

MATTHEW 17

The Transfiguration

1 Six days later¹ Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother² and led them up on a high mountain (ὄρος) by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured (μεταμορφόω, aor. pass.)³ before them, his face shined as the sun, and his garments became white as the light.⁴ 3 And look, Moses⁵ and Elijah⁶ appeared to them, talking with him.⁷ 4 Peter said to Jesus:

Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you desire, I will make three tabernacles (σκηνή)⁸ here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and look, a voice out of the cloud said:

¹ This is the most specific Matthew has been regarding chronology.

² Why were only three of the disciples allowed to see the transfiguration?

³ “[T]o change in a manner visible to others, *be transfigured* of Jesus, who took on the form of his heavenly glory” (BDAG, 639). **Ro 12:2** 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but keep being changed inwardly (μεταμορφόω, pres. pass.) by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the desire of God is. **2 Co 3:18** 18 We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being changed inwardly (μεταμορφόω, pres. pass.) into the same image from glory to glory. **1 Co 15:51-53** 51 We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed (ἀλλάσσω, fut. pass.), 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

⁴ Peter, James, and John are seeing Jesus as he will appear in the Messianic kingdom. **Mt 16:28** 28 Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here [Peter, James, and John] who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

⁵ Moses may represent believers who die before being resurrected and entering the Messianic kingdom.

⁶ Elijah may represent believers who are enter the Messianic kingdom without dying.

⁷ That Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah, two prophets, emphasizes that Jesus, too, is a prophet. It also emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. Despite what the Jewish leaders may believe, Moses and Elijah are on the side of Jesus.

⁸ “[T]hree huts (of temporary structures made from brush)” (BDAG, 928). Did Jesus’ transfiguration take place on on the Festival of Booths (σκηνοπηγία)? This was “a festival celebrated Tishri (roughly=October) 15–21, out of doors when poss., in booths made from tree branches” (BDAG, 928). The Festival of Booths prefigures the Messianic kingdom, so it would be very appropriate for the transfiguration to happen during this festival.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased (εὐδοκέω, aor.).⁹ Keep listening (ἀκούω, pres.) to him!¹⁰

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their face and were extremely afraid. 7 But Jesus approached and after touching (ἄπτω, aor.) them said:

Get up and do not fear (φοβέω, pres.).

8 So they lifted up their eyes and saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded (ἐντέλλω, aor.) them saying:

Tell no one about the vision (ὄραμα)¹¹ until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.¹²

John the Baptist Is Elijah

10 And the disciples [Peter, James, and John]¹³ asked him:

Why then do the scribes (οἱ γραμματεῖς) say that Elijah must come first?

11 And he answered and said:

Elijah indeed comes (ἔρχομαι, pres.) and will restore (ἀποκαθίστημι, fut.)¹⁴ all things.

12 But I say to you that Elijah already came, and they [the Jewish leaders, including the scribes] did not acknowledge (ἐπιγινώσκω, aor.)¹⁵ him but did to him whatever

⁹ “[T]o take pleasure or find satisfaction in someth., *be well pleased, take delight*” (BDAG, 404).

¹⁰ **Is 42:1** 1 Look, my Servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights (ἠγαπή). I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. **Mt 3:16-17** 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water. And look, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him. 17 And look, a voice out of the heavens said: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased (εὐδοκέω, aor.). **Mt 12:18** 18 Look, my Servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased (εὐδοκέω). I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. **2 Pe 1:16-17** 16 We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Messiah, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to him by the Majestic Glory: This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased (εὐδοκέω).

¹¹ **Ac 7:31** 31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight (ὄραμα). And as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord. **Ac 11:5** 5 I was in the city of Joppa praying. And in a trance I saw a vision (ὄραμα), an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky. **Ac 16:9** 9 A vision (ὄραμα) appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him.

¹² That Jesus reveals more to Peter, James, and John does not mean the other disciples are unbelievers. Similarly, that Jesus reveals more to the twelve disciples does not mean the crowds consist of unbelievers. Jesus reveals more to certain people at certain times. This is often the case in the Bible. There are various levels of understanding based on one’s capacity and teachability.

¹³ Probably Peter, James, and John are in view here.

¹⁴ “[T]o change to an earlier good state or condition, *restore, reestablish*” (BDAG, 111). **Ac 1:6** 6 So when [the apostles] had come together, they were asking [Jesus] saying: Lord, is it at this time you are restoring (ἀποκαθίστημι) the kingdom to Israel?

¹⁵ “[T]o indicate that one values the person of another, *acknowledge, give recognition to*” (BDAG, 369).

they desired. So also the Son of Man is about to (μέλλω, pres.) suffer (πάσχω, pres.) by them.

13 Then the disciples understood (συνίημι, aor.)¹⁶ that he spoke to them about John the Baptist.¹⁷

The Disciples' Little Faith

14 And after they came to the crowd (ὄχλος), a man approached him, kneeling down (γονυπετέω, pres.) to him and saying:

15 Lord, have mercy on my son, because he is an epileptic (pres.) and suffers (πάσχω, pres.)¹⁸ badly. For often he falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 And I brought (aor.) him to your disciples, but they were not able (δύναμαι, aor.) to heal him.

17 So Jesus answered and said:

O unbelieving (ἄπιστος) and misled (διαστρέφω, perf.)¹⁹ generation (γενεά),²⁰ how long will I be with you? How long will I put up with you? Bring him here to me.²¹

18 So Jesus rebuked (ἐπιτιμάω, aor.) him, the demon (δαμόνιον) came out of him, and the boy was healed from that hour.

¹⁶ One of the major themes of Matthew is the steadily increasing understanding of the disciples.

¹⁷ What happened to John is what will happen to Jesus.

¹⁸ Jesus suffers voluntarily (Mt 17:12) so that our suffering may end (Mt 17:15).

¹⁹ (1) [To cause to be distorted, *deform*.... (2) to cause to depart from an accepted standard of oral or spiritual values, *make crooked, pervert*; (3) to cause to be uncertain about a belief or to believe something different, *mislead*" (BDAG, 237). **Ac 13:10** 10 You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked (διαστρέφω, pres.) the straight ways of the Lord [Jesus]? **Ac 20:30** 30 From among your own selves men will arise, speaking distorted (διαστρέφω, perf. pass.) things to draw away the disciples after them. **Lk 23:2** 2 We found this man misleading (διαστρέφω, pres.) our nation, forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Messiah, a King. **Php 2:15** 15 ...So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and misled (διαστρέφω, perf. pass.) generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.

²⁰ (1) [T]hose exhibiting common characteristics or interests, *race, kind*.... (2) the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time and freq. defined in terms of specific characteristics, *generation, contemporaries*" (BDAG, 191). **Mt 1:17** 17 So all the generations (γενεά) from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations. **Mt 11:16** 16 To what will I compare this generation (γενεά)? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the others.... **Mt 12:39** 39 An evil and adulterous generation (γενεά) craves for a sign, but no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. **Mt 12:41** 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation (γενεά) at the judgment, and will condemn it.... **Mt 12:45** 45 Then [the unclean spirit] goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. So the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation (γενεά). **Mt 23:36** 36 Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (γενεά). **Mt 24:34** 34 Truly I say to you, this generation (γενεά) will not pass away until all these things take place.

²¹ It is faith in himself that Jesus requires: "Bring him here to me."

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said:

Why were we²² unable to drive it out (ἐκβάλλω, aor.)?

20 So he said to them:

Because of the littleness of your faith (ὀλιγοπιστία).²³ For truly I say to you, if (ἐάν) you have faith (πίστις) as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: Move (μεταβαίνω, aor.) from here to there, and it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you [pl].²⁴ [21 But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]²⁵

Second Death and Resurrection Prediction

22 And while they [Jesus and the disciples] were gathering together in Galilee,²⁶ Jesus said to them:

The Son of Man is about to be delivered over (παραδίδωμι, pres.) into the hands of men, ²³ and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.

So they [the disciples] were extremely sad.²⁷

²² It is Jesus' "me" versus the disciples' "we."

²³ In phase two, we can revert back to the unbelief of the world around us and become spiritually impotent.

²⁴ The object of one's faith, Jesus, is much more important than the amount of one's faith.

²⁵ "{A} Since there is no satisfactory reason why the passage, if originally present in Matthew, should have been omitted in a wide variety of witnesses, and since copyists frequently inserted material derived from another Gospel, it appears that most manuscripts have been assimilated to the parallel in Mk 9:29" (Bruce M. Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 35).

²⁶ Jesus and the disciples are journeying from Caesarea Philippi through Galilee towards Jerusalem. Jesus' death is approaching. The tension is building. The crisis is coming.

²⁷ It is important for Matthew's audience to understand that Jesus' death and resurrection was no accident. It was the key to God's plan of salvation. This is what Messiah Jesus had to do.

Jesus Pays the Two-Drachma Tax

24 When they came to Capernaum,²⁸ those who collect the two-drachma tax (τὰ δίδραχμα)²⁹ approached Peter³⁰ and said:

Your teacher (διδάσκαλος)³¹ pays the two-drachma tax, doesn't he?³²

25 He said:

Yes.

And after he came into the house, Jesus anticipated (προφθάνω, aor.)³³ him saying:

What do you suppose, Simon? From whom do the kings (βασιλεῖς) of the earth collect customs duties (τέλος)³⁴ or a poll-tax (κῆνσος)? From their sons (υἱῶν) or from foreigners (ἀλλοτρίων)?³⁵

26 After he said from foreigners, Jesus said to him:

²⁸ **Mt 4:13** 13 Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea.

²⁹ These were likely Matthew's work colleagues. As a former tax-collector, the episode Matthew describes here was likely a significant one in his life. "According to custom every Jew 20 years old and above was required to pay a temple tax of half a shekel or two drachmas each year to help support the temple (cf. Ex. 30:13–15; Neh. 10:32)." Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:61. **Ex 30:13-15** 13 This is what everyone who is numbered will give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to Yahweh. 14 Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, will give the contribution to Yahweh. 15 The rich will not pay more, and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to Yahweh to make atonement for yourselves. **Ne 10:32** 32 We...placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. This tax involved two days' wages. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 22:269.

³⁰ Peter was alone and had to think on his feet.

³¹ "[F]ormally ordained rabbis (which Jesus was not) were exempt from this tax. Would Jesus, despite his lack of formal training, claim the same privilege?" Blomberg, *NAC*, 22:270. **Mt 9:11** 11 When the Pharisees saw, they said to [Jesus'] disciples: Why is your teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners? **Mt 12:38** 38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to [Jesus]: Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

³² This is another test of Jesus' authority (Cf. Mt 9:11; 12:38).

³³ Jesus' omniscience is shown here.

³⁴ **Ro 13:7** 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

³⁵ Jesus' teaching method is to pose questions to his students. He wants them to think critically.

Then indeed the sons are free (ἐλεύθεροί).³⁶ 27 But in order that we may not offend (σκανδαλίζω, aor.)³⁷ them, go to the sea and throw in a fishhook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater (στατήρ).³⁸ Take and give that to them for you and me.³⁹

18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said:

Who then is greatest in the kingdom (βασιλεία)⁴⁰ of heaven?

³⁶ “[B]eing free from control or obligation, *independent, not bound*” (BDAG, 317). Because Jesus is king, he and his disciples (i.e., mighty men) are technically exempt from taxation. After all, he is the King of kings, the Creator God himself. The doctrine of sovereign immunity applies. In the parable, Jesus is the king, and the disciples are the free sons of the king. Nevertheless, Jesus will pay the tax. **Jn 8:36** 36 If the Son makes you free (ἐλεύθερος), you will be free indeed. **1 Co 9:19** 19 Though I [Paul] am free (ἐλεύθερος) from all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. **Ga 4:26** 26 The Jerusalem above is free (ἐλεύθερος). She is our mother. **Re 19:16** 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

³⁷ “[T]o shock through word or action, *give offense to, anger, shock*” (BDAG, 926). Regarding church-state relations, churches, ministries, and believers must choose their battles wisely. It takes wisdom to know when and when not to offend. We must not unnecessarily offend, but sometimes offense is necessary. **Mt 15:12** 12 The disciples came and said to [Jesus]: Do you know that the Pharisees were offended (σκανδαλίζω, aor.) when they heard this statement? **1 Pe 2:13-17** 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the desire of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

³⁸ “[T]he stater, a silver coin = four drachmas (c. four days’ wages)” (BDAG, 940). Jesus’ omnipotence is shown here. He truly is Lord of heaven and earth. His resources are infinite. This was the exact amount needed. Jesus and the disciples must have been penniless.

³⁹ Jesus will miraculously provide for churches, ministries, and believers so that that are able to pay their taxes and follow government laws and regulations, even as they pursue the Great Commission and Jesus’ coming kingdom. **Mt 19:28** 28 Jesus said to [the disciples]: Truly I say to you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **Mt 22:21** 21 Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. **Re 2:26-27** 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father. “While Matthew did not record the rest of the story, it may be assumed Peter did as he was commanded, caught the fish, found the money, and paid the tax. The Lord thereby demonstrated His submission to ruling authority.” Barbieri, *BKC*, 2:61.

⁴⁰ The two-drachma tax episode is all about King Jesus and whether he, as king, should pay tax to those who are technically subordinate to him. It is a question of law and authority. “The power to tax is the power to destroy,” but it will be impossible for the State to destroy the Church. The State won’t be able to tax the Church out of existence.

Notes