LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Matthew 17 (Part 1) :1-9

The Transfiguration

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Matthew 17, if you're there, I'm going to read through the first few verses. You can follow along as I read, and it says, verse 1, After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. I heard someone say, by the way, one of my commentators suggested the reason Jesus took Peter, James, and John is because they needed close supervision. It's like, I'm going to go up to the mountain, so I'll see, oh, wait a minute, you, you, you, come with me, you know, sort of. I don't believe it, but I thought it was kind of cute, nonetheless, anyway.

It says, verse 2, There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. 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.

And while he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, this is my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified, but Jesus came and touched them. Get up, he said, don't be afraid.

When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 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. I'm going to have you stop right there, although I'm sure you want to read on. Let's pray. Open our hearts, Jesus.

We look to you as the teacher, the instructor of all good things. Let your Holy Spirit minister to our hearts, we pray. Jesus' name, amen. When we're reading the Bible, one of the things that we have to remember is that chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original writings. People wonder when those came about.

The Old Testament was divided into chapters and verses were added in the 15th century, and in the New Testament, it happened in the 16th century. And so they haven't really been around all that long. What that means is when Matthew was writing his account and he came to the end of chapter, chapter 16, it was just a continuous flow of thought. And we struggle sometimes to weave the Word of God together into an understandable form because we think of chapter divisions as the start of a new thought process and so forth. I mean, we kind of assume that it's kind of like a novel, you know.

You start a new chapter, you start a new thought. But there's no break in Matthew's original writings. And last week I told you I was going to take the last verse of chapter 16 and connect it here with chapter 17. So go ahead and read with me. Look at the very last verse of chapter 16 and it says this, I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

And as we began our passage today, we find that it says, after six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and so on and so on and so on and so on. And that is exactly what Jesus is doing. He is making good on his promise that they would see his glory, that they would see him in the fullness of his glorious kingdom presence. And that's what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was just, in fact, that's why Matthew took time to say to you, six days later, this happened.

That's why he said six days, okay? There's no reason to give you the time between what happened, his statement, and the transfiguration except if he's connecting them. That's the only reason to give you a time frame. So what he basically does in the end of chapter 16 is he says, here's a promise Jesus made. Six days later, he fulfilled it.

He took these three guys up onto the Mount and there, it says, he was transfigured before them. And this was kind of a foretaste for the disciples of what was to come. To see Christ apart from the veil of his human flesh. I speak of it as a veil because, in a sense, his glory had to be veiled, you know? He had to empty himself of his glory.

But it says that he was transformed or, as Matthew says, transfigured. Interesting word. Use that word in your own vocabulary very often. But the Greek is a verb which means to transform. It literally is where we get our English word, metamorphosis, speaks of that very thing that takes place, you know, when we watch a caterpillar turn into a butterfly.

And it doesn't just speak of an outside change. It denotes the idea of a full, complete change inside and out. So this was more than just the disciples seeing Jesus' clothes get really bright and seeing his face shine like the sun. It was way more than that. They were witnessing the glory of Jesus.

The eternal Son of God. And I'm struggling to put it into human words. You can probably tell. But it's more than just, ooh, your clothes are really bright. Turn them down, sort of a thing.

They are seeing him. They are seeing him. They are seeing the glory that Jesus set aside to become a human being. They are recognizing that eternal glory as they look at Jesus. And we know this, actually, because Peter lived long enough to write about it.

Second Peter, chapter one, it goes like this. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. I probably could have underlined that for you, but that's powerful right there. We were eyewitnesses, he says.

He didn't say we were eyewitnesses of some really, really bright clothing. No, they saw what the transfiguration produced in him. That majestic glory of who he really is. He says we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. What happened on the mount?

It says for he received honor and glory, honor 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'm well pleased. And Peter even says, he says, listen, we ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. So this is what the idea of transfigured means. Again, it goes a long way beyond just being bright, transformed on the inside, on the outside, and so on and so on. Now this is obviously a huge event.

This is a big deal, guys. This isn't something you and I should just read in our Bible and go, oh wow, that's cool. Kind of like we just saw a really neat light show or fireworks display. No, no, no, this is pregnant with meaning and insight and so forth in understanding what God is trying to say at this juncture in the public ministry of Jesus Christ and what he is saying also to the disciples specifically who, by the way, were kind of getting it but kind of not. Probably best personified by Peter who in the last chapter said, you are the Christ and then a few days later rebuked him.

And so forth. So you see, that's kind of the life of the disciples. It would look like a light was coming on from time to time and then it would dim. You know. And so forth.

And so we have to wonder, you know, why did the Lord go to all this trouble and why, why these two men, why did Moses and Elijah appear in the transfiguration, you know? Well, the why of doing all this seems to be, as we've kind of mentioned, to give these men a glimpse of Jesus as he is, the majestic King of all kings. And I really believe that that was an important thing. Again, they were starting to get it. They were starting, starting to understand.

But they needed a demonstration that was going to really impact. packed them and the transfiguration became a powerful thing, which as we see here in that passage from Peter, he wrote about many years later, it obviously had a huge impact on them. I was reading a quote by Harry Ironside, lovely departed brother in the Lord who wrote the following quote, the glory of Christ's eternal sonship shone through the veil of his flesh so that the disciples might have visual proof of his true character as Emmanuel, which means God with us, God and man in one person. That's one of the reasons why God did this, so that they would have a visual proof, this is the one, this is the one, and I'm gonna let you see his glory. And so this was a needed revelation, but as to the other question, why Moses and Elijah?

Why those two particular men? You know, why didn't David appear? Why not Abraham? Why not Noah for that matter? You know?

Well, the reason is is because what these men, Moses and Elijah, represented to the Jewish people. Think about it, Moses, think about Moses. Who is Moses? Moses is the lawgiver. Moses is the one who presented to the Jewish people the law, in fact, they so connected Moses to the law, they called it the law of Moses.

They referred to the Torah as the law of Moses. Technically, it's the law of God. But it was such a connection to the people, it was the law of Moses. So he was the embodiment of what it meant to be given the law, that presentation of the law, you know, from the people. It was constantly and forever connected in their mind.

Now Elijah, on the other hand, was a prophet of prophets. And he was that one who was revered as perhaps the greatest of all prophets in that he never experienced death. He was simply caught up to be with the Lord. So together, they represent, these two men represent what the Jews, the terms the Jews referred to the Bible or the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures by, the law and the prophets. When they would talk, they wouldn't say the Bible.

You and I say, what does it say in the Bible? The Jews would say, what does it say in the law and the prophets? That's what they called it, the law and the prophets. And here, standing on the Mount of

Transfiguration are the human embodiment of the law and the prophets. Now, that is significant, and it must have been a powerful vision.

It must have been awesome to behold for these men, these Jewish men, these three men who had been raised, no doubt, hearing stories about these men from as early as when they could hear stories. You know, Moses, story of Moses, and Elijah, the prophet, you know, who was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. And all the glorious stories of the things that took place in those men's lives. Moses, you know, had died upon a mountaintop some 1,500 years before this event took place. Elijah had been captured, taken up into heaven some 850 years before this event took place.

And now, here they were. They're standing right there. Isn't it interesting, too, that the guys just knew it was Moses and Elijah? It's not like Jesus goes, guys, just wanted to introduce you here, couple of friends of mine. Peter, James, John, this is Moses.

Moses, Peter, James, John. And guys, this is also Elijah. Can you imagine? They didn't need an introduction. And not that they'd ever seen him.

There wasn't any pictures back then. No photographs. But as they stood there in the presence of these men, I believe they just knew. They knew who they were talking to. They knew who they, well, they didn't actually talk to, but they knew who they were seeing.

Here they are, the embodiment of the law and the prophets. Now, it is no mistake at all that these men who represent the law and the prophets are standing there at this time. Let's see what God has to say about that. Verse three, just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Oh, and by the way, Luke actually gives us an insight into what they were saying.

Check this out. From Luke chapter nine, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, meaning his death, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. I find that interesting. Here's Moses and Elijah perfectly aware of current events.

Perfectly aware, discussing it with Jesus. They're talking about his departure. They're talking about his upcoming sacrificial death on the cross. They're discussing it. So, coming up, huh?

You know, I don't know what they said. What do you do? What do you say? You know, like, well, the big event. But they're talking about this.

They're aware of it. And then, of course, Peter, who should have held his tongue, spoke up, verse four. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you'd like, I'll build a house around you guys. Actually, it's just a shelter.

One for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah, so forth. You know, I put up a little canopy thing. You know, you guys are probably, don't wanna be out here in the sun. Luke actually tells us, the only reason Peter said that is he didn't know what to say. And every one of us is reminded of something our mothers told us.

We don't know what to say. Don't say anything, right? But, you know, anyway. That's not Peter. That's just not him.

But then this is the important part. Verse five. While he was still speaking, so God interrupted Peter, did you get that? Peter starts blabbering, oh, Jesus, it's really good for me to be here. And God just kind of, whoa, just kind of butts in there and says, all right, here's what's going on.

While he was speaking, a bright cloud enveloped him, and a voice from the cloud said, this is my son whom I love with him I am well pleased. And I want you to pay very close attention to these next three words. Listen to him. I don't know if you got that or not, but here, this is why Moses and Elijah. The embodiment of the law and the prophets.

These men had been raised on the law and the prophets all their lives, and it was the end all, say all. And not that Jesus in any way takes anything away from the word of God. But you see, the disciples kept stumbling over traditional Jewish interpretation of things like the coming of Messiah. Like everybody else, they were confused by the language that Jesus used about his mission, about dying. Dying, are you kidding?

Dying? That's why Peter rebuked Jesus. What are you talking about, dying? Listen, I know the prophecies. The Messiah doesn't die.

He conquers. He's a hero. You don't need death, you know? That's why he rebuked Jesus. You see, they weren't getting it, guys.

There was so much Jewish interpretive kind of programming to the law and the prophets that had gone into them. And traditionally, the Jews, as you well know, seemed to kind of gloss over anything that the Old Testament said about the suffering servant, the suffering Messiah. They saw him only as the deliverer.

And Jesus is telling them now, listen, guys, I want you to know that I'm going to Jerusalem, and there I will be rejected. And I will be delivered over to the Gentiles.

And I will be put to death. Doesn't compute, doesn't compute. Because you see, the law and the prophets say, you see? You see? So now, what does he do?

He's up on the mountain. The law and the prophets are here. They are in the embodiment of these two men. And God the Father speaks to them from the cloud. And he says, listen, this is my son.

I love him. I'm pleased with him. Listen to him. Listen to him. The focus now is on Jesus.

You know, when the writer of the book of Hebrews started his amazing letter, he started off with these words from Hebrews chapter one. In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but listen, in these last days, who is the spokesman? It is the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. He is the creator God. Listen to him.

Listen to him. He's now the spokesman. Listen to him. Jesus came to give insight and understanding to what had been given in the Old Testament. He came to give us depth of understanding.

Guys, when we went through Matthew chapter five, I know it was a long time ago, we've been going really slow, but we went through the Beatitudes. You remember the Beatitudes? Do you remember when Jesus was clarifying things for them? You've heard that it was said, and he made reference to the law and the prophets, but I say to you, and God the Father's right there saying, yeah, listen to him. You've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, just look at a woman with lust, and you've already done it.

God says, yes, listen to him. You see, the interpretive process of the Jews was a very legalistic, short-sighted, fairly narrowed understanding of what the Word had to say. Jesus came and enlarged. Jesus came and gave insight, clarity, dimension, and dynamic to the Word of God, and to the understanding of the application of the Word. And God says, listen to him.

This is my son. He's my spokesman. Listen to him in a way that you've never listened before. And that's why the transfiguration happened. That's why this was given.

God wanted to make it just abundantly clear to the disciples and so forth, that even in the awesome presence of Moses and Elijah, Jesus is the one to listen to now. In fact, the law and the prophets are what actually point us to Jesus. He's the goal of the law and the prophets. He's the goal. You think, well, why did God give us all that stuff?

He could have just jumped. Jesus is the goal. Let me show you a couple of passages. First of all, let's talk about the law. Galatians 3.24.

Why did God give us the law? The law was put in charge to lead us. To lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Why did God give us the law? To lead us to Christ.

That's why he gave it to us. You think he gave us the law so that we could think we could keep it perfectly? No, that was the deception of the Jews. We can do this perfectly. We don't need a savior.

No. The law is perfect, but you're not. And you can't keep it perfectly. So what does it do? It leads us to Christ.

How? It gets us on our knees when we realize, you know, I can't do this. I just can't. Because we're told in the scripture that if you break the law in one area, you've broken it all. It's like, so you're a lawbreaker.

You ever done anything wrong? Then you're a lawbreaker. And you're condemned. So what does the law do? It leads us to Christ.

How about the prophets? Look at Acts chapter 10, verse 43. All the prophets testify who? About him. Right?

That everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. So you see two passages here. Galatians and Acts, it says, the law and the prophets point to Jesus. And I think the disciples might have at least partially gotten that message because it says, if you look with me in your text in verse six, it says that when the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. Must have been just very, very overwhelming.

Seeing Jesus change right before their eyes. Seeing Moses and Elijah standing there, talking to Jesus, hearing the voice of the Father, you know, and so forth. But that's the power of this thing we call the transfiguration or the metamorphosis, the change. But here's where it gets personal, okay? And this is what we're gonna end on.

This transformation, this transfiguration, this metamorphosis. You might be interested to find out that the very same Greek word that describes what happened on that mountaintop that day is used in the Bible to describe what happens to you and I when we come in contact with the living God. Same word. Exact same word in the Greek, and it's actually used by the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transfigured.

It's the same thing. Transformed. Be a metamorphosis by the hand of God. How? By the renewing of your mind.

Wow. Same thing. And by the way, it's not just on the outside, just like we said with Jesus. It's from the inside. It's the whole person.

You know, one of the exciting things about being a believer, a Christian, is that we can really change. I remember when I was doing Bible studies back up in Washington when I had people over in my little apartment and invited them over just to study the word of God, I was really kind of captivated by this whole idea and I just made a little sign, I did handwriting, put it up on the wall, just taped it up on the wall so people would see it when they came in and it was a little sign that said this. Jesus changes people. Because it was the message of the word and what happens when we truly open our hearts to his word and allow the Holy Spirit to take that word and change us from the inside, it's God's metamorphosis of the believer. And it's a wonderful, beautiful thing.

But I know what some of you are thinking right now. You're thinking basically, well, if I've truly been transformed, if I've truly been changed, why am I still struggling with my flesh? Why do I still have such a hard time with certain things in my life? Well, if you read the New Testament letters by Paul, James, the writer to the Hebrews and so forth, do you see them saying to the believers they're writing to, so now that you've been transformed, probably nothing much going on, huh? I mean, we're just kind of all sitting around just oozing righteousness and purity to anybody we come in contact with.

So just chill and Jesus will be here soon signing off, Apostle Paul. It's really not how the letters go, is it? No, there was this constant battle that Paul talked about that was raging. He said it was even raging in his own life. He said, you know, now there's this thing going on in me where I wanna do what's right.

I really do. But I find this law within me that just seems to make me go the other direction. And when Paul's writing to the church, he's constantly exhorting them, telling them, you know, that they need to resist the flesh, you know? It's a battle. Okay, so there's two things that I need to bring out about this whole metamorphosis thing that God promises to you and I, which we already see that God promised because we saw it in Romans chapter 12, that this is truly a transformation that takes place in our lives.

But there are things about that transformation, just two points that we wanna make. First of all, we wanna make the point that it's a gradual work. And secondly, that it's a daily decision by faith to walk it out. Let me show you the first one. It is a gradual work, all right?

First, 2 Corinthians chapter three, verse 18. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being, being, being, that's present tense, transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. We are being. So you see, guys, this is a process. It's a process of transformation.

You know, when that caterpillar, you know, crawls into the cocoon, it doesn't just happen overnight, does it? There's a process that takes place over time. Same thing with you and I. The problem. as things never quite happen as quickly as we would like them to, but we need to trust that God's process is going on in our lives, you know?

We are being changed with ever-increasing glory. It is a work that is being done in our lives. Trust that the Lord is doing his work. But there's a second thing, and this is the part where it kinda comes on your side of the equation. On the one hand, we know that God is doing this work gradually.

On the second part, it is truly a daily decision. Look at Ephesians 4, and this is just one example of what Paul has to say throughout many of his letters. He says, you're taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self. See, that suggests something you need to do. He says, put it off.

Put off your old self. That's just a corruptible, stinky old self. Put it off. It's being corrupted by all the deceitful desires that are swirling around in this world. He says, rather, you are to be made new or transformed in the attitude of your minds, and then to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Do you get those ideas of put off and put on? See, that's the part where you and I choose on a daily basis to walk it out. There's a transformation that's taking place in our lives. It's a gradual thing. The power to transform is ongoing, of course, but we have to walk it out.

And the enemy would love to do one very deceitful thing in your life, and that is get you to believe there's no way certain things are ever gonna change in your life. He'd love to do that, you see, because if he can convince you that you're really not going to change, then you're going to stop putting off and putting on, because you're not gonna think that there's, see, that's an act of faith. To put off the old man, to put on the new man, that's an act of faith. And if Satan can come and convince you it's really no use, you're stuck, then you're gonna stop trying, stop walking it out on a daily basis. That's why Paul said in his letter to the Romans, reckon yourselves dead to sin.

That means believe it in your heart. And walk it out. Reckon yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Believe it, because it's a metamorphosis that is really truly going on inside of you through the power of the Holy Spirit. And it becomes a reality in our lives as we walk it out by faith, by faith.

This life of transformation that we are experiencing here on earth, it's not automatic, it's by faith. And should that surprise you? The Bible says the righteous shall live by faith. And all that God does in our lives is from faith to faith. So it's a thing that you and I need to lay hold of in the promise of God's word and say, you know what?

He promised me that I'm going to change, that I'm going to literally be like that caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It's not a butterfly though, it's the image of Christ is what I'm being transformed into. And he promised it. And so I'm gonna lay hold of it. I'm gonna understand that it is a gradual thing and that part maybe kind of disappoints me a little bit, but I understand that if God were to just transform me all at one time, it probably would have killed the caterpillar, you know?

So I'm gonna be patient and let God do his work. But by the same token, I'm not going to become discouraged and give up. I will not be convinced by the enemy that this isn't happening in my life. I'm gonna continue to believe God that I can change, that he is changing me. That he is transforming me into the image of his son.

Day by day, as I choose to put off the old man, I don't want that anymore. Choose to put on the new man. That's what I want. I want you, Jesus. I want to be changed.

I want to be more like you. That it will happen.