

Matthew 16:28-17:13 - “The Transfiguration” – Feb. 18, 2024

1. Stu gave the pictures of the early 80s Islanders dynasty to paint a picture of how victory frequently comes through suffering
 - a. Bossy was the best!
2. The two themes of struggle and victory are not opposed to one another
 - a. They are not at opposite ends of a spectrum, as though we have to find a mid-point without really embracing either concept fully
 - b. Victory and struggle go together; in the story that God has authored, dominion/victory comes through struggle and setback
 - i. Analogy of air travel – lift is only possible due to resistance
 - ii. The biblical metaphors often use imagery from sports and agriculture
 1. Both show that winning and advance, harvest are possible, but both come through diligence, patience, and genuinely difficult work
 - c. Ch. 16 highlighted that these things go together – Christ promises the growth, dominion, and the ultimate victory of His church in history, and then He goes on to explain the kind of suffering that Him and the apostles are going to have to go through to get there
 - d. Peter tries to avoid the suffering part, and Christ rebuked him in the sharpest, most pointed way ever, saying that the desire for a kingdom without a cross is Satanic
 - i. There’s immediate application for us here as well
 - ii. Desirable outcomes take work

1. Don't expect godly children and grandchildren if you're not going to put the effort of discipline and love and instruction in
 2. Don't expect a fulfilling marriage if you find yourself to be the most interesting person in your marriage
 3. Don't expect a healthy church unless you're willing to put in the work of being a healthy church member
 4. Don't expect the nations to be won to Christ if you refuse to engage in kingdom work
 5. Victory comes through struggle – it's going to take work
- e. The chapter ended with the promise of repayment, which Stu noted isn't automatically a negative thing
- i. Repayment from God means punishment for the unbeliever who is still in his sin
 - ii. But for the believer who has been adopted into God's family, all his struggle and suffering for the kingdom will be rewarded with eternal treasure
- f. the fact that suffering and struggle are the pathway to victory and dominion prevents us from veering into an unhealthy ditch on either side of the road
- i. prosperity gospel/triumphalism
 - ii. poverty gospel/pilgrim & exile mentality
- g. Christ ends the chapter in v.28 on a note which serves as a natural transition into Ch. 17

3. V.28 – *“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*
- a. What does this have to do with all that Jesus has just taught about the church conquering over the gates of hell, and the toll it is going to take?
 - b. What Jesus is doing here is giving a taste of the fact that the payback that God’s suffering saints receive is not only future, for after we die
 - c. The First Century believers get to see and taste glimpses of that future glory in the present as they go through their suffering
 - i. The church is going to get reminders along the way that their efforts are not in vain, and that perseverance is most certainly worth the cost
 - d. Because of popular Christian media in the last century (Scofield Bible, Late Great Planet Earth, Thief in the Night, Left Behind, etc.) Christians have been conditioned to think about the end of the world, or of the final return of Christ when they hear language about “the day of the Lord” or “Christ coming in His kingdom”
 - i. Because of that, the time stamps in the Bible itself seem to not make sense to us
 - ii. Many people (critics like Bertrand Russell & Christopher Hitchens; Christians like C.S. Lewis) assume that Jesus got the timing of His return wrong
 - 1. Critics suppose this means Christ is not God; He makes mistakes
 - 2. Lewis thought verses like this were an embarrassment and chalked it up to Christ making mistakes due to His human nature

- iii. But the problem only exists if you have a certain system of thought in place already settled before you deal with these texts
- e. there are many “days of the Lord” in the Bible, and a number of texts in both OT & NT that speak of God or of Christ coming to earth that are not dealing with eschatology or things which are future to us
 - i. something being future to a biblical author does not automatically make it future to us
 - ii. they are not speaking about the end of history when Christ returns; what we often call His “Second Coming” when He returns to earth bodily just like He did at His first coming
 - iii. if we allow the Bible itself to define these things, these “days of the Lord” or “comings of Christ” are not referring to the bodily return at the end of history but of God intervening in human history; sometimes in judgement and sometimes in glory
- f. here Christ says that some of the Twelve will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom
 - i. the Son of Man coming in His kingdom language comes directly from Dan. 7 which is a picture of Christ ascending to the Father after completing His ministry on earth
 - ii. Matthew 10:23 uses the same language – *“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”*

- iii. in Ch. 24 Jesus is going to use the same language again, but in reference to the way He is going to come in judgment against Jerusalem for her unbelief, and through the Roman army is going to pour out all of the curses Moses threatened against covenant breakers in Deuteronomy
- iv. it has been proposed that what Jesus means here about His coming in His kingdom could be a reference to the Transfiguration, to His Resurrection, to His Ascension, to the spread of the gospel as the apostles fan out, and to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, at the end of that generation
- v. because the Transfiguration is only 6 days in the future, it would seem odd to say “*some of you won’t taste death*” as none of them died in that 6 day window
- vi. and it certainly can’t be a reference to the Second Coming, because all of them are dead now and this event is still future
- vii. I think this is a reference to all these events in a kind of cascading order
 - 1. There are several installments of Christ coming in His kingdom in that first generation of the church
 - 2. John Gill – “*till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom; which is not to be understood of his personal coming in his kingdom in the last day, when he will judge quick and dead; for it cannot be thought, that any then present should live to that time, but all tasted of death long before, as they have done; for the story of John's being alive, and to live till then, is fabulous, and grounded on a mistake which John himself has rectified at the*

close of his Gospel: nor of the glorious transfiguration of Christ, the account of which immediately follows; when he was seen by Peter, James, and John, persons now present; for that, at most, was but an emblem and a pledge of his future glory: rather, of the appearance of his kingdom, in greater glory and power, upon his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to heaven; when the Spirit was poured down in an extraordinary manner, and the Gospel was preached all over the world; was confirmed by signs and wonders, and made effectual to the conversion and salvation of many souls; which many then present lived to see, and were concerned in: though it seems chiefly to have regard to his coming, to show his regal power and authority in the destruction of the Jews; when those his enemies that would not he should reign over them, were ordered to be brought and slain before him; and this the Apostle John, for one, lived to be a witness of.”

3. So what is in view here is that Christ’s kingdom has come, continues to come, and it will continue to come throughout history until Christ returns in the flesh at the end of history
 - a. It came when Christ appeared and ministered, and now looking ahead, Jesus is saying it will come in further steps in the Transfiguration, in the Resurrection, the Ascension, at Pentecost, in the spread of the gospel as it gets preached,

and then in the Destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem
at the end of that generation

b. These events are all highly significant because each one
marks the rising up of the NC and the passing away of the
OC

i. Wedding analogy/WWII analogy

ii. This transition takes a generation to complete, as
Jesus indicates in Matthew 24

iii. The destruction of Jerusalem is the final event at
which point the OC system is completely
terminated

c. Some of the apostles are alive for each of these events;
although by the time Jerusalem gets judged, only John is
left (John 21:20-23)

g. The reason this marks a transition is because the Transfiguration is about to serve
as the first installment in this series of events

i. These events are all significant reminders that God's work is advancing
even through the difficulty and suffering the apostles are enduring

ii. The Transfiguration is going to be such a glorious moment, that it is going
to help the apostles keep pressing towards the goal despite opposition and
even martyrdom

iii. This is the light they need to see their way through the darkness that is
coming

- h. The church took 300 short years to conquer the ancient and mighty Roman Empire; and they did it through suffering
- 4. VV. 1-2 – *“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.”*
 - a. The time marker here is interesting
 - b. After Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ, our Lord promises the growth and dominion of the church advancing through history in His “gates of hell” speech, He has foretold of His death and resurrection, He sharply rebukes Peter, to the point of calling Him Satan, He talks about preserving your life in exchange for nothing, or sacrificing it for the gospel, He talks about repayment and how He is going to progressively come in His kingdom power, and then there’s a six day silence
 - c. It’s as though Jesus wants the apostles to marinate in the weight of everything they’ve just heard
 - i. It’s a lot to digest!
 - d. Jesus is transfigured
 - i. Trans (across)
 - ii. His figure moves from one form to another
 - iii. It is as though His divine nature starts seeping through His humanity and keeps intensifying in glory until it is bright and blinding like the sun

- iv. He is still the same God-Man, but the glory and the radiance and the beauty and the supremacy of His divinity are now displayed in a way that have normally been veiled by His humanity

5. V.3 – *“And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”*

- a. Imagine being there
- b. Of all the incredible things that happened in Jesus’ ministry, which one would you be the most interested in being an eye witness to?
 - i. This must make the short list
- c. Six days ago Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, and now there has been six days of down time
- d. The silence breaks by Jesus taking the inner three (Peter, James, & John) up a high mountain, and then putting His divine glory on display like this
- e. And now Moses and Elijah appear and are talking with Him!
 - i. It’s not said how Peter, James, and John know that it is Moses and Elijah, but somehow this knowledge is communicated to them
 - ii. These saints who are separated by centuries somehow know one another; Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, and here they are together at the command of Jesus
- f. Why Moses and Elijah?
 - i. Moses – dead for 1400 years
 - 1. God appeared to Him in a burning bush
 - 2. Confronted the mighty Pharaoh and prevailed over him
 - 3. Took him up a mountain and gave him the law

4. Dies in mysterious circumstances
 - a. God shows him the promised land from atop a mountain, then
 - b. Deut. 34:5, 6 – *“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, 6 and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day.”*
 - c. Jude 9:9 speaks of the archangel Michael contending with the devil over Moses’ body
- ii. Elijah – gone for 900 years
 1. Like Moses he also had his confrontations
 - a. Ahab and Jezebel
 - b. 850 prophets of Baal
 2. Elijah flees to Mt. Horeb, another name for Mt. Sinai
 - a. Same place where God gave Moses the Law
 3. God appears to him there
- g. Now these two men appear before Peter, James, and John on another mountain top, and they see something they have been longing to see for centuries
 - i. Exodus 33 – Moses has just been angered and provoked by the idolatry of the people when he came down from Sinai
 1. God takes him back up in that discouragement

2. Moses is blinded by a veiled look at the backwards parts of God as He passes by a cleft in the rock
 3. It is so glorious that Moses himself has to wear a veil over his face so the eyes of the Israelites are not hurt when they look at Him
- ii. 1 Kings 19 – Elijah has been angered and provoked by Ahab and Jezebel
1. “troubler of Israel”
 2. Elijah likewise goes into a cave at Horeb/Sinai
 3. God calls him out of the cave and sends a great wind that breaks the rock to pieces; then an earthquake; and then God speaks to him in a low whisper, and Elijah comes out of the cave and has to cover his face in the presence of God
- h. So here are two men; each called by God, both confronted powerful kings and prevailed; one gave the Law, the other one preached that same Law; both came down from the same mountain and were provoked to anger; both get a glimpse of God but are forced to cover their faces
- i. And now, hundreds of years after their ministries, each man gets the honour of seeing something they did not get to see during their lifetime – they get to see the glory of God Himself with unveiled faces
- j. They stand here before Christ as representatives of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah)
- i. A suitable summary of Christ’s ministry
 - ii. Matthew 5:17, 18 – *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For*

truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

- k. The same pattern of giving these old prophets a glimpse of God’s glory in their time of discouragement is repeated here for the apostles
 - i. They get a glimpse at the glory of Christ as they enter into their season of suffering
6. V.4 – *“And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”*
- a. Peter is so intrigued by what is happening that he wants to make it last longer
 - b. Some commentators have suggested that Peter is bumbling here because he doesn’t know what to do or what to say
 - c. He offers to make a tent or a booth for all three of them
 - d. By offering to make three booths, Peter may be suggesting that these three men are on equal footing
 - i. If that is the case, he is about to be corrected
7. VV. 5-8 – *“He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, I with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”*
- a. The Father interrupts Peter’s proposal and makes it clear that these three men are not on equal footing

- b. God sends a cloud which overshadows both Moses and Elijah so that Christ alone stands out
- c. Moses and Elijah fade into the background when the Greater Moses and the Greater Elijah appears
- d. The successor is greater than the forerunner, and God announces His blessing on the Son
 - i. Similar to Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17)
 - ii. This is the Father repeating His own words from Psalm 2
 - 1. VV.7-9 – *“I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*
 - 2. Kings and rulers and empires must obey King Jesus, or He will smash them to pieces
 - 3. This is how the Christian church outlasted the Roman Empire in short order, and how the church has shown itself to be far more versatile than any earthly kingdom or empire that the world has known
 - a. Many wars have been fought, many kings and empires have grown by the grace of God and been cut back down for their disobedience; the map has been redrawn countless times, and yet Christ continues to build His church

b. *“The Church is a perpetually defeated thing that always outlives her conquerers.”* — Hilaire Belloc

iii. By giving this vision of His Son, having the Law and the Prophets bow to Him as the Final Word, and then showing that this is the Son that David anticipated, God is showing the absolute supremacy and greatness and majesty and sovereignty and glory of Jesus Christ

1. *All the rivers of redemptive history have emptied themselves into the vast ocean of Christ’s glory.*

2. The Apostles get to see this, and what looked scary to Peter just six days ago – that Christ must go to Jerusalem and be killed – now looks quite different

3. *Jesus is not walking into Jerusalem as a weak servile beggar, but as a conquering King administering His most holy Law, as an anointed Prophet who will preach repentance to small and great alike, and the Great High Priest, leading His people from the front – walking right into the heart of the battle in order to do what He must do so He can take His throne at the Father’s right hand.*

e. The blinding radiance and white-hot power of what is happening is not lost on the disciples; they fall to their faces in fear and terror

f. Yet the Son is only a terror to those who oppose Him; the only knees He shatters with His rod of iron are those that don’t bend to Him

g. He is also the kind of prophet that Isaiah saw, one who doesn’t just afflict the comfortable, but who also comforts the afflicted

- i. Jesus is kind and gentle to the lowly; He will not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering wick (Matthew 12:20; cf. Isaiah 42:3)
 - h. These men see the Lord for who He is and respond accordingly; so Jesus comes and gently touches them and sends all fear away
 - i. For those who find refuge in the Lord, all fear, all guilt, all anxiety melt away
 - ii. He is patient and compassionate and soft to those who are His
- 8. VV. 9-13 – *“And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” 10 And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” 11 He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.”*
 - a. This mountain top experience can’t last forever; eventually they must come down
 - b. Because it is not yet time, Jesus gives instructions yet again to stay quiet
 - i. There are still some who expect a top-down political kingdom who have no category for understanding the nature of the kingdom Christ is building
 - c. The disciples are still in need of sharpening their thinking further
 - i. They know that Malachi 4:4-6 prophecies that Elijah must come before the Messiah
 - ii. But they are reading with a wooden literalism that keeps them from understanding

1. They are staring at the window instead of seeing through it
2. They are reading sentences but not making sense of the story
3. *Prophetic and apocalyptic literature is rich with symbols and metaphors, so when we read about Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, we're not to think that we're learning about the human skeleton; rather we're getting a metaphor for the deadness of fallen man; when we read about living water coming out from under Ezekiel's temple, we're not learning about a building with significant plumbing problems; we're learning about how the gospel runs out to the nations from the Christian church; when we read about mountains dissolving and separating in Malachi and Zechariah, and see de-creation language like sun, moon, and stars falling in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zephaniah, we're not learning about geography and astronomy, nor are we to think that all these things must still be in our future because they haven't yet been observed with a telescope. We're reading about the birth pangs as the world of the old covenant is giving birth to Christ and to the world of the new covenant.*
4. *We are to let the prophetic language supply its own meaning – we are reading about the lights going out in old cosmic governance now that Christ has taken His throne; and when we read about the Elijah in Malachi's future; we're reading about John the Baptist*

5. A literal reading includes a literal understanding of the genre, and this can be challenging
6. Matthew Henry – *“God’s promises are often fulfilled, and men perceive it not, but enquire, Where is the promise? When it has already been performed. The scribes busied themselves in criticizing upon the Scripture, but understood not by the signs of the times the fulfilling of the Scripture. It is easier to explain the word of God than to apply it and make a right use of it.”*
7. What Matthew Henry is saying here is that Jesus is teaching His disciples to not just stare at sentences like the scribes did, but to understand the story in all its vivid telling. Let Scripture supply its own definitions to words. Let Scripture be the lens by which you interpret Scripture. Don’t stare at the words – consider what the author means by those words
8. In this case they start to understand and realize that by “Elijah”, Malachi was looking to John the Baptist, and he has already entered and exited the story right on time
9. He came and by preaching repentance, he did restore all things
10. He set the stage just right for Christ to take over

9. SUMMARY/APPLICATION

- a. B.B. Warfield, in his book “The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible” compares the Old Testament to a dimly lit study. Everything is there in its proper place, but is difficult to see properly.

- i. The truths of God are present but not fully illuminated or understood
 - ii. With the coming of Christ and the giving of the New Testament, the blinds are pulled back and the lights are turned on so that everything can be clearly seen
 - iii. In one sense, nothing has really changed, but in another sense, the gift of sight changes much
- b. In His ministry so far, Jesus has gone out of His way to say that He did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them
 - i. Any view of Scripture that puts the OT on a lower tier than the NT is severely misguided and prone to many errors
 - ii. The OT is not something that used to be the Word of God; it is the living breathing Word of God right now! It continues to serve as a lens to read the story of history; and to point us to our living Saviour.
- c. And all of it points to Christ and to His ministry as we've seen in this text
 - i. Christ is now the focal point – He's the light by which we read the OT with a much deeper, fuller, more glorious understanding
- d. Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets have been the forerunners for hundreds of years to point us to the better law and the better prophet
- e. Christ has come in splendour, majesty, and the highest honour possible
- f. His holiness is so bright and so pure and so direct that even Moses and Elijah must once again step back and seek cover in the cloud
- g. This holiness is a great terror for those who will not bend the knee, and a great comfort and protection for those who gladly bow to King Jesus

- h. So I am going to ask you this morning – I am going to ask myself this morning – have you gladly submitted to King Jesus?
 - i. If you have, He will touch you and heal you
 - ii. He will never bruise the broken reed or snuff out the smoldering wick
 - iii. If you have seen Jesus for who He is, in all His holy terror and splendour then take comfort this morning that He is telling you to “*Rise, and have no fear*”

10. CHARGE

- a. *Peter, James, and John receive the honour of being eyewitnesses to one of the most glorious events in human history. Together, with Moses and Elijah, they have the profound and long anticipated blessing of seeing God the Son as He truly is, with unveiled faces, in all His refulgent glory. Towards the end of his life, Peter looks back to this day and tells us that what we have now is even better than that eyewitness experience was (2 Peter 1:16-21). The dissonance and tension and waiting of the ancients has found its resolution in Jesus Christ. He uses this mountain top Transfiguration experience to show how He is progressively ushering His eternal kingdom into our physical world. The early Church Father Augustine said of the Bible that “the New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed”. Today we sing in agreement with him “Amen! Amen! From beginning to end, Christ the story, His the glory. Alleluia! Amen!” Christ shines the light of meaning onto all history. He alone is holy. There is none beside Him. He is perfect in power, in love, and in purity. Kiss the Son. He is the final Word.*

11. BENEDICTION

- a. Hebrews 1:1-4 – *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”*