

Matthew 17:1 – 13 In His Glory!

{Matthew 16:27} I think the first thing that we need to know to understand this text is that here on Earth, suffering leads to glory. This is why Jesus goes from His own suffering and death to His glorification! This is why we see denying ourselves and taking up our crosses leads to the promised reward for what we've done and the promised gift – participation in His Kingdom! Even in man's twisted thinking, it is common sense that no one would endure suffering without a promise of benefit. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that this is true even of our Lord - **"For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."** Jesus went to the cross for the joy of obeying the Father, of completing the plan and receiving the reward, believers (a gift from the Father - John 17:6). When we follow Christ and suffer on His account, it leads to glory for us also **"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."** (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV) In summary, those who are first here will be last in the Kingdom and those who are last here will be first (Mark 9:35)! If you and I want to get ahead where it counts – in the Kingdom (Heaven) then we need to humble ourselves and become a servant to all. Trust me, you and I won't have a struggle getting there – everyone is fighting to climb that proverbial ladder (to make something greater of themselves) – there is no traffic for those who have decided to go down (we're like fish swimming against the flow). This is the only logical reason that someone would deny themselves – it's for a greater reward (deferred gratification).

{vs. 28} Truly or verily (you know anytime God says **"really!"** - it's a guarantee!) – truly, some here will see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom. Some take this to be a mistake – that Jesus expected the Kingdom to come before they all died but that's not the case! **This promise will be fulfilled in two ways:**

- The first and more straightforward way is through John's vision or revelation. John who was standing there, would be shown in his old age **"what is now and what will take place later."** (Revelation 1:19). The book of Revelation is John's testimony of what will take place through the end of time – the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Millennial Reign, God's final victory over the devil and those who follow Him and yes, the beginning of our eternity with God!
- The second is what the inner circle (Peter, James and John) would see on the Mountaintop as described in chapter 17! I believe this is what John describes in 1:14 when he writes **"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"**. Moreover, Peter describes the event in his second epistle (2 Peter 1:16-18). So let us examine Matthew's account of that day on the sacred mountain!

{Matthew 17:1} Luke's account (Luke 9:28) says "some eight days later" but that is a Jewish equivalent to "about a week later". Although some have pointed out the differences as a contradiction, however we don't know when either of them starts or stops their clock. Does it include time mountain climbing or is Luke's simply a rounded estimate. We know that scripture is inerrant and this type of nitpicking or word parsing does not prove anything.

Why only these three? Was it so that a matter could be established by the testimony of two or three as Deuteronomy 19 required? Partially. Some have said that these three were kept close by Jesus - - - just to keep an eye on them, to keep them from trouble! However, no doubt this is partially because these three were being groomed for positions of leadership in the church.

So Jesus goes mountain climbing (not just a little hill like when He sat to teach the crowds but a **'high mountain'**) with His right-hand men. These are the three that saw Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from the dead, that saw His glory on the Mountain and His sorrow in the Garden. Curiously, each deals with death – Jesus' power over death and His own upcoming death. What happens when they get to the top? Jesus begins to pray and the guys (these great apostles) do what they do - they go to sleep (Luke 9).

{vs. 2-3} While the boys took their nap (it must have been the hike and the altitude), Jesus is changed – the Greek word is *metamorphoō* (from which we get metamorphosis – used for a caterpillar’s change into a butterfly). The Divine glory that was veiled or masked within Jesus’ human form was allowed to shine out – not just through the skin but also through His clothes without being diminished! Have you ever put a really bright light up to your fingertip – you get an idea of the process but instead of a red-tinted glow, this light was so strong that it was whiter than possible here on Earth - **“His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”** (Mark 9:3 NIV).

It is important to understand that this light was from Jesus; it did not come from the Sun (s, u, n) or from the cloud of glory that we’ll see in two verses. **This is not a reflected glory (like the moon reflects the light of the Sun) but the glory of the One and Only Son of God!** Light is one of the characteristics of God – it is the first thing created (day 1!) and if you go through the Old Testament, you’ll see that God appears in light (the Shekinah glory) again and again. This brilliant light awoke the boys from their nap and as they shake off the grogginess, they see Jesus and two other figures (Moses and Elijah) with Him. Luke’s account tells us that they appeared in glory – this maybe a fine point, but they were in Jesus’ glory – illuminated by and reflecting that glory, as Moses did coming down from God’s presence (Exodus 34). Although all three were there when they woke up, Luke says they saw His glory (not their glories). Jesus is clearly shown to be preeminent over the other two. In fact, they are about to leave – while Jesus remains (symbolic) when Peter begins to speak.

Why these two? Because they represented the Old Covenant. Moses is the Law-giver and Elijah was the chief of the prophets. **‘Moses and the Prophets’** was a common way to refer to the entire Old Testament scripture. Matthew and Mark simply say that the two are talking with Jesus but Luke tells us that the topic is the departure that Jesus is about to accomplish in Jerusalem. This word for **‘departure’** can be used to gently describe death (i.e. decease) but is actually the word for exodus in Greek. They are confirming the foretold Messiah’s deliverance (from sin) – just as Moses delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

{vs. 4-8} Peter, Peter, Peter – Mark (9:6) tells us **“he did not know what to say, they were so frightened”**. Many of us have the same habit – speaking when we are afraid and speaking when we should keep our mouths closed (and our ears open). The disciples are afraid but also in awe – the kind of reverential fear that God deserves. Peter, who only a week ago heard some of these will see **“the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom”** makes the assumption this is it, sadly this is not the complete fulfillment, but only a preview or sneak peek. There is still the six months of ministry until Passover and most especially the part they failed to hear or understand – the suffering, dying and rising again!

{vs. 9} All of this served as confirmation that what Jesus was now telling them (that He would suffer, die and rise again) was what Peter called **“the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”** in that first sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23). However, now is not the time to declare this news, just as Jesus told them not to tell anyone that **He is the Messiah, the Son of God**. I have to imagine that this would be a frequent topic when these three were all alone and yes, it must have fed into the great desire for the full revelation of the Kingdom. **We should all live in the excited expectation of Christ’s return** (as long as it doesn’t keep us from doing what we should here below)!

{vs. 10-13} Trying to make sense of what has just happened, the boys come up with what they think is a safe question. They ask about Elijah coming before the Messiah (foretold in Malachi 4:5-6), the Kingdom, the restoration of all things – **is that what we just saw Jesus?** Jesus tells them that the prediction is true, that Elijah will come before Christ’s reign on Earth – but the one who came in the spirit of Elijah has come and they put him to death (John the Baptist). Since the nation rejected John the Baptist, the destruction promised in verse six was on its way (fulfilled by the Roman destruction in 70 AD). Jesus again reminds them – “I too am going to suffer” (Today’s suffering leads to future glory!) God’s is not taken by surprise at this, the plan is still on schedule. It’s hard to consider, but the Kingdom would have come, if they accepted John and Jesus. That did not happen, but what is important to understand is that God did all that He promised – Elijah came, the Kingdom was offered and God is good (to His word and us). Now we know that Elijah will come again and this time Israel will say **“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!”** and the Kingdom will be established!