

Jesus Lights the Way for His Disciples

Matthew 17:1-13

July 24, 2016

Pastor Tom

Someone once said “human beings are like rivers. Just like rivers look for the easiest path around mountains, humans look for the easiest path around obstacles.” We don’t naturally gravitate toward doing hard things. Say you have to get to work or school or some office where you have an appointment. You know of two routes to get there. One is often clogged with traffic and slowed down by construction. The other is smooth sailing with light traffic and easy access to your destination. Most people would not choose the harder route to get there.

Or say you have your eye on a certain career. You discover there are two paths to that career. You can take a two year program at one school or a four year program at another school. There is no difference in pay scale between graduates of the different programs. Most people would choose the shorter program to get to the destination faster.

Yet people do hard things. People take difficult paths. Why? Sometimes, we take those paths because we have to. A woman who is pregnant faces delivering that baby. To actually hold that living baby in her arms, she has to go through whatever difficulties the delivery brings to get that baby out. Or you get diagnosed with cancer. Maybe it’s a type you have to treat or you’ll die. So people go through hard treatment because they need to fight to keep their health. Sometimes we do hard things because we have to.

Sometimes people do hard things because of the reward or hope that’s promised once the hard thing has been done. So you enter into an exercise program. There are hard moments where your body hurts. But you keep at it because at the end of the program you hope you will look and feel better.

Sometimes people take a hard path because the other paths may look easier now. But they know those paths will end in a much a harder place while the hard path later will end in a much better place. Examples of this would include the long and sometimes challenging path of marriage compared to the other path of leaving a marriage for someone more exciting. That second path may seem easier at first but ends up with all kinds of hardship, heartache and damage. Another example is the long and sometimes challenging path of hard work and saving compared to a sitting back and spending on credit. The spender enjoys their new pool or house or car while the hard working saver has no pool or an older house or an old car. But the saver enjoys a life apart from the heavy burden of debt while the spender faces bankruptcy and losing everything.

The path of discipleship or following Jesus is long and sometimes very hard. Why would we sign up for it when so many other people around us are not following Jesus and seem to enjoy a pretty good life? We might even have thoughts today wondering if it's really worth it to keep going with Jesus because life sure hasn't been great lately.

But friends, I want you to hear today that Jesus is not unaware of our struggles. He does not minimize the hardships we face because of our faith. He does not just call us to discipleship and then abandon us like an uncaring salesperson who immediately drops us the second they have our money. We will see today that **Jesus and His teaching bring enlightenment and encouragement on the path of discipleship.**

Jesus has just affirmed to His disciples that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the promised one by the Old Testament. They expected the Messiah to follow this announcement by taking steps to conquer their oppressors and restore them as a powerful nation. They looked for an easy and triumphant path to power. Instead Jesus announces that His path will involve going to Jerusalem, suffering, being killed and then raised the third day. Peter speaks up and declares this shall never happen to Jesus. But He sharply rebukes Peter calling him Satan for trying to deter him from the cross.

Then Jesus calls the 12 to discipleship. But discipleship is not an easy life. Thankfully, Jesus did not just drop them after delivering this bombshell. Jesus would continue to shepherd and guide them on their journey. Throughout their lives up to and including their deaths. He guides and shepherds His disciples, today if only we will pay attention. As we travel on our journey of discipleship, we need to watch for ways Jesus lights our path so we can keep going. Today, we are going to see several ways Jesus enlightened the disciples so they could continue on the difficult path they had to travel. These can help us if we will pay attention to this help. Then we will see how we can respond to the light Jesus provides for our path ahead.

Matthew 17:1-13 (ESV - Page 692 in the pew Bibles)

17 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”¹⁰ And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?”¹¹ He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things.”¹² But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.”¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

How does Jesus enlighten the disciples for their journey?

Jesus reveals Himself in His divine glory through the transfiguration. (17:1-2). Last week, we ended Matthew 16 with verse 28 where Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Matthew then tells us in verse 1, “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.” So quite soon after verse 28’s promise, Jesus brings these three up on a mountain. We don’t know which mountain. If they were still in Caesarea Philippi, it would be a mountain around that city. If they had travelled back nearer to the Sea of Galilee, it could have been a mountain there.

But he takes them up on this mountain. While there, Matthew tells us “He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” The word translated “transfigured” is metamorphosis in Greek – literally change in form. Jesus form or physical appearance dramatically changed in front of these disciples. His face shone like the sun. If you have read any part of the Old Testament story of Moses, you might remember when Moses came down from a mountain after spending time in God’s presence. Moses’ face shone brightly. In fact, his face shone so brightly that the people were scared of him. So he had to put on a veil to cover his face and dim some of the brightness. Moses’ face shone because it reflected the glory of God. But Jesus’ face shone on its own. His clothes, which were probably ordinary clothes that first century Jewish males wore, were also transformed so that they become bright white like light.

Can you imagine that moment for Peter, James and John? What is going on? Jesus reveals to them what he really looked like in His unveiled glory. Jesus lived in glory prior to coming to the earth. John who was there that day quotes Jesus’ prayer to his father in John 17:5. There Jesus prays “And now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.” Jesus was already glorious before He came to earth. He laid it aside in some way to become human. That’s what Paul writes about in Philippians 2:5-7 – “Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing

to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” So Jesus had this brilliant glory before He came to earth. During his life time, Jesus’ glorified body was veiled in some way by putting on human flesh. Yet in this moment, He gives these disciples a glimpse of what He looked like in His glorified state. Whoa – that is an amazing picture!

They write about it later. Peter talks about this moment in his own letter, 2nd Peter 1:16-18. He writes “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made know” to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice from heaven, for we were with him on that holy mountain.” John who was present on this mountain top, writes in his Gospel, 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Then Jesus returned to that heavenly glory after his resurrection. John describes what the glorified Jesus looks like in Revelation 1:16 with these words. “In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”

Those moments of transfiguration must have been an incredible, stunning, awe-inspiring, blinding moment for these disciples. They see Jesus as they have never seen Him before. Peter has said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Now they see He is the Christ the Son of the Living God” in his unveiled glory.

Why does Jesus do this? These three disciples will have important and difficult roles to play in the establishment of the early church. James would be killed for the faith. Acts 12:1 tells us “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword.” So James will face martyrdom. Peter will play a key role in the establishment of the early church. But he also will die at the hand of the executioner. John will write the Gospel, the three letters of John and the Revelation. He too will suffer and be exiled because of following Christ. Yet each one witnessed these moments of glory on the mountain. In some way, these glimpses helped sustain them through their darker hours. This enlightenment would greatly encourage them on their discipleship journey.

We too can gain encouragement for our journey by what Jesus has done here. How? **Place the transfigured Lord clearly in your mind’s eye before you pray.** What difference might it make to our prayer lives if we first stopped to

consider Jesus on the mountain top with his face shining like the sun? We follow no mere man, friends. Jesus is the Son of God with divine glory. There is no one in the universe who equals Jesus in glory. He has been given the name that is above every name.

On Wednesday night this past week, I was driving to prayer meeting here at the church. It was a beautiful night. Lots of people were out running, walking and enjoying the sun. From a human perspective, going to sit in a room with others and talking out loud to someone who doesn't talk back out loud seems like a waste of time. What difference does it make for 5 guys to get together and pray about the world, our church and the people here? Not much if we pray to someone who doesn't exist. But we do not follow cleverly devised myths. We pray to the glorious, eternal Son of God whose face shines like the sun. He's got power to do something about the state of the world and our lives.

When I keep this in mind, it is a great comfort to me. I am concerned about protection over our church family from spiritual attack and division. If it is solely up to the pastors and Elders, we are vulnerable. We have fewer elders on our team right now and some are away on vacation. But since we pray to the glorious, eternal, all-powerful Lord, I gain assurance that my prayers for protection and deliverance will be listened to and acted upon.

What difference might it make in your life if as a parent you entrusted your children to the glorious Lord of the universe when you couldn't be with them. Or as a student if you entrusted the path of your life to the glorious transcendent Lord and stopped worrying about how everything will turn out? There are many other possibilities for us to gain comfort and confidence in the things before us if we keep the glorious Lord in mind. But this was not the only enlightenment Jesus provided for the disciples that day.

The moment becomes even more magnificent. Matthew 17:3 states that "Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus." These two Old Testament prophets played key roles in God's story. Moses who lived somewhere between 1400-1200 years before Christ. He became Israel's first deliverer. God empowered him to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt. They ended up at Mount Sinai where Moses meets God.

Then comes Elijah who God raised him up as a prophet during a time when Israel wandered from God. In fact, King Ahab and Jezebel led the nation in worship of the pagan god Baal. Yet Elijah met 400 prophets of Baal and 450 prophets of Asherah at an encounter on a mountain. Elijah challenged the prophets to demonstrate the true God. God

revealed Himself with fire while the pagan prophets cried out in vain. Elijah also went to Sinai to meet with God who speaks with a still small voice. Elijah lived probably 850 years before Christ.

But now both join Jesus on this mountain. Maybe Moses represented the law and Elijah the prophets. But they talk with Jesus. Somehow the disciples recognize them or at least Peter does. How, we don't know. There were no pictures in those days. Peter had never met Moses and Elijah. Maybe something they said revealed to Peter their identity. So there's Moses, Elijah and Jesus talking.

Peter decides he has to talk. You ever have those times when you wish you didn't say anything? Maybe this would have been one of those times for Peter. He starts with the brilliant, insightful commentary on this dramatic moment. "It is good for us to be here." Thanks for inviting us Jesus. Yes, what a memorable camping trip. It was a good time." But then he follows up with a proposal to do something. "If you wish, I will make three tents here – one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Was Peter just being hospitable offering to protect the three from the elements? Were these tents or shelters going to be memorials to this special visitation from heaven? We're not really sure. But while he is talking, another remarkable event occurs.

A bright cloud overshadows them – them being Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Then a voice speaks out of the cloud with a familiar message. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Those are the same words that came down from heaven at the moment of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:17. But the voice adds one more phrase. "Listen to Him." Listen to my Son.

Now what might God have been doing here? Well, it seems like Peter is treating Moses, Elijah and Jesus as equals. Each one gets a tent. But the voice says "*This* is my Son. Listen to Him!" So this is the next piece of enlightenment for the disciples. **Jesus has supremacy even over Moses and Elijah. (17:3-8)** Jesus is supreme over the greatest Old Testament characters. He is unlike any other. He has no equal. He needs to be recognized as supreme.

The disciples fall on the ground in terror at the sound of the voice. But Jesus comes over and touches them. "Rise, and have no fear." They look up and it is only Jesus who remains. He apparently looks like His normal self again. But the disciples receive some major enlightenment from the Lord to help them on their discipleship journey.

They have been shown that they must **Place Jesus as the supreme authority over their lives.** We must not be disciples of any human teacher. They are still human. They still sin. No one pastor or teacher or leader is flawless. But Jesus is. His teaching is God's Word to us. Certainly, He can use the words and writings of other Christians to help and direct us. But if we find ourselves talking more about some teacher, author or our favorite preacher more than Jesus, this might be something we must guard against.

If we want to find Jesus' guidance on our discipleship journey, we have to place Him as supreme. That's why I discourage anyone from ever referring to Sturgeon Valley Baptist as Tom's church. It is not my church. This is Christ's church. I am simply one of the under-shepherds Jesus has called to serve for part of this church's life. Jesus must remain at the supreme place over our lives.

One way to give Christ the supremacy in our lives is to begin our day with Him. When we get His Word into our minds in the morning, it can work its way through us and our day. Or keep talking to Him all day. Ask for His wisdom in work or with your children. Ask Him for right words in a difficult conversation or for peace as you prepare for an exam. And Christ will be supreme all day.

So we have seen Jesus strengthen His disciples by revealing Himself in His divine glory. We have seen the Father reveal Jesus as supreme over Moses and Elijah. Now Jesus has encouraged the disciples to get up off the ground. They begin their journey down the mountain. He instructs them to not tell anyone about what they have seen until after He has been raised from the dead. The disciples then ask "why do the scribes say Elijah must come?"

Perhaps the vision of Elijah has brought this question to their minds. The last verses of the Old Testament talk about Elijah the prophet returning to prepare the way for the Messiah. So are the disciples simply asking a question of chronology or a fine point of theology? "We just saw you in all your glory Jesus. But the scribes say the Elijah has to come and restore all things before the Messiah comes. So why do we need Elijah still to come?" Or is there something more here. The disciples have struggled with Jesus' announcement that He will suffer and be killed. They imagine Elijah would come and restore all things. Then the Messiah would come and conquer. Now they've seen a glorious display by Jesus. So why would Elijah need to come? Why this suffering?

Jesus answers "Elijah does come and he will restore all things. But I tell you Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands."

Then the disciples understood he was talking about John the Baptist. So Jesus says Elijah or John the Baptist restores all things but still suffers. Jesus will certainly suffer but through his suffering He will restore everything.

After all the “Elijah” or John the Baptist restored some things in preparation for the Messiah’s coming. But there was not complete restoration of all things in the world.

Jesus reveals that He is the only one who can ultimately restore all things. (9-13) Friends, do you hope for restoration of all things? Or have you given up? Do you find it easier to go through life without clinging to such a hope lest you be disappointed? It’s hard to fathom how all things can be restored.

Think about the planet. Massive garbage dumps rise up in some of the densely populated cities. People live there. There are polluted areas like the scarred landscape surrounding Chernobyl, Ukraine where a nuclear reactor melted down and then spread fallout throughout the region. Now that region is abandoned because of its heavy radioactivity. Pollution and smog surrounding major population centers. Think of the garbage floating in the ocean or the garbage at the base camp of Everest? Who will restore the earth?

Think about the restoration needed in government and Institutions. Truly, we do enjoy many great benefits and privileges living in a democracy like Canada. But Our institutions need restoring. Now we see courts and politicians institutionalizing things that are directly contrary to God’s Word and making them law. Once something is law in Canada, it is very difficult to get that law revoked. Who will restore our institutions and structures of society?

We now live in a world where terrorism is a very real possibility that all of us must deal with. Our city experienced that last week when a student from MacEwan University was among the victims of the terror attack in Nice, France. We have governments of western nations fighting the terrorists. We have Islamic Terrorist who are ideologically committed to the destruction of our way of life. Then we have the constant regional tensions between China and her neighbors; North Korea and the world; Israel and her neighbors; the black population and the police in the United States. Who will restore the nations to peace?

What about wrongs and injustice that have gone unpunished? Who will hold Adolf Hitler accountable for all the horrors he inflicted on the people of Europe? What about all the unsolved crimes and murders throughout history? Who will deal with those who got off with some light sentence on a technicality? Who will call to account some local official who used his or her power to abuse the weak?

This does not even include the restoration required in our individual lives. We Christians have been restored to a right relationship with God through Christ. But there are still consequences from past and current sins that need restoration. We still experience broken relationships that require some deep heart change for restoration to occur. Some of us struggle with health difficulties. Have all health challenges been restored? Who has the power to restore everyone's relationships, health, mind and soul?

So we must place our hope for restoration in Jesus. He brings much restoration to our lives now. But He will bring ultimate and complete restoration to all when He returns. So we always have reason to hope in restoration.

Jesus lights our way on the journey of discipleship. We don't have to find our way alone. We serve and follow the divine Lord who is supreme over all. We can hope in Him for our own restoration and the restoration of all things. Through His suffering and death He has purchased redemption and restoration with God for anyone who will receive it. Will you receive what He has for you today? Christian will you come and worship the glorious and supreme Lord of the universe – Jesus Christ. Who will continue to enlighten and encourage you in your journey of discipleship?