

Kingdom Dawning

Matthew 17:1-13

23 February 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Idea: Jesus is the king whose kingdom will come in glory.

Big Question: Why did Jesus give a glimpse of his glory?

Introduction

Usually, we want to be on the winning side.

After all, winners are gridders.

When the history books are written, we want to know that we'll be on the side that came out on top.

I'm really not into boxing at all because it doesn't seem to me like it's a very wise sport (if, like golf, you can even call it a sport).

No one thought that James 'Buster' Douglas was any good as a boxer.

He was considered to be average, at best.

By age thirty, he'd been knocked-out three times in his career and lost about a third of his bouts – never a champion.

Mike Tyson on the other hand, was a winner.

Ten years younger than Douglas, from pretty much the moment he began boxing at eighteen he was winning fights.

In his first year and a half as a professional, he won each and every one of his 27 bouts.

He was the undisputed world heavy-weight champion.

When a fight with Evander Holyfield was delayed, Tyson's manager wanted to organise another something else.

It didn't really matter with whom, Tyson just wanted to keep his winning streak going.

Douglas agreed to fight him.

No one took Douglas seriously and everyone agreed he'd be destroyed with odds of 42-1.

Given those circumstances, who'd want to be a Douglas supporter?

I wonder how the disciples were feeling after their trip to Caesarea Philippi?

They'd left everything to follow Jesus around for the best part of the last three years.

They'd seen all the miracles that the carpenter from Nazareth was able to do.

But Peter's great confession in chapter sixteen was a real turning point as he blurted out that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus agreed with what Peter had said.

More than that, he made some really grand promises.

Jesus said that he'd build his church on Peter after he'd made this confession, promising that even death wouldn't be able to stop them.

This was mind-blowing.

But then Jesus went on to say that although he was Messiah, he wasn't the kind of Messiah that they were expecting.

He wasn't going to be the Governor like Arnie Schwarzenegger.

They weren't getting a mighty military champion who'd come to turf out the Romans and bring safety and peace

He wasn't going to get rid of Herod to put himself on the throne.

Instead, Jesus was calling his disciples to follow after him by having cross-shaped lives as they followed their cross-shaped Saviour.

Followers of Jesus will count the cost of denying themselves and laying down their lives.

Jesus' kingdom is inverted – you gain your life by losing it, 16:25:

Matthew 16:25 (NIV11) ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

It must've all seemed pretty confusing and we know that the disciples didn't understand it all straight away.

This's the second week that I've had Jesus' words from the end of chapter sixteen rattling around in my head and heart, and I'm still struggling to come to terms with what they mean too!

No matter how hard I try, I can't escape the consequences of what Jesus said - following him comes at great cost.

Regardless of how well they knew Jesus, this must've got them thinking.

They must've felt like they were supporting Douglas the underdog.

They were following Jesus against all of the leaders of Israel.

It must've at least crossed their mind that they might've backed the wrong bloke.

Jesus gave was hope in verse 27 that went beyond laying down their lives.

By losing their lives, they would find them.

They could look forward to that day when the Son of Man would come in his Father's glory.

They could look with hope towards the time when Jesus would return and reward his people.

Outline

In this section of Matthew's gospel, we're taken from confession to the cross.

It's critical to remember that the cross comes before the crown.

As they anticipated a future through suffering, it was important to know that Jesus will ultimately be victorious.

Jesus might be going to suffer, but he's also going to be glorified.

The path to glory is going to be gory, but it's still the path to glory.

His suffering certainly isn't an indication that he doesn't deserve glory.

I don't think it's an accident that Jesus says what he does in chapter seventeen straight after chapter sixteen.

It's often called "The Transfiguration" although that really only happens in one verse.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us about this in their accounts of Jesus' life and it's always tied to the same things before and afterwards.

So, I take it that this is important.

I think they did that at exactly this point because the disciples needed to be reminded that Jesus isn't just Joe the Carpenter's son.

He might look like an underdog, like just another ordinary bloke (who admittedly could do some pretty neat miracles), but Jesus is God.

Jesus is informing his disciples – and us as we read along two millennia later – exactly who he is.

In one sense, what's going on here is very simple: Jesus is the Messiah.

Far from being a fool to follow him, Jesus' disciples are about to experience a glimpse the future, a taste of his glory.

These events assure us that **Jesus is the king whose kingdom will come in glory.**

- Jesus has God's Glory (vv1-4)
- Jesus has God's Authority (vv5-8)

- Jesus has God's Plan (vv9-13)

Jesus has God's Glory (vv1-4)

Jesus takes a small subset of his disciples off for the kind of mountain top experience they really will remember for the rest of their lives.

They get to see Jesus in all his glory.

Mountains are significant across the whole Bible, but especially in Matthew.

For instance at the beginning of the book, the Sermon on the Mount happened on (you guessed it) a mountain.

Jesus gathers his disciples on a mountain again at the end of the book to give them his great commission.

As we read Matthew's gospel, we're meant to go, "Aha! A mountain. What will Jesus do now?"

Jesus takes The Rock, James and his brother John.

Just in case you're confused, that's John the disciple and not John the Baptist.

It's quite rare that Jesus takes only this trio – the only other time he does that is in the Garden of Gethsemane.

These guys are going to be the witnesses of some fairly amazing stuff and Jewish law said that two or three witnesses were needed¹ especially as they'd end up being pillars in the church community.²

It's also unusual for Matthew to tell us that some something happened "six days later".

That's partly because this's connected to what happened before but something else is going on here too.

There's an allusion to Exodus 24, where the LORD tells Moses to goes up the mountain with three blokes to meet him.

After six days, God gives Moses the Law.

There's a clear sense of history repeating itself.

On this occasion, as Peter, James and John watch on, Jesus is transfigured.

What exactly does that mean?

It's really hard to know because this was an extraordinary event that's well outside of our everyday experience.

The word used is that he metamorphosed – like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly.

The word means more than just a change in appearance – it's a change from the inside out.

It's probably hard to put what they saw into words if you weren't there.

We're told that Jesus lit up; his face beamed like the sun.

His clothes looked like they were white – Mark tells us whiter than it's possible to bleach.

Verse 2:

Matthew 17:2 (NIV11) ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

Seeing Jesus must've been like when you go out into the bright sun on a summer's day... your eyes have to adjust.

Everything looks so vivid with all of the colours of the world looking so rich.

You want to grab for you sunglasses because everything's so intense.

I imagine that's the kind of thing that's being described.

What they were experiencing was a small taste of Jesus' true glory.

Appearances CAN be deceiving.

They were used to seeing the human Jesus but here, they were getting a glimpse of his amazing glory.

His glory is so great that it seems to change what he looks like physically.

Glory's a hard concept to describe.

It's honour for being magnificent and beautiful.

Our God deserves praise for his perfect character.

Jesus' beauty is more than just skin deep.

The same kind of description is used to describe God himself in other parts of the Bible.³

People often say that Jesus never claimed to be God.

That's kind of true in that he never says those words.

But he certainly did show it!

Something similar happened in Exodus.

When Moses came down from the mountain in Exodus 34, his face was radiant from being with the Lord.

That was similar, yet profoundly different because Moses was reflecting God's glory. There's not reflection happening here – it's coming from the inside of Jesus.

Jesus is entitled to God's glory.

That's incredible because the God of the Bible is the one who won't share his glory with anyone else.

God the Father's not sharing his glory with another, Jesus is the second member of the Trinity.

Isaiah 42:8 (NIV11) ⁸ "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

Perhaps you're thinking that is whole transfiguration thing sounds a little bit far-fetched.

It's unlike anything you've ever experienced before.

Well, Peter himself thought that it was significant and these events remained on his mind.

Towards the end of his life, he was writing to a number of churches and he refers to this incident.

In 2 Peter 1, he argues that he and the others didn't make these things up, but that he was an eyewitness to them.

Peter's testimony is the evidence that these things happened.

Just when you thought it couldn't get any stranger, the next thing they know, Moses and Elijah join the scene.

Jesus didn't transfigure into these men, they were standing there with the transfigured Jesus.

They were two of the biggest names from the Old Testament who'd long since passed into the history books.

Having these two men there is kind of like have two truly famous people for dinner – like having the great scientists Newton and Einstein over for a meal.

It was a big deal.

Now, this raises all kinds of questions, doesn't it?

Where on earth (or otherwise) did they come from? I really don't know.

And how did the disciples even know who they were? It's not like they had photos.

Your guess is as good as mine.

And why do they show up at this point?

Some people have suggested that this's because Jesus is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets.

Moses is a representative of the Law and Elijah is a representative of the prophets.

There's truth to that, but why these two?

Why not Abraham and David? Or Joseph and Daniel?

It's these two because of Malachi 4.

There aren't many places in the Bible where you find Moses and Elijah referenced together.

In the last verses of the Old Testament, Malachi says:

Malachi 4:4–6 (NIV11) ⁴ “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

Malachi was calling the people back to God.

Telling them that they need to remember God's law that was given to Moses.

Elijah was ministering at a particularly low point in Israel's history and his job was to call God's people back to repentance.

Malachi says that Elijah will come before Messiah comes.

Jesus is the one who makes it possible for his followers to follow the law of Moses.

For them to repent and be saved from the great day of judgement.

And he's going to be able to do that at the cross.

The Elijah-type voice (who was John the Baptist, as we'll see later) is the one to prepare the way.

These two giants of the faith were now talking with Jesus.

Matthew doesn't tell us what they were talking about.

However, Luke tells us:

Luke 9:31 (NIV11) They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.

The word that that Luke uses is the word “exodus”.

They talked about the exodus Jesus was about to bring about in Jerusalem when Jesus would rescue his people from their slavery to sin.

This's the plan that all the prophets wanted to see and now they got to find out.

Later, Peter wrote:

1 Peter 1:10–12 (NIV11) ¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

Jesus is the one that they were all pointing to and preparing the way for.

He deserves glory because he's the pinnacle of God's plan of salvation for the world.

Jesus has God's glory.

Peter finds his voice and opens up by offering to make some shelters.

This means a temporary structure that's little more than a roof over your head.

As kids, we'd go into the bush and make little huts out of branches and leaves.

They were called 'gunyahs', using an Aboriginal word from the Sydney area.

Matthew 17:4 (NIV11) ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Why did Peter think that setting up some shelters would be a good idea?

Build some tabernacles... of course. Why not?

Why tabernacles? That's a great question you've asked.

We don't know and I don't think Peter did either.

We can't be sure exactly why he suggested this, but it seems to me that the least likely reason is because of the Festival of Tabernacles.⁴

Part of the problem is that Peter wants to put all three of them on the same level.

Moses and Elijah are great, but they pale next to Jesus.

Even physically, they're not shining like he was.

Peter compromised Jesus' uniqueness by offering to put them all on the same level.

Peter was also saying, "Let's take some time because the glory has come down and been shown to us."

He thought he'd hit peak religion.

Let's savour the moment and bask in the glory.

He doesn't want the moment to end.

It kind of sounds like Peter thinks that he's doing them a favour.

He doesn't think that it'd be good for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but for Peter, James and John.

He means that it's good for them to be there and not anywhere else.

Moving on from this moment means moving on to the cross.

This isn't the spiritual peak though.

This was only a taster of what's going to come.

The glorified Jesus on the cross will be the one to wait out for.

But that could only come through the cross.

Don't settle for anything less than the glory of Christ crucified and risen.

We accept the fleeting glory of lesser things in all kinds of ways.

We want glory without the cross.

The risen Lord Jesus alone is worthy of all our glory.

One of the reasons God made is so that we would glorify him.

We've been learning in the New City Catechism this week:

Question 4: How and why did God create us?

Answer: God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.

Jesus has God's glory.

Jesus has God's Authority (vv5-8)

Jesus also has God's authority.

If there was any doubt that Peter got it wrong, it's that he was cut-off by God himself.

He's in the middle of what he's saying and God himself interrupts him with a cloud blowing in.

Tongariro Crossing is one of the most famous tramping tracks in New Zealand.

It takes you up and over the crater of an active volcano.

When we were right at the top, looking out at the other volcanos nearby when clouds started to roll in.

In the space of 30 seconds, it went from a beautiful sunny day to being surrounded by cloud and rain so that you couldn't see past the end of your arm.

It was scary to be on the top of this mountain, exposed.

That's nothing on the experience of Jesus' posse.

They saw this bright cloud rolling in – God's shekinah glory.

Can you imagine what it would've been like to see that bright cloud?

A cloud is how the Lord got around in the OT, not because he needed it to carry him around, but to keep him hidden.

And then a voice speaks from the cloud.

How do you think they felt?

There are only three times in the gospels that God the Father speaks directly and this's one of them.

We're not told explicitly that this was God, but it seem obvious.

Matthew 17:5 (NIV11) ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

These are the exact same words that were said at Jesus' baptism.

They're words of approval.

They're a combination of words from Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42.

This brings together God's Son from Psalm 2 and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42.

Peter himself interprets these events for us.

He says that this was God giving Jesus honour and glory.

2 Peter 1:17 (NIV11) ¹⁷ He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

God loves his son.

That's important to remember, especially when he's rejected as he goes towards the cross.

If you think trials in your life means that God doesn't love you, then you need to remember this.

When you're feeling really weighed down, it's Biblical and wise to ask yourself whether it's because there's unrepentant sin in your life.

Could God be disciplining you because you're straying far from him?

In the Bible, for instance, we see that the Corinthians were suffering because of how they were behaving at the Lord's Supper.

However – and it's the really important 'however' that I want us to see from the passage this morning, suffering isn't always directly related to our sin.

Sometimes it can even feel like God is distant or perhaps not even there.

I imagine that's how Jesus felt as he went to the cross and was held there by sin that wasn't his.

This is the same Jesus that God says that he loves.

More than just recognising who Jesus is, this voice tells them to listen to him.

Jesus is the great prophet who comes in the line of Moses, Deuteronomy 18:15:

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV11) ¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

They needed to listen to Moses, how much more Jesus.

Do you listen to Jesus?

I'm not just wondering if you hear what he's got to say.

Sometimes, when I ask my kids to do something, I get a reply but then they don't do it.

Listening means doing.

Jesus has the authority to speak on behalf of God.

Jesus is God's approved representative to inform the world.

We give him glory when we do what he says.

According to Peter's speech in Acts 3, this means we need to repent because Jesus will judge us for all he's done.

There will be a day that the prophet comes back to do the judging.

The disciples have the same experience that the Israelites did in Deuteronomy 18.

In verse sixteen, people fell down when they heard the voice of Yahweh.

When the disciples hear God speak, they fall to the ground too.

They were terrorised.

That's a perfectly reasonable response when you hear the voice of our holy God.

Who can blame them for being terrified?

They made sure they were being respectful.

Yet Jesus goes to them and does something quite unusual: he touches them, verse seven.

They've had a real experience of Jesus – seeing, hearing and now touching.

Jesus reassures them and tells them to get up.

Tells them that they don't need to be afraid.

And they saw that it was only Jesus.

The Greek emphasises that it was just him left.

Where did Moses and Elijah go? We don't know.

He's there by himself, back to normal, but the disciples were forever changed for having seen that Jesus has God's authority.

He's the focal point of what's going on here: he's the one who has authority.

Jesus Has God's Plan (9-13)

Finally, Jesus has God's plan.

They went back down the mountain and normal life continued.

Jesus' revelation of his glory was only temporary.

They got a view into the future, but it wasn't part of God's plan for it to happen immediately.

Jesus told them not to speak about it, verse 9:

Matthew 17:9 (NIV11) ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

As the disciples reflected on what they'd experienced, they were a little puzzled and confused.

They'd seen and experienced Jesus' glory.

Yet the Scribes taught that Elijah would come back before Messiah came in glory.

Elijah had been and gone all too briefly and it didn't add up.

Matthew 17:10 (NIV11) ¹⁰ The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

The Scribes were right because that's what Malachi 4 says.

But you wonder if the disciples forgot about what Jesus said back in chapter 11?

Elijah has come in the person of John the Baptist.

Like Elijah, it was his job to call Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of Messiah.

The thing is that all of the leaders of Israel rejected John.

They didn't recognise him when he was right in front of their faces.

And so they didn't treat him very well.

Actually, Herod put him to death.

They're going to do the same thing with Jesus.

They don't recognise Jesus as Messiah either.

Both John and Jesus had to suffer at the hands of others because that's the path to glory.

Finally, the disciples seem to get it in verse thirteen.

Yet Jesus didn't want to be stopped.

He tells them not to speak about this, verse 9.

They understood that Jesus has God's plan.

Conclusion

It can sometimes feel like we're following the underdog.

Douglas won his fight against Mike Tyson in a great upset.

Tyson was humbled and the world will one day be humbled when Jesus comes back.

"Where is Jesus?" people often wonder.

He rose from the dead and then he ascended into heaven.

"When is he going to return in his glory?"

"When will his kingdom come?"

We're not the only ones who are waiting.

People were asking the same question of Peter long ago.

What's interesting is that Peter didn't reassure the churches by pointing them to the cross and resurrection.

In 2 Peter 1, he reminds them of the transfiguration.

This glimpse of Jesus' glory would give them certainty that Jesus is coming back.

And it should do the same for us as we wait for him to return.

¹ Deuteronomy 19:15

² 2 Peter 2:9

³ The Ancient of Days is white in Daniel 7:9

⁴ It would be unusual for Jesus and his disciples to be in the north of the country at the beginning of that week, rather than in Jerusalem.

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Big Idea: Jesus is the king whose kingdom will come in glory.

Big Question: Why did Jesus give a glimpse of his glory?

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that Jesus was transfigured (v2)?
2. What's significant about Moses and Elijah being there with Jesus?
3. What was wrong with Peter's desire to make tabernacles?
4. Why did the voice speak from the cloud?
5. Is the cross a sign that Jesus' Father doesn't love him?
6. What does the voice mean when it says, "Listen to him?"
7. What lasting impact did this event have on Peter?
8. Why were the disciples confused about the timing of the Son of Man's coming?