

(Through the Bible) Matthew 17

by Chuck Smith

In Matthew 17, Jesus reveals His divine glory through the transfiguration and addresses the misunderstanding of His disciples regarding His kingdom and the role of Elijah.

Duration: 45:05

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-3, Matthew 17:5, Matthew 17:7-9, Matthew 17:22-23, Hebrews 1:1-2

Topics: "Christology", "Divine Revelation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, as described in Matthew chapter 17. The chapter begins with Jesus talking to his disciples about his death and the glory of his Father. Jesus also mentions that some of the disciples will see him coming in his kingdom before they taste death. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the context of this statement and not assuming that Jesus failed. He also highlights the significance of listening to Jesus as the full and true revelation of God. The sermon concludes with Jesus instructing his disciples not to share the vision they witnessed until after his resurrection.

Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 17. The 17th chapter of Matthew actually begins with the 28th verse of the 16th chapter. It's unfortunate that the men who divided the Bible into chapters and verses made the chapter distinction where they did.

They should have taken and included the 28th verse of chapter 16 in the chapter 17 and it would have eliminated a lot of questions. Because Jesus is talking to his disciples there at Caesarea Philippi and is talking to them about his death and about the glory of his father that he is going to bestow and his coming in the glory of his father with his angels rewarding every man according to his works. And then Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Now from that there are people who have assumed that Jesus no doubt failed because all of the disciples who were standing there did die and the Lord has not yet come in his kingdom. So it's a very confusing thing. It would seem that Jesus made a false prediction of his return.

However, if you'll go right, if you don't have the chapter distinction and you don't stop at the end of chapter 16, but you go immediately into chapter 17, you'll find out what Jesus was referring to. Verily I say unto

you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother and brought them up into a high mountain apart and was transfigured before them.

And his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. So Jesus was referring to the fact that some of his disciples and those that he was referring to were Peter, James and John, that they were actually going to see him in the glory of his kingdom.

And so he took them up into the high mountain. Now, they were at Caesarea Philippi, which is at the base of Mount Hermon. And so it is quite obvious that the high mountain that he took him into was Mount Hermon.

Now, in years to come, when they sought to establish the Holy Land as a tourist attraction for Christians from throughout the world, in establishing where the holy sites were, that is where the events actually happened. Most of the holy sites were established by the mother of Constantine some 300 and 300 years plus or minus after Jesus was crucified. And she established the holy sites by her feelings when she stood in a spot.

Oh, this feels like the spot where he must have been born. I feel, you know, interesting sensations in this spot. Surely this must be the cave where he was born.

Oh, this must be the place where the angel announced to Mary that she was going to conceive and have a child. Oh, this must be the place where he lived. And she went around the country establishing these holy sites.

And they began to build then these churches on these holy sites to commemorate these places where Jesus supposedly did these various things. In her establishing of the holy sites, it's obvious that she wasn't too familiar with the scriptures. And it's also obvious that they wanted to make it convenient for tourists.

So, they established the site of the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, which is sort of in the middle of the land near the Sea of Galilee and in the area of the Valley of Megiddo. They said that's where Jesus was transfigured. So, they would have an excuse to build a huge church on the top of Mount Tabor.

And after all, how many tourists are going to journey all the way up to Mount Hermon to see the place where he was transfigured? The multiplying of the loaves and fishes, though it was around on the upper end of the lake near Bethsaida. Yet, at that time, there weren't any roads going around into that area. And so, they established a church down near Magdala, which is closer to where all of the tourists can go.

And so, that's where they established the loaves and fishes. And then the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. They established that in the place of the Church of the Crucifixion within the walls of the old city of Jerusalem.

Though the scripture tells us plainly that they took him outside the walls and that in a cave near the place where he was, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a cave. So, they though have established it in a, inside the Gate of Damascus. And they have, of course, recently excavated the ancient Gate of Damascus.

And you can actually see the very gate that Jesus no doubt went through when he went over to Golgotha and was crucified. But it was convenient for tourists to get things close together. And so, they established the holy sites that way.

Tabor is not a especially high mountain. In fact, it isn't even as high as Mount Gilboa right in that same area. Hermon is the highest mountain, 9,800 feet high.

And is, the fact that Jesus was all the way up in Caesarea Philippi, it doesn't seem reasonable that he would hurry down to Mount Tabor, which would be a good six day journey. I mean, really hustling in order that he might go up to the top of it to be transfigured for his disciples. But, traditions such as they are would have you, and when you go there, if you go with someone other than me, they'll probably take you to Tabor and let you get the same sensation that Constantine's mother got as you stand in the place.

There are three churches of the Ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives, and all of them swear that theirs is on the exact spot. One will even show you a footprint that he left in the rock when he ascended. Even though the scripture said he went as far as Bethany, and there he ascended into heaven.

But they didn't read that gospel. And so, they established all the churches of Ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives. So, I guess distorting news isn't anything new.

So, Jesus was referring to the fact that these disciples were going to see him in his glory. And as he was transfigured before them, they actually saw God's glory upon him. He was transfigured.

His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was as white as the light. And there appeared unto him Moses and Elijah talking with him. Matthew does not tell us what they were talking about, but Luke's gospel tells us that they were talking to him about his death that he was soon to accomplish in Jerusalem.

They were there talking to him. Now, what tremendous persons to talk to Jesus. Moses, who of course, stood for the law, and Elijah, who was the head of the prophets.

And in as much as in the law, all of the sacrifices and the feasts and so forth were spelled out, now he who was the fulfillment of all of this which was just a shadow, now the substance Christ is here. And the sacrifices which were all just a shadow of that which was to come is now to be fulfilled. And so, Moses is no doubt talking to him and has himself a better understanding than even when he wrote the Pentateuch.

Elijah talking with him also concerning this death that he was to experience. Then answered impulsive Peter, our good friend, and said unto Jesus, Oh, it's good for us to be here. If you will, let us make here three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

Isn't it interesting what stupid things we say when we should keep our mouths shut? But sometimes we think, well, we ought to say something. You know, and when we talk for just the sake of being, you know, many times people talk just for the sake of talking. And that's always dangerous.

You put your brain in neutral and start talking. It's amazing what will come out. And you think, well, I got to say something.

And so, impulsive Peter got to say something. Well, Lord, this is good for us to be here. Let's build three tabernacles.

Moses lied to you, you know. But while he spoke, he was interrupted by a bright cloud that overshadowed them. You remember in the Old Testament, there was a bright cloud that led the children of Israel when they came out of the bondage of Egypt.

And that cloud followed them or led them through the wilderness. And it was the cloud that represented the Shekinah, the glory of God. Later, when the tabernacle was completed and they were ready to begin the sacrifices, this bright cloud descended there on the tabernacle, the glorious presence of God.

It was that which filled the holy of holies. And then later on, when Solomon had completed the temple and when they dedicated the temple again, this bright cloud came upon it. And now once more the bright cloud and the voice out of the cloud which said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Hear ye him. They had heard the law. They had heard the prophets.

But now God is saying, hear him. In Hebrews chapter one, we read those momentous words. God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoken to our fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his own dear son.

And so the father is affirming this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him. The laws represented, the prophets are represented.

But now God is saying, listen to him. The full revelation of God, the pure revelation of God, the true revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Hear ye him.

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and they were frightened. And Jesus came and touched them and said, arise, don't be afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man save Jesus only.

And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them saying, tell the vision to no man until the son of man is risen again from the dead. Now just keep this quiet. Don't go spreading it until I am risen from the dead.

And his disciples, a little confused, said, why is it that the scribes tell us that Elijah must first come? Now again, the question of Elijah. And this question is a legitimate question because in the last of the books of the prophets in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, and in the last chapter, in fact, one of the very last promises of the Old Testament, the fifth verse of chapter four of Malachi. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

So here is the prophecy that before the Lord comes, Elijah will first come to turn the hearts of the people to their fathers, that is, to the religion of their fathers, and to the God of their fathers. And thus, believing that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Peter had just confessed this six days earlier, we know you're the Messiah. Then where is John? If John has, I mean, where is Elijah? If Elijah has to first come, and here you are, where's Elijah? Now, it needs to be noted that Jesus declared, and notice carefully, verse 11, Elijah shall truly first come and restore all things.

Jesus is reiterating the fact that that will happen. Elijah will indeed come and restore all things. Now the confusion in the minds of the disciples arose over the fact that they were anticipating that Jesus would

immediately establish God's kingdom upon the earth.

They were expecting it in their lifetime. They were waiting for him to establish God's kingdom upon the earth. What they didn't know is that from the time of the crucifixion, or from the time of the ascension of Jesus Christ, until his coming to establish the kingdom would be a long period of time.

They did not foresee this 2000 year interval that would exist, and thus anticipating the immediate establishing of the kingdom. How do you fit together the fact that Elijah is going to first come? And Jesus repeats the prophecy of Malachi, Elijah shall indeed first come and restore all things. Now, when we get into the book of Revelation, and John is dealing with the third section of the book as he is talking about the things which will be after the church things, John declares in chapter 11 that he saw these two witnesses and God gave to them power to witness for a period of time, three and a half years.

And during the time of their witness, they will be able to exercise supernatural type power. They will be able to stop the heavens that it rained not during the time of their prophecy. They'll be able to call down fire from heaven to consume their enemies.

The very things that Elijah did while he was here upon earth, praying and it rained not, calling down fire upon the captains who were commissioned by the king to bring him back as captive. And it is obvious that one of the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11 will indeed be Elijah. And that is the complete fulfillment of what the Lord has declared here.

Elijah shall first come and restore all things. However, in as much as there was a double coming of the Messiah, first in humiliation to bear the sins of many, to die in the place of us for our sins, and his second coming to come in power and glory to establish the kingdom of God. So there were two forerunners, the one John the Baptist.

And Jesus then said, but I say unto you that Elijah is come already. And they knew him not, but have done unto him whatever they please. Likewise also will the Son of Man suffer of them.

And the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. Now, when Zachariah, the priest was in the temple offering the incense because that was his that when they cast lot, that was his chore that he received in that particular course of his priesthood. As he was standing before the altar of God offering the incense, suddenly there appeared unto him the angel Gabriel.

And he was frightened and he said, fear not, Zachariah, for you have found favor with God and your wife Elizabeth in her old years is going to conceive and bear a son and thou shalt call his name John. And he will go forth in the spirit and in the power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers. Now that was the prediction made by Gabriel to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist.

And of course, Zachariah said, you know, how can this be? My wife is an old woman. She's stricken with years. That is, she's bent over in years, you know, and the angel said, because you've doubted the word of God, you'll not be able to speak until the day that the child is born.

And the people all wondered why Zachariah was in the temple so long and because they were waiting outside. The people wait outside and the priest would come out and give them God's blessings. And so they were waiting for that blessing.

And man, he was in there and they watched the old sundial going down and what's taking him so long, you know. And finally, when he came out, they were amazed that he wasn't able to give them the blessing. You know, he wasn't able to speak.

He went back to the hill country. His wife Elizabeth conceived. And of course, John the Baptist was born.

Now, when John began his ministry, he attracted many people and they came out of the villages and out of the cities to be baptized and to hear his words. And because the people were gathering to him, there was a stir among the Pharisees and scribes and all, and they sent out certain men to him to find out where he got his authority to do these things. Who gave you the authority? Who are you anyhow? Are you the Messiah? No.

Are you Elijah? He said no. Yet Jesus is declaring, if you're able to receive it, this is Elijah of whom the scriptures speak. Now, not the complete fulfillment, not the restoring of all things, the children to their fathers and the restoring of the religious order.

That will come when Elijah comes again preceding the coming of Jesus Christ during the time that just after the church is removed. So, I have no anticipation of seeing Elijah, even as I have no anticipation of seeing the Antichrist. And I'm looking not for Elijah.

I'm not looking for the Antichrist. I'm looking for Jesus Christ to come and take me to be with him. And then is when these other events will be triggered.

So, Elijah will come again. Jesus said that. Elijah shall indeed come first to restore all things.

But he will not come alone. Elijah has already come, Jesus said. And they did not know him, but have done to him whatever they wished.

And they're going to do the same. So, am I going to be suffering at their hands? Now, when they came to the multitude, there came to him a certain man kneeling down to him and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son for he is a lunatic. The word in the Greek literally is he has been struck by the moon.

Now, in those days, they felt that insanity was related to sleeping under a full moon. And thus, the word lunatic. The word luna in Latin, of course, is moon.

And this is a feeling that has existed since the for many centuries, even before Christ's time. They felt that there was some relationship to mental illness and the moon. There does seem to be some kind of a relationship between mental illness and the moon, because I know at full moon, it seems that all the loonies come out.

In fact, so much so that during full moon, the first day of the full moon, the first couple of days before and after, we always take the phone off the hook at night. Because all times during the night, we get phone calls from loonies during full moon. And it seems to be that it does something to them and activates some kind of a weird trigger inside their brains that cause them to, at full moon, begin to react and all.

So, he is saying, have mercy on my son. He has been struck by the moon. There was insanity there.

He is sore vexed, for oftentimes he falls in the fire and many times in the water. And I brought him to your disciples and they could not cure him. Now, it is interesting that this, of course, is after the time that Jesus had given to his disciples power over unclean spirits.

And they went out and ministered in this power and they came back rejoicing that even unclean spirits were subject unto them. And Jesus said, don't rejoice that unclean spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. But they had exercised this power over unclean spirits, but here they seemed to be unable to do so.

I would like to point out one thing here that I think is quite significant, and I think that it's almost a rule. It seems to me that Satan is waiting at the bottom of the hill of every spiritual high experience that you may have. I know that after having a very beautiful spiritual experience, it seems that I am always tested and tried by the enemy.

He tries to immediately come and rob you of that which God has given. You know, God just blesses you and you're so excited and thrilled. Oh, Lord, it's good to be here.

Wow, this is glorious. I don't want to leave, Lord. I want to stay right here.

But you've got to keep going. And so when you get to the bottom of the hill, it seems like Satan is just waiting there to smack you and to take away all of the glory and all of the blessing that you've just received. And so it is well to be armed and to realize that no matter how great my spiritual blessing, I do not have an immunity from the attacks of the enemy.

That many times after our greatest blessings, he is there to try to distract, to destroy that which God has done. And so here is this father kneeling before Jesus, pleading for his son. And the disciples were unable to help him.

Then Jesus answered and said, Oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer? You bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil and he departed out of him and the child was cured from that very hour. So that which the disciples were unable to do, Jesus did immediately without a lot of hullabaloo.

He just rebuked the devil and departed out of him. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said, why could not we cast him out? It's a good question because they had been given authority and power. And here is one where, uh, they, they sought to do it, but we're in, we're unable to do so.

And Jesus said unto them, because of your unbelief, for verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove hence into the honored place and it shall remove and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Albeit this kind, that is this kind of faith only goes out by prayer and fasting. Now the disciples are wondering why they were powerless in this situation.

And Jesus says, because of your unbelief. Now in another gospel, it tells us that while they were bringing this boy to Jesus, the devil threw him on the ground, the devil that was possessing him, threw him on the ground and he began to wallow on the ground and everybody began to run to see what was happening. And it was very possible that when they brought the young man to the disciples that this demon, uh, manifested himself probably in some dramatic way before the disciples.

And they became so amazed at the power of the demons and the demons ability to so distort and destroy a life that they lost sight of the power of God. And many times when we are observing the power of Satan and the work of the enemy, by just our observation unbelief begins to fill our hearts. We're so amazed at the power of Satan to destroy a life that we forget the tremendous power of God, which is greater.

There are some very interesting stories of demonic activity. Even in this 20th century, one of the most outstanding of all of them, uh, was of Teresa, uh, who was in protective custody in the Bilibid prison in the Philippines, uh, because of these demons that would attack her and bite her all over her body. Uh, when the attack was over, uh, she would end up with bite marks on the back of her neck and on her back places where it was totally impossible for her to bite herself.

She was in solitary confinement in a padded cell. Uh, but yet these attacks would take place. Uh, the finest psychiatrist in all of the Philippines were brought to treat her and none of them could do her any good.

They finally suggested that they call for an American missionary. And at this time, Reverend Summerall and, uh, Bob McAllister were brought in, uh, to, uh, deal with the, uh, girl Teresa. As they came in, these demons began to attack her.

They saw her, uh, in, in one of these fits and these bloody bite marks beginning to break out all over her body. And you look at something like that and I'll tell you, uh, suddenly unbelief begins to arise. I mean, you believe in, in Satan and Satan's power and you think, wow, you know, that's horrible.

Look at that. And it begins to strike sort of fear and terror in your own heart. Uh, but these men fasted and prayed and, uh, they were able through the power of the name of Jesus to command this, these evil spirits to leave her.

When Teresa was freed, she told then, uh, Lester Summerall and Bob McAllister how that these demons had been molesting her sexually and how that whenever any man would approach her, that's when they would attack her, uh, because they were insanely jealous of any man approaching her. And that's when they would begin their attack on her body. And, uh, the, they warned her that when demons are cast out, they will come back and try and re-inhabit the body.

And when they come back, that she was just to claim the victory of Jesus and call on the name of Jesus and all, which in a couple of days, these demons did come back and she began to go into this fit, calling upon the name of Jesus and all. And, uh, she was delivered completely. A very interesting and fascinating story.

It was written up actually in Life Magazine, uh, not her deliverance, just her case because it was a, uh, in the psychiatric annals. And, uh, her deliverance of course is told by, uh, Lester Summerall in his book called Bitten by Demons. Uh, he was the minister that God used, he and Bob McAllister to set Teresa free.

But when you see this kind of demonic activity, it does just, you know, you, you become so sort of captured by the power of demon activity. It has a tendency of just sort of diminishing your faith. But thank God, greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world.

And we do have authority over all of these forces and powers. And as children of God, we don't need to fear. We don't need to be, uh, in a, in a position of, of, oh my, did you see that? Or, oh, isn't that awful? But we have authority and power through Jesus Christ over every force and power of darkness.

And, uh, so Jesus said it's because of your unbelief. That's why you couldn't do it. Because if you just had the faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to the mountain over there, be removed and cast in the sea.

It makes you wonder just how much faith do we have? How be it Jesus said that this kind only goes out by fasting and prayer. That is this kind of faith. Or it could be referring to this kind of a demon.

It could have been a, a, a, a demon of greater authority and power because demons are ranked in authorities and powers. And while they were still there in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, the son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men and they shall kill him. And the third day he shall be raised again and they were exceeding sorry.

Now he told them this over and over. He was telling them this. He's, he's on his road now to the cross.

These are his final days. He's in Galilee, but soon they'll be journeying towards Jerusalem and, and he's on the road to the cross. And so he's warning them over and over.

You know, I'm going to be slain. They're going to kill me. I'm going to be betrayed.

They're going to kill me. But the third day I'll rise again. Well, by the time Jesus said they're going to kill me, there was a, this thing that went on in their minds.

Oh no. You know, and they never heard. And I'm going to rise again the third day.

Somehow they have blanked that out. It wasn't until after his resurrection that they began to remember, well, yeah, he said he was going to rise the third day. Did it? All right.

You know, but they, they didn't remember that part until after his resurrection. It's interesting how that so many times we hear some shocking news and our minds just sort of blank out with shock and we don't hear the rest of the story. Uh, we don't record it.

It doesn't sink in. We're so shocked by what we heard. And whenever Jesus would talk about his death, it was so shocking to them because you know, if he dies, then how am I going to be prime minister? And, and they were so upset by his talk of his death that, that they just didn't pick up the fact that he was also saying, but on the third day I'm going to rise again.

And it is interesting on the third day, none of them were looking for his resurrection. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter and said, doth your master pay tribute? And he said, yes. And when he was coming to the house, Jesus prevented him saying, what do you think Simon of whom do the Kings of the earth take custom or tribute of their own children or of strangers? And Peter said unto him of strangers, Jesus said unto him, then are the children free, but notwithstanding lest we should offend them, go down to the sea and cast in your hook and take up the fish that you first catch.

And when you have opened his mouth, then you'll find a piece of money, take it and give it to them for both of our taxes. I love this. Once a fisherman, always a fisherman necessary to pay your taxes.

Now Jesus could have said to Peter, now go dig over under the tree, you know, and you'll find a coin in the dirt or something. But what fisherman wants to be digging holes unless he's digging for worms? He tells him to do something he enjoys doing. Something that Peter just really loved.

He loved fish. So the Lord says, well, let's combine a little pleasure with business. Go fishing, Peter, cast your hook in.

And the first fish that you catch when you pull it up, open his mouth, take out the coin and go pay our taxes for us. You know, serving the Lord can be the most delightful thing in the world. Jesus said, my yoke is easy.

My burden is light. God doesn't lay some heavy, horrible fish burden upon us and say, all right, carry that. You know, He delights to do good things for His children.

God just delights doing good things for you. Now, you who are fathers, if your son should come up to you and say, well, dad, you know, I've just been thinking this morning how neat it is to live here at home. You pay all the bills.

You give me money for my clothes. I don't have to worry about the light bills. I don't have to worry about food.

It's always on the table. It's been so neat living here at home, dad. I really appreciate all you've done for me.

And I was just thinking, dad, and just to show my appreciation today, I want to do anything you want me to do. I just want to show you how thankful I am. Now, which of you fathers, if you had a son who came to you and said such a thing, would not first of all think, but when they threw the water on you and you recovered, what do you think you would say to your son who has come to you in such appreciation, giving himself totally to your disposal? Would you try to think of the rottenest, most miserable job that he has been slacking on for months? All right, I've got you where I want you, you know.

First of all, start with those smelly garbage cans. Scour them. Get them clean, you know.

And lay out all of these miserable tasks. I don't think so. If you're anything like me, I would be so pleased to see this attitude in my son.

I'd want to make this a great day for him. I love him. He may not be as appreciative as he should, but I still love him.

And the fact that he is showing some appreciation, I'd want to do something good for him. I'd say, well, why don't we just forget everything today and let's go water skiing. Or, you know, I hear the surf's up.

Why don't we get our boards and go down and we'll spend a day at the beach, you know. I'd want to do those things that he would delight and be pleased in. And, you know, our Heavenly Father is no different.

When you come to God and say, oh Lord, I appreciate so much being your child. You've taken such good care of me and I really thank you and appreciate all you've done. I don't have to worry because you're watching over me and I just want to give myself to you completely.

Whatever you want me to do, Father, you know, I'm available to you. Well, God doesn't think of all the miserable, nasty, rotten things now. I'm going to, you know, do this, do that and make you rue the day that you committed your life fully to him.

He says, hey, why don't you go fishing? That is if you enjoy fishing. He lets you do the things you like to do. He delights in giving good gifts to his children.

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