalm 16, verse 10. To turn there. Psalm 16 is a messianic psalm.

Verse 10, this is speaking of Jesus, or it's Jesus speaking is a better way to put it. It says, you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will you allow your holy one to undergo decay.

So from this, they should have deduced that Messiah in the grave will not be allowed to undergo decay.

So he must therefore be raised. Isaiah 53, if you turn there, probably the most famous of prophecies from which we get so much.

Isaiah chapter 53. Isaiah 53. And if we read verses 9 to 11, says this, His grave was assigned with the wicked men. Yet he was a rich man in his death because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.

[21 : 26] But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief if he would render himself as a guilt offering. So this is a description of, you know, the Lord was pleased for Jesus to voluntarily render himself as a guilt offering for us unto death.

And then he says this, he will see his offspring. He will prolong his days and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand. So there's these indications in the Old Testament that should have led the Jews.

When Jesus said, don't mention this to anybody till I'm raised from the dead. These scriptures should have come to their minds. Psalm 22, when he cried out on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalm 22 starts with those words and paints a picture of a man who is being beset by evil for the benefit of others.

Genesis 22, where there's the sacrifice or the intended, what seemed to be the intended sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham.

[22 : 36] And then God provides himself a lamb. So there are all these indicators that it should have been no shock when Jesus said, keep quiet until I'm raised from the dead.

Oh, yeah. Genesis 22, Isaiah 53. They should have rung bells with them. And it didn't. So they were asking him.

Well, they weren't asking him. They were pondering among themselves. What does he mean being raised from the dead? And then finally, they asked him about the return of Elijah before Messiah came.

Just turn with me to Malachi 4, the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi chapter 4. So we read from verse 4. Remember the law of Moses, my servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb.

For all Israel, behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.

[23 : 41] So those verses clearly speak of the end times. These are end times verses. So did these disciples think that because they'd just seen Elijah, we must be in the end times?

Was that their thinking? We don't know. But going back to Matthew, and by the way, there's also a reference to the one who would herald Jesus coming, John the Baptist.

There's a reference to him in Isaiah 42, where he is. Sorry, Isaiah 40, verse 3, which also speaks of the herald who will precede Jesus.

But if we go back to Matthew, what we then see, they said, and this is a cause of so much confusion, but it also transpires that it's an interesting reference to, if you remember Joe spoke, last time Joe spoke, he talked about middle knowledge.

I don't remember, I don't know whether everybody was blessed by that. I was because it opened up something to me that I hadn't previously spotted. But in Matthew 17, they said to Jesus, why then did the scribes say that Elijah must come first?

[24 : 59] Because obviously Elijah has now disappeared, so he hasn't come, so to speak. He's not come to minister in any way. He was there a minute on the mountain, and then he's gone, and they're asking him questions.

And then Jesus says, but I say to you, verse 12, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished.

So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. So Jesus says, Elijah will come, and then says, Elijah has come, which seems to be a contradiction in terms.

So the first thing is, why would John the Baptist be considered to be Elijah in some sense? And if you pop back to Matthew 11, I think we talked about it a bit when we were there.

Verses 11 to 15. In verse 10, you've got the quotation from the Old Testament. Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you. Speaking of John the Baptist.

[26 : 01] In verse 11, truly I say to you, among those born of a woman, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

For from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

And if you're willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. Now, where I get to sort of the talk about middle knowledge here is God intended to send and still intends to send Elijah to, and we'll look at that in a moment, still intends to send Elijah to help to bring everything to a conclusion.

But what he's saying here is, if you'd been willing to accept it, John the Baptist could have been Elijah to you. The point here is, what Joe said when he last spoke was middle knowledge is that God provides for, he knows what will happen, but he also provides for what doesn't happen.

In that he knows that people, so if you think about it, the Jews had two options here. They could have accepted John the Baptist's preaching and therefore embraced Messiah when he came, in which case it had to be possible for the kingdom to come at that point.

[27 : 32] Otherwise, it was a pointless promise. One of the reasons I love this is it actually puts Calvinism in its place, because the Jews were not predestined to reject Messiah.

They could have accepted Messiah, and had they done so, John the Baptist would have provided them an introduction to Messiah, which would have been valuable, would have taken the role of Elijah, operating in, if you like, the spirit and the power of Elijah.

Now, the Lord knew they wouldn't accept it, so Elijah himself has been kept for another day, and he will, if we read in Revelation 11, turn there.

This feels a bit weighty this morning. I hope it's beneficial. Revelation 11 and verse 3 and following, And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth.

And these are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies.

[28 : 47] So if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying.

And they have the power over waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with every plague as often as they desire. So you've got these two witnesses in the end times, the first one of which has the power to shut up the heavens, which is the one thing that Elijah is most famous for.

He shut up the heavens and it didn't rain for three years. And then he spoke again and he saw a cloud the size of a man's hand, didn't he? After he prophesied it's going to rain.

And then he saw a cloud coming and the rain came. So Elijah will still come. But had the Jews responded as they should have done, it was fair to say Elijah did come.

Because the provision of the spirit of Elijah was in John the Baptist. One of the reasons of a few that I've come up with recently, you can believe that John the Baptist had a ministry of miracles.

[29 : 58] Because he was considered to be, if you remember, Herod thought that this Jesus who was going around doing miraculous things was John the Baptist raised from the dead.

So John the Baptist must have had a history of miraculous works. For Herod to be kind of, ah, if he's doing miracles, it must be John the Baptist raised from the dead. So they had every reason to believe in John the Baptist and God provided him as a forerunner and with the spirit and power of Elijah.

And if they had accepted him, that would have been sufficient. And the kingdom of God could have come in at that point. Has that helped? Yes. Now I want to finish with this.

In a sense, and only in a sense, we have our own transfiguration. That is that before we were saved, we had no concept of Jesus.

We didn't know what he was like. Now we still don't know what he looks like, but unless you believe those photographers that are messing with the Shroud of Turin. But we don't know what he looked like.

[31 : 18] But what we do know is what he is like. We know his nature. We know his likes, his dislikes, his love, his compassion, his kindness. All of those things we've walked into since we got saved and we understand what he's like.

And I say this, this is purely metaphorical, but he is... Turn to 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9. Paul says this to the Corinthian church, talking about this very thing.

But just as it is written, things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

Even so, the thoughts of God, no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

[32 : 46] By his Spirit, those who become born again, God reveals himself. Not only does he reveal himself to you because you've been filled with his Spirit, but he uses you to reveal him to others.

Hence, we get scriptures that say things like, the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts. We get exhortations like Hebrews 12, where it says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

To the extent that we are prepared to keep our eyes on Jesus, that will also be the extent to which we have our own transfiguration, in a sense.

He's there in all his glory in the pages of scripture. He's there in all his glory in his creation. He's there in all his glory in Israel.

Because the fact that Israel is still even existing is remarkable. It's miraculous and it glorifies God. He's there for us to see through the Holy Spirit when we discern his will and his strategies.

[33 : 56] When we're able to pray into circumstances in an informed way. We have this exhortation in Matthew chapter 5, verses 13 to 16, to be salt and light in the world.

We're there so the world can see Jesus. In James 2, 17 to 19, we're supposed to demonstrate our faith by our works.

There should be a demonstration of Jesus at work because we're at work. And 1 Peter 2, verse 12, exhorts us to show godly behavior when we're among unbelievers, so that God will be glorified among them.

So this witness, this testimony, in a sense, is with us all the time. However, in 1 Corinthians 13, verse 12, what we read is at the moment we see in a glass darkly.

What I'm talking about with this, in a sense, transfiguration is a far cry from what these disciples experienced on the mountain, isn't it?

[35 : 06] And it leaves me jealous. I want that. I want to see him. Paul the apostle said a similar thing. He used the word know. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.

But 1 Corinthians 3, verse 12, says, at the moment we see just as if in a glass darkly, or as in a mirror darkly. But then, meaning at the end, we will see face to face.

So that leaves me thinking this. The transfiguration that they saw, where Jesus was transfigured before them, when we do see the transfigured Jesus, we will also be transfigured, as in this corruption we'll put on in corruption, and this mortality we'll put on in mortality.

So when we do get to see it, like they did, we'll also see it in our brothers and sisters and in ourselves. It's as if the transfiguration itself is a forerunner or a model for us, for the future.

And I find that a glorious thought to finish on. So Father, I thank you for this remarkable scripture, which I have to say has tried me in the study of it.

[36 : 29] But Lord, it is your privilege to conceal a matter and our privilege to seek out that matter. And I pray, Lord, that we will understand more and more and see more and more clearly the Lord that we serve in all his magnificence and glory and wonder.

And that, Father, when people look at the church, at the moment in this land, when people look at the church, they laugh. But Lord, I pray that when people look at this church, they will see the love, the kindness, the compassion, the glory and the wonder of the living God.

In Jesus' name. Amen.