

Matthew 16:24-17:13 – “The Transfiguration”

Jesus is bringing His disciples into a greater understanding of who He is here at Caesarea Philippi. They’ve declared ‘*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*’ Now that they are understanding **who He is**, He needs to bring them to an understanding of **why He came**.

He does that in Matthew 16:21, but Peter isn’t having any of it. He starts rebuking Jesus because this doesn’t line up with Peter’s view of the mission of the Messiah. This seemed to be the mindset of all the disciples because Mark’s gospel says that Jesus looked at all the disciples as He rebuked Peter in return.

- You see, we need to learn that God doesn’t do things the way we think they should be done. Peter was quick to try and correct Jesus when he thought Jesus was out of step with what he believed should happen.
- Do we ever have moments like that where we question God thinking, ‘*This is not the way I expected things to unfold. I’m not too sure I’m liking this approach.*’
- Listen, we’re going to quickly unravel if we have preconceived expectations of what this life in Jesus is all about. So, Jesus now shares how we can avoid being shaken over our unmet expectations and what His expectation is of those that will follow Him.
- I believe these are some of the most important verses we have for the M.O. of true followers of Christ.

1. Jesus’ Expectation of His Followers – 16:24-26

16:24 - *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

Jesus let’s His disciples know that a cross isn’t just in His future, a cross is in their future as well (and ours).

Jesus wants us to count the cost of following Him. And we don’t follow Him to get our way, or our wants met. We follow Him simply because He is the way! It’s in Him alone that we find life, forgiveness of sins, and eternal assurance.

If we’re coming to Him with unrealistic expectations, then we’re going to be deeply disappointed with the outcome. This is why we need to lay ourselves down. It’s not about you, it’s about finding life in Him! And the life that is laid down in surrender and denial of self is the life that isn’t going to be shaken at things that run contrary to your expectations.

Now look at some of the truths we learn from this important verse:

1. It's open to all: ***If anyone***. Whatever background you come from, whatever sins you may have committed, you're invited!
2. It begins with a ***desire***. Do you have a desire to follow after Christ? Is it a priority? What's driving you in life? And if there is something that is a greater pull or focus than Jesus, there's a remedy.

Deny yourself. This is not self-denial. This is not keeping things away from you and suppressing the flesh. This is denial of self. This is where you decide clearly that you're not living for self.

- Yet the whole world system is all about self. Improving self, pampering self, a better you, a stronger you, a healthier you. These are things we hear too much of even in Christian culture. Jesus isn't interested in improving you, He's interested in making you new. And to make something new, we need to depart with the old.

3. It requires death. This is why Jesus says to ***take up*** [our] ***cross***.

Now, what does that look like today?

- People have often misunderstood this statement. They'll say we all have a cross to bear. And if they have a harsh boss, that's their cross to bear. Or if they have a nagging spouse, well, that's just taking up my cross. Perhaps it's a sickness or disease – *I'm just carrying my cross*.
- But this isn't at all what Jesus was talking about. He's not talking about difficulties or trials. He's talking about death! That was the purpose and outcome of the cross. There's only one way we can properly deny self - and that is if we die to self.
- We've tended to glorify the cross today. People wear it as jewelry or tattoo it on their body (nothing wrong with this) but it's simply become a religious icon to some. But when Jesus spoke of it, it meant one thing – death!
- To take up our cross then is more than just carrying a burden. To take up our cross means that we identify with Christ in His surrender, suffering, and sacrifice. It means we daily live not for self, but for God.
- This is something we wrestle with so much. It's the life that's lived for self that is in the most misery. You can't be happy living for self. Our fleshly demands are too high, we can't satisfy them!
But there's a real joy and peace in laying your life down (Galatians 2:20).
- It's when we are denying self that true life is then experienced because its life lived for God – His way! We're out of the way. And when we get

ourselves out of the way, we're not as irritable or frustrated, things don't bother us like they once did. We have a higher purpose!

There is a real beauty and blessing that comes from death – death of self.

- An artist asked the gallery owner if there had been any interest in his paintings on display at that time.

"I have good news and bad news," the owner replied. "The good news is that a gentleman inquired about your work and wondered if it would appreciate in value after your death."

"When I told him it would, he bought all 15 of your paintings."

"That's wonderful!" the artist exclaimed.

"What's the bad news?"

"The guy was your doctor."

- You see, our stock rises as we lay our lives down. Not that we become greater or more prominent, but we become a greater example of Jesus and are able to be used in a greater way.

4. Jesus doesn't tell us what to do and then goes a separate way, He says to ***follow Me***. In other words, we're not called to do anything He hasn't already done. And when we live this life, this is where we'll be closest to Jesus!

And just watch, because as you commit to being a true follower of Christ, you're going to be tested. The only way to find out if you've died to your self is to have the self stepped on a little. This is why marriage is so helpful to this process of dying to self 😊.

16:25-26 - *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Sadly, there are a lot of people that are trying to find life. And they're trying to find life by holding on to their life, or filling their life with stuff they think will satisfy. Jesus makes it very clear here that the one who loses their life for His sake (in other words, those who lose their life to gain Jesus) will truly find the life worth living!

The way of sacrifice and death pays much better dividends...

For what profit is it to a man... Sadly there are so many people who are living for gain. They just want more and more. Yet the reality is that they are losing the most important thing – their soul.

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Do you recognize the intrinsic value of your soul? There is no amount of riches in this world that would suffice in giving up your soul. Your soul is eternal. Those riches are not.

No amount of riches will compare to a soul that is eternally secure and at rest.

- People can sometimes think that if they just build up enough resources or win enough brownie points, they surely will not be rejected at the day of judgment. But what could we give or offer that would come close to the sacrifice Jesus made for us? That was the price needed to buy us back from sin and death. That was the work needed to save our souls. If we turn away from Jesus, will there be anything that could possibly replace what He did for us?
- He came to secure that position of eternal life. And it comes through laying our lives down to Him. And we find as we do, true life begins. Glory always follows suffering. He came to provide this for us, and He's coming again to reveal the glory that will be ours. He will reward all those that have faithfully laid their lives down for Him.

Jim Elliott said: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

16:27-28 - For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. ²⁸ Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Jesus is coming again with His reward to give to all who have not traded in their soul for temporal gain.

Verse 28 has left some people scratching their head. Does this mean that some of these people with Jesus are still alive? We haven't seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom yet, so what did Jesus mean by this. Was this an oopsie?

- Again, the Bible was written without chapter breaks and verses. So, if we read this as though it's concluding chapter 16, it doesn't make sense. If we read this as though it's beginning chapter 17, makes perfect sense.

17:1-2 - Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; ² and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

After their time in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took these three disciples (who He will begin to spend more and more time with, in preparation for their ministry) up to a high mountain alone.

- The traditional site of this mountain is Mount Tabor. I lean towards it being Mount Hermon. Caesarea Philippi is right at the base of Mount Hermon. This is the largest mountain in Israel and contains their only skiing hill.
- Again, this was a place believed to be filled with idolatry and supernatural occurrences, and it's here that Jesus reveals His glory and power that is over every other so called god.

And it's here that Jesus fulfills what He said in Matthew 16:28. Peter, James and John saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. It's not that the kingdom of God was now established, but that they saw Jesus come in the power and glory of the kingdom. They saw the kingly glory unveiled for the first time.

- John would write in **John 1:14**, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"
- **2 Peter 1:16, 18**, "*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁸ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*"

Jesus was transfigured. This is the Greek word *metamorphoo*, which means to change into another form. We get our English word 'metamorphosis' from it. This is Jesus revealing, for the first and only time in His earthly ministry, the glory that has been His all along.

This was not Jesus reflecting the glory of the Father or the glory of heaven. It's not that it came from some other source and it's just resting on Jesus. This glory came from within. That's a metamorphosis.

- Like a caterpillar who turns into a beautiful butterfly. The butterfly didn't come from somewhere else and eat up the caterpillar, the butterfly came from within that caterpillar.

- Jesus has been concealing this glory as He came to this earth clothed in humanity. But now for the first time He's allowing His disciples (the inner three) to see what He's really made of. Going to the cross is not going to cancel out His glory, because the glory is innate. And it's the glory that will be seen when He comes again at His second coming, and it's the glory that will be a mark of His kingdom.
- **Matthew 24:30**, *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

It was as though heaven's veil was rolled back and these three got to see what is awaiting them. And the future's so bright, you gotta wear shades. Jesus' face was shining like the sun. There was a brilliance and majesty to what He was radiating forth. Jesus was seen for who He truly is: the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God (***His clothes became as white as the light***).

- I am so looking forward to this day when we pass into glory and lay aside these sin stained tents and will be clothed in white garments.

I think Jesus in His grace is giving these guys a reminder that though He's calling them to lay their lives down; though discipleship may be costly, it will all be worth it when we are rewarded in glory.

- **Romans 8:18**, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

17:3-4 - *And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

While they're on the mountain Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah. Two very important people. Moses represents the law, and Elijah the prophets. Two very important divisions of Scripture.

- What's interesting is that these two had very interesting endings to their life. Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind; he never tasted death. When Moses died, God buried him in an unknown place (Deut. 34:5-6). Later in Jude 9 we read of a dispute for his body by the devil. Interesting stuff.
- Nevertheless, Moses and Elijah are given the opportunity to accompany Jesus.

We learn from Luke 9 that Moses and Elijah were discussing with Jesus about His decease. Perhaps they're wondering if He's really going to go through with the cross?

- That word decease means exodus, or departure. Jesus was showing that though He may die, He's just departing to the true and real life. That's the same for us. As we talk about dying to self, it just leads to greater life!

And we read in Luke that the disciples were sleeping. They're not aware that Moses and Elijah are hanging out with Jesus. When they come to their senses, Moses and Elijah were departing. This is when Peter speaks up and says, let's make tabernacles for all. Let's stay in this moment. We can have the kingdom right now, right here!

And I love what we read next, **while he was still speaking**... God had to come and interrupt him because Peter is just rambling...

17:5-7 - While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"⁶ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

So the disciples have the remarkable experience of hearing their heavenly father speak, and God reveals that Jesus is indeed the Anointed One. It's the same thing spoken at His baptism. But here God adds, **Hear Him!**

- Peter is interested in keeping Elijah and Moses around. But we're to listen to Jesus.
- Too often people are looking for something more. They're wanting fresh revelation, heavenly encounters, angelic visits. But we're to look to Jesus and hear Him. This is who God speaks through today.
- **Hebrews 1:1-4**, *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;³ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."*

- Be sure you're not listening to the counterfeit when we have the source of all truth in Jesus. We will hear Him as we read His Word!

17:8 - *When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

Jesus is who we need. We can get so distracted or caught up with seeking experiences. We want the glory encounters and heavenly highs. But we're to seek Jesus. He's all we need. Don't get sidetracked with emotional or spiritual sensationalism, seek Jesus. Keep the main thing the main thing. He's sufficient.

These mountain top experiences are wonderful and helpful, but they're to prepare us for what awaits us at the bottom of the mountain. The Mount of Transfiguration is always more enjoyable than the way of the cross, but the Mount of Transfiguration is to enable us to walk the way of the cross.

You see, this transformation of Jesus is what He desires to do in our lives. And He accomplishes this as we live daily for Him and in Him.

- **Romans 12:2**, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*
- **2 Corinthians 3:18**, *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

17:9 - *Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."*

The disciples still had much to understand with everything they've seen and been told. This could easily be misused or abused if passed on to others without proper understanding. So He tells them to wait until He's risen from the dead. Then it will all add up.

17:10-13 - *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. ¹² But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.*

The disciples begin to question that if the Messiah is going to die, what about the prophecies of Elijah coming back according to Malachi 4:5-6.

They expected that Elijah would come again before the Messiah.

So Jesus begins to explain a few things to them. The prophecy in Malachi will indeed be fulfilled, but it will come at His second coming. It is expected that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:2-13. He will return to this earth before the coming of the Conquering King, the Messiah.

But Jesus adds in vs. 13 that ***Elijah has come already***. Elijah has already come? Yes, he has come in type through the person of John the Baptist.

- **Matthew 11:11–14**, *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come."*
- See also Luke 1:16-17

And as the Messiah will suffer, so too this forerunner will suffer. John suffered a premature death at the hands of Herod Antipas. And this was all a precursor to how they would treat the Son of Man. They rejected the forerunner and will reject the King.

How about you? Have you received King Jesus? Have you understood who He is and His purpose for coming? Do you know what that means for you today? Have you laid down your life to live it for Jesus? Have you comprehended the gain there is as you do?