

Title: Hail the Incarnate Deity
Text: Matthew 17.1-13
Theme: The glory of Jesus
Series: Matthew #86
Prop Stmtnt: There is more to Christ than you will ever realize.

60 second review of the gospel.

Review the gospel – God, man, Christ, response

Believing the gospel (good news about Christ) is not only the means by which we become a follower of Christ, it is the only means by which we can become a follower of Christ. The gospel is a term that summarizes the three main truths of what it means to be saved; justification, sanctification and glorification.

Justification means “to be declared righteous.” When you repent of your sin and trust in Christ alone as the one who died on the cross to pay the penalty of your sin, you are declared by God to be righteous. That is because when you repent of your sin, your sin is credited to Christ (who died for it) and when you trust in Christ, you are credited with his righteousness (which he lived for).

Sanctification means to become more and more like Jesus in thought and action. Sanctification is the word that describes the Christian life. As a follower of Christ (justified) I not only have become a follower of Christ, but I grow and mature as a follower of Christ. I grow by applying the gospel to my life. Justification necessarily leads to sanctification. Therefore, we say that “the means by which we become a Christian is the means by which we grow as Christians. I repented of my sin and trusted in Christ in order to become a Christian and I continue to repent of my sin and trust in Christ in order to grow as a Christian. I become a Christian once. That is, I become a Christian at a point in time, but my growth as a Christian is continuous until I am with Christ. When I am with Christ, then I will be like Christ. That is called glorification.

Justification means that I have been saved from the penalty of sin.

Sanctification means that I am being saved from the power of sin.

Glorification means that I am (will be) saved from the presence of sin.

Now, let me go back again to a statement I just made. I repented of my sin and trusted in (believed in) Christ in order to become a Christian and I continue to repent of my sin and trust in (believe in) Christ in order to grow as a Christian. We call ourselves, “believers” because belief in Christ not only is the means by which we become a follower of Christ, but we continue in that belief and we continue in that belief with excitement, amazement and love because there is always more about Christ to learn and therefore, more about Christ to believe and more about Christ to be excited about, amazed at and love. That is why heaven will never be boring. Boring is the state of being unchallenged mentally or experientially. In the Christian life and in heaven, we never “know it all.” We never have seen it all or have done it all. There is always more to learn and more to experience. In

heaven we will be continually amazed and continually satisfied. This truth is clearly displayed in this text. Peter, James and John understand some things about Jesus. They understand that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the Living God. But, there is so much more to learn about that! And they are about to experience something that they will never forget and at the same time, they experience something that is preview of what is to come.

Because of the nature of this text, I am going to preach it a bit differently. I am going to take you through it and explain it. Then I want you to understand this event in light of the immediate context, then in light of Matthew's gospel and finally in light of the entire story line of the Bible.

I. Explanation of the Text (1-13)

This event known as the Transfiguration of Christ is one the most astounding things that took place in the life and ministry of Christ. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that Peter, James, and John were taken by Christ up a high mountain. Tradition has identified this mountain as Mount Tabor, although there was a Roman garrison positioned on its summit. So, I doubt that it was there particularly since Matthew mentions in verse 1 that they were there "by themselves". My guess is that it was Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon is located in the northernmost point of modern Israel whose peak elevation is over 9,000 feet. Others have suggested Mount Meron, but we do not know the exact location of this with certainty.

A. The Glory of God in the face of Jesus (2)

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him in order to pray, which is not unusual since Jesus was known to go up into a mountain to pray. But, what happens is extraordinary! Jesus "was transfigured before them." Matthew goes to explain what he meant by that. The face of Jesus shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light, or dazzling white. Jesus became intensely bright and brilliant. As we will see later, this is not the first time that the 2nd person of the Trinity revealed himself like this, however it is the first time that Peter, James and John saw him like this. Sixty years from this event, John will have another similar encounter with Jesus. This is the glory of God in the face of Jesus. Jesus is not only reflecting the glory of his Father, he is radiating the glory of God because this event is only underscoring the truth that Jesus is God! If that was not enough, Moses and Elijah showed up and were talking with Jesus!

B. The Appearance of Moses and Elijah (3)

Sure, Moses represents the law because the law came through him. And yes, Elijah represents the prophets. So, you have the law and the prophets, that is the entire OT being represented here. But, think of it! Moses and Elijah are standing in front of you and they are talking with the man that you have been hanging out with for a couple of years! Holy lighting rod, Batman! This is crazy! How did Jesus pull this off? And what is happening here? It would have been tempting to be amazed at the fact that Jesus was talking with

Moses and Elijah, except that Jesus was the one whose appearance was brilliant, not Moses and Elijah. For over two years now, Peter, James, John and the other disciples had been with Jesus almost every day. It was normal to talk with him, eat with him, listen to him and watch him. It was not normal to be with Moses and Elijah. But, the truth is, it is amazing that Moses and Elijah could talk with Jesus.

Vincent Van Gogh's paintings are some of the most valuable in the world. Some of have sold for 39 million, 54 million, 57 million, 58 million, 71 million and 82 million dollars. Apparently Van Gogh, who was highly critical of his own work, did a painting that he called "Sunset at Montmajour" but he did not like how it turned out, so he never signed it. The painting ended up being stored in a Norwegian family's attic for 100 years. Only in the last couple of years was this painting discovered to actually be the real deal and is probably worth over \$50 million. No one really knew what they had all along. Peter, James, John and the disciples were walking on dusty paths with God. They were eating bread, riding in boats, talking, laughing, with the Lord and Creator of the universe. Did they know? Did they know who this really was? They would, but they didn't, yet.

C. The Response of Peter (4)

Luke says that they had been sleeping (presumably they fell asleep while Jesus was praying), but now they are wide awake. Unfortunately, that means for Peter that he thinks that he needs to speak. "It is good that we are here." That's brilliant Peter! It is good that we are here. I don't know if he said this somberly or excitedly. And I do not know exactly what he means by "we". Is he including James and John in this? I raise that because in his next statement he goes from "we" to "I". So, I am not exactly sure what he means. It is good that we are here is something you would say when you are having a good time with some friends, not when God has just put his glory on display before you. It gets worse. Peter then says to Jesus, *"If you wish, I will make three tents (or booths) here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."* I honestly have no idea what Peter was talking about. I don't know if he just wants everyone to hang out here for a while so that he can make this last as long as possible or what? But Peter doesn't stop, does he? Look at v.5. *"He was STILL speaking when behold (BAM), 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."*

D. The Response of God (5-8)

In the previous text, Jesus had to interrupt Peter. Now it's the Father who does it and I am guessing that the voice of the Father was louder than Peter's. But don't miss this. Moses, Elijah and Jesus are standing together and the Father speaks up and tells everyone (particularly Peter) to listen to Jesus. The Father loves His Son and is pleased with His Son and commands us to listen to His Son. Moses and Elijah are famous historical figure, who spoke the Word of God, but Jesus is the Word of God because He is God. At this point, Peter does finally shut-up. He does so because he and James and John are terrified and fall on their faces expecting to be destroyed. But, they aren't. In fact, Jesus comes

and touches them and says, “*Rise, and have no fear.*” When they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone and Jesus was the only one there.

E. The Concluding Conversation (9-13)

Walking down a mountain provides a lot of opportunity for conversations. In that conversation Jesus tells the disciples not to speak of this event until his resurrection. I am guessing that he looked at Peter when he told them all to keep their mouths shut. (It’s just a guess) You see, you will never understand the true significance of the transfiguration until you understand the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was the King of Glory before he became Jesus of Nazareth. And when Jesus of Nazareth is crucified, he will not remain in a tomb because he is the King of Glory. In his transfiguration Jesus was revealing to his disciples what had been veiled. He showed them a taste of the glory that was his and the glory he still had, but covered. He also showed them a taste of the glory that is his forever and that he will display before the universe. But, at this point in time, these three disciples did not know all of that.

Naturally, with the appearance of Elijah, the disciples wanted to know if this was the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy that the scribes (legal experts in the law of Moses) were apparently speaking about. I am assuming that the scribes were saying that Jesus could not be the Messiah because Elijah had not come. So, the disciples were asking if Elijah’s appearance just fulfilled that prophecy by Malachi and Jesus says that John the Baptist was the Elijah who came.

Altogether this event was like a summary of the past, present and future ministry and glory of Jesus. The disciples saw a taste of the glory that Jesus had before he came to the earth and a taste of the glory that is rightfully his and the glory that he will be known for in the future. The disciples also were able to see that the glory of Jesus and the present ministry of Jesus as well as his upcoming suffering and death are somehow all related together. The disciples were also able to see another example of the perfect and joyful relationship that the Father and the Son enjoy together and therefore, the authority that Jesus has when he speaks. Finally, the disciples were able to see that everything that has happened and everything that is about to happen is all part of God’s sovereign plan.

II. Relationship of this event to the immediate context

Peter makes an astounding pronouncement about Christ (chap. 16) when says, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” Jesus then helps Peter and the disciples understand what kind of a Christ (Messiah) he is when he explains that he is going to Jerusalem, suffer, die and be raised again. That was the setting for Christ to explain what it meant to follow him and the cost that they needed to be prepared to pay. Now, this event focuses upon the second half of Peter’s confession. You are the Son of the Living God. Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, but Peter did not understand what all that meant. He thought he did, but there was so much more that Peter and the disciples needed to know. The same thing is true with his confession about Jesus being the Son of the Living God.

Peter thought that he knew what that meant; after all, he was the one who said it. But, again, there is SO much more to this than what Peter understood at the time.

Peter calls Jesus, the Son of the Living God. The Father calls Jesus, “my beloved Son.” To be the son of someone or something means to share in the same identity. In Peter’s confession he was declaring that Jesus was God and Jesus agreed with him. Now, the Father affirms that. Jesus is indeed God. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail the Incarnate deity.” The transfiguration of Jesus made it clear to Peter, James and John that Jesus was God, the very God. The transfiguration also made it clear that Jesus was God and the Father was God. In order to listen to and obey the Father, one has to listen to and obey the Son. Why does the Father demand that we listen to the Son? Because the Son says exactly what the Father says. The Son says everything that we need to hear and everything that we need to believe, accept and obey. The Son is the perfect representation of the Father. And because the Father loves the Son, in order to love the Father, we love the Son and in order to love the Son, we love the Father.

The same Messiah who would suffer and die is the same Son of the Living God. The same glorious Jesus who was standing on this mountain between two titans of the past and is engulfed in transcendent light is the same humiliated Jesus who would hang on a cross between two criminals and be engulfed in darkness. There is a relationship between suffering and glory. Peter and the disciples needed to learn this. In a time before there was time, there was God. In a place before there was space, there was God. All reality has to come from an ultimate source of reality. If you look back as far as you can before the existence of the world, the solar system and the universe itself, there he was, God. Eternally existing as the Father, Son and Spirit in perfect love, perfect harmony, perfect joy and perfect communication. The disciples knew the Son as Jesus of Nazareth. Peter had figured out that he was God, but did he realize how true that confession really was? Did he know that it was Jesus who spoke and by the sheer authority of his Word, billions of stars came into existence, comets began to fly, and planets began to orbit? Did he know that he was Jesus who is the Alpha and Omega meaning that there is nothing before him and there is nothing after him? Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together. Did Peter know that while Jesus was walking up the mountain with him, James and John that Jesus was simultaneously keeping the entire universe in order? Did he know the power of the word of Jesus? Did it ever dawn on you that while Jesus was being whipped almost to death, and nailed to a cross and left to die that he was at the very same time holding the entire creation together? Probably not, but the Father did and he ordered Peter and everyone else to “listen to him” because there is no one who is more amazing, more glorious, more powerful, more gracious, more loving, more truthful and more astounding than Jesus!

III. Relationship of this event to the gospel and message of Matthew

(skip this point if short on time)

Matthew points out that mountains were strategic places that Christ used in his ministry. 5.1; 8.1; 14.23; 15.29, 21.1; 24.3 and 28.16 (explain). But only here and in 4.8 does Matthew describe the location as being a “high mountain.” I think this is intentional by

Matthew because it was on the high mountain in 4.8 where Satan promised to give Christ all of the kingdoms of the world if Christ would simply bow down and worship Satan. Obviously Christ was not going to do that and did not do that. He chose the difficult road of suffering, rather than the easy road of convenience. On that high mountain Satan offered him a way out. On this high mountain, Christ, Moses and Elijah discussed his mission to suffer and die. On the first high mountain, Christ refused to succumb to the temptation of taking a shortcut. On this high mountain Christ accepted his mission to follow the long road of rejection, sorrow and death. On the first high mountain, instant glory was offered (as a lie). On this high mountain, future glory was confirmed.

Matthew also points out that Jesus is the new Moses. This event is another example of that. Jesus is the prophet that Moses was not, but the prophet that Moses spoke of and pointed to. Exodus 24 tells us that for six days, the glory cloud covered Mt. Sinai and that after those six days, Moses ascended the mountain with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. Beginning in v.15 we read, *“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Munt Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain....”* Here, Jesus goes up on the mountain with Peter, James and John. While Moses and the others saw the glory of God, Peter, James and John see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

At the baptism of Christ, the Father said, *“this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Here the Father said, *“this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him.”* At the end of his gospel, Matthew records the great commission where Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples from the entire world and as part of the disciple-making process, they were to baptize these believers in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Matthew makes it very clear that Jesus is not only God, but that God is Triune, that is he is one God who is made up of three persons.

IV. Relationship of this event to the entire Bible

A. The Glory of God in the face of Jesus.

There are several places in the Bible where similar appearances of God occurred. Two of them are in the New Testament. The one is here and the second is in Revelation 1. It is interesting that in both occasions, John is present when the actual glory of Jesus is revealed. But, there are others in the Old Testament. But, what happens in the New Testament helps us understand what was going on in the Old Testament. For example, in Isaiah 6, Isaiah records his experience of seeing the glory of God. The apostle John mentions that event in his gospel and informs us that when Isaiah saw God, he actually saw Jesus. When you read of Daniel’s vision of God, you now realize that Daniel saw Jesus.

B. The appearance of Moses and Elijah

You cannot understand the Old Testament (Moses and Elijah) unless you interpret it in view of Jesus. That is why Judaism is sadly a false religion. They have the OT but they misinterpret it because they reject the lens (Jesus) through whom all of Scripture is to be read and interpreted. Moses and Elijah did not sit down and talk with the disciples and neither did the disciples talk with them because only through Christ can they be understood.

C. The Limits of Mountain-top Experiences

It is tempting to think that if we had been there and had seen what these guys saw that we would never doubt again and that we would never falter in our Christian life. It is also tempting to think that we need something like this to help us be faithful. Well, neither one is true. Peter saw this and he clearly doubted and even betrayed Christ. Have you ever read through the book of Numbers? It is story after story of unbelief, rebellion and God's miraculous intervention. This one thing is abundantly clear, just because you see a miracle of God does not mean that you actually trust God. But, years later it is Peter who writes about this experience in his 2nd epistle and says, (SLIDE) *"...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well please,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. AND we have something MORE SURE, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* 2 Peter 1.16b-21

A few years ago a couple of books came out based on a child's account of dying and going to heaven for about 30 minutes and then coming back to earth after they were resuscitated. People were all excited about them and I said they were not to be trusted because their 1) their experience of God's glory did not match the Bible's and 2) the whole thing feeds this idea that experiences like that prove the Bible, which I strongly reject. The Bible can stand on it's own. It needs no experiences to prove it. When I said that, some of you became upset with me because you liked those books. But, I wasn't surprised when a couple of months ago, one of the authors confessed that he had made the whole thing up, and now, all of the books, video's, study guides had to be pulled off the shelves of Christian book stores.

The Church has become enamored with these sorts of things because we fail to realize what we really have in the Bible. You already have what you need, right here. The word of God points us all to the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

Take Home Truths:

- 1) This further answers the question: Is there life after death? It also answers the question: Will we know each other in heaven?
- 2) You are not at a disadvantage because you did not live back then. You can now see the entire picture in the Bible. You already have all that you need for faithfulness, right now. Bank on it.
- 3) Suffering is the path to glory. Suffering is not your enemy. Unbelief is. By the way, this was the point of Peter's 2nd epistle. He indeed got it. So must we.