

Jesus Transfigured | Matthew 17:1-13
Andrew Kneeland, February 19, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a famous photographer who was told to go take pictures of a great wild fire in the Pacific Northwest several years ago. He couldn't get a good photograph because of all the smoke, though, so he asked his magazine to hire a helicopter to give him some aerial shots.

The magazine agreed and told the photographer to go to the airport where his helicopter would be waiting. So he went to the airport, saw a helicopter warming up near the runway, and hopped in.

"Let's go! Let's go!" he yelled at the man in the cockpit, and soon they were in the air. "Fly low over the north side of the fire," the photographer said. "Make three or four low, slow passes over the fire."

"Why?!" the pilot asked in return. "Because I'm going to take pictures," the photographer responded. "I'm the photographer, and I'm going to take pictures!"

After a pause the pilot said, "You mean, you're not the flight instructor?"

It's important to not make false assumptions. We need to see things as they really are.

How often have we told our kids to not judge a book by its cover? It's important to not judge things by their appearances; to not make hasty judgments or assumptions about people and things.

This was a mistake that Peter, James, and John might have made in our text today in Matthew 17, about the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Even though things might have appeared different to them earlier, Peter, James, and John learned three things that day: That Jesus was **divine**, that Jesus was **better** than the prophets, and that Jesus wanted **a personal relationship** with them.

We can learn the same things from our reading today, too. Let's pray:

Father God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the time we have together this morning to look at and learn from your Word. Knit us together as a family, and draw us closer and closer to you. In your name we pray, amen.

The first thing we can learn from this Transfiguration is that JESUS IS DIVINE.

Jesus is God. It might seem obvious to us today, but there would be no denying that truth *especially* after seeing Jesus transfigured like that. “His face shone like the sun,” “His clothes became as white as light,” and God Himself spoke from heaven and said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

Some of Jesus’ apostles and disciples knew Jesus’ family. They might have even known Jesus as He grew up as a carpenter. It would have been easy for these friends of Jesus to forget that Jesus was more than simply a humble, blue-collar worker from Nazareth. It would have been easy to judge a book by its cover. But Jesus was *much* more than that.

And for us today, we can sometimes make false assumptions about who Jesus was.

He was a carpenter who worked with His hands, so He was strong, but Isaiah 53:2 says that Jesus “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.”

Jesus probably didn’t stand out from most other Jews of that time period. But He certainly stood out when He was transfigured before Peter, James, and John.

Jesus wasn’t just an old, weak old man, He wasn’t just a strong young revolutionary, and He wasn’t just an average Joe, either. Jesus Christ was God incarnate.

Hebrews 1:3 | *“And Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God’s nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.”*

Jesus Christ is DIVINE. But also, Jesus showed that He is FAR SUPERIOR to the prophets.

When Jesus had performed miracles to various groups of people, some thought that He was the return of the prophet Elijah, or a return of the prophet Moses. That was high praise coming from the Jews of that day: Moses was responsible for writing much of their Scripture, and Elijah was a very important figure in the history of Israel.

It was very high praise for Jesus to be compared and equated to the prophets. But it wasn’t nearly high enough. Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration showed Himself to be *distinct* from the prophets, and *far superior* to the prophets.

Just a few chapters earlier, in Matthew 13, Jesus asked his disciples who they

thought He was.

“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets,” they responded. Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?”

“Simon Peter responded, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!’ And Jesus answered Him, ‘You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven!’”

Jesus is not simply a prophet. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Jesus was also superior to Moses. Listen to these verses from Hebrews 3:

“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

In John 8:58 Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” That’s another incredible statement, isn’t it? Can you imagine the people hearing that just being totally baffled and confused? Jesus was claiming to not only be superior to the prophets, but also to be superior to and separate from *time itself*!

What else is Jesus superior to? He’s superior to every other path to heaven. People may try to climb ladders of self-righteousness to heaven’s pearly gates – by living good lives, not hurting anyone, maybe even going to church once in a while – but those ladders will collapse before they reach heaven.

Others may attempt to reach heaven by the ladders of spirituality: they might try to “experience God” or “surrender themselves to the Holy Spirit.” But those ladders will fall short, too.

Jesus said in John 14:6 | *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Nobody comes to the Father except by Me.”*

Jesus is superior.

Jesus revealed Himself to be DIVINE on the Mount of Transfiguration, and He

showed Peter, James, and John that He was SUPERIOR to the prophets. Thirdly, Jesus showed that He wants a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with us.

Verses 6-8 in this chapter in Matthew 17 might be some of my favorite in all of Scripture:

“When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, ‘Get up, and do not be afraid.’ And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.”

Those few verses are a beautiful representation of the Gospel, and of our correct response to that Gospel message.

Peter, James, and John had been confronted with the incredible glory and majesty of God. They had witnessed first-hand the perfect holiness of Jesus, and could only fall on the ground in utter fear.

This is exactly the same response Isaiah had when he had a vision of being in the temple of God. He fell face-down and said “Woe is me, for I am ruined!”

When compared to the perfect Creator God, we fall so far short. Nothing we say, do, think, don’t say, don’t do, don’t think, could ever measure us up to the level of holiness that God demands. Peter, James, and John realized this in our story today, and fell face-down terrified.

But Jesus didn’t gloat in His splendor or leave his children in their fear. The Bible says “He came to them and touched them,” which is true on a much larger scale, too.

Jesus left His heavenly throne and came to *us*, His creation. He came to us and He performed an action that offered salvation to us. He lived a perfect life without sin, He was blamed for all the iniquity in the world, and He was crucified on a cross. And He raised from the dead to show His power over death and offer to us eternal life with Him in heaven.

Jesus came to us, and He touched us. He healed us, and He relieved our fear. He came to us because He *wants* us; He wants a personal relationship with us.

Matthew 18:11 | *“For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”*

Speaking of “judging a book by its cover,” this can be a common misconception about the Christian faith, too. Many view God as an all-powerful old man sitting on a throne in heaven doling out punishment and rewards based on the things

we do. Others view God as a divine vending machine, only giving us what we need when we ask for it.

Many people haven't met the one, true God. Many people don't understand who the real God is, and many people don't know that He loves them and wants to have a personal relationship with them.

2 Peter 3:9 | *"Instead Jesus is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Jesus desires a personal relationship with us. He wants us to know that He is God, that He is all-powerful and holy. He wants us to realize that He is better than the prophets and better than any other route or method by which we could pursue salvation.

And He wants us to get up and not be afraid. He wants to save us and He wants to accomplish great things *in* and *through* us.

Peter, James, and John might have been judging a book by its cover. They might not have truly appreciated Jesus for who He was, but their assumptions were turned on their head at the Mount of Transfiguration.

So let's not make the same mistake. Let's see Jesus for who He really is, and give Him the response He asks for and deserves. Let's allow Him to pick us up and save us by the strength of His mighty hand.

Revelation 3:20 | *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."*

Let's pray.