

Matthew 21-06-13a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We're continuing our study on this 13th day of June 2021 in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up in chapter 17.

We have been taking a detailed look at the transfiguration and the events that precede and follow it. We're going to be concluding that study this morning and drawing our pertinence and application from it. So we'll be moving with some alacrity through these verses.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our study, and on our ability to understand, remember, and apply the things that we see this morning. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for another chance to spend time together looking at the truth of Your Word, having our souls nourished and built up and strengthened. We pray that as we reflect on the truths that are contained in this portion of Your Word, that Your Holy Spirit will minister them to our hearts, impress them on us in a way that's meaningful, that results in bearing the fruit of the Spirit, being a blessing to each other as we function within our spiritual gifts and in the sphere of faith, hope, and love.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Matthew chapter 17, this is such a central mountaintop experience, as you might say, and worthy of the time that we have spent on it.

You will remember the run-up very quickly now by way of review. Jesus asked the question in chapter 16, verse 13, who do men say that I am? And people think He is everybody except who He actually is. He's a prophet.

He's John the Baptist come back. He's Elijah. He's Jeremiah.

But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter says you are the Christ. The great confession it has been called. Now, Jesus recognizes that Peter genuinely believes this and gives him the name Peter.

This foundation, this identity, and your recognition of it is going to be the foundation for my group, my ecclesia, my church. It's translated here. Of course, people have no notion of church at that time, but Jesus is going to begin a new assembly, a new called out group that's different from national Israel.

National Israel was called through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, called through Moses at Mount Sinai, called under the law, preached to, called to repentance, called to change of mind, called to faith and obedience by the prophets. That was the old called out group. You are a special people God said to Israel and you're honored for the sake of your fathers.

And it was hereditary. It was national. It was covenant under the various old Testament covenants.

This is going to be a new group founded on a new foundation, founded on a foundation. And that foundation is the recognition of who Jesus Christ is. And Peter believes this.

James and John believe this. I know Peter, James and John believe it. Peter says it here.

James and John believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the coming one, the King of the future kingdom, because they ask him, can I sit on your right hand and on your left when you come into your kingdom? They wouldn't ask that if they didn't really believe that's who he was. These three I know of a certainty have recognized Jesus for who he is and they believe it. This is essential to understand our chapter.

So Jesus says you're blessed because this revelation to which you have attached your faith, this thing that you believe isn't a human construction. It's not the result of logical persuasion or preponderance of evidence. My father in heaven, Jesus says, reveal this to you and you believe this divine revelation.

It is an assurance in the heart. It's a propositional truth. One can believe it or one can doubt it.

As with so many other things the Bible teaches, do we really believe what the Bible says or not? First of all comes, do we understand what the Bible is saying? Many people have put firm faith in a misunderstanding and fall by the wayside. So it is essential to first understand what the father actually is revealing, what he says and what he doesn't say, and then to aim our faith at that and have confidence in it. So this is background.

If we do believe what God reveals, this should result in action. So Jesus in the latter part of chapter 16 makes this clear. If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

You would only want to come after Jesus if you believe who he really is, what he means, the future of eternal life and presence in the kingdom with the father, what all of that signifies, what it promises. If you believe that, that faith should result in action. We should quit living for ourselves, deny ourselves, take up our cross.

This is going to be a sacrificial way of life. It's going to require enduring some momentary light affliction, as Paul calls it. There's going to be some self-denial.

We're not going to live for the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. We set that common viewpoint of humanity aside and look to Jesus.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we follow in his footsteps. What

are his footsteps? To understand and fulfill God's will, to be a part of accomplishing his purpose and his mission, because in that path lies true peace, abiding happiness, future promise of blessing, reward, and opportunity for further service in the kingdoms which are to come. We are blessed now and we're blessed in the future.

Who wouldn't want to do this? If you understand who Jesus is, why would we not do this? We'd be crazy to not be a part of God's perfect plan and purpose, both now and in the future. But a lot of us are crazy because we don't actually live this way. What is the problem? That's what our chapter illustrates.

Chapter 17 explains why chapter 16 doesn't happen in our lives. It's very instructive. What profit, Jesus says in verse 26 of Matthew 16, what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? You look at the accumulation.

I have the opportunity to be in many wonderful homes. It spans the gamut. I am in homes where you've got to poke a rag in the wall to keep the wind out, and I'm in homes that are very, very finely furnished with rare and valuable statuary and paintings, tapestries, Persian rugs, just hundreds of thousands of dollars of possessions carefully arranged and on display, the accumulated treasures of a lifetime of hard work and investment and so on.

But in many cases, the people who dwell in those houses are very advanced in years. And to be in a home and know that the people who dwell there with all of these wonderful things, that their time is very short and in the not too distant future, they won't be here. You think we can build a chair that will outlast all of us.

There's chairs that Abraham Lincoln sat in, chairs George Washington sat in. They've got artifacts from Columbus and all kinds of things going back hundreds of years, but we ourselves can't last to maintain possession and enjoy those. What does it profit us to accumulate earthly treasure when we are going to leave? Losing your soul is largely talking about the exodus from this life.

It becomes rather meaningless. You can achieve fame. You think about the Hollywood stars that are well known by image and by name to us, but they're gone.

They're completely unconscious of how many people know their name or how many people watch their movies or what happened to their estate if there's a little museum of their career or a web page with a bunch of appreciation of what they did, whether it's in the area of music or arts or entertainment or politics or any other athletics, any other field of achievement. We live a day that begins with a dawning, rising sun. It goes overhead and then it sets.

And with the setting of the sun, the sunset years of our life, and then the sun goes down and we're gone. What is leftover that endures? What is leftover that matters? You say,

well, I made some people happy. I left a mark.

I benefited humankind. That is the best that secular godless life can offer. Well, some people appreciate me, but when the planet goes up in a fiery ball and there's nobody left to even remember that, what did it all mean, if anything? And in reality, I think about this often, driving and flying put me in a philosophical mood, but if you drive our roads, you will see a flattened raccoon at some point.

You cannot go more than about four miles on these back roads without seeing a flattened raccoon. This raccoon is descended from raccoons who themselves had parents, and this is a line of raccoons that goes back to the dawn of creation. Here's this particular raccoon.

I passed one yesterday going over to Pryor. Well, I passed several actually, but there was one that got this little barrel of monkeys of thought rolling down the hill, and I think of this quite often. That raccoon was born, grew, ate things.

He was trying to run across the road. Some car previous to me hit him, and he's gone. There are little buzzard birds around here that are going to come and pick him apart.

The beauty of the way God's creation works is in the organic world, there's 100% recycling. There's no leftover cans, bottles, plastics, things that go into landfills. When we create things, there's all of this messy trash left over when we're finished, packaging and broken things and useless things and used up things.

God's world, the recycling is perfect. Even when we burn fuel, our exhaust benefits the plants. When plants burn fuel, their exhaust benefits us.

We expel carbon dioxide for them. They expel oxygen for us. It's a wonderful, beautiful reflection of the perfection of God's plan where things are useful and meaningful and benefit each other when nature is left alone and man doesn't mess with it.

But you look at that flattened animal on the road. His brief time on this earth is forever over. What a tragedy if a human life is essentially the same.

You were around, you had some experiences, you have memories, you have conversations, you have activities, and when you get flattened by whatever takes you out, it's gone. It perishes within a few generations. The vast majority of your days are unrecorded, unremembered.

Anything you did, anything you said, anything you accomplished has blown away with the sands of time and is forever gone unless we recognize who Jesus is and the offer of permanence, the offer of eternal life, the offer of a life that has meaning and purpose and value now and that doesn't merely try for treasure on this earth where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal. Remember we did a detailed study of that.

It's not actually rust.

That's a really wonderful study. But anything put together here falls apart. But laying up treasure in heaven, the minutes and the hours and the days of this life, instead of being spent away on say rent that's good for the moment, but next month you're going to owe some more, it's an investment.

It is a down payment on permanent possession, permanent dwelling, permanent significance and meaning in God's eternal plan and purpose. This is a wonderful gift and a tremendous opportunity for us if we recognize it and if we lay hold of it. This is how to do it.

Whoever desires to preserve his life here, Jesus says, will lose it. But whoever loses his life in the sense of I'm not worrying about trying to be humanly significant or humanly successful or momentarily well off and accumulate a pile of possessions, I lose my life here. I'm not interested.

I'm going to deny myself and take up my cross, i.e. I'm going to identify with Christ. I'm going to live with him and for him and look to an eternal future with him. That's when we find our life.

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. If we work for ourselves, why would we get a reward from the Lord? But if we follow him, if we invest our lives in his service, in his plan and purpose, there is reward and his reward never fades, never perishes, cannot be taken away. It is permanent *la olam*, as they say in Hebrew, unto the ages.

Aionios in Greek, unto forever. Why try to hang on to what you cannot keep when you can instead invest in something you can never lose? It's just good common sense if we recognize on faith who Jesus is. That was the subject of chapter 16.

In chapter 17, we have the illustration. After six days, Peter, James, and John go up to the top of the mountain. The other nine disciples are down below.

They see Moses and Elijah talking with the Lord Jesus. This has so many communication meanings, one of which is, who is it that testified and provided the means of faith of believing who Jesus was in previous generations? The law and the prophets testified to who Jesus is. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established, the Old Testament says.

The law, through its sacrifices and feasts, its symbolism, the details of the rituals, foreshadowed the coming of Christ. Every detail of every sacrifice is meaningful. What happens with the skin and the legs? What happens with the fatty portions? Where is the blood applied and poured out? How is the sacrifice accomplished? Every detail foreshadows Christ.

We've seen this in our Levitical offerings study. The feasts of Israel foreshadow and predict what God is going to do in human history and when He's going to do it, in what sequence, in what order, with what significance. The law of Moses testifies to Christ.

The prophets, Samuel, beginning with Moses, who was also a prophet, but Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, all of the prophets of the Old Testament, their books, every single one of them, and we have looked at every single one of them in our studies, every one of them addresses the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether it is identifying the need for Him, the sin that He is coming to bear and resolve, the Father who sends Him for the deliverance of His people Israel in fulfillment of His covenant promises, every single prophet anticipates and looks forward to Jesus Christ. So how appropriate is it that when Jesus' glory is revealed to these three individuals, Peter, James, and John, Moses is on one side, Elijah is on the other, and they're not just there in a freeze in a little bas-relief still photo.

They are talking. They are talking to the Lord Jesus, speaking with Him. All three Gospels that record this say they were speaking with Him, talking about His exodus, it says in Luke, His departure.

But this reminds us that in His humanity, the Lord Jesus Christ was guided by the word of God. Jesus knew the law. Jesus knew the prophets.

He quotes them. He tells Satan, I don't live based on where I get my food, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, the law and the prophets. So here is this wonderful scene.

And then as the third and most profound witness, the glory of God appears and God Himself says, this is my son. I am well-pleased and you better listen to Him. Listen to Him.

The present imperative of Akua, we get the word acoustics from this, but the present imperative has this ongoing idea. We say, do you hear that? And that's kind of a momentary thing. Do you hear that noise? Do you hear that sound? But when we say, listen, if I'm listening to music, if I'm listening to someone speak, that has an ongoing idea, right? And that's the idea of the present imperative of Akua.

God says, listen to my son, keep on listening, be a listener, be one who listens to Him. Well, he has just said some wonderful things in chapter 16, which we have just now reviewed. And so what are we going to do about this? We've listened to it.

Now, you know, you can listen to a sales presentation and then eventually the salesperson will come around to, well, are you going to purchase? Can I interest you in this product or this service or this opportunity? I've shown you the house. Do you want to make an offer? I've presented the benefits of these insight. When I was a kid, there was

encyclopedia salesmen all over the place.

They come to the door, lugging this big case, got encyclopedia Britannica here. Don't you want to, this was before the internet and you had to get your knowledge out of a book instead of on a screen. But they would vacuum cleaners, brushes, fuller brush man would come around.

Salespeople used to come and they make their pitch. Here's the qualities. This is what separates our product from others.

Patty and I had a window guy. We wanted to get our single pane windows that leaked air conditioning and heat all the time. Wanted to get good windows that would really insulate the house.

So a window guy came by and we saw more than one presentation, but this guy was really good. He had a little sample window pane and he had a lamp and he had a meter over here and he showed how much of the energy could pass through that double pane window that he was selling that would keep your drapes from fading and your upholstery from getting blanched by sunlight and how thermally efficient it was. And that lamp and that meter, that was the deal.

I thought, you know what? This stuff really works. And we bought those windows, took us several years to pay them off. But you listen to information and then what? You've come to a decision point.

Anything you listen to, are you listening to a politician? Well, do you believe him? Are you going to vote or support or undertake a thing? Listen to a doctor. He says, you better do this or your health is going to go in the tank. You can listen.

People that smoke, hey, you need to quit. This is bad for your health. Well, we've listened.

God the Father says, listen to my son. Once we have listened, what's the next thing that happens? Decision. Are we going to take up our cross? Are we going to deny ourselves and invest in the future, in the eternal, in that which pleases God, the God of our salvation, the God who sent his son, the Lord Jesus, to pay for our sins, to redeem us from condemnation, to give us new life, new hope, new power, great peace, contentment, and inner happiness now and in the age to come.

God has presented that. And for those of us who accept that wonderful gift through Christ, God says, I want you to listen to the one who has saved you, to the one who sacrificed himself on your behalf. Are you willing to sacrifice self-interest, self-gratification, and invest in this new life that Jesus died to give you? Yes or no? You listen.

Now we decide. Well, here's the thing. Sometimes deciding is a process.

We delay. We procrastinate. It's on the table.

Remember when Herod locked up John the Baptist because he was saying bad things about the wife that he took from his brother and so on. And John said, you shouldn't be doing that. And the wife got mad.

And so Herod locked him up, but he didn't want to execute him because he was pretty sure he was a prophet. And he would visit him from time to time and listen to what he had to say. He wouldn't let him go and he wouldn't kill him.

He just delayed, delayed, delayed. Finally, the daughter does the dance. I want the head.

John dies. He's forced into a decision. And all of us will have to decide one way or the other.

And procrastination really is a decision in itself because we have not said yes. To not say yes is basically to say no, at least not right now. And we say, well, like Felix and Drusilla and Paul, maybe some future time.

Not right now. I'm busy right now. Well, as the Bible says, now is the appointed time.

Now is the day of deliverance. And whether we are unsaved, looking at the offer of salvation, whether we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, listening to the Son, it is a decision time. Who am I living my life to please? Myself or the Father in heaven? Well, we've got a group of 12 men here and some of them, despite their time with the Lord Jesus, have not committed.

They've not really placed their faith in him. Now, do they believe that Jesus is extraordinary? Do they believe, have they seen with their own eyes, miracle after miracle and profound conversation after profound conversation? These men have been with him for three years now. They've all seen it.

They've all listened to Jesus do the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the plain. They have listened. Some of them have made a decision to place their faith in Jesus.

This is not, I'm not talking about salvation now. I think these men are all saved. I think at any point had they died, they would have gone to glory.

This is living faith we're talking about here. This is the faith that operates on a daily basis. I live differently.

I think differently because I believe we're not talking about ticket out of the hot place and well, will I arrive in heaven someday? That's a different faith. The faith that Jesus is talking about in chapter 16 is not salvation faith for eternity. This is salvation faith for today.

The one of the parallels says, take up his cross daily and follow me. This is what do you do with your day? What do you do with this investment of time? Time is money. It's on my clock over here.

Time is money in the spiritual sense. We either fritter it away or we invest it. If we're going to invest it, we invest it by faith.

Faith says, I'm not necessarily going to do the easy thing or the self gratifying thing. I'm going to do the thing that is an investment in the plan and purpose of the father and in my own eternal future. I believe therefore I choose.

So the question we've been asking ourselves over these last couple of weeks is why did Jesus only take Peter, James, and John to the top of the mountain? This is a glorious experience. They see and hear the actual Moses better than Charlton Heston. With apologies to those who think Chuck did the best job ever depicting Moses.

The real Moses is better than the 10 commandments. Moses, smarter, handsomer, more vigorous, lived longer. The real Moses, the real Elijah, the Elijah of Mount Carmel, the Elijah who built the altar and watched the fire of God come down and consume the sacrifice, the altar and the ground under the altar and all the water in the moat.

That Elijah, the Elijah who threw his mantle down to Elisha, the Elijah who traveled in the chariot of fire to a distant place, not heaven. They see them. It's interesting that nobody has to introduce them.

Nobody has to say, that's who this is. People have asked, will we know each other in heaven? There seems to be some detail after Jesus' resurrection that people did not immediately recognize him. He seemed to look different.

So will we know each other? I can tell you this, Peter, James, and John instantly knew who Moses and Elijah were without an introduction. I think we will know even as we are known. In the same way that we recognize people that are in our family, friends.

Sometimes we recognize, we can't remember the name, but I know you. Where do I know you from? Did I go to school with you? Did I share an experience with you sometime in the past? But I believe, based on this passage and a couple of others, that in the eternal realms, when we leave this earth and are promoted into our resurrection environment, there will be no need for introductions. You'll recognize Jeremiah.

You will recognize Hosea. You will recognize Zechariah. You'll recognize each of the disciples.

There is something about our perception and our appearance and the way things work in that state and that environment where we will know. We will know each other. We will know others.

And we will be known. And I think there are some additional pieces of information that come along with that knowledge. I think our garments and our location and our function in the eternal future will reflect how interested we were in the things of God in this life.

And there are those who are, as it says, rusty old halo, skinny white gown. And, you know, it's so woolly it scratches. And then there are those whose robes of righteousness, whose rewards from the Lord Jesus Christ and proximity to him will reflect faithfulness and obedience in this life.

Having said that, what about the nine down below? What is going on at the base of the mountain? Why did those nine not come up to the top? If this is such a wonderful revelation and you've got the three witnesses, Moses, Elijah, and God himself saying, this is the son. This is the Christ. Peter has already affirmed it before this.

Why did the nine not go up? And what goes on at the base of the mountain is the answer. So after they have fallen on their faces, once God the father appears, they were standing. Peter says, let's, let's make some shacks and try to extend this moment, this beatific vision here.

Let's just make this permanent. Unconsciously, by the way, when he says, let's Lord, if you like, I'd be glad to make three habitations here, three booths, three shrines, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah in his enthusiasm. Think about what Peter does here.

Moses and Elijah are elevated to the same status as Jesus. Kind of like you find in the Catholic church where saints and departed faithful are elevated to equality in terms of their, well, they've got an in with God. If I pray to this saint, if I appeal to Mary, they'll put in a good word for me.

Why do I not appeal through Christ directly to God, the father, as I am instructed to do in scripture, Jesus says, pray in my name to the father. Catholics say, pray to a saint and get the saint to talk to God, pray to Mary and get Mary to talk to God. And the beginnings of that kind of thinking, you know, the Catholic church follows Peter as the first Pope allegedly.

Well, they make the mistake that Peter makes here. Let's build three shrines and Moses and Elijah get one just as good as yours, all three of you here. And it's, he's shooting from the hip.

He's, you know, and Mark says he didn't really know what to say. He just thought he ought to say something. And this is what came out of his mouth.

And, uh, as a wise man, if I'm acquaintance, occasionally says words come back. Let me, let me unsay what I just said, but it is not the momentary revelation that is the point. It is faith daily faith.

That is the point. And to make that point, God, the father says, listen to my son. And the son has spoken in chapter 16, and he is going to speak as once they get to the foot of the mountain.

So we're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we are going to see what it is that God says we should listen to from the lips of Jesus. And it is a difference maker.

It is another point of decision. Once we have listened, then we can choose what to do about it. We've seen what Jesus said in chapter 16, are we going to deny ourselves and try to live to please the father? Are we going to continue to please ourselves? He is going to say something at the foot of the mountain that is, is symmetrical with that equally significant and equally important for us.

And we'll see it when we come back.