



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 17

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Introduction



Chapter Main Points:

- The significance of the transfiguration
- The reason for the failure of a miracle



An Overview

- The Son of God transfigured (verses 1-8)
- Identifying Elijah (verses 9-13)
- Healing of a boy possessed by a demon (verses 14-21)
- The second prediction of the Passion (verses 22-23)
- Jesus pays the Temple tax (verses 24-27)

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- And after six days - That is, six days from the conversation recorded in the last chapter
- St. Luke 9:28 says, about an eight days after
- St. Matthew mentions the six days that intervened between the day of the conversation and the transfiguration
- St. Luke includes both those days, and thus calculating eight
- Besides, St. Luke does not pretend to fix the precise time
- He says, "about an eight days after."
- These three disciples were with Him, also, in the garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14:33

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- He designed to prepare them in an eminent degree for the work of the gospel ministry by the previous manifestations of His glory, and of His patience in suffering
- The mountain is generally believed to be Thabor
- Thabor is situated about 12 miles from the sea of Galilee, and eight from Nazareth
- Others, however, do not think the transfiguration took place on Mount Thabor
- They believe it is Mt. Hermon

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- It was a high mountain, ten thousand feet high
- Mt. Tabor has been celebrated as the site of the Transfiguration since the 4th century AD
- The disciples and Apostles must have been frightened and discouraged after Jesus' prediction of His death
- To give them a vision to grasp in their darkest hour when the prediction of His death is fulfilled, Jesus took these three Apostles to let them witness a manifestation of His glory that confirms He is the Son of God and that He will come in glory when all has been fulfilled

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- The word "transfigure" means to change the appearance or form
- Not the substance of His body was changed, nor even the shape of it altered, only it received a more glorious form
- A divine glory which from His deity showed itself in a visible manner through His flesh
- That fullness of the Godhead, which dwelt bodily in Christ, now shone forth through the human nature, and manifested to His disciples that Divinity which Peter had before confessed, Matthew 16:16

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- His face did shine as the sun, Thus John describes the glorified Savior when he beheld him on Patmos: His face as the sun when he shineth in his strength (Rev 1:16)
- He did not put off His clothes, nor were the nature and substance, and fashion of them changed; but such rays of glory darted through His flesh, and through His clothes, as made them as bright and shining, as the light of the sun at noon day
- St. Mark says, they became "exceeding white as snow"

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- In St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration, he tells us that Moses and Elijah also appeared in glory and discussed with Jesus the coming hour of His "exodus," meaning His departure, "from Jerusalem" (Lk 9:30-31)
- In this brief interview between the greatest worthies of the old dispensation and the Founder of the new dispensation their conversation would be confined to the most important theme of earth and heaven. That was the Savior's death

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- In the epiphany on the Mount of Transfiguration, the three Apostles witnessed the coming together of the Old and New Covenants with Christ as the beginning and the end of divine revelation
- The Old Covenant Church was represented by Moses and Elijah who embodied the law and the prophets of the old Israel, and the New Covenant was represented by Peter, James, and John who embodied the new Israel, the Church of the people of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- The Jews had accused Christ of blasphemy, and of breaking the sabbath; the presence of Moses and Elias disapproved the lies; for the founder of the Jewish laws would never have sanctioned Him who was a transgressor of those laws; and Elias, so full of zeal for the glory of God, would never have paid homage to one who made Himself equal to God, had he not really been the Son of the Most High. (St. Chrysostom, hom. lvii.)
- Elijah came from heaven in the same body which he had upon earth, for he was translated, and did not see death, 2 Kings 2:11
- Contrary to our belief, some biblical scholars believe that the body of Moses was probably raised again, as a pledge of the resurrection.

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- And as Christ is to come to judge the lively and the dead, for we shall not all die, but all shall be changed, 1 Corinthians 15:51, He probably gave the full representation of this in the person of Moses, who died, and in the person of Elijah, who never tasted death
- St. Luke adds, "*not knowing what he said*"; and St. Mark, "*for he did not know what to say*": under the awe and dread of such majesty, St. Peter did not know what to say
- He was ignorant of the purpose and of the design of this appearance; which was, not that this glory should continue

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- Besides, he was wrong in putting these two men upon an equal foot with Christ
- Each of them have a separate tabernacle as He; and he appeared to be quite out of the way, in proposing earthly tabernacles for glorified persons to dwell in, who had a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens
- Moreover, as to the mystical sense, Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, were not to be considered as in distinct apartments, and separate from Christ, but as agreeing with Him, and fulfilled and swallowed up in Him; who only, according to the voice that followed, was to be heard and attended to, and not they, as distinct from Him

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- A cloud is a frequent vehicle for God's presence in Scripture (Ex 16:10; 19:9; 24:15-16; 33:9 and 2 Mac 2:8)
- By the disciples such a luminous cloud would be instantly accepted as a symbol of Divine presence
- The Divine Voice is the same voice heard at Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:17)
- The pronouncement of the Divine Voice, *this is my beloved Son*, is confirmation of St. Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God and the words *listen to Him* are a rebuke of Peter's refusal to listen to Jesus' announcement of His coming Passion
- Such a confirmation of the great confession of St. Peter was never to be forgotten

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- Almost a generation later, when he wrote his second epistle, the remembrance of this night was as vivid as ever: For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory (2 Pet 1:17)
- It is not only a rebuke of St. Peter but also a confirmation that Jesus is the prophet like Moses that God promised the people in Deuteronomy 18:15-19
- That prophecy ends with a promise and a command, (Deut 18:18-19)
- They were fearful at the presence of God, and fell on their face in solemn adoration on the ground, and their fears were removed only by the voice of their beloved Master

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- So the Lord never speaks to His disciples in danger or fear (Mt 14:27;28:10; Mk 5:36;6:50; Lk 12:4; Jn 6:20; Acts 18:9)
- When they rose from their prostration the glorious vision was gone
- The sole design of this transfiguration was to convince them that He was the Christ; that He was greater than the greatest of the prophets; that He was the Son of God
- While He was with them it was unnecessary that they should relate what they had seen

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- When He was crucified they would need this evidence that He was the Christ
- Then they were to use it
- There were three witnesses of it as many as the law required Deuteronomy 17:6; Hebrews 10:28, and the proof that He was the Messiah was clear

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- Besides, if they had told it then, it would have provoked the Jews and endangered His life
- His time was not yet come
- Expose not an event so wonderful to the rash criticism of the envious Pharisees, who falsely spoke of Christ and misrepresent the most evident miracles
- Jesus Christ also gave a lesson here to His followers to observe the closest secrecy in all spiritual graces and favors

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- As the disciples saw that Elijah returned to heaven, knowing the tradition of the elders, and the prophecy on which the tradition was founded, Malachi 4:5-6, it was natural enough for them to inquire what the meaning of the tradition, and the intention of the prophecy, were
- John the Baptist who was Elijah in spirit, is already come
- The Baptist was the forerunner of Christ at His first coming
- the Jewish rulers have not acknowledged him, did not receive him as the forerunner of the Messiah

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- Elijah the prophet will be the forerunner of the second coming of Christ
- Malachi, predicting this coming of Christ, says in Malachi 4:5: *I will send to you Elijah the prophet*; thus evidently distinguishing him from the Baptist, who was also Elijah in spirit
- Jesus Christ here confirms the literal sense of the prophecy; (Malachi 4:5-6)

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount (17:1-13)



- Jesus in a most beautiful manner takes advantage of this conversation, to remind them of His future passion, and from the recollection of the sufferings of John, affords them comfort in his own (St. Chrysostom)
- When He spoke of the sufferings of this prophetic Elijah, and also of His own, which had been the subject of the conversation on the mount, during the transfiguration, they clearly apprehended that He spoke of John the Baptist



A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)

- *And when he was come.* St. Peter, by wishing to remain on the holy mount, preferred his own gratification to the good of many
- But true charity seeks not its own advantage only; what therefore appeared good to St. Peter, did not appear so to Christ, who descends from the mountain, as from His high throne in heaven, to visit man (Origen)

A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)



- This man addressed Him with great marks of honor and respect, not only by gesture, but by words; he craves mercy, pity, and compassion
- The symptoms are those of epilepsy, in this case caused by demoniac possession
- The son was a child (Lk 9:38)
- He was dumb as well as epileptic (Mk 9:18)

A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)



- We must not imagine that our Savior, who was meek, uttered on this occasion words of anger and intemperance
- Like a tender physician, observing his patient totally disregarding his prescriptions, He says, How long shall I visit you; how long shall I order one thing, and you do the contrary? Thus Jesus is not angry with the man, but with the vices of the man; and in him he upbraids the Jews, in general, for their incredulity and perversity (St. Jerome)

A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)



- The general sentiment is, that these reproaches are limited to the people; some extend them to the apostles
- The word "rebuke" has the combined force of reproof and commanding
- He reproofed him for having afflicted the child, and he commanded him to come out of him

A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)



- The disciples come secretly to Jesus Christ to learn why they could not cast out devils
- He answered them, that it was their lack of faith, which probably failed them on this occasion
- The mustard-seed is brought in with an allusion to its hot and active qualities
- That is, a perfect faith; which, in its properties and its fruits, resembles the grain of mustard-seed in the parable



A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)

- By faith is here understood, not that virtue by which we assent to all things that are to be believed of Christ, the first, of the theological virtues, in which the apostles were not deficient, but that confidence in the power and goodness of God, that He will on such an occasion exert and put forth these, His attributes, in favor of the supplicant
- To have a true faith of this kind, and free from all presumption, is a great and high privilege
- Faith can begin small and if nourished by the grace of God can grow to become powerful enough to "move a mountain."



A Boy Is Healed (17:4-21)

- The point is “moving a mountain” is an act of God and great faith can be rewarded by God in making mighty acts on behalf of the believer
- In order to work miracles of this kind to cast out devils faith of the highest kind is necessary
- That faith is produced and kept vigorous only by much prayer, and by fasting
- Not only demons, but envy, pride, greed, materialism, a revengeful spirit, that must be also cast out by prayer and fasting

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (17:22-23)



- Jesus then taking the road to Jerusalem with his disciples, and while they were in Galilee, which they had to pass through, He gives the second prophecy of His Passion, His sufferings, death, and resurrection
- This time the disciples understand and are "overwhelmed with grief."
- They full well understood that He would be put to death, but did not sufficiently comprehend the shortness of His rest in the grave, the nature of His triumphant resurrection, nor the immeasurable benefits which His death would bring on the world
- Christ perfectly knew all things that should befall him, yet undertook the work of our redemption, which strongly shows His love

St. Peter and His Master Pay Their Taxes (17:24-27)



- They had now returned from the journey north
- A tax, according to some, laid on every person who was twenty years of age, for the service of the temple
- Others think it was a tribute paid to the Romans, as Christ, in verse 24, seems to hint, by mentioning the kings of the earth; and the Jews were tributary to them at this time
- Peter, as usual, answered before he reflected, and then came to Jesus with the matter
- Peter came into the house to speak about it, but Christ knew his thoughts and spoke first
- Christ was not subject to tax



St. Peter and His Master Pay Their Taxes (17:24-27)

- Jesus Christ pays the tribute, not as one subject to the law, but as consulting the infirmity of the people
- “Lest they should think that we despise the temple and its service, and thus provoke needless opposition; though we are not under obligation to pay it, yet it is best to pay it to them”
- St. Peter was a fisherman
- A miracle
- The Lord by His power would draw the fish that had sought to swallow the coin to Peter's hook

Conclusion



- Where did Jesus go and who did He take with him?
- Why do you think He took only these disciples?
- Who appeared when Jesus was transfigured?
- What might they represent?
- Describe the transfigured Jesus. How does this image of Jesus contrast with the Jesus whom the disciples knew? What does this transfiguration teach about who Jesus is?



Conclusion

- When were the disciples to tell others what they had seen? Why?
- Who was at the foot of the mountain? Why had a crowd gathered? How did one man approach Jesus? What was his problem? How had the disciples at the foot of the mountain compounded the problem?
- What do you think was hindering the disciples' faith?
- What did the disciples think when they saw Jesus cast out the demon? What did they ask Jesus? What did He teach them about their real problem? What can we learn about the power of faith?