

Jesus Revealed as the Glorious One

Matthew 17:1-13

Halifax: 5 March 2006

Introduction

For the last few weeks,

- We have been looking at that time in Jesus' ministry when He began to reveal His person and work more fully to His disciples.
 - We have seen how Peter, speaking for them all, confessed that He was:
 - "the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 - We have seen how Jesus clearly affirmed that Peter's confession was correct, but also told the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.
 - The people of Israel did not at all understand what the Christ was to do at this time,
 - and to tell them that He was the Christ would have brought mayhem and confusion as they would surely have sought to crown Him at once!
- But with His disciples, Jesus goes even further and begins to reveal to them that nature of the work the Father has given Him to do.
 - He explains to them that it is necessary for Him
 - "to go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things for the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised the third day."
 - But Peter, who had just confessed Him to be "the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"
 - took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.
 - Peter and the other disciples could not deal with the fact that the One they believed to be the Messiah was going to die at the hands of their leaders!
 - This just could not be!
 - But Jesus made it very clear by sternly putting Peter to silence, saying,
 - "Get behind Me Satan! You are an offense to be Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."
 - Jesus **did** have to go to the cross and not only that,
 - but He told them that anyone who wishes to be His disciple must also deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus.
 - There is no other option...
 - The cross is the only way.

- But Jesus does not leave it at that.
 - He goes on to encourage His disciples...
 - He tells them that the cross will lead to glory.
 - He tells them that He will come again with great glory to judge every person,
 - He tells them that even in their lifetime, they will see Him coming in His kingdom
 - You need this encouragement just as the disciples did!
 - It makes so much difference when you know where the way of suffering leads!
 - If you forget, you will begin to adjust what you believe and practice just enough to take the edge off...
 - just enough to avoid the ridicule and the rejection that comes when you fully follow the Lord.
 - Now that Jesus has suffered and we know why,
 - You might think it would be easier for us to follow Him with boldness...
 - But just look at the church and you can see how quickly the message of the cross is adjusted...
 - In every generation, it is adjusted in whatever is necessary to remove the offense.

TRANS> Jesus knew that it was difficult for his disciples then, and He knows that it is difficult for us today.

- And so it was that six days after having spoken these difficult words,
 - Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain to reveal His glorious majesty to them...
 - **He made these three men witnesses to the whole church that the suffering One was also the glorious One!**
 - For a moment on an unnamed mountain,
 - He laid aside the veil of His humiliation and let them see His glory!
 - Peter himself nicely summarises this true “mountain top experience” in his second letter when he says:
 - 2 Peter 1:16-18: For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were

eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

- Brothers and sisters,
 - The account of Jesus’ transfiguration is written for your encouragement!
 - It is written to assure you that the suffering one who lived here in such great humiliation is truly the glorious One!
 - Peter says, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty!
 - We have seen the glory in which the Lord Jesus will come again.
 - Peter, James and John have seen it and they have declared to us.
 - It is for you to look through the eyes of these faithful witnesses and see that He who came in such great humility is in fact the King of Glory!

Consider what they saw in order that you might be encouraged.

I. First, see how the glory of the person of Christ was displayed

- . Matthew describes it with reverent simplicity:
 - 0. In verse 2, he says:
 - “and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.”
 - 0. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to see a person’s face shining like the sun, and to see their clothes change.
 - The description is so brief and simple that it leaves us to wonder.
 - It is obviously something that we would have to see to fully appreciate,
 - but what is clear is that Jesus was not like any person they had ever seen.
 - The intrinsic glory of His person shone forth.
 - 0. Yet, we must understand that even this glorious appearing of Christ was that of His glorified human body...
 - The divine nature is pure spirit and does not have a physical appearance to be seen at all!
 - What we have in the transfiguration is the divinity of Christ shining through in the human nature.
- . There can be little doubt that what they saw is what we shall see when Christ returns.

- 0. Jesus had just told them six days before that He would come with the glory of His Father—at the end—on the day of judgement.
 - . Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three link the transfiguration with Christ's announcement that He would return with glory...
 - There is a deliberate connection between that promise of glory and this transfiguration.
 - This link shows us that these three men are enabled to see a preview of what Jesus' glory will be like when He returns.
 - . When Jesus first told them that He would return with glory,
 - It would have been difficult for them imagine...
 - His appearance among them had always been quite ordinary...
 - He did extraordinary works, but His appearance was like that of any other man.
 - Therefore, it was helpful for them to see Him for this brief moment in His glory.
- 0. This made it clear to them that when they saw Jesus from day to day,
 - they were seeing Him as One whose glory was veiled.
 - Here they saw what He was truly like in His human body when the veil was lifted.
 - This glowing figure before them was the very same figure they would see suspended between earth and heaven,
 - and rejected by both.
 - The glory of that figure that they saw on the Mountain was the glory that rightly belongs to Him.
- . It is for you, my brothers and sisters, to see this glory!
- 0. Today you don't see Christ given the honour that belongs to Him in this world either.
 - . He is ignored, He is despised, He is subjected to the opinions of men and grossly distorted even by those who claim to love Him...
 - . Though He is reigning at God's right hand heaven,
 - His glory is not yet seen in the world.
- 0. But you brothers and sisters are to believe what Peter, James and John saw on this mount!
 - . You are to believe that even though the glory is still veiled to us, it is still His!

- That even though it is not seen now, it will be seen!
- . You are to believe that the next time you feel afraid to admit that you are disciple of Jesus Christ!
 - You are to believe that the next time you are called to do something difficult—
 - something you don't want to do...
 - something that seems to great a sacrifice...
 - or something you have to keep on doing in the face in the face of opposition.
 - You must remember that you do not follow a weak, impotent Jesus,
 - but a Jesus whose glory is great and whose glory will shine forth when the days of our humiliation on earth are over...
- 0. Yes, as it is now, we see the church of Jesus Christ in her humiliation...
 - . We see her in her weakness.
 - We see her ridiculed and mocked by the world.
 - We see her excluded and persecuted.
 - We see her members sick and dying...
 - . But this is only because the glory that belongs to her through Jesus has not yet been revealed.
 - 0) As Paul says in Romans 8:22:
 - Rom 8:22-23: For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.
 - 0) John tells us that her glory will not be revealed until the glory of the Lord is revealed...
 - But he says:
 - “When we see Him, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.”
 - Christ is our hope of glory.
 - We will share in the glory that He has had with the Father since before the foundation of the world.

TRANS> You must not see Jesus only in His humiliation...

- By faith you must know Him as the glorious one!
- You must see through the eyes of these faithful witnesses that the suffering one is also the glorious one!
 - That is the first thing you are taught to see in this account.

II. Secondly, you must see your suffering Saviour in completely harmony with Moses and Elijah.

- . In verse 3, Matthew says,
 - “And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.”
- 0. We are not told just how the disciples knew that it was Moses and Elijah...
 - Certainly there are many details that we are not told,
 - but they knew for certain that it was Moses and Elijah.
 - Perhaps the Lord Jesus addressed them by name!
 - Or maybe it was divinely revealed to the disciples that it was Moses and Elijah,
 - Somehow they knew.
- 0. But the significant thing is the harmony that Jesus has with them.
 - . He is there talking with these two men—
 - Moses who had walked on this earth some 1500 years before Jesus...
 - And Elijah who had lived over 800 years before his coming.
 - . It is very obvious that these men are friends with Jesus.
 - They are there talking with one another—
 - Luke tells us in his account that they were speaking of Christ’s departure—of His coming death.
 - What a comfort it must have been to Jesus to have these glorified saints who understood that He must die.
 - There was no man on earth that really understood this...
 - But here were two glorified saints who knew that Jesus’ death was the foundation of their happy estate.
 - What a boost this must have been to King Jesus to speak to them.

TRANS> But there is more than encouragement to Jesus here...

- . Jesus’ harmony with Moses and Elijah is quite significant for the church in every age.

0. These two men are representative of all that God had revealed under the Old Covenant.

- . You may remember that in the Sermon on the Mount,
 - Jesus said
 - Matthew 6:17: Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill.
 - You see here how Jesus speaks of the Old Testament as “the Law and the Prophets.”
 - That was the way it was often referred to.
 - Jesus says that He is going to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.
- . Now if you were to choose one person to represent the Law, who would it be?
 - Surely it would have to be Moses...
 - The very Law of God given by Moses is sometimes even called “the Law of Moses.”
 - Moses is the one who gave us the first five books of the Old Testament which are also called the Law.
 - It was through Moses that God established the Old Covenant with His people and revealed to them how He was to be worshipped.
- . And if you were to choose one person to represent the Prophets,
 - Elijah is surely as good a choice as any!
 - He was the first of the great miracle working prophets who came to restore God’s people.
 - After Him came Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.
 - But Elijah was held in the highest esteem of them all among the Jews,
 - in part because he did not die, but was carried to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire.

TRANS> So these two men, Moses and Elijah, represent the whole of God’s Old Testament revelation: the law and the prophets.

0. Jesus’ harmony with them testifies to the unity He has with the Old Testament.
- . Jesus’ disciples may have been having a hard time harmonising what Jesus was doing (and saying He was going to do) with the Old Testament...
 - The scribes and Pharisees may have found very little agreement between what Jesus was doing and what was written in God’s word...

- **But not Moses and Elijah!**
 - Moses saw in Christ's plan to go to the cross the fulfilment of all those Old Testament sacrifices that he had appointed...
 - and he saw in Jesus conduct and teaching a perfect conformity with the Law...
 - And Elijah saw in Christ's promise to send the Spirit the fulfilment of all those promises that God would restore His people to His ways.
 - And in all Jesus' reformational preaching, He saw perfect continuity with what had been taught before.
- . The problem was not that Jesus was out of sync with the Law and the Prophets,
 - The problem was that scribes and the Pharisees and Jesus' disciples did not understand the scriptures.
 - Now it is best when the disciples of Jesus simply see and understand the harmony,
 - but in when they don't, they have this testimony of Moses and Elijah.
 - It is as if the Lord is saying to us,
 - "Do you not understand how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament?"
 - "Well then, let's see what Moses and Elijah have to say about that!"
- . I often get a chuckle at how easy it is for men to proclaim themselves to be disciples of godly men that have lived in previous generations!
 - 0) Dead prophets are very easy to follow because their teachings can be twisted around and certain parts of it ignored and parts embellished to suit the disciple just fine...
 - For this reason,
 - there were many self proclaimed followers of Moses and Elijah in the day of Christ that Moses and Elijah would never have recognised as their followers!
 - And so there are many followers today of Augustine or Calvin or Spurgeon who would only get a rebuke from these men if they were alive today...
 - 0) But let Moses and Elijah come and speak for themselves!
 - They immediately recognise Jesus!
 - He is the One of whom they testified when they were on earth, proclaiming God's salvation!

- In 1 Peter 1:10-11, Peter says of them...
 - 1 Peter 1:10-12: Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.
 - Let these prophets who wrote of Jesus come back, and we will see that they recognise Jesus when a scripture twisting generation doesn't.
 - They are not surprised that the Son of God has come to suffer...
 - They testified of this beforehand, and now they see it fulfilled.
0. This is yet another confirmation for all of you who desire to follow Jesus!
- It is both a confirmation and an encouragement.
 - . It is a confirmation that Jesus is truly the Messiah...
 - The only way the scribes and Pharisees knew that a Messiah was coming at all was from the ministry of the Law and the Prophets...
 - And here the chief representatives of the Law and the Prophets come and show their harmony with Him.
 - You can be sure that Jesus is truly the Messiah...
 - . Jesus harmony with Moses and Elijah is also an encouragement for you...
 - It is an encouragement for you to seek to understand the unity of the scriptures...
 - It shows us that the coming of Jesus is not a change in God's plan, but the fulfilment of it.
 - There are many today who act as if the Old Testament has very little to say to us.
 - They consider it to be reading into the text something that is not there to find Christ throughout its pages...
 - But here you are encouraged to look for harmony between the law and the prophets and Jesus Christ.

TRANS> Peter looks on this great scene and is quite taken with it!

- As usual, he speaks out at once with warm affection but without careful thought...

- v. 4 “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles (or huts perhaps): one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”
- We can appreciate Peter’s hospitality!
 - He is ready to set up camp in this place!
 - He is hoping that this is a permanent arrangement!
 - He is still hoping that all this talk about the cross is at an end!
 - The glorious kingdom has come at last!
 - For him, this is not a preview of Jesus coming glory, but it is a standing condition.
- But Peter is cut off at once...
 - He is cut off by the third great affirmation that the suffering one is also the glorious one.
 - We have seen the revelation of the glory of His person...
 - And we have seen the revelation of the harmony Jesus has with the Law and the Prophets...
 - Now we see...

III. The affirmation of God the Father that Jesus, the suffering One, is also the glorious One.

- . God the Father manifests His presence according to the pattern found in the Old Testament...
 0. He comes in a glory cloud.
 - . He came in this manner on Mount Sinai...
 - We read this morning how Moses was taken up into the cloud to meet with God...
 - And you know how God also led his people through the wilderness in the form of a glory cloud.
 - . God appeared in a cloud to show His people that they cannot see Him...
 - He is too great for human eyes to behold...
 - That which is flesh cannot behold that which is pure spirit.
 - The glorious Lord is hidden within a cloud.
 - . Yet, it was no ordinary cloud.
 - It was a glorious cloud that let everyone know deity was present.
 - So God stoops to reveal Himself in a way that we can understand...

- And even in such a condescended form,
 - poor human flesh feels like it is about to fly apart at the seams when it sees the manifestation of Him!
0. See how it was for poor Peter, James and John!
- . We are told that they were overshadowed by this cloud...
 - Not in darkness, but in light...
 - As I say, it was no ordinary cloud at all!
 - . They could hardly bear it!
 - They go face down on the ground and are said to be greatly afraid until at last Jesus comes to comfort them.
 - When the manifestation is gone, He touches them and tells them to not be afraid...
 - How gentle He is with His own!
 - But how great was that glory that put these men down on their faces!

TRANS> But now let me show you the great affirmation of the Son of God by His Father

- The affirmation comes from the voice of God speaking from this glory cloud!
- . In verse 5, the voice of Father declares,
 - “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him!”
 - How those words ought to ring in your heart
 - It is the Father’s personal testimony concerning His Son!
 - There are here three things observe.
0. First, you see that He claims Him!
- . Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God,
 - And Jesus in His humbled earthly estate had affirmed it...
 - Very few believed it...
 - But now the Father Himself confesses it from glory!
 - . The Father declares that this One who has just declared that He is on His way to Jerusalem to suffer many things at the hands of the leaders of God’s people is His beloved Son.
 - On earth, He does not look much like God’s Son to the people,
 - but here the Father says “He is my beloved Son.”

- No one can learn this by his own reasoning or intuition...
 - Jesus the carpenter's son can only be known to be the Son of God by the testimony of the Father.
 - The philosophers can philosophise and the dreamers can dream, but no one knows Jesus to be the Son of God unless He learns it from the testimony of the Father.
- . And here is that testimony for all of you to believe!
 - Jesus is the Son of God...beloved by Him from all eternity...
 - The Father said so!
- 0. Secondly, the Father affirms that He is well pleased with Him...
 - "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
 - . This is not so much speaking of the Father's pleasure with Jesus' person...
 - He is already described Him as His beloved One...
 - . But this has more to do with God's pleasure with Him as our Mediator...
 - 0) The Father is saying that He is pleased with the work that Jesus was doing on earth for His church...
 - He looked at what Jesus was doing and He said,
 - "This pleases me!"
 - 0) We have already seen that the work of Jesus did not please the disciples and the multitudes very well...
 - They wanted Jesus to get on with doing what the Messiah was supposed to do from their perspective...
 - save them from the Romans!
 - Neither did the work that Jesus had just recently told His disciples He was going to do please them...
 - and it would please them even less when Jesus actually carried it out and went to the cross!
 - But it really did not matter what anyone else thought...
 - Here we are told that the Father was pleased.
 - 0) And I might add here that is no matter what you think either!
 - Jesus does not need your approval!
 - You may think the cross is a stupid thing...

- You may think the lowly condition that the church in North America is in right now is a stupid thing for God to do...
 - You may think the difficulties and hardships you are facing right now are stupid...
 - But whatever any human may think of Jesus and His work,
 - the Father in heaven is perfectly pleased with it.
- . Now I want you to consider that the Father's pleasure with Christ as mediator means **everything!**
- 0) As the Mediator of the church, Jesus is bound up with us.
 - He is so bound up with us that it was necessary for Him to do something about our sins...
 - As Mediator, He had to take personal responsibility for them.
 - 0) If the Father had not been pleased with the work that Jesus did for us...
 - There would be no possibility of salvation for any son or daughter of Adam!
 - Every thing hinged upon the Father's acceptance of Jesus' work for us!
 - 0) And here you have the Father's testimony that He **is** pleased with Jesus!
 - That is your hope.
 - God the Father has accepted the work of His Son and you can be saved if you will only trust the Son—
 - rely on His saving work!
 - The disciples may not have liked where Jesus was going,
 - but the Father did!
 - He was pleased with His Son our Saviour—
 - How glad we ought to be!

TRANS> So the Father affirms that the lowly Jesus is His glorious Son and that He is pleased with His the work of His humiliation...

0. Then the Father commands the disciples (and all of us too) to hear Jesus.
 - . If Jesus is God's Son and if Jesus had done God's work as mediator,
 - Then it is our duty to hear the Son.
 - It is our duty to sit at His feet and learn of Him from His word.

- . There are so many people—even people in the church—who do not hear Jesus today!
 - 0) They may speak His name, but they rely on their own hearts and their own feelings instead of listening to His word.
 - Instead of preaching acceptance by means of the cross, they teach acceptance by sentimental love...
 - They may talk of the cross,
 - but it is the cross as an example of dedication and love instead of a cross where atonement is made for sinners...
 - sinners who would go to Hell if they did not believe.
 - 0) What about you?
 - Do you hear Jesus?
 - Or do you make up your own religion with a bit of Jesus served up however you want?
 - Every one of you need to hear the Father's command to hear Jesus...
 - Do not ignore Him...
 - He speaks from the glory cloud!
 - If you do not obey, you will surely die in your sins.
 - Have you heard the Son?
 - Have you believed?
 - I hope you have—
 - It is the Father's command.

TRANS> And so my brothers and sisters,

- You see how the glory of Jesus that is veiled was wonderfully revealed on this Mount...
 - How glad we ought to be that we are able to see all this faithfully recorded for us in the Scripture.
 - The lowly carpenter's Son from Nazareth is none other than God's very own Son.
 - Peter, James, and John saw the glory of His person...
 - They saw His harmony with the Law and the Prophets...
 - And they heard the Father's very own testimony from the glory cloud that this was His beloved Son who pleases Him well.

- We need to see Jesus on the cross, but we must also see Him as this glorious only begotten Son of God!
 - You must see that the suffering one is also the glorious one.
 - Welcome this testimony of His glory into your heart!
 - You cannot be saved if you see only a man...
 - Nor can you be saved if you see only God...
 - You must see Jesus our Mediator.
 - The curtain was pulled back for Peter, James and John...so that they might see His glory...
 - The curtain was pulled back for us, so that we might see His glory also through their testimony.

Conclusion

But you can be sure that as you go along, doubts will sometimes arise...

- There will be things in God's word that you do not understand,
 - There will be things in God's word that do not sit right with you.
 - But no matter what difficulties may come,
 - The transfiguration stands forever as a witness to assure you that suffering One is also the glorious One.

Even after this glorious revelation of Christ,

- The disciples raise a point about which they are confused...
 - The present it to Jesus in verse 10:
 - "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"
 - It is a point of stumbling for them...
 - It seems strange to have a point of stumbling after such a wonderful revelation of glory,
 - but it is not really so strange when you think about it...
 - It is often at the times when you are learning the most about the Lord and His work that you have the most trouble.
 - Sometimes it seems like everything has been shaken loose!
 - There are things you have surely learned, but there are other things that just don't seem to fit!
 - Such was the case with the disciples.

- Without going into a lengthy explanation of this text,
 - You see that Jesus shows them that it is true that Elijah must come first as a forerunner to the Messiah...
 - The mistake does not lie in that belief...
 - The mistake lies in missing the fact that Elijah has already come.
 - That is where the leaders of Israel went wrong.
 - In v. 12, Jesus says,
 - “But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”
 - Immediately the disciples realise that Jesus is talking about John the Baptist.
 - You will remember that John was beheaded by Herod...
 - That is what Jesus means when He says that they did whatever they wished to him.
 - Even Jesus’ forerunner had to go the way of the cross in an anticipation of his master.
 - The angel who announced John’s birth to Zacharias explained in what sense John would be Elijah...
 - In Luke 1:17, the angel says of John:
 - “He will also go before Him 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.”
 - The prophecy did not mean that Elijah would literally return to earth,
 - but rather that one would come who would be like Elijah—
 - and so John was.
- Immediately the disciples’ problem is cleared up.
 - There is always an explanation.
- There are difficulties that will arise in your faith,
 - but you must never allow these to unsettle you about the things that are certain.
 - No matter what comes, no matter how low the church may become in our day and what our Lord may suffer in the body of His people...
 - You must always be certain that the suffering One is also the glorious One.
 - The testimony of the transfiguration tells you so.