

Matthew 21-06-06a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege and a blessing to look out on the vast throngs assembled here and those of you who are watching from afar. One day I hope to visit afar, I've never actually been there, but I know a lot of you are there and you can give me a weather report on your ham radio when time permits.

Let's resume our study this morning, this is the 6th of June 2021 and we're in the Gospel of Matthew, we're in chapter 17, looking at the Transfiguration. This is perhaps the single most unique account between the birth narrative and the resurrection narrative in Matthew. This is the pivot point in the Gospel of Matthew and we are, like the Apostle Peter, hoping to spend a little time on this mountaintop.

I don't think we're going to build three shrines there, but we are going to try to understand why this is such a signal event recorded in the three synoptic Gospels with interesting variations in detail. Because this is our last Gospel pass, to my knowledge, I am, as you know, feeling much more free to go raid the other Gospels for details, where in the past we have tried to respect the narrative flow and the details that were included for each Gospel's purpose. So we're going to kind of do both things in looking at this account in Matthew.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our study, on our memories, and on our future application of the things that we are going to see from God's Word this morning. Shall we pray? Father, we're so grateful for this opportunity to spend time together with the distractions and the requirements of life set aside for these few moments where we can refresh ourselves at the oasis of living water that we find in Your Word. We thank You for the presence and the power of Your Holy Spirit and the wonderful access that we have to Your Word and to Your Spirit through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

We thank You for Him. We thank You for this opportunity to see Him in His unveiled glory. And we pray that as we examine this passage and the ones related to it together, that the Holy Spirit will teach us and impress these things on our hearts, illuminate for us the principles and the promises and the doctrines from Your Word that will guide us and equip us for every good work and prepare us for future presence and service in Your Kingdom.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is such a great passage.

I never tire of looking at it and thinking about it. It's been rattling around in my largely empty cranium for most of this past week and bouncing around on the riding mower yesterday. I was thinking about it.

And when I say bouncing, if you mow a brush-hogged pasture with a riding mower, you know what I'm talking about. And Patty knows it quite well. But in Matthew chapter 17, we've seen this.

Now, after six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, His brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves. There is so much in this verse, I don't hardly think we're going to be able to cover it all. Look at this verse.

There is not a wasted word. There is not a concept that doesn't bear fruit when you examine it. You can start with the word, now.

Now. Why now? Because in all three Gospels, the exact same material precedes this and sets its context. And we've reviewed this.

The question that Jesus asks, who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Peter says, you are the Christ. Jesus says, and this is just so critically important, blessed are you, Shimon bar Yonah. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

What are we looking at on the mountaintop? This is a direct revelation from heaven. Jesus says, blessing is sourced in the revelation we receive from the Father in heaven. It seems like such a simple concept, but often we don't keep a grip on it.

And it's easy to think, well, blessing comes as my circumstances improve. Blessing comes when my resources are replenished. Blessing comes in fellowship with other believers.

And all of these things can be a blessing. But Jesus here and the narrative here is focusing on the source. And it's critically important for us to remember we are Christians.

We celebrate Christ. We are named after him. We are his body here on earth.

We represent him. We communicate him. Our hope is in him.

So many things are centered in Christ. You remember that great menorah of blessings that we looked at in Ephesians chapter one, the seven fold in him's, in him we have, in him we are, in him, in him. The Lord Jesus Christ is central, but Jesus himself is the first to tell us, I am the way dot, dot, dot to the father.

John 14, six, I am the way to the father. You can't come to the father, but by me and the point and the purpose is to come to the father, our relationship, our future. And, and in this particular context, our blessing, our fruitfulness, our reflection of God's glory is sourced in God, the father.

It is the father to whom we pray in the name of the son and in the power of the spirit. But our relationship, our conversation, our communication is with God. Blessed are you,

Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.

It wasn't the latest thing you learned in Bible class by somebody's human intuition or private interpretation or speculation. This is something that God the father has revealed to you. Lots of intermediate sources, but we're focusing on the ultimate source.

And from this, Jesus can talk about the foundation that he's going to build his unique group on, his ecclesia, his gathering. In the day that Jesus said this, nobody had a concept of a church. Ecclesia is, is the group that identifies as belonging to Jesus that he founds that is associated and connected with him.

I will found my called assembly. Remember ecclesia called for a purpose, ecclesia was used in Greek. If you were going to have a town hall meeting, if you were going to have a convocation to debate, to discuss, to move forward on a project, you would have an ecclesia.

You would call the appropriate people together and meet for that purpose. It's a group that meets for a purpose. That's what an ecclesia is.

And of course, that's what a church ought to be. And we ought to know what that purpose is. What is that purpose? First pop quiz of the morning.

What's the purpose for which the church meets? In seminary, they gave us an acronym, WIFE, because they think the church is the bride of Christ. And so WIFE and it's worship instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. But that's not it.

With all due respect to all the people that worked hard on that acronym, I disagree. This is my suggestion. What was our introduction this morning? Why did Jesus come? It's an equally valid question and it has the same answer.

Why did Jesus come? Remember we did a special on that? It's somewhere in the archives. Why did Jesus come? And all of the scriptural statements. I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

Son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost. That's his mission to Israel. Not to save Israel, but to find Israel, who already belongs to God, but has wandered far from the fold.

He didn't say, I've come to take wild goats and tame them. I've come to find wild sheep and bring them into a domesticated flock. They're the sheep that has wandered far away.

I have come to seek and save that which was lost. You get that in Luke, the lost coin, lost sheep, lost son, all of those lost things, parables that we looked at. But why did Jesus come? What does he tell Pilate? I'll let you look that up for homework.

Jesus tells Pilate why he came. He says, well, I'll tell you. He has come to bear witness to the truth.

Many statements on why Jesus came. What is the summary answer? The Lord Jesus came to bring people to his father. It's about the father.

This is as a side note, I think Glenn Carnegie understood this. Those of you that went to a Petrean church in Tulsa, why was it called Petrean? Patria? This is referring to the father. So it's about the father.

My father has revealed this to you. I will build my group, the believers of this dispensation, which was yet future and as yet unrevealed. But Jesus in a prophetic moment here says, I am going to build my unique assembly.

This is not Israel. Israel has a direct covenant relationship with who? The father. And there is the means by which Israel is redeemed and brought to the father.

And that's through the Lord Jesus Christ. But their covenant relationship is with God, the father. It is God, the father, who revealed his word at Sinai through Moses, about which we have more to say.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. What you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

And this is the Israel side. This is the Millennial Kingdom side. The keys represent authority, judgmental authority.

We looked forward in Matthew to see where Jesus says, you disciples will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Those keys are keys of authority and binding judgments, legal judgments. These will be decisions that just as in Old Testament Israel, decisions were made at the gate or they were made in the court of the king.

The distributed authority of the Davidic king on the throne in Jerusalem will be through the 12 disciples. Jesus says it. But then he commanded his disciples they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

Interesting. There is a time to proclaim Christ and there is a time not to. And Jesus says, you know I'm the Christ.

You've said I'm the Christ. You've told me that people misunderstand who I am. In a human mind, you would think, well, Jesus says, who do men say that I am? Well, they say you're everybody but the Christ.

Who do you say I am? Well, you're Jesus the Christ. And so Jesus says, you need to go forth and convince these people who think I'm John the Baptist or one of the prophets or whatever. You've got to go straighten them out.

You make sure they understand you know who I am. You share it with them. Make sure they understand who I am.

He says the exact opposite. He says, tell no one I am the Christ. And it's a reminder to us about sensitivity to God's timing.

There is a time when these men are going to boldly proclaim Christ. But this is not that time. So how do we know when it's time? Well, we ask.

Jesus knows the timing. There's only one time Jesus doesn't know and that's when the Father is going to send him back. But Jesus knows the time.

The Father knows the time. And it is our communion through the Holy Spirit and through Christ with the Father that informs us of the times and the seasons. And there is a time and a season for everything.

But it's so fascinating to me when the revival comes to town they never go to Matthew 16 20 and say don't tell anybody Jesus is the Christ. It's usually the opposite. But this is recorded several times.

Jesus tells people don't tell anyone what God has just done for you. There's a time for testimony and there's a time not to share testimony. Jesus tells several of the people that he heals tell no man.

And when they do it messes things up because now Jesus can no longer go to the towns and cities that he wanted to go and minister to because they are all assembling and drowning him out for the wrong reasons. It is a distraction and a misdirection and it creates false issues and it tells us in other places Jesus could no longer openly travel and he couldn't go to large towns anymore because people had blabbed and he had turned into a circus sideshow in the minds of many. The circus is in town.

Let's go see it. Jesus wanted to come and teach. He wanted to reach those who were asking and seeking and knocking and people who spoke at the wrong time messed it up.

He commanded his disciples they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. This is the preceding context for the Transfiguration.

So many times, now think about this, so many times you come to the Mount of Transfiguration especially if you're not working Syriac and through any one of the Synoptic Gospels, you think Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, Glory Cloud, let's build three tabernacles and that's kind of its own little pericope and it floats as a story independently of its context. We cannot understand the Transfiguration if we do not understand its context and each of these three Gospel writers carefully preserves under the Ministry of the Holy Spirit this context. Why the Transfiguration? Most of the time

people will look one verse back and say well this is the fulfillment of Jesus saying there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Do you remember my suggestion to you about what Jesus meant when he said taste death? What's the standard reflexive understanding we have of this? There are some of you who will not die until you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom and you say wow we're in the rapture generation so to speak. Some of us are going to live long enough that whatever happens between now and then we're going to see Jesus sitting on a throne in Jerusalem. We're not going to taste death some of us until we see this.

I suggest to you in the context that is not what he is talking about. What death is in the context? Has Jesus said anything about the disciples dying? Whose death is in the context? Verse 21, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must be killed. Death in the context is the death of the Lord Jesus.

You can just draw a circle around taste death and run a line over to verse 21. The Son of Man must go to Jerusalem and be killed. But some of you will see the kingdom and the Son of Man coming in his kingdom before you taste that death.

I would submit that perhaps in the life of these disciples, soon to be apostles, the death of the Lord Jesus was far more traumatic, far more of an issue than their own death. From this time forward, you think about the boldness of Peter when Jesus says right now you dress yourself and you go where you want to go. There's a day coming.

Remember that at the end of the book of John when others are going to handle your clothing and others are going to tell you where to go. That didn't concern Peter. You look at the strength of the apostle Peter in his apostolic days.

You look at John. His death isn't going to be until after he's been exiled to the isle of Patmos and writes the revelation down after he receives it. This happens before his death, the Lord Jesus' death.

That's the issue. The rest of these guys are not going to see it until after his death. They are going to see his glory in a different form.

So that's my suggestion. It's worth every penny you pay for it, but that's what I think. Now, so with that as a background, when you come to chapter 17, after six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, his brother, and led them up on a high mountain.

Now, let me ask you this. Has there ever been a case where there was a six-day interval and then somebody took three people up a high mountain? Has that ever happened before in Scripture that you can think of? Turn with me back, I hope I'm remembering this right, to Exodus chapter 24. Exodus chapter 24.

You remember that this is the context of the giving of the Ten Commandments and so on. And so if you keep your finger in 24 and turn back to 19, this is when they come to Mount Sinai. And God says in verse 10 of chapter 19, go to the people, consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, let them be ready for the third day.

Let them be ready for the third day. Be sanctified, be cleansed. You think about Passover and the high Sabbath that it represented.

You think about the Feast of Unleavened Bread. You think about the Feast of Firstfruits and the three days that it enforced at the time of the crucifixion. And you then have the people being afraid of God's presence.

All the people witnessed in verse 18 of chapter 20, the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, the mountain smoking. The people saw it, trembled and stood afar off. They said to Moses, you speak with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die.

Very important to our passage and our context. The people at the foot of the mountain say, you go listen to God and you tell us what He said. We are too afraid to go.

Moses said to the people in verse 20, do not fear. God has come to test you that His fear may be before you that you may not sin. So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

Now what's inside the darkness? The thick darkness is when you look at it from the outside. What's inside the thick darkness? The glory of God that's going to make Moses' face glow in the dark, right? So think about this now. There's thunder and lightning, sound of a trumpet.

The mountain is smoking. The mountain is quaking and the people are quaking. And there is this scary aspect looking at the mountain from afar.

The people move away from the mountain. Moses heads into the thick darkness because he knows what's inside the darkness. And to get there, he has to climb a mountain.

I say again, Moses has to climb a mountain. Why didn't God just appear and have him make the tent of meeting and appear in the tent of meeting? Why didn't God say, Moses, draw near to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that you've got in the camp? Moses is more than 80 years old now. His natural vigor is undiminished and his eyesight is good and so on, all the way until he's 120.

But he's an 80-year-old man and God makes him climb the mountain. And this mountain, there's lightning and thunder and smoke and angelic ram's horns evidently are being blown. It's a freaky sound that people haven't heard and they're afraid of it.

Moses heads into it because he knows that's where God is to be found. And there's a quick point of application here that sometimes our experience of the presence and the glory of God comes when we head into the storm and not run away from it. We shouldn't fear the Moses says, don't fear.

This is God's test. Is God more real to you than the smoke and the thunder and the trumpets and the lightning flashes and the climb up the hill? If your faith in God and your belief in God and your sense of and desire for the presence of God is a greater motivation than your natural reservations, then you will head into the thick darkness. This cloud is going to descend on the mountaintop for six days.

So in chapter 24 now of Exodus, God says to Moses, come up to the Lord, you and three guys, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near the Lord. They shall not come near, nor shall the people go up with him.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and the judgments. That's primarily the content of Exodus 20 through 23. Moses wrote the words of the Lord.

He rose early in the morning, built an altar at the foot of the mountain, 12 pillars according to the 12 tribes of Israel, sent the young men of the children of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. You know why the young men of Israel are doing this? A little minor point of order here, but you don't have Levites yet, do you? Haven't had the Levitical priesthood instituted. You don't have Aaron as a high priest.

This is still the family priesthood. And so these guys are operating on behalf of clans and tribes, families. Moses took half the blood, put it in basins, half the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

He took the book of the covenant. That's what he just got through writing down. That is only the content of Exodus 20 through 23.

He starts with the 10 commandments as the feasts, the three annual feasts. He puts it in the book. He read it in the hearing of the people.

They said, all that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient. Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, this is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you according to all these words. Then, verse 9 of Exodus 24, Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel.

And what did they see? No man can see God and live. However, they saw the God of Israel under his feet. There was a paving work of Sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.

But on the nobles of the children of Israel, he did not lay his hand. So they saw God and they ate and drank. The Lord said to Moses, come up to me on the mountain and be there.

And I will give you tablets of stone and the law and commandments, which I have written that you may teach them. It's very interesting because you remember back in Exodus 20, God had already given Moses verbally the 10 commandments. Moses came down and wrote down his own copy.

What is the King in Israel supposed to do? As soon as he takes the throne, he's supposed to get the law from the priests and make his own copy. So Moses gets it from God, makes his copy. Now God is going to make a copy in stone.

So we have a precedent of a six-day interval. If you look in this context, I can't spot it right now and I didn't write it down. But you remember in the story of Sinai that the glory cloud settles for six days over the mountain and then they go up.

Moses goes up. So the Lord said to Moses, come up to me on the mountain and be there. And I will give you tablets of stone and the law and commandments, which I've written that you may teach them.

Verse 13, so Moses arose with his assistant Joshua and Moses went up to the mountain of God. So there is a mountain and Moses and Joshua go up. He said to the elders, wait here for us until we come back to you.

Indeed, Aaron and her are with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them. So Moses and Joshua go on up.

But it's a very interesting look backward when you come back to Matthew chapter 17 or its parallels in Mark and Luke and see Jesus after six days taking his disciples to the mountain, leaving nine of them down below and taking three of them up with him. And this time you have Yeshua on the mountain with Moses and you have Elijah. In Moses' day, the prophets had not yet spoken.

In Moses' day, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. At this point when he goes up the mountain, how many people have been imbued with God's Holy Spirit when Moses goes up Sinai with Joshua, Nadab and Abihu and the 70 elders? How many people have been enabled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit? Samson hasn't come yet. Bezalel and Aholiab haven't been enabled for the tabernacle.

David hasn't come and had a portion of God's Spirit. Does the Bible have any record of God's Holy Spirit enabling and imbuing or enduing anybody? We've seen the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1 hovering on the face of the waters. Have we seen him since? Any Holy Spirit in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, early days of Moses, burning bush, pillar of cloud, pillar of fire? So think about this now.

You come to the New Testament. The Holy Spirit was not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified. The Holy Spirit only came at special times and special occasions and not until after the law is fully given.

The Word comes, which is God's law, God's instruction, God's purpose, God's revelation. Then the Spirit comes to enable understanding and accomplishment. The Holy Spirit never speaks for Himself.

He only takes of the Word and speaks through that. The Holy Spirit enables and enlivens our understanding of God's Word. Here comes the Word.

It's interesting that it says in the beginning, it doesn't say in John 1,1, in the beginning was the Spirit, and the Spirit was with God, and the Spirit was God. Because in the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God.

The Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And when the Word becomes flesh, the Word is imbued with the Spirit.

And the power and enablement for understanding and function and accomplishing God's purpose is brought to the earthly man by God's Spirit. So on the mountain you have Joshua, who is a shadowy background figure. We don't know what Joshua is doing for most of the time.

He is there primarily to supply his name, in my view. And Moses is there receiving the Word. Joshua is a shadowy presence.

But on our mount of transfiguration, which by the way is not Mount Tabor. If you go to Israel, I've heard people go there and they say, well, here's the Mount of Tabor. They take you to Tabor.

There was a Roman garrison on top of Mount Tabor in Jesus' day. I seriously doubt that Jesus said, excuse me, Romans, my father's coming. Can you all step aside? We've got to do this transfiguration.

It is an unknown mountain of Jesus' choice. But it wasn't Mount Tabor. But now because of the progress of Revelation and the sporadic ministry of God's Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the coming constant ministry of God's Spirit, you have not only Moses, but you will have Elijah.

And the whole issue with Elijah, you think about it, not the whole issue, but one of many issues with Elijah is, what do you remember about the transfer of the commission from Elijah to Elisha? What's the big deal? What does Elisha ask for? A double portion of what? Your Spirit, Moses, the Word of God, the Law of God. He writes it down. God writes it down.

These are written words. This is the Word. What does Elijah represent? This is the power of the Spirit.

You've got one on the right hand and one on the left. And it is the Word of God and the Spirit of God that are going to enable the Lord Jesus in his humanity to accomplish the perfect will of the Father. So that's yet another way to view this wonderful scene on top of the Mount of Transfiguration.

And of course, when you think about, well, what do I do with that? What did I review in terms of what the modern day church is? What are we? Do we think of ourselves primarily as a bride? Do we think of ourselves primarily as a kingdom? What are we? We are the body of Christ. The physical human body of Jesus has left and put us in its place. And the Spirit that enabled and empowered him now enables and empowers.

So as we look at this tableau on the Mount of Transfiguration, what does it say to us? What did it say to its original viewers? Peter says, it's good for us to be here. And God says, that's not really the point. This is my son and you need to listen to him.

And it encourages us to go back and remember what Moses said about the coming prophet. There is the element of priesthood. There's the element of kingship.

And you have the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ, past, present, and future. But of all of the prophets, why Elijah? Why not Samuel? Why not any of the writing prophets? Why not Isaiah or Ezekiel who has been in the presence of God before? Moses sums up and is the essence. Remember what Abraham says to the rich man in torment? They have Moses and they have the prophets.

Let them hear them. They've got the Word. And if they're interested in the Word and want to understand it, God will send His Spirit to those who ask Him.

If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Spirit to those who ask Him? The Spirit was available by request. Why was Simeon at the temple on the day that Mary and Joseph brought the baby? He was led there by the Spirit. Why was Anna there? She was a woman of the Spirit.

And there were people who had the ministry of the Spirit because they loved and honored God's Word and they desired to understand it. Carnal mind cannot understand the things of the Spirit. They are spiritually discerned.

And the only way to truly understand God's Word is to cultivate that ministry of the Spirit, the Word and the Spirit, Moses and Elijah. This is how Jesus Christ in His earthly life accomplished God's will. How should you and I accomplish it? It's the Word and the Spirit.

We say, okay, that's a good point. Then we can move on to now how do I do that? Well, the Word portion we're doing this morning, we're in God's Word. We're seeking to get it into our hearts, into our souls, into our minds, make it the source of our strength and our motivation.

But none of that is going to happen if we are not qualified for the presence of the Spirit, the power and the voice of the Holy Spirit to make those words of God real and meaningful, to help us see their pertinence and application, to understand God's timing. We have to be sensitive. God the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, don't worry when you're dragged before kings what you're going to say, it will be given to you in that hour.

How is it given? This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We've got all kinds of, you know, is this the time to gather or a time to scatter? Is it a time to reap or a time to sow? Is it a time to speak or a time to remain quiet? Certain times in His trial, Jesus says not a word like a lamb to the slaughter, He opens not His mouth. Other times Pilate asks Him a question, Jesus has a conversation with Him.

How did Jesus know when to speak and when not to? It's the Holy Spirit. Enabled and empowered Him, led and guided Him, it enables and empowers, leads and guides us. But we have to be sure and check that we are susceptible, that we are qualified, that we're not a polluted vessel that needs to be cast outside the camp instead of a holy vessel that can be of use in the temple, in the tabernacle, in the presence of God.

And that's a constant battle to remove defilement from ourselves and ensure that we do the Romans 12, 1 and 2, holy and acceptable part of our responsibility. So something to think about. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we're going to get into the details here. And again, I haven't really gotten much past verse 1 of chapter 17, but now is important, after six days is important, the three individuals that are taken up is important because not everyone is taken up there. Leadership ought to be qualified, but Moses is told to leave the 70 elders further down the mountain.

Why don't the elders who are going to administrate this law of God go up the mountain? They're not ready. They're not qualified. Only Moses and Joshua are ready to head into the thick darkness, ready to receive the Word of God.

Interestingly, though, the 70 elders do eat and drink in God's presence. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see more from this very, very interesting passage.