

WEEK 9: JESUS REVEALS HIS GLORY

Matthew 17:1–13



The Place of the Passage

The transfiguration¹ is a climactic moment in the story of Scripture and specifically the ministry of Jesus. It is a significant moment in the life of Jesus when he transfigures or transforms before his disciples so that they experience in the flesh the glory of God made known in Jesus Christ. It is a moment in which the disciples share the light of Jesus, a light that will one day fill all the earth: “The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23). This is a preview or trailer for the reality of the new creation and a unique revelation by which Christians are given true hope. The transfiguration reveals that Christ unites the living and the dead, the old and new covenants, and even the age to come so that the transformation of the Christian is guaranteed (see 2 Cor. 3:18). For this reason this miracle is categorized as a miracle of glorification, because it is a revelation of the true majesty and perfection of Jesus. The transfiguration is intimately connected to the cross; together the two declare that light defeats darkness and that Jesus’ humiliation is also his exaltation (John 12:32–33). This category of miracle, glorification, rests in the economy of the new creation, as its purpose is connected to the revelation of truths about the life to come.

The Big Picture

Jesus is the glorious Son of God, and the revelation of his glory is a present hope and a future reality.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Matthew 17:1–13. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1856–1857, or visit esv.org.)



The Setting (Matthew 17:1)

Jesus waits six days before taking the disciples up the mountain (Matt. 17:1). What could be the potential significance of both the six days and the mountain? (Hint: read Exodus 24:16.)

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him up the mountain. What could be potential reasons that Jesus does not take all the disciples?

While the actual identity of the mountain that the disciples climb is debated (see *ESV Study Bible* note on 17:1, page 1856), what does the act of ascending to high places signify?

The Miracle (Matthew 17:2–8)

What would the transfigured Jesus have look liked to the human eye or have been like to experience in person? What would the experience communicate about Jesus?

Why do Moses and Elijah appear next to Jesus? (Hint: see *The ESV Study Bible* note on 17:3, page 1856.)

What is misguided about Peter's response to the miracle (see 17:4)?

What is the significance of the pronouncement from the heavens and the disappearance of the two Old Testament leaders (17:5–8)? What does this scene, and especially the statement from the Father, teach us about Jesus?

The Conclusion (Matthew 17:9–13)

After the completion of the miracle, Jesus charges the disciples not to share with others the vision they have witnessed until the resurrection (17:9). What would be the purpose of this secrecy, and what does it teach us about the importance of the resurrection?

The disciples show their confusion and ask Jesus a question about Elijah. How does Jesus’ answer show a fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 4:4–6? What does this teach us about the unified plan of God from the Old Testament to the New Testament, as well as the climactic role of Jesus?

In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach Christians about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?



Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE GLORY OF JESUS. Peter, James, and John are given a sneak peek of the majesty of Jesus. While the Son must still be tried, handed over to the Romans, and crucified, this preview miracle teaches believers that the gospel is fundamentally connected to the glorification of the Son. The words from the Father at Jesus' baptism are repeated on the mountain: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Any claim to Christianity that seeks to take glory away from the Son and redirect to self is a deviation and misappreciation of the gospel (see Col. 1:15–23).

THE SON MUST RISE. Jesus often seeks to conceal the results of his ministry (healings, exorcisms, etc.) by charging the recipient with secrecy (Matt. 8:4; cf. 9:30; 12:16; 16:20). After coming down the mountain he delivers a similar charge to the three disciples with him. In this case, however, Jesus offers a bit more explanation by specifying that any information must be delayed until after the resurrection: "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). As Jesus has predicted his death, that death and his subsequent resurrection lend context to Jesus' secretive nature. The resurrection of Christ is not only the central point of the story but the interpretive key to make sense of the whole. The resurrection, which is another miracle of glorification, is the final revelatory statement of Jesus by which he declares the reality of the glory revealed only partially in the transfiguration.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS. A unique component of this miracle is the appearance of Moses and Elijah. While there is much scholarly debate concerning their purpose in the miracle, a majority consensus addresses their distinct but cooperative roles in communicating what is true about Jesus: Both the law of God (given by Moses) and the prophetic announcement of the coming Messiah (revealed by Elijah) reach their fulfilled climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The transfiguration connects the old covenant (testament) to the new covenant (testament), uniting the whole story of Scripture and the progressive revelation of God in the world to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

THE TIME OF ELIJAH. The appearance of Elijah on the mountain spurs a question from the disciples concerning the prophetic expectation of his arrival. In Malachi 4:4–6, the last verses of our Old Testament, the waiting world is given a prophetic picture of the day of the Lord.² Before this "great and awesome day," a major sign given by the Old Testament is the arrival of the prophet Elijah. While Elijah himself was spared from death (2 Kings 2), his return marks the beginning of the turning point in human history. But his return is not as straightforward as the disciples

expect, as Jesus connects this prophecy with the life and ministry of John the Baptist. As the four Gospels reveal, John prepares the way for Jesus, and thus for the great day of the Lord (see *ESV Study Bible* notes on Mal. 4:4–6, pages 1779–1780).

Theological Soundings

GLORIFICATION. While this miracle is a snapshot or a vision of the glorious realities of the new creation, the message of this miracle extends through Christ to believers, who have been united to him by faith. The life of faith is a life of growth toward Jesus in obedience to his word and love of neighbor. This process in Christian theology is called sanctification. The finality of this growth, completed at the death of the believer, is called glorification. As Christ is glorified, so one day we will be also. The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18 explains this process: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” This transformation will be completed when Christ returns.

JESUS ONLY. The reverent fear of the disciples on the mountain leads to the exhortation from Jesus, “Rise, and have no fear” (Matt. 17:7). When the disciples rise up and look to their Lord, they see only him. Without explanation Elijah and Moses have disappeared, and they see “no one but Jesus only.” The shift from three men on the mountain to the one proclaims the central claim of Christianity, that a person can see the glory of God only through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus’ person and his work—his death, resurrection, and ascension—can the believer ascend “the mountain” of the Lord. This truth is a wonderful and exclusive truth. Not only can no one attain righteousness through the law (Romans 2), but no one can attain justification³ through any other source (religion) ever conceived or created either. It is through Jesus, and only Jesus, that a person can be saved!

Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of Matthew 17:1–13 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Matthew 17:1–13

As You Finish This Unit . . .

God's Word gives you an insider vision of Jesus in his true glory! Reflect on what this means for your life and respond in prayer.

Definitions

¹ **Transfiguration** – An event in the life of Jesus Christ in which his physical appearance was transfigured, that is, changed to reflect his heavenly glory.

² **Day of the Lord** – According to the Old Testament prophets, God would come at the end of history, judging his enemies and restoring his people. This was referred to throughout the Old Testament as the “day of the Lord” (e.g., Isa. 13:9; Joel 1–3; Zechariah 12–14; Mal. 4:5). Also, any day on which God took action in judgment might be called a “day of the Lord” (e.g., Amos 5:15–20).

³ **Justification** – The act of God's grace in bringing sinners into a new covenant relationship with himself through the forgiveness of sins, and in counting them as righteous before him through their faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:20–26).