

Kingdom: A Journey Through Matthew

Behold Our God!

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BEHOLD OUR GOD! Matthew 17

We will become like what we behold.

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to Matthew 17. I was coaching the 6-year-old Rangers T-ball team yesterday. We had a good game. Nobody got hurt and everybody got snacks. Mission accomplished. And as I was driving Caleb, our 6-year-old, home from the game, he sat in the back seat and said to me, "Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be a baseball coach." I said you, "You do?" He said, "Yeah, I do." I said, "Why do you want to be a baseball coach?" And he said, "Because you are, and it looks like it's a lot of fun." I said, "It is, buddy, and I think you'll be a great baseball coach one day." As we drove on, I was reminded that my son (and my children, for that matter) are continually watching me, and the more they watch me, the more they will imitate me, for better or for worse.

We all know that, don't we? The more our children grow, the more like us they become. As they learn to talk, their words mirror ours. As they learn to make decisions, their reactions mirror ours. It's a humble thing to see a reflection of yourself in your children.

But it points to a truth that's been said by different people at different times: We will become like what we behold. As children see and listen and watch their parents, they naturally become like their parents. And it's not just in parenting; it's in so many different areas of life. The more we study someone, the more we listen to someone, the more we watch someone, whether it's in sports or entertainment or politics or work, the more we begin to emulate people and patterns that we esteem.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short story back in the 19th century called "The Great Stone Face." The story is about a mountain overlooking a village, and on this mountain was etched in the stone of the face of a man. The legend was that one day, a man with that face would come and visit the village, and he would be a blessing to all the villagers. A boy named Ernest heard that legend and longed for that man to come. Ernest would gaze continually upon that "great stone face," studying its contours and contemplating all the ways that man could bring blessing to that village. Every once in a while, rumors would circulate about someone with a resemblance to the "great stone face" coming to the village, and Ernest would rush in his excitement to see if it was him, only to recognize quickly that none of them was the one they were waiting for.

As Ernest grew older, he loved the village he was a part of, and he became known for his wisdom and care for the villagers. Until one day, a man was walking with Ernest, and Ernest turned to look at the man as they were talking. And as the man gazed at Ernest, he could see the "great stone face" in the background. And suddenly, the man threw his arms around Ernest and shouted, "Behold! Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face!" Ernest had become like the one he beheld.

This is not just a reality in our lives or in short stories of the past. This is a reality in Scripture. Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "*And 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. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*" Did you catch that? Talking about Christ, Paul says, "We behold His glory, and as we do, we are transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another." In other words, the more you behold Christ, the more you become like Christ. The more you and I fix our attention and our affection on Jesus, the more our lives begin to look like Jesus. The more you and I fix our attention and our affection on Jesus, the more we will want to become like Jesus.

And so what I want to do this morning is I want to show you Jesus. I want to show you one of the most exhilarating, awe-inspiring, worship-evoking portraits of Christ in all of Matthew. And as you see Him, my prayer is that you will want to become like Him. Not in the sense of becoming divine as Jesus is divine. But in the sense of wanting His character to be your character, His love to be your love, and His life to be your life. My prayer is that in the process of beholding Christ, we might become more and more like Him as we long for the day when He will come back for His people. This is sanctification; this is the Christian life: Beholding the glory of Christ, being conformed into the image of Christ, as we long for the return of Christ. And we've got a bit of a preview of that in Matthew 17.

So let's read this chapter, again, section by section, and let's behold our God.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Behold the divine glory of the Son.

What I've got in your notes here are five portraits of Jesus. I'll go ahead and let you know that we're going to camp out a while on this first one, and then we'll hit the last four pretty quickly. Oh, see Him in these ways. One, behold the divine glory of the Son. So this word "transfigured" in verse 2 is the same word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to describe how we are "transformed" into the image of Christ. In both instances, this word refers to a change of form. So as we are transformed into the image of Christ, we begin to take on a new form. The life of Christ begins to transform the way we think and feel and believe and act and worship. Paul uses the same word in Romans 12 to talk about how we must not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds.

So that's what it means for us, but what does this mean for Jesus to be transformed, transfigured? And the picture we have here in Matthew 17 is nothing short of glorious. And we're helped in our understanding by the portrait of Jesus on this mountain alongside two men of God from the Old Testament: Moses and Elijah.

So let's do some turning this morning to put this in perspective. Go back with me to Exodus 33. I want to show you why Moses and Elijah are a part of this scene, and how Moses and Elijah help us to understand who Jesus is in this scene. You think about Moses, who represented the Law of God. God had met with His people in the book of Exodus on another mountain, and there God had given His people His law. While everyone else among the Israelites had to stand back in fear from that mountain, it was Moses who met with God on that mountain, and listen to how this played out. We'll start in Exodus 33, in the middle of intercession that Moses is making for the people of God. Look at what Moses asks for in Exodus 33:18:

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

You come down to Chapter 34, and this is exactly what happens. Let's start in Exodus 34:1:

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain." So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

Now skip to the end of the chapter, and follow this in Exodus 34:29:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses 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. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he

commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

So see the picture here way back in the Old Testament when Moses (representing the Law, having been given the Law) had reflected divine glory. He beheld God (albeit a veiled depiction of God; God's face, He said, shall not be seen). But as a result of beholding the glory of God, Moses came down the mountain reflecting the glory of God.

So you have Moses in Matthew 17, and then you have Elijah representing the Prophets who had proclaimed divine glory. Go to 1 Kings 19 with me. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal on another mountain – Mount Carmel. Elijah proclaims the glory of the one true God over Baal and other gods that were being worshiped by God's people. Elijah proclaimed God's glory and God brought fire down from heaven.

And then, in 1 Kings 19, Elijah fled for his life in fear. And God came to him and revealed His glory to Him. 1 Kings 19:9 says,

There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Now there's a lot we could unpack in this passage. I heard an incredible sermon by Ligon Duncan, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS, a couple of weeks ago on this text. But suffice to say at this point that God had taken these two men -- these two strategic men in the Old Testament representing the Law of God and the prophets of God who proclaimed that Law – God had taken these two men at strategic points in their lives and ministries to a mountain where He had shown them His glory, and their lives were changed as a result in visible ways.

So now, they join Jesus. Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets on a mountain where He now reveals divine glory. And that word is key: "Reveals." Jesus is not just reflecting divine glory, or proclaiming divine glory, but Jesus is the revelation of divine glory. Jesus doesn't just mirror the glory of God or imitate the glory of God; Jesus is the glory of God. John, who is on that mountain with Jesus in Matthew 17, would later write, "*The Word (God) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory!*" (John 1:14) John 1:18 says Jesus has made God known to us. Jesus is far greater than Moses or Elijah, who only reflect or proclaim the glory of God, which is part of why Peter misses the point here, seemingly putting Jesus on par with Moses and Elijah. No, be quiet, Peter. Jesus is revealing the glory of God. See Him!

He radiates the splendor of God. His face shining like the sun; His clothes white as light. Oh, for this glimpse of Jesus' glory. In John 17, Jesus refers to the glory He had with the Father before the world existed. Yet when He came to the earth, Jesus left His throne in glory.

Philippians 2 says *"he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness."* As Jesus grew as a man and walked in this world, we see Him in weakness and humiliation. But during these couple of moments here on this mountainside in Matthew 17, we see Him in all of His glory unveiled. It's like a curtain has been pulled back, and Peter, James, and John see Jesus for who He is: The supreme God-man. To quote the author of Hebrews, they see *"the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature"* (Hebrews 1:3). For a moment, they see Jesus as the Father sees Jesus.

Jesus radiates the splendor of God, and He unveils the presence of God. A bright cloud overshadows the scene, immediately taking us back to Old Testament imagery of God leading His people by His presence in a cloud. This is the cloud that protected God's people from Egyptians who were trying to pursue them, the cloud that descended on Mount Sinai when Moses met with God to receive the law, the cloud of glory that enveloped the tabernacle when it was completed, and the cloud that appeared at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8.

Behold the glory of God in Jesus. He unveils and discloses the presence of God, and He embodies the pleasure of God. A voice from the cloud speaks, and the Father says, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* These are the same words we saw in Matthew 3 when Jesus was baptized. They are an allusion to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 when the Father looks at the Son, the Father cherishes what He sees. Oh, the mystery of the Godhead: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one. One God, three persons existing in glorious harmony and love together.

Jesus embodies the pleasure of God, and He speaks the Word of God. The Father adds one thing here to the words He had already declared in Matthew 3. Here, the Father says, *"Listen to him."* Now you hear that, and you can't help but to think about Peter who's showing himself so quick to speak in the last part of Chapter 16 and now in Chapter 17. It's as if God the Father is saying to Peter, "Be quiet, boy. Listen to my Son. When He speaks about the coming cross, listen to Him; do not rebuke Him. Listen to Him."

Moses, way back in the Old Testament, had prophesied about a coming a prophet, and this is the exact language that he had used. Deuteronomy 18:15: *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers—it is to him you shall listen."* Deuteronomy 18:15 is pointing us to Matthew 17, where God says, "This is my Son, who speaks my Word; listen to Him." Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses.

Now one more thing I want to point out here about Moses. Matthew tells us that on the mountain here, Jesus has a conversation with Moses and Elijah. And it begs the question, "What were they talking about?" You get Jesus and Moses and Elijah together and what does that conversation look like? And though Matthew doesn't tell us, Luke does. Luke says (this is Luke 9:30): *"Behold, two men were talking with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."* So what did they speak about? Jesus' departure, and the word there for "departure" is the Greek word from which we get the word "exodus." So here's Moses, and he is talking with Jesus about His exodus, about how the Father had sent Jesus to deliver His people from sin.

So Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses to speak His word and deliver His people, and Jesus is the messenger preceded by Elijah. So in Matthew 17, when they come down from the mountain, Jesus tells the disciples, "Don't tell anybody about what you've seen until after the resurrection," and the disciples are confused. They say, "Why do the scribes say

that first Elijah must come?" And it's a reference to the last book in the Old Testament: Malachi.

So turn with me one more place there. Malachi Chapter 3. We've talked about this some in relation to John the Baptist, because we've seen Jesus, in Matthew 11:14, refer to John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come. And this all goes back to the end of the Old Testament, where God had promised His people in Malachi 3:1, "*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.*" And then more specifically, the last verses of the Old Testament – Malachi 4:4 – where we actually see both Moses and Elijah are mentioned together. But pay particularly close attention to Elijah here:

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

So the promise was that preceding the Messiah, Elijah the prophet would come and prepare the way of the Lord.

And so the disciples are asking about this. And on one level, their question is chronological, i.e., "We just saw Elijah. How come He didn't come before you?" And the answer to that is that John the Baptist, the Elijah to come, did come; he has already come, Jesus says in Matthew 17:12.

But that just leads to a deeper theological question. Because Malachi 4 said – and Jesus says here – that Elijah would restore all things, but John the Baptist had been beheaded. He didn't usher in any restoration, or so the disciples thought. And this is where Jesus is helping them to understand that the kingdom of God is not being ushered in the way they thought it would be. They expected a messianic forerunner and then a messiah who together would usher in a political kingdom, a rule and a reign on this earth marked by triumph and power. But Jesus is showing them that God's kingdom is coming in a very different way. The Elijah to come, John the Baptist, had a ministry of restoration. He was announcing that the kingdom of heaven was near and calling people to repent, and in the end, this ministry of restoration was accomplished through his suffering and death. "They did not recognize him," Jesus said, "but they did to him whatever they pleased."

Now watch the connection. Matthew 17:12, "*So also the Son of Man will certain suffer at their hands.*" Jesus is preparing them for the reality that His ministry of redemption would be accomplished through His suffering and death. This is a key truth that we are seeing over and over again now in the book of Matthew as Jesus teaches His disciples. They were wanting an immediate kingdom set upon this earth, glory for Jesus the Messiah King. That's one of the reasons Peter says, "Let's set up some tents for you all to dwell in glory on this mountain," and Jesus says, "No. I still must suffer and die."

The cross of Christ must come before the crown of Christ. This is why Jesus says, "Don't tell anyone about this. Don't tell people about the glory you have seen in me until after the cross, after I have died and risen from the grave. There is no glory apart from the cross. Suffering must precede splendor. Oh, in all of this, behold the divine glory of the Son. He radiates the splendor of God, He unveils the presence of God, He embodies the pleasure of

God, and He speaks the Word of God. He was promised by Moses and preceded by Elijah, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus reveals the glory of God.

Behold the patient power of the Son.

Second, behold the patient power of the Son.

And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

From one extreme to the other: The glory of God in Christ on a mountain to the pain and suffering of the world. Oh, see the God who stoops to become a man, to identify with us in our suffering in order to bring us salvation from sin. A boy with epilepsy possessed by a demon is constantly convulsing, throwing himself into the fire or water...

I remember being in a Sudanese hospital, seeing a child with sleeping sickness. This was a disease that caused him to basically go into a trance at any moment, falling over unconscious. And this little boy had been sitting next to a fire when it happened, and he had fallen into it, and the fire had charred half of his body. Oh, the violence of suffering, and Jesus' disciples lacking the faith to do what Jesus had given them authority to do: Deliver this boy from this demon.

So follow the portrait of Jesus we see here. On one hand, we see that Jesus endures our unbelief. In this glimpse into the depth of His heart and soul -- we think of His glory that we've just seen in this passage -- we're reminded that before coming to the world, Jesus, with His Father in glory, commanded myriads of angels who instantly responded to His bidding. And now He is confronted yet again with the unbelief of men. The disciples, the crowds, the religious leaders -- see how Jesus hates unbelief. "*How long am I to bear with you?*" Praise God, in His patience, Christ bears with us. But let us not be content with unbelief; let us put our faith and trust and hope in Him. He is worthy!

He graciously endures our unbelief, and Jesus meets our need. He does what we've seen Him do all throughout Matthew. He heals this boy and brings him out of his misery instantly. Jesus alone has the power to heal, to save, to deliver, to meet the deepest needs of our lives, and He is faithful to do so. Oh, see this this morning. Man or woman caught in sin, man or woman, drowning in suffering, look to Jesus as the only One who can meet the deepest needs of your life. Put your faith and your trust and your hope in Him alone.

Jesus endures our unbelief, He meets our need, and Jesus enables our ministry. So privately, Jesus has this conversation with His disciples, who are asking Him, "Why couldn't we cast this demon out?" And we're not sure all that was going on in the minds and hearts and motives of these disciples as they failed to cast out this demon, something they had done before by the authority Christ had given to them. We know in Mark's account of this story -- Mark 9:29 -- that Jesus told them, "*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.*" And the likelihood is that the disciples had begun to look at their ministry in the

name of Jesus as mechanical, dependent on their own ability, their own strength, instead of in dependence on God.

So Jesus looks at them and says, much like we saw Him say to Peter in Matthew 14 on the water as Peter fell, "Put your focus on the object of your faith." A little bit of faith in a great God can and will accomplish great things. Don't trust in yourself, don't trust in your ability, don't trust in your power. Trust in God. And He uses this figurative picture of saying to a mountain, "You move there," and it will move.

Mark it down: Nothing is impossible for the man or woman who trusts in the power of God to accomplish the will of God. Believe this, church. Nothing is impossible for the church that trusts in the power of God to accomplish the will of God.

Behold the willing sacrifice of the Son.

Behold the patient power of the Son, and behold the willing sacrifice of the Son. Matthew 17:22-23 says, "*As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.'* And they were greatly distressed." This is Jesus' second major prediction in Matthew of His suffering and death, and there will be more. See how He is preparing His disciples for what is to come. John Calvin said, "The nearer the time of His death, the more often Christ warned His disciples, lest that particular sorrow should undermine their faith." Jesus is preparing them for His certain and willing death.

Oh, just think of it! In light of the portrait we have just seen of Jesus, no one can overpower this man! He is God in the flesh; He radiates the splendor of God and reveals the glory of God. Who can take Him on? If Jesus dies in Jerusalem, which He will, it will be clear: It is because He has chosen to die. He will not accidentally fall into the hands of sinful men. He will, at the Father's bidding, walk into the hands of sinful men, and they will kill Him.

Behold the certain victory of the Son.

Behold the willing sacrifice of the Son, and behold the certain victory of the Son. He will be raised on the third day. Why were the disciples distressed about this? Because, just like we talked about on Easter Sunday, they were having a hard enough time trying to grasp the fact that the Messiah would be killed by the Jewish leaders of the day (the leaders of the people of God!). And they had no concept of the reality of Jesus' impending resurrection. If only they knew then what they would know soon. Behold the certain victory of the Son.

Behold the humble authority of the Son.

And finally, behold the humble authority of the Son. Matthew 17:24-27 says,

When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

This story sets the stage for Matthew 18, where we are going to see humility described and displayed in all kinds of ways. Yet here we see in this discussion about the temple tax, the humble authority of Jesus. It's interesting that Matthew is the only gospel writer who tells

us this story. Do you remember what his profession was? A tax collector. But the temple tax described here was actually not a tax collected by the Roman government like we think of most tax pictures we see in the Gospels. Instead, the temple tax was collected by Jewish leaders for the service of the temple there in Jerusalem.

Based loosely on Exodus 30:11-16, the people of God were expected to help provide for the place that housed the glory of God. Yet we've already seen Jesus, back in Matthew 12:6, talk about how He was greater than the temple. We know that He was the literal dwelling place of God, and we know that He had come to usher in an altogether new and glorious way of access to God through Himself. When He died on the cross, as we saw a few weeks ago, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and the way was opened for man to come to God through Christ.

So why pay for the upkeep of the temple? And Jesus, in His conversation with Peter here, uses an analogy. He talks about kings who raise money from taxes, and He asks, "Does a king tax his own family, or others, whether citizens of the kingdom or even citizens of other kingdoms?" And Peter, of course, says, "The king doesn't tax his own family." And the picture is clear: God is king, and Jesus, the Son, and by implication all who are with Jesus in the faith family of God, are free from that obligation. However, in order "not to give offense to them," Jesus says we pay the tax.

So Jesus is greater than the temple, yet He still pays the tax. Why? Not because He is under obligation, but because He is working for others' salvation. And so He sends Peter to the sea, and He says, "Catch the first fish you can, and you'll find some money there." I love this. Jesus, the sovereign King of heaven, has ordained that somebody drop a shekel into the water, that some fish scoop it up in its mouth but not swallow it all the way, that that fish swim over to the shore at the moment where Peter walks up, and as Peter reaches down, he catches that fish, opens that mouth, and pulls out that coin, all so that a temple tax could be paid in order not to bring unnecessary offense on the people God desires to save from sin. See it: Jesus is sovereign over the sea, yet He graciously stoops for our salvation.

How shall we respond?

Let us look to His worth.

So how shall we respond to this text? Four ways, generally: One, let us look to His worth. Behold Christ. See His divine glory and His patient power and His willing sacrifice and His certain victory and His humble authority. And do what the disciples did: Fall on your face in worship. Behold Him. Fix your attention and your affection on Him. Don't spend your life fixed on the trivial and the temporal. Lift your eyes and look to Christ. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and let the things of this earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Let us listen to His Word.

Let us look to His worth, and let us listen to His Word. Okay, you've got to turn one more place with me: 2 Peter 1. I want you to see what Peter wrote later when reflecting back on Matthew 17. You may be tempted to think, after reading Matthew 17, "Oh, I wish I could have a mountaintop experience like that. I want to see a bright light, and cloud, and I want to hear the rolling thunder of God's voice. If only I could see something like that, I could have so much faith." But listen to Peter in 2 Peter 1:16:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

So there it is, but now listen to what Peter says next. Catch this, don't miss this:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Did you hear that? Peter says, "Yes, my experience on that mountain was glorious. I was an eyewitness to His majesty. But even more sure than this, Scripture, the prophetic Word of God, is like a lamp shining brightly in the middle of darkness. Listen to it!" You want to see, to behold, the glory of God in Christ on a daily basis? Read the Word. Study the Word. Meditate on the Word. Memorize the Word of God, and you will see His glory, and you will love His glory. The Word of God revealed in Scripture, Peter says, is more certain than even this exceptional vision on a mountainside in Matthew. Listen to the Word of God. Listen to Him.

Let us live for His renown.

Let us look to His worth, let us listen to His Word and let us live for His renown. When you see the glory of God, you want to spread the gospel of God. So let's proclaim the One we praise. Let us not see His glory and then be silent. Let us speak to people about the Christ we cherish.

Let's proclaim the One we praise, and let's embrace suffering as we follow our Savior. Oh, feel this application from Matthew 17 to our lives. The cross of Christ must precede the crown of Christ. John the Baptist suffered in the spread of God's kingdom; Jesus suffered in the spread of God's kingdom. Do we think that we will have it easy, then? No, the way to glory is the way of the cross, and that's why (Matthew 16:24) no one can follow Jesus without taking up a cross. We give away our possessions, we risk our reputations, we go to the hard places in this city, and we go to the hard places around the world, following Christ wherever, however He leads us, knowing that the sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Not that we seek suffering, but we seek Christ. We follow Christ, and we know that the path of Christ that leads to a crown involves a cross.

Let's embrace suffering as we follow our Savior, and let's live as responsible citizens of this kingdom for the eventual coming of His kingdom. Even in this conversation with Peter and Jesus about the temple tax, let's realize this: Yes, we are headed toward a heavenly kingdom, but today, we are citizens of an earthly kingdom. So let's live responsibly here for the sake of people's salvation here. Let's pay our taxes. I should have preached this message last week on April 15. If you didn't do it, do it; pay your taxes, not ultimately because you believe in every single thing those taxes are used to support, but because you are under law (Romans 13:5) and you want to live as a responsible citizen in this earthly kingdom for the spread of His heavenly kingdom.

Many of you know that Chuck Colson died yesterday. I had an opportunity to meet him a couple of years ago when I traveled to New York at the invitation of him and others to discuss the Manhattan Declaration, a document written to describe how Christians stand firm on convictions in this earthly country while we wait for a heavenly country to come. I praise God for how this brother's life was used in this earthly kingdom for the eventual coming of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

Let us long for His return.

So much more could be said here, but ultimately, in all of this, Matthew 17 beckons us, yes, to look to Jesus' worth and to listen to Jesus' Word and to live for Jesus' renown, but ultimately, Matthew 17 beckons us to long for His return. Let's long for the day when our faith shall be sight, when we will see Jesus as the Father sees Jesus: Revealing the glory of God and radiating the splendor of God. Revelation 22:4 says we will see His face.

And see the connection here with the beginning. We will become like what we behold. Follow this in 1 John 3: "*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*" We will see Him, and we will become like Him. This is the Christian's hope. This is what drives our lives every single day. We behold Him, and we want to become like Him.

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