

The Transfiguration

📖 Matthew 16:28-17:13

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We are studying the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16. A little review is in order. Why is Matthew writing his gospel? Matthew is writing to meet a need. All the books of the Bible were written to meet a need. These books aren't just here. They are written to meet a need. What was the need? Jewish believers needed to have an answer for the objection of Jewish unbelievers that Jesus was the Messiah. What was their objection to Jesus? If Jesus was the Messiah then where was Messiah's kingdom? They expected that when Messiah comes He will establish His kingdom. Since Jesus did not establish His kingdom then they object to Him being the Messiah. This was the Jews objection then and it's still the big objection today. How does Matthew answer that objection? The kingdom has been postponed because of Israel's rejection. That's the big idea of Matthew. The King came and offered the kingdom but the King was rejected and therefore the kingdom has been postponed. Now the kingdom is still going to come and we think the transfiguration is a sneak peak of the future kingdom. It indicates that the kingdom is still going to come. So the kingdom offer at this time in Matt 16 was off the table but it was only off the table temporarily. In the future that offer will be back on the table and a generation of Israel will repent; Jesus will come in His kingdom. So what Jesus is doing at this time is training His disciples for their ministry during the postponement and preparing them for His cross work which they have little to no understanding of. Even after the resurrection they did not believe. So in their estimation this was not in the cards. You are not going to die says Peter. Oh yes I am, says Jesus, it's necessary. That's kind of what's happening.

Last time we saw in Matt 16:16 that Peter could properly identify Jesus' Person but in 16:22 He could not identify properly Jesus' Work. We noted that this revelation of His work began in 16:21 where Matthew says "From that time Jesus began to show...that He must of divine necessity go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Sanhedrin and be killed and be raised up on the third day." The reason these things must take place is because they are part of the prophetic plan of God for the Messiah. If Jesus doesn't fulfill messianic prophecy Jesus isn't the Messiah, plain and simple. Peter was opposed to this. In 16:22 he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him, going so far as to say "May God's mercy not permit this" and "This shall never happen to you." The language shows that Peter was willing to use physical restraint to stop Jesus from being arrested and killed and in fact, later he did when he cut off the ear of the high priest's slave. In 16:23 Jesus was not impressed with Peter's

courage. "But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Satan means "adversary" and since Peter was voicing the purpose of the adversary he was acting in the role of *Σατανα*. Peter, who was called the rock, had now become a stumbling block. He wanted a kingdom without a cross; glory without suffering. But in a fallen world there is no such possibility. The kingdom is entered through the cross and glory through suffering. Some of you may have wondered how Peter, who could correctly identify the Person of Christ in verse 16, seemed completely oblivious to the Work of Christ in verse 22. And how could anyone who does not recognize the Work of Christ even be a believer? The answer to that is that the content that one has to believe down through history is not static but changes. This is a bit of a controversial point but we have many who argue that the content never changes and so a person in the OT believed that Jesus would die on the cross for their sins. The problem is that the OT is not that specific. They didn't have that revelation. Peter is an everlasting memorial to that fact. Peter did not believe that Jesus had to die on the cross for sin. He said, "May it never be!" And yet he is clearly justified before God. The only one of the Twelve who is not justified is Judas Iscariot. So the content one had to believe down through the OT must be that God would send the promised Seed who was Messiah. Of course, the OT predicted the death of the Seed, but this was not well-understood. It was hinted at as early as Gen 3:15 when it says of the seed of the woman "...you shall bruise him on the heel." The bruise on the heel was a mortal wound and pointed to a death that was in some way remedied. It was mentioned in the context of Daniel's 70 Weeks where it says after the 69th week "the Messiah will be cut off..." What else does "cut off" mean than die? It was spoken of in Isa 53:5, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourgings we are healed." Unless this refers to someone other than Messiah it was a prediction of His death. Even John the Baptist in the NT seems to know about this when he points out Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Did John understand what he was saying? Did he connect the connotation of Lamb with sacrifice for sin? I don't know but it's quite clear that while the Work of Messiah was revealed in the OT it was not well-known or understood. That's why you see Peter resisting it. It didn't fit his Messianic profile. But the Messiah begins at this time to state unequivocally that part of the profile is that He must suffer before entering into His kingdom to reign in glory.

In 16:24-27 Jesus laid down the same principle for the Messiah's followers. They wanted to enter into the kingdom to reign in glory. They wanted to be great in the kingdom. But that is impossible apart from suffering. To reign in the kingdom in great glory they must first suffer. The suffering Jesus is talking about is not suffering because you have an illness or disability. It is suffering because of your identification with Christ. Believers who identify with Christ are called committed disciples. And if anyone wishes to be a committed disciple of Jesus Christ he must first deny himself, that is to deny that he himself is the authority over his own life, second take up his cross, that is to publicly come under the authority of Jesus Christ and third, follow Him no matter what kind of persecution may come along because of that association. That is more than simply being saved. Salvation is a free gift. Discipleship is costly. A committed disciple is literally risking it all for Jesus Christ. That kind of life is extremely dangerous; you could be killed, thrown in prison, tortured. It is naturally a fearful way to live and so in

16:25 Jesus begins to motivate those who choose to be committed disciples by assuring them it will all be worth it in the end. He says, whoever wishes to save his quality of life now by not identifying with Christ will lose out on quality of life in the kingdom later. But whoever sacrifices quality of life now for his identifying with Christ will gain quality of life in the kingdom later. In 16:26 what will it profit a man if he gains all the world's material possessions and yet he refuses to identify with Christ to get it, will he not forfeit quality of life in the kingdom to come? Or what material possessions will a man trade God for in order to receive a greater quality of life in the kingdom? In 16:27 the final motive is that "the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels." That is to say that He is certainly going to come and establish the kingdom on earth. Premillennialism, the idea that Christ returns before the kingdom, is not an idea, it's a fact, it's a non-negotiable fact. And when He does those who are entering the kingdom will be rewarded according to deeds done in the body. Therefore, it is critical to consider how we are living our lives now. The bottom line is that greatness in the kingdom requires that we suffer now. This suffering, again, is not related to having a difficult life, being dropped on your head as a baby, or being disabled. It's suffering for your identification with Christ. So, you can live for here and now and have your reward here and now or you can live for then and there and have your reward then and there. But there is no easy road to greatness in the kingdom. Not even Jesus had an easy road. He had to go through the suffering of the cross before being raised to enter into glory and reign in the kingdom. He's sitting right now at the right hand of the Father waiting to receive that kingdom. And we too must go through suffering by carrying our own cross before being raised to enter into glory and reign with Him in the kingdom.

Alright, in 16:28 he mentions that some of them standing there would get a preview of the Son of Man coming in this kingdom. I take this verse as a transition to what we find tonight in chapter 17, the transfiguration. And I would say that the reason this prediction and fulfillment are here is because it is very difficult for humans to keep the future kingdom in perspective. They get bogged down in the present and when you're suffering in the present you want to do whatever you can to stop the hurting and so the natural tendency is to dissociate yourself from Christ if that is going to cause pain. So what Jesus is doing is giving them a foretaste of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom so that they forever have this perspective. It's having that future perspective that enables them to endure the suffering in the present.

Now when you read verse 28 you need to know this is a highly controversial verse. 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. Why do you think this is controversial? Toussaint says, "This verse has caused much difficulty."¹ Why? Because people don't agree on the kingdom. The kingdom is a huge issue in Scripture and unless you follow its development via the covenants made with Abraham and David and materialized in the generation that went out of Egypt at the Exodus and went into disrepair at the Exile to Babylon then you can never understand what this verse and the kingdom is all about. So there are several views that all break down because they are trying to fit it with a kingdom now idea. Their theology says the kingdom must be now and so when exactly did some of those who were standing there see the Son of Man come in His kingdom?

First, some of them think that Jesus was predicting His resurrection and ascension. Some standing there did see His resurrection and ascension so those requirements would be met. However, the requirement that this be a coming of the Son of Man would not be met. His resurrection and ascension are not a coming but a going. In John 14:2 He doesn't say "I'm coming to prepare a place for you" but "I go to prepare a place for you" and in 16:7 He says, "If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." So His resurrection and ascension were visibly seen by some standing there but that was not a coming but a going and so that view does not meet the requirements of the text.

Second, some think that Jesus was predicting the day of Pentecost. These are the amillennialists. The amillennialist says there is no more millennium than there is now and it began on the day of Pentecost. Some standing there did experience the day of Pentecost, all of them actually, except Judas Iscariot. But the Son of Man did not come in His kingdom on the Day of Pentecost. What did He do on the Day of Pentecost? He sent the Holy Spirit to baptize Jewish believers into the Church. And the Church is not by any stretch of the imagination the covenanted kingdom of the OT that was prophesied to be rebuilt and restored. Therefore, this view fails to meet the requirements of the covenanted kingdom. But amillennialists simply gloss over the details of the covenants.

Third, some think that Jesus was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in AD70 and ended the Jewish age resulting in the present form of the kingdom. This is the view of full preterists. A full preterist rejects the bodily return of Jesus Christ and teaches instead a spiritual return of Jesus Christ which occurred in and through the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem in AD70. So Jesus is not coming back, Jesus already came back. The second coming already happened and we are already living in the new heaven and new earth. This idea may sound strange to you but they are resting on the idea that this had to happen during the lives of the apostles and because they don't want to see this fulfilled in the Transfiguration they go to AD70 and spiritualize the Second Coming. So they reject the bodily return of Christ and that is heresy but people are convinced by this kind of thing. Further, the covenant details are spiritualized and this is unacceptable. Pentecost said, "This was not a promise that the kingdom would be instituted in their lifetime. Rather, it was a promise that some would be given a revelation of the kingdom and of the glory which belongs to Christ."² That brings us to the fourth view.

Fourth, the best view is that Jesus was predicting a preview of His return as the Son of Man in His kingdom in the Transfiguration. As Walvoord said, "He was introducing...the transfiguration of chapter 17, which anticipated, in vision, the glory of the Son of man coming in His kingdom."³ This view is supported by several lines of argument, First, the context is the suffering that a committed disciple must go through to reign in the kingdom. A preview of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom would encourage them to keep their eyes focused on the glory to come so they could endure the sufferings. This is exactly what the transfiguration was. Second, all three parallel accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke record the transfiguration immediately after this prediction. Toussaint says,

"All three Synoptics (John omits the transfiguration) place the transfiguration immediately after this prediction of the King."⁴ Evidently they made a connection between the prediction and the transfiguration. If they made the connection shouldn't we? Third, only some of the apostles saw the transfiguration. 17:1 says Peter, James and John. The presence of only some at the transfiguration therefore meets the requirements of the prediction. Fourth, the prediction is that they would "see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" and that is what they saw in the transfiguration. To be abundantly clear, the kingdom was not established at the transfiguration but a preview of it was given in the form of a vision. 17:9 says this was a vision and so the kingdom was not established but the kingdom's establishment was previewed by way of a vision. Pentecost said, this was a "miniature and premature picture of the second coming of Christ to establish His kingdom."⁵

When we look at 17:1 note the close connection with the prediction in 16:28, six days later. It was only six days later that Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. So this was a private trek Jesus took these three on. Where did they take their trek from? In 16:13 they had entered "The district of Caesarea Philippi." Caesarea Philippi is 26 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Most likely they were still in Caesarea and set out on their trek from there. What high mountain did He take them up on? We don't know for sure but there is a very high mountain named Mt Hermon nearby. The elevation today is 9,232 feet above sea level. Most scholars think Jesus took them to Mt Hermon although others think it was Mt Arbel on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Mt Arbel would be more than a day's trek at more than 30 miles away. So most likely they went to Mt Hermon. Edersheim says, "There can scarcely be a reasonable doubt, that Christ and His disciples had not left the neighbourhood of Caesarea, and hence, that "the mountain" must have been one of the slopes of gigantic, snowy Hermon."⁶

Now the Matthew narrative in verse 2 goes straight to the transfiguration but the parallel in Luke 9:28 says that they went up to pray and that while praying "Peter and" the others were "overcome with sleep." So the transfiguration began while they were asleep and it describes Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah during this time and that sometime during the discourse they "were fully awake." I'm not sure of any significance to that except to perhaps suggest, that when the Messiah does come in His kingdom one should not be asleep, but alert, or else you might miss it. The theme of alertness relative to the coming kingdom is a theme that is especially pronounced in Matt 24 and 25. So there may be a connection between their being asleep and the warning to not fall asleep but I wouldn't push it.

What we see then in Matt 17:2 is He was transfigured before them. The Greek word transfigured is *μεταμορφωθη* and simply means "to change in a manner visible to others." I don't think there was an actual change because verse 9 says that they saw this in "vision" but there are some who seem to think that He did. For example, Walvoord says, "In determining the nature of the transfiguration, it is sufficient to conclude that it was a real and supernatural revelation of the glory of God, not just an appearance or a theophany." However, I see no evidence of a real change. Jesus predicted in 16:28 that they would "see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" using a

verb that may refer simply to an “appearance.” The parallel in Mark 9:4 adds that “Elijah appeared to them” using the same verb (also cf Mark 9:8, 9). The parallel in Luke 9 follows suit using the same root word several times. These evidences seem sufficient to show the nature of the transfiguration as an appearance in vision and not a real changing of form. Since Luke says they had fully awoken Matthew is correct in saying this was a “vision.”

What did they see in the vision? In verse 2 we read His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. The parallel in Mark 9:3 says “His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.” The parallel in Luke 9:29 says “His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.” Pentecost said, “Thus did the Gospel writers seek to convey the blinding brilliance of the glory that belongs to the person of Jesus Christ. This was none other than a revelation of the essential glory of God that belongs to Jesus Christ.”⁷ We are to know that Jesus did not for one second surrender His essential glory in the incarnation. Otherwise Paul could not say, “the rulers of this age...crucified the Lord of glory.” Instead, His glory was veiled so that the Holy One could dwell among an unholy people. The author of Hebrews says that His human body was the veil and that it corresponded to the veil in the temple. The veil in the temple separated the people from the blinding holiness of God in the Most Holy Place so they would not be struck dead. Just as the veil in the temple served this function of shielding the unholy Israelites from the blinding holiness of God so Jesus’ body hid and shielded sinners from His blinding holiness. On this occasion His glory was unveiled for a brief moment to give Peter, James and John a glimpse of His coming in glory at the Second Advent. This was a terrifying display that led them to fall in fright to the ground. John, who was an eyewitness of His glory, reports on seeing it in John 1:14 when he said, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” He is referring to the sight on Mt Hermon. Peter also gave his report in 2 Peter 1:16-18 when he said, “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— 18and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.” Peter’s words are a direct reference back to the transfiguration on Mt Hermon. It was just a glimpse, just a taste of Jesus’ appearance when He will come in His kingdom. In confirmation that His glory was merely veiled and not relinquished we have Jesus’ High Priestly prayer in John 17 where He prayed to the Father these words, “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was.” He was asking that the veil of His body be transformed so that the unveiling of His glory could take place permanently as it did by preview at the Transfiguration. When we turn to the Book of Acts we see that His prayer was answered when Stephen “gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God...” and said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” And again in Acts 9:3 when Saul saw His glory described as “a light from heaven flashed around him” which he described in Acts 22:6 as “a very bright light” so intense that in 22:11 it was stated to be the source of his blindness and in 26:13 as “a light from heaven brighter than the sun.”

The transfiguration is the foretaste of the blinding Majesty of Jesus Christ. Pentecost said, "This glory will be revealed to the world when Jesus Christ comes to this earth again (Matt. 24:30; 25:31). The glory that will lighten the whole world at the Second Advent was here revealed to the three who witnesses the Transfiguration. The light in which the redeemed will walk for all eternity (Rev 21:23) was witnessed by Peter, James, and John."⁸

In addition to His face changing appearance and His garments appearing brighter than light Matt 17:3 says And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. How they recognized them is not known. Perhaps as Jesus, Moses and Elijah spoke with one another they used one another's names. In any case, why Moses and Elijah? Moses represents Israel's prophetic office since this office was established with him. He is the first of the prophets. In Deut 18 it was revealed to him that God would "raise up for" Israel "a prophet like" Moses" from among" them, "from" their" countrymen," and they shall listen to him." This one was the Messiah. He is greater than Moses. Elijah is probably mentioned because he was predicted in Mal 4:5-6 to return as the last prophet to come before the kingdom of God comes to earth. His function would be to restore Israel to the Lord. So they are the first and the last of Israel's prophets.⁹ The two bracket the entire prophetic history of Israel. Both of them appeared in glory and were talking with Him. Matthew doesn't tell us what they were talking about but the parallel in Luke 9:31 says they "were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

In 17:4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The parallels in Mark 9:6 and Luke 9:33 say that Peter did not realize what he was saying. However, his reference to building three tabernacles shows that he did realize that the kingdom is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. The word tabernacle (*σκηνη*) refers to a dwelling place. In both the tabernacle and the Temple God dwelled among the nation Israel behind the veil seated above the ark of the covenant. The Feast of Tabernacles was given to Israel to depict God's dwelling among them. It was the last of Israel's annual feasts. It will be the last to be fulfilled. The millennial kingdom will be the fulfillment. Since Peter had seen Jesus in all His glory dwelling with the glorified Moses and Elijah in the messianic kingdom he was suggesting that they celebrate the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. However, such a celebration could not occur on this occasion because that generation of Israel had rejected the Messiahship of Jesus. That feast will be fulfilled only when the nation receives Jesus as their Messiah and the kingdom comes. Pentecost said, "...it was impossible for Israel to experience the fulfillment of what was anticipated in the Feast of Tabernacles until the nation turned in faith to the Messiah. This the nation was not doing and, therefore, Peter's proposal brought a rebuke from Christ."¹⁰

In 17:5 this suggestion is immediately cut off as Matthew reports, 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!" The voice out of the cloud was the voice of the Father. The cloud itself that enshrouded His voice was the Shekinah Glory by which He had led the Israelites through the wilderness, revealed the Law on Mt Sinai and dwelled in the Most Holy Place. This bright cloud overshadowed them. The parallel in Luke 9:34

says they entered into the cloud and from within the cloud they heard these words, This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him! Peter had made a significant blunder by suggesting that he make three tabernacles here, one for Jesus, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. This put all three on the same plane but all three are not on the same plane. The Father says that His Son is on a plane all by Himself. His words single out the Lord Jesus Christ as far superior to Moses and Elijah. They are very similar to the words He voiced after His baptism by John with one striking addition (cf 3:17). The words may be broken down into three parts. The first part are the words This is My beloved Son. These words are taken from Psalm 2:7, a messianic Psalm. They refer to the Son as the rightful heir of the world. As the Father says there, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession." As the Father's beloved Son, Jesus is heir of the world, not Moses or Elijah. The second part are the words with whom I am well-pleased. These words are taken from Isaiah 42:1, a Messianic servant passage. There the Father refers to Him as His Servant, the choice One in whom His soul delights and says of Him "I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations." This, too, will be fulfilled in Jesus, not Moses or Elijah. The third part are the words: listen to Him! These words were not voiced after Jesus' baptism by John. They are taken from Deut 18:15 where the prophet like unto Moses was predicted and it is said, "you shall listen to him." Jesus is the prophet like unto Moses, not Moses or Elijah. Therefore, Peter, James and John should give special prominence to Jesus over Moses and Elijah. It was not proper for Peter to suggest building each of them a tabernacle as if they were equal. The entire situation was a rebuke; the overshadowing of the bright cloud and the voice out of the cloud.

As such, in 17:6, When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. Matthew is the only writer to reveal this. Constable said, "When people see the glory of God revealed and realize that they are in His presence, the result is terror."¹¹ Daniel had a similar response to a vision of the glorified Christ in Dan 10:5ff where he says, "I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength." It is a fearful thing to come into the presence of God. His majesty is overwhelming. Every human on record who saw the glory of God by vision collapsed, nearly died, stood speechless and had to be helped back to their feet.

In 17:7, Matthew says, And Jesus came 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. The transfiguration was completed, the preview of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom was finished. Now they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. He alone is the only One we need to see in all of this. Through this what did HE teach these three privileged disciples? First, He confirmed the reality of a future kingdom in which resurrected saints will tabernacle with Christ on earth. Toussaint says, "The presence of Old Testament saints on earth with Christ in a glorified state is the greatest possible verification of the kingdom promises in the Old Testament."¹² The main purpose of the transfiguration was to confirm the nature of the kingdom as the OT prophets envisioned it. Second, this kingdom can in no way have arrived in any sense because of the connection with 16:27 which says that when He comes He will come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will judge the world. Unless

language ceases to have meaning then this has not been fulfilled. Jesus has not returned in full glory and judged the world and so if language has any meaning we must conclude that the kingdom has not yet come in any sense either at the resurrection or Pentecost or AD70. Third, the kingdom cannot come and will not come until the nation Israel receives Jesus as the Messiah. This is evidenced by Peter's desire to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at that time and the Father's refusal to allow any such feast. Only when the nation Israel receives Jesus as the Messiah will the kingdom come, the glorious Son of Man tabernacle among us in the earth. All these things confirm that a kingdom of the same nature predicted by the OT prophets is to come to the future earth.

Now in 17:9, 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." Several suggestions are made as to why but the best is that the nation had already rejected Jesus as the King and Jesus had told them they would only receive one more sign, the sign of resurrection. Once that sign is given to the nation then they would be free to share this vision with others. After the resurrection both John and Peter did speak of this vision in their books. John said, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This is almost certainly a reference to the transfiguration. Peter said, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" — 18and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet 1:16-18). Peter's words are a definite reference to the transfiguration on Mt Hermon and the fact that after the resurrection they made His coming in great power and glory known to others. He says we were there, we saw it, we heard it and we tell it to you.

Now in 17:10 we have an interesting dialogue about Elijah. They had just seen Elijah in the kingdom and so they were thinking about what the scribes taught about Elijah, that he must come first, before the kingdom and so they asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Do you see what's happening? They think the kingdom that they just saw previewed, is about to come, they think it's coming soon. I mean, heck, they still think it's coming soon in Acts 1:6, "Is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" They ask. So they're thinking that if the kingdom is about to come then what about the scribes teaching that says Elijah must come first? In 17:11 He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things." So the scribes were right on this one. They got one right every once in a while. All false teachers get some things right. That doesn't mean listen to them. But here they got one right. Elijah is coming. But note what Jesus says in 17:12, but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. They didn't get that one right. Then He builds a comparison and says, 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. Now this discussion about John and Elijah is always interesting. John comes, he's the forerunner of the King. He's got a message of repentance. He's baptizing people. This was strange activity. That's why they called him John the Baptizer.

Baptizing people isn't strange to us but Jews didn't baptize other people. They only knew of self-baptism. So they nicknamed this guy, the Baptizer. And he was preaching out in the wilderness, and actually in the region where Elijah was last known to have ministered and from where he was taken up in the whirlwind. And he was wearing a garment of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist just like Elijah. And his food was locusts and wild honey just like Elijah. So it's no wonder that some people thought he was Elijah. And people were trotting out from Jerusalem to see this strange guy and the Pharisees sent out some priests and Levites to inquire "Who are you?" "Are you Elijah?" and he said, "I am not." So he denied being Elijah but Jesus says here in verse 12 that he was Elijah, "Elijah already came." And the disciples understood that he was talking about John. But in 17:11 note that Jesus says Elijah is still coming in the future. So what is going on? What is going on is that John would have been Elijah if the nation had repented. This is the concept of contingency in the offer of the kingdom and the precursors of the kingdom like the coming of Elijah. So when we talk about contingency we're talking about things from the human standpoint and from the human standpoint it was truly possible that John was Elijah and that if the nation would repent John would have been Elijah. As Jesus said in Matt 11:14, "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come." John's identification as Elijah was contingent on the nation's accepting John's message. And yet, here we are now and Jesus points out here, they did not recognize him. And that really shut things down because John was the forerunner of the King. So if they reject the forerunner of the King then what are they going to do to the King Himself? The same thing. That's what Jesus is predicting right here. They did to John whatever they wished. They said he had a demon and just let Antipas have him and behead him. So what do you think they're going to do to me, Jesus asks? So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. So as goes the forerunner so goes the King. John was accused of being possessed by a demon and Jesus was accused of being possessed by the chief of all demons, Satan himself. And people wonder, what's the unpardonable sin? Can we do that today? What a joke. Get a clue. Read this book. The unpardonable sin is a generational sin committed by Israel. They accused the Messiah of doing His works by the power of Satan. Because of that the penalty was judgment and they went to judgment in AD70. That's the penalty for the unpardonable sin. And that's why, in 17:11 what does Jesus say? Elijah is still to come. John didn't fulfill the OT prophecies of Elijah. He could have but they rejected and so those prophecies still remain to be fulfilled, all of them. It is a joke to think that John fulfilled Isa 40:3; Mal 4:5-6 or any of the other prophecies because the fulfillment of those prophecies is contingent upon Israel's reception. He was a voice in the wilderness but not the voice.

Alright, so this adds another vital truth about the kingdom. Since Jesus teaches that Elijah must come before the kingdom and He affirms that Elijah's coming is still future then the kingdom has been postponed and is future. All kingdom now ideas are completely at odds with Jesus' teaching. When did Elijah come after Matt 17:11? All of them say John was Elijah but that is at complete odds with what Jesus teaches. John in no way was Elijah though he could have been if they accepted him, but they did not and so Elijah must return and restore all things.

Alright, so what have we seen? A lot. This is thick, heavy stuff. This is like wading through syrup. There is nothing here for the faint of heart. In 16:28 Jesus is predicting a preview of the Son of Man coming in the kingdom as an encouragement for committed disciples to endure the difficulties associated with their identity with Christ. It's not going to be easy if you make this identification. But in the end it will all pay off. Jesus predicted this preview of His coming to motivate them to persevere through the difficulties because that is the way to reigning in great glory in the kingdom. Six days later in 17:1 this prediction was fulfilled. Jesus took Peter and James and John up on Mt Hermon. Luke says to pray and they fell asleep while the transfiguration began and then they woke up fully and in 17:2 saw Jesus in His blinding brilliance of glory in 17:3 having a discussion with Moses and Elijah in the kingdom. In 17:4, Peter, not knowing what he was saying, requested to build three tabernacles, one for each of them in order to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles as fulfillment of the kingdom. However, this suggestion in 17:5 was completely shut off by the Father who enveloped the entire situation in the brilliant cloud covering of the Shekinah Glory. This is, in fact, how Jesus will come back, upon the brilliant clouds of heaven enshrouded in Shekinah Glory. Within the cloud they heard the voice of the Father commending His Son above Moses and Elijah. He is His beloved Son or heir of the world, with whom He is well-pleased as the Servant who would come and issue justice to the nations and the prophet like unto Moses, listen to Him. He is the key. In 17:6, the disciples, having seen the glory of God were terrified. In 17:7, Jesus, with compassion touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid. In 17:8, when they lifted their eyes the transfiguration was over and Jesus alone was there. They had just seen the only preview of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom but John and Peter would reveal it later, in accordance with Jesus' words in 17:9, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." In 17:10 they asked, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And he answered in 17:11-12 that it is true that Elijah came first but that Elijah already came in John the Baptist but they did not recognize him but allowed him to go to death. And that they would do the same to Him. And therefore Elijah is still to come. And in conclusion notice that in 17:9 we see reference to His death and resurrection and in 17:12 to His suffering. And all of this is exactly what He already said in 16:21, "that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." The full picture we can see in hindsight, He's going to die, He's going to be raised, He's going to ascend and sit at the right hand of the Father until Elijah comes and the nation Israel receives Him and then He's going to return in great power and glory as we have seen previewed in the Transfiguration.

¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 209.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 255.

³ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 126.

⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 210.

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 256.

⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus Christ*, p 122.

⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 256.

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 256.

⁹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 258.

¹¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 17:6.

¹² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 211.