

# The Coming Kingdom After His Suffering and Death

by John F. Walvoord

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*The sermon explores the significance of the Transfiguration and its implications for understanding Jesus' mission and the nature of faith.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:5

**Topics:** "Divine Glory", "Faith Healing"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the Transfiguration, where Jesus reveals His divine glory to Peter, James, and John on a high mountain, accompanied by Moses and Elijah, signifying the fulfillment of the kingdom. The disciples witness Jesus' transfiguration, hear God's voice affirming Jesus as His Son, and are instructed to keep the vision secret until after His resurrection. Jesus later demonstrates the power of faith by healing a demon-possessed child, emphasizing the importance of unwavering belief. The sermon concludes with Jesus foretelling His death and resurrection, and a lesson on paying tribute, showcasing Jesus' authority over earthly matters.

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## Transcript

Transfiguration, 17:1-9

Six days after Peter's notable confession, recorded in chapter 16, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, the inner circle, to a high mountain, apart from the other disciples (cf. Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36). Many believe this to be Mt. Hermon, 78 north of Caesarea Philippi, but Matthew does not give the name of the mountain, nor does Mark or Luke.

Matthew gives the most complete detailed account of the transfiguration, showing that he is not as dependent upon Mark's gospel as some have taught. Luke relates that the event occurred "about eight days" after Peter's confession (Lk 9:28), meaning a week. There is no contradiction between the accounts. Luke also mentions that Jesus was praying and the disciples were sleeping when the transfiguration took place, and suddenly, the face of Christ shone as the sun, and His raiment also took on a supernatural light. Mark states that His raiment was "exceeding white as snow" (Mk 9:3), and Luke mentions especially that "the fashion of his countenance was altered" (Lk 9:29). In determining the nature of the transfiguration, it is sufficient to conclude that it was a real and supernatural revelation of the glory of God, not just an appearance or a theophany.

As Jesus was transfigured before His disciples, they were abruptly awakened and, wide-awake, saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Luke says that they were discussing the coming death of Jesus, which would be accomplished at Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Attempting to do something about this, Peter, responding to the situation although he had not been addressed, said to Jesus, "Lord it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles [tents]; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Mt 17:4). Both Mark and Luke comment that Peter did not know what he was saying, as it was not a sensible proposition.

The answer to his suggestion, however, was a bright cloud which overshadowed all of them, and out of the cloud came a voice of God the Father, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (17:5). Matthew alone records that, in response to this heavenly vision and command, they fell on their faces and were very much afraid. Jesus commanded them, however, to arise and stop being afraid, and with this assurance, when they lifted up their eyes, Moses and Elijah as well as the cloud had disappeared, and Jesus was restored to normal appearance.

As they were coming down the mountain to rejoin the other disciples, Jesus instructed them to tell no one of the vision until after His resurrection. Obviously, to tell of this vision would have only aggravated the problem of the people who wanted to make Jesus King by force.

What is the meaning of the transfiguration? The Scriptures do not provide an immediate commentary on the purpose of the transfiguration. W. A. Criswell suggests that the purpose was to encourage Jesus in view of His coming death, as well as the disciples in the trials which they would face.<sup>79</sup>

Probably the disciples needed far more than Jesus' spoken assurances to offset the frequent references to His death, which they could not fit into their concept of the Lord's future program. That it left an indelible effect upon the disciples is clear from 2 Peter 1:16-18, where Peter refers to it, and in John 1:14, where John mentions it. It was a dramatic and reassuring experience that no matter what happened, the glory of the kingdom was still ahead.

Numerous questions can be raised about the incident. Why were Moses and Elias, or Elijah, selected? Probably the best answer, as Lenski suggests, is that Moses was the greatest lawgiver of the Old Testament and Elijah was the first of the great prophets.<sup>80</sup> It is also true that Moses represents those who, through death and resurrection, will be in glory, and Elijah represents those who will be in glory without dying. The fact that they both have bodies gives some support to the idea of an intermediate body in heaven, prior to the day of resurrection or translation, although Lenski brushes this aside as not being taught in the passage.<sup>81</sup>

The selection of Peter, James, and John, rather than all the disciples, was appropriate, following the example of Moses, who, when he went up into the holy mountain, took with him Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (Ex 24:1). The transfiguration of Christ, however, far exceeded the glory which Moses experienced. While the companions of Moses, including the seventy elders, apparently saw the glory of God, none of them were permitted to accompany Moses when he went up into the mountain to receive the law. The disciples, in the transfiguration of Jesus, were witnesses of the entire transaction.

Taken as a whole, the transfiguration was the fulfillment of Matthew 16:28, where they had been promised that they would see the Son of man coming in His kingdom. The transfiguration was the prophetic view of the glorious Christ.

## Question About Elijah, 17:10-13

The appearance of Elijah on the mount reminded the disciples of a problem they had with the prediction of the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord (Mai 4:5-6). They now raised this question, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?" (Mt 17:10). As Lenski observes, "It was the popular expectation that Elijah would first teach the Jews, settle all their disputed questions, again give them the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that blossomed, etc."<sup>82</sup>

In His answer, Jesus acknowledged that the scribes had correctly understood that Elijah was related to the restoration of Israel. Jesus solved the problem by affirming that Elijah had already come and that the scribes had not recognized him. The disciples understood this to be a reference to John the Baptist (cf. Mai 3:1; Mt 11:14; Lk 1:17). Scholars differ as to whether John the Baptist completely fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah, or whether a future appearance of Elijah is necessary. The theory of a yet future appearance of Elijah is connected with the view that he is one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.<sup>83</sup> The evidence that John the Baptist at least in part fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah is clear, but a future appearance of Elijah is debatable.

## Healing of the Demon-Possessed Child, 17:14-21

As also recorded in Mark 9:14-29 and Luke 9:37-43, upon the return to the valley, Jesus encountered the other nine disciples in trouble. A child had been brought, severely afflicted with epilepsy caused by demon possession. The expression that he was a "lunatic" is often understood as indicating that he was epileptic on the basis of the symptoms, although he may have also had mental unbalance, as Morgan believes.<sup>84</sup> The case was presented to Jesus by his father, who, kneeling before Jesus, pleaded mercy for his son, whom the disciples could not cure. The incident, no doubt, had been embarrassing to the nine disciples and may have provoked ridicule of the crowd.

The failure of the disciples moved Jesus to say, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me" (Mt 17:17). Although addressed generally to the generation, it obviously was a rebuke to the nine disciples.

When the child was brought to Jesus, the devil was cast out and the child was cured immediately. Mark 9:20-26 indicates that there was an exchange of conversation between Jesus and the father, in which it was brought out that the child had had this difficulty ever since he was small, and sometimes it caused him to fall into fire or into the water. Jesus, addressing the father, said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mk 9:23). The father, in response, cried out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (v. 24). Even as Jesus was talking, the child "fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming" (v. 20). The situation was attracting a crowd, and Jesus immediately cast out the spirit, according to verse 25. It left the child as one dead, and Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up (vv. 26-27).

Later, as Mark 9:28 indicates, when they had returned to the house, the disciples asked why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus, in reply, made clear to them that their problem was not the demon or the child but their own unbelief. To the disciples, He said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Mt 17:20). Jesus added, however, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (v. 21). What Jesus could accomplish in a word, the disciples needed to accomplish through prayer and fasting.

The lessons of this incident are obvious. It is not the greatness of the problem that is the difficulty; it is the lack of faith on the part of believers. How quickly Jesus responded to the simple and sincere cry of the father of the child, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

#### Announcement of Christ's Death and Resurrection Repeated, 17:22-23

With the approaching feast, which would be the time that Jesus would be crucified, He again reaffirmed not only that He would die and be raised, but that He would be betrayed by His friends into the hands of His enemies (cf. Mk 9:30-32; Lk 9:43-45). This time, the disciples did not raise objections, but the Scriptures record, "And they were exceeding sorry" (Mt 17:23). Morgan observes that their sorrow arose not from sympathy but from their lack of understanding of both His death and resurrection.<sup>85</sup> Tasker thinks the sorrow is because of the assertion that Jesus would be "betrayed."<sup>86</sup> The lengthening shadow of the cross is beginning to stretch over the incidents that were to lead Jesus to Jerusalem.

#### Problem of Tribute, 17:24-27

Following these incidents, they came to Capernaum for what would be the last visit there before He went to Jerusalem to die. The tax collectors, who were collecting the temple tax, approached Peter because neither he nor Jesus had paid the tax. Matthew alone records this incident. The custom was based on the law which required every Israelite, above twenty years of age, to pay a half shekel in the support of the temple (cf. Ex 30:13-14; 2 Ki 12:4; 2 Ch 24:6; Neh 10:32). It was normal to have this tax collected just before the Passover. Peter had assured the tax collector that his Master would pay the tribute.

Before Peter could talk to Jesus about it, Jesus anticipated the question and asked him, "What thinketh thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" (Mt 17:25). Peter replied that taxes were collected of strangers not of children.

Jesus, having made His point that Jesus and His disciples should not have to pay tax, nevertheless, instructed Peter to cast a hook into the sea, pick up the first fish that came, and open its mouth. He would find a piece of money which he could take to pay the tribute tax (v. 27). Although many have tried to explain away this incident because Matthew does not go on to complete the story, it seems clear that Peter caught the fish with the money in its mouth and paid the tax. According to Mark 12:13-17, the Pharisees were especially desirous to catch Jesus in breaking the law of the tribute. Jesus, at this point as He was facing Jerusalem, did not want to make a small issue important.

78 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 167.

79 W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 103.

80 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 654-55.

81 *Ibid*, pp. 655-56.

82 *Ibid*, pp. 662-63.

83 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), pp. 178-80.

84 G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 224.

85 *Ibid*, p. 226.

86 Tasker, p. 169.

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