

I thoroughly enjoyed our time together in worship last week on Resurrection Sunday. Every once in a while it proves so helpful to step back from the tree—in this case, of Matthew's account of the Gospel—to see the grand forest: God's sovereign plan—from Genesis to Revelation—of His desire to exalt & magnify His Son, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Looking over those many passages last week served as a great reminder of where we've been, of where we are, and of where we're going. To glimpse the Grand Narrative can be so helpful in the midst of the daily grind. As followers of Jesus, He calls us to take up our cross & follow Him. But at present, the hope we need to lay down our lives, depends on our being convinced of the supremacy of Christ's future glory which is just around the corner.

Before we get into our passage for today, let's start by recalling Matthew's mission, the purpose for writing his account of the Gospel: to show his fellow Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was & truly is indeed "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus and had Him crucified on a criminal's cross. In His first coming, all they saw in Jesus was a Galilean peasant from nowhere special, a friend of sinners, not Messiah; just a carpenter's kid... maybe.

Matthew opened our last chapter—chapter sixteen—by pointing out how the Pharisees & Sadducees demanded proof of Jesus' identity. "If you're really the Messiah, show us a sign from heaven." But what greater sign could there have been from heaven than the Son of God Himself? He came preaching & teaching in ways that marveled the masses: "None of our rabbi's speak with such authority." He came exorcising demons & healing the sick, revealing His mastery & authority over all creation. What further proof of Jesus' identity could God provide them? How about one more sign, Jesus said: "the sign of Jonah," God's resurrected prophet after three days in the belly of the great fish who went on to preach to the Gentiles, who repented at the message of God's impending wrath.

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees. Since they'd rejected the *Word made flesh*, they had no business teaching God's Word to the people. They didn't have eyes to see Jesus for who He really was. "But who do you say that I am," Jesus asked His disciples. And that's when Peter proclaimed his great confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." What a blessing that must have been for Jesus to hear. Finally, His men knew the Truth. "Blessed are you Simon Son of Jonah," Why? "For flesh & blood didn't reveal as much to you. You see because My Father in heaven has opened your eyes to the Truth." What a moment that must have been. But, it wouldn't last long.

Now that His torch-bearers were confident of His identity, it was time to show them more, to permit them closer, to warn them of what was going to happen soon, to assure them of His absolute control even at the Cross. In v21 we read, “*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders & chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day*”—just like Jonah—“*be raised.*” As glorious as the news of His resurrection may have sounded, they missed it. The thought of their Master being killed was beyond their reason, outside the scope & plans they had for their Messiah: “Surely not!” Peter wasn’t having any of it! He took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, “Not on my watch, Master!” But then Jesus turned and rebuked Peter who, in his understandable misunderstanding, had sided, not with the plans of the Father, but with Satan. “Get behind Me, Satan,” Jesus sternly rebuked. Peter’s efforts to prevent Jesus crucifixion, to keep Him from rescuing us from our sin... well that was exactly what Satan wanted. And so the same Peter who made the *great confession*, received Jesus’ *greatest rebuke*.

And, finally, in our previous passage in Matthew, Jesus proclaimed His *great call* upon the lives of any who would come after Him: *deny yourself, take up your own cross, and follow Me*. The Pharisees & Sadducees were wrong: the way to glory was not by making much of ourselves, not by padding our own pockets, not by seeking your own plans, ambitions, and glory, but by laying our lives down, following the Way, the Truth & the Life. Otherwise, no cross of death meant no crown of Life to lay at the Master’s feet.

Now, try to imagine how puzzled & perplexed the disciples must have been right about now: “So according to our Messiah, the way to life is death?” That’s a lot. That was a lot for those disciples then, and it’s a lot for disciples still today. According to *their* ideas, all their hopes & dreams for fame & notoriety depended on their Messiah’s conquering reign, not on His suffering & crucifixion. Jesus’ cross was certainly NOT part of their plan, much less was a cross of their own. “Jesus, are you sure that’s the way to glory?” Today we get a glimpse into His answer:

1 About a week after calling His men to death, Jesus takes His closest disciples up on the mountain to behold His glory. It’s hard to determine exactly which mountain, but whichever mountain, what’s interesting is that the Lord took them up one. Remember where Moses met with God? Where God gave him the Law? Yup, on a mountain. In 1 Kings 19 the prophet Elijah also met with God, and, you guessed it, it was up on a mountain. Both these Old Testament leaders met with YHWH on a mountain. And, here, the Lord leads His men up a mountain to behold their God. He had a special revelation in store for them on the mountain as well.

2 Do you recall how Moses' face was lit up when he came down the mountain among the people? In Exodus 34.29-30 we learn the source of Moses's bright complexion:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai [he] did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

Why was his face lit up? *"Because he had been talking with God."* Having been in the presence of God's glory, Moses face lit up. But in v2 of Matthew 17, it isn't just Jesus' face that's transfigured with light, He Himself, His whole self, is transfigured in glory. The word for transfigured suggests *a change in form*, like such a thorough, inward change that it can't help but be seen on the outside as well. And, note carefully, the text doesn't just say, "He was transfigured," but that "He was transfigured *before them*", before the disciples. In other words, this whole transfiguration of Jesus event was for their sake, was meant for them to behold.

Remember, Jesus had just told these men of His impending death. Imagine how that made them feel? And, in addition, He'd just called them to follow Him, to deny themselves, take their cross & die daily. He wanted to give them a glimpse of His preincarnate glory which, in the midst of their own suffering for His sake, would grant them hope of His soon-coming exaltation. He wanted to strengthen their spirit, to assure them of His good control. That their Master was, indeed, none other than the Christ, the Son of the living God, but who, indeed, would lay down His life in suffering for their sin, that they might be with Him in glory forever. And as they daily laid their lives down for His Kingdom, having had this glimpse of their Master's glory, they could do so with confidence, knowing He is surely leading them into His surpassing presence forever.

3 And, *idou!* Behold! In other words, "this is marvelous!" Here are Moses & Elijah who had both been on the mountain in the presence of God's glory before, and now, with the disciples, here they are, once again, in the presence of God's shikinah glory: *Jesus the Christ*. No man better represented God's Law than who? Moses! And no man better represented God's Prophets than Elijah, the one prophesied to be the forerunner for the Messiah. And now here they are with the One who—as the narrative progresses—will be revealed as Superior, above all!

4 Don't you just love Peter? He just can't help but opening his big mouth & saying something. "Wow! I know I'm a fisherman and all, but I can make some tents. One for each of you maybe? So long as we can all just stay right here... forever!" He totally senses that something tremendous is going on. He wants to memorialize it, to erect some tabernacles. But little did Peter realize how his self-proclaimed plans belittled his Lord. Peter, James & John would be the

key witnesses to carry the torch of Jesus' coming Kingdom after His departure. Therefore, it was incredibly important for them to realize just who they were dealing with. Matthew records Peter calling Jesus "Lord" here; Mark has "Rabbi," and Luke has "Master." Rabbi & Master are close enough, but why does Matthew have Peter addressing Jesus as *Lord*? Most likely he's doing something similar here as he did earlier in chapter 16 when Peter called Jesus "Christ". Peter was right, but then he rebuked Jesus for stating that "the Christ must suffer & die". In other words, Peter may have known Jesus was the Christ, but clearly didn't understand everything that meant. Likewise, in our passage today, Peter calls Jesus "Lord," but then suggests a bit of a compromise when he ropes his "Lord" in on equal grounds with Moses the Law-man and Elijah the Prophet. In time, Peter would realize that Jesus was indeed "the Lord," but not just any lord. He was the unqualified *supreme* Master... of everyone & everything.

5 "Peter was still speaking when..." Do you remember back in 16.22 how Peter was cut off by the Lord as he "began to rebuke Jesus"? Why was Peter's rebuke cut short by Jesus' rebuke? Because Peter was wrong. Just like Satan, Peter would have prevented Jesus from going to the Cross. But Jesus wouldn't stand for it. If Jesus was going to build His Church upon this little rock's message & ministry, then Peter needed to know & understand: *No Cross, no Crown!* And now here in 17.5, once again, Peter was cutoff by the Lord, while "he was still speaking". Why? Because, just as before, though Peter's intentions were good, he was wrong and *must needs* be corrected! The fishermen would've built three tents for the Carpenter: one for Christ, one for the Law, and one for the Prophet, as though all were on equal footing. But the heavenly Father wouldn't permit such poor judgment. Peter needed to know the Truth: Jesus is not just another law man or just another prophet: He is the reason the Law & the Prophets exist. They were written for Him, they are all about Him. He is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, infinitely superior to everyone else! He is the Alpha & the Omega, the one through whom, by whom & for whom everything was made that has been made. The Father wouldn't even permit His Son Jesus to correct Peter this time. No sir, He took it upon Himself to make it absolutely clear: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased;" This is the One who makes Me happy. This is the center of My world, of all worlds, of everything. He is My pleasure, and will sit "at My right hand [where there] are pleasures forevermore!" All of the Law & the Prophets find their meaning in Him. They all point to Him. They were written for Him. Therefore, He is the One to listen to: My Son, in whom is My pleasure forevermore! You want to know what pleases Me, how to please God? Listen to Him. Watch Him. Love Him. Follow Him! We have such a tendency to give ear to what other men say: popular pastors, politicians, historians, scientists,

facebook, twitter, Fox News. So many opinions. None of them are Jesus. Let no man's mind & mouth take the place of Christ & His Word. It's a battle, and it's won first thing every morning, by opening the Word of God: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ."

6-8 Throughout Scripture whenever man comes in contact with deity, there isn't some sort of warm, fuzzy feeling that comes over them, but terror & fright. When sinners are in the presence of holiness, fear rightly fills their body, their pride is humbled, onto their faces they fall. "Do not fear," is usually how divine visitors have to address fearful men. And, indeed, that is the case here. The Master of mercy comes to the aid of His fearful sheep, touching them with encouragement to "Rise, and have no fear." But not a word now from loud mouth Peter. Only silence. We're only left to wonder what he & the others were thinking: "What do You mean 'fear not', Lord? You're... You're radiating... with light & glory." Divine splendor found them on their faces! And when they finally were able to "*lift up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*" Don't miss the emphasis here. There is no more Moses, no more Elijah. Those prior forms of God's revelation pale in comparison to the revelation through His Son.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

The boys had no way to fully comprehend this mountain marvel, but the transfiguration was a crucial next step in persuading them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Any doubt on the way up, was wiped away by the Voice of God Himself: "*This is My beloved Son... listen to Him.*"

HNSL? Considering the kindness of our King in His provision for His people. No sooner had He confounded them by saying "the way to life was death", did their Master give them a glimpse of incomparable glory in exchange for laying down their lives. JC Ryle put it this way:

The corner of the veil was lifted up, to show them their Master's true dignity. They were taught that if he did not yet appear to the world in the guise of a King, it was only because the time for putting on His royal apparel was not yet come.

We are so quick to forget of God's coming glory, our own future glory. Throughout the New Testament, small little gatherings called "the people of the Way" met regularly. Later in Acts these little gatherings were called *the Church*. Now, why would they gather? To remind one another of the coming glory of Christ! That the daily cross they would faithfully bear wasn't the end, but the means to such a glorious end, the presence of Christ forevermore! To prevent them from focusing on earthly things below, to fix their minds on things above, they gathered together regularly, they would Restore & Sustain one another by reminding each other of God's promises, singing Psalms & hymns, sharing their meals & testimonies of how Christ loved them, of eternity in glory with One who gave His life for them. Oh what a disservice we do one another when we fail to gather. Are we a gathering Church? Is there any other kind? Let's gather together and remind one another of our future glory with Christ. Jesus knows how essential it is. His call on our lives is self-denial, to die daily. And He knows good & well that we won't unless we're regularly reminded of His promised rewards, of the eternal joy that awaits us in His presence. Otherwise, we'll just go about our days assuming that what is real is only that which meets the eye. We don't see everything under His feet just yet, but we will, soon. For now, in this world, almost all we have is sorrow, sin, sickness, hatred, people rejecting Jesus and laughing at us for loving Him. Where else in this world do we see signs of our future reward? Nowhere! No wonder we're so tempted to give in to sin & doubt. But by God's grace, as we fix our eyes on the Transfiguration of our Lord, be reminded of the brightness of that soon coming Day when He returns for His bride: glory beyond anything anyone has ever imagined! He didn't just promise such glory, He even showed a glimpse of it to our brothers Peter, James & John.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. –John 1.14

Just as Moses & Elijah were raised, take hope, Christian, you will most certainly be raised: to any who don't trust & love Christ, to eternal death & torment; but to those who do, to eternal glory! Just as our Lord said in Luke 20.38: "He is not God of the dead, but of the living!"

PRAYER

COMMUNION

SONG: *Doxology*

BENEDICTION: *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. –2Th2.16-17*