

Matthew 17A

- Jesus' disciples have received a whirlwind introduction to the Kingdom Program
 - After Jesus withdrew the Kingdom from that generation of Israel, He began preparing His apostles to lead in His place
 - Jesus initiated a series of lessons and experiences that must have left His disciples' heads swimming
 - In fact, it's remarkable to look back and see how much the Lord has accomplished in such a short time
 - The most challenging thing Jesus taught came at the end of Chapter 16
 - Jesus revealed that He wasn't establishing the literal Kingdom on earth, at least not yet
 - Instead, something new and different would come, something Jesus called "the Church"
 - Jesus said He would establish His Church not based on tribal identity but upon faith in Him alone as revealed by the Father
 - Moreover, Jesus designated Peter to usher this new entity into existence and move it outward to reach all nations
 - And once the Church was planted, Jesus promised that not even the powers of Hell could stand against it
 - That's not what these Jewish men were expecting from their Messiah
- And then Jesus told them something that was simply too much to bear
 - He said that in order to bring the Church into existence, Jesus must suffer and die
 - Peter objected forcing Jesus to rebuke Him
 - And Jesus exhorted all the disciples to prioritize the Kingdom life over this life
 - But that moment illustrated the problem facing these men

- They couldn't appreciate how to serve Jesus because they didn't understand Jesus' plan
- Hearing Jesus say He will soon die in Jerusalem rattled them, and they couldn't see past that concern
 - They knew that if their rabbi is killed, they would likely be threatened as well
 - And more importantly, if Jesus dies, would they ever see the promised Kingdom? Would they lose their chance to enter it?
- So in the next section Jesus does something to address those concerns

Matt. 16:28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

- As we look at Jesus' statement, we start by taking note of Jesus' open phrase..."Truly I say to you"
 - This phrase means "believe what I tell you", but that's not why Jesus spoke it
 - Obviously, Jesus always expected His disciples to believe what He told them
 - That phrase was Jesus' way of introducing a new topic, a new thought
 - Back in v.27 Jesus had been speaking about His coming in His glory to set up the Kingdom
 - And He says when He comes, He will repay all humanity for their deeds
 - The point is to encourage these men to prioritize the next life over this one and to be ready for that judgment
 - But even more importantly, Jesus is reassuring these men that His death is part of the plan of the Kingdom, not a threat to that plan
 - They need not fear the reality that Jesus would die, but they did need to understand why it happens
 - So to encourage them further, Jesus gives them a second promise, a promise that they will see fulfilled in their day

- Jesus says (in my own words), "...speaking of Me coming into My glory, some of you will not taste death before witnessing the Son of Man in His kingdom."
 - My English translation says coming in His "kingdom" but the original Greek language is less specific
 - It could be translated coming in His "reign" or "royal power"
 - Obviously, the physical Kingdom didn't appear in their lifetimes (nor even in ours)
 - So we know Jesus wasn't speaking of the literal place, and therefore the better translation is coming in His "royal power"
 - That's why Jesus used the phrase "taste death" in v.28...He was responding to their concerns over Jesus' prediction of His own death
 - Jesus is reassuring His disciples that the prophecies of His coming death will not stop the Kingdom from arriving
 - In fact, they will see Jesus reigning with power in their day
 - But Jesus couldn't promise that the Kingdom itself was coming soon
 - Yet He could reassure them that His victory and His reign was right around the corner
 - So He must show them that His rule takes place from another realm at least for a time before it appears in this realm on earth
- That's the single most important detail of the Kingdom Program Jesus needs His disciples to understand
 - And it's going to take something special to make that clear
 - So Jesus allows three of His disciples the privilege of witnessing Him in glory and power

Matt. 17:1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

Matt. 17:2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

Matt. 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

- Notice that Matthew specifically mentions that this scene took place six days after the events at the end of Chapter 16

- The Gospel writers rarely give exact time references like this, so when they do, it means the timing is important for our understanding
 - Matthew wants us to understand that this moment is connected to the earlier one
 - In fact, Luke introduces this moment saying “and it came to pass...”
 - In other words, this is the moment Jesus fulfilled His promise to show them His power and glory
- Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the top of a high mountain alone
 - We don’t know the exact mountain and many locations have been proposed
 - We know they were in Caesarea Philippi a week earlier
 - And nearby is the highest mountain in the Middle East, Mt. Hermon
 - But a week is a long time, so they could have traveled to almost anywhere in the Galilee, and the exact place isn’t important
- So Peter, James and John accompany Jesus on this high mountain and then at some point, Jesus enters into a glorified state
 - The other Gospels say the three disciples were sleeping at the time and awoke to see this scene
 - And Matthew says they saw Jesus transfigured into glory
- The word for transfigured is *metamorphoo* similar to metamorphosis, and it means Jesus completely changed before their sight
 - He wasn’t merely the same person glowing or floating...Jesus looked very different in all respects
- Matthew gives us only a brief description of what Jesus looked like in that moment, but John gives us a full description elsewhere

[Rev. 1:13](#) and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

[Rev. 1:14](#) His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

[Rev. 1:15](#) His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

[Rev. 1:16](#) In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

- John's description of Jesus in His glory is consistent with several other descriptions of Jesus glorified taken from the Old and New Testament
 - And it matches the details here as well, so it's likely what these three men saw when they awoke
 - This is certainly a demonstration of Jesus in His royal power, just as Jesus promised
 - And in case you doubt it, Luke says plainly they saw Jesus' glory
- Curiously, they also see two figures standing next to Jesus and talking to Him, which the Gospel writers name as Moses and Elijah
 - Luke says these two figures were glorified also, though based on the descriptions, we know Jesus' glory was much greater
 - And Jesus was conversing with these men in this moment
- And this scene raises so many interesting questions
 - How did the three disciples recognize Moses and Elijah? No photos existed and presumably no one painted their portraits
 - We assume the disciples must have received divine insight to know their identities
 - Which means the Lord wanted these men to know it was Moses and Elijah, but why?
 - And perhaps the real question is what's the purpose in this scene overall?
- Our answers start by remembering this scene is connected to the earlier moment with Peter and the disciples
 - Peter objected to Jesus' dying, which led Jesus to challenge His disciples to be willing to lose things of this life in order to preserve the next life
 - And losing their lives now meant (among other things) losing Jesus' company for a time in this life

- Jesus had to die, resurrect and then ascend leaving the disciples to minister in His place
- Those men had to be willing to work with that arrangement confident they would see Him in the Kingdom to come
- Secondly, losing their life here also meant being willing to live without the physical Kingdom on earth for a time as served Jesus
 - In a future day, the Kingdom would be a reality and they would join Jesus in that place
 - But in the meantime they serve something different, the Church and the Kingdom Program
- That's a lot for anyone to understand, and these men have to grasp it all very quickly, in less than a year
 - So rather than spelling it all out in words, Jesus chooses to tell the story in pictures, because a picture is worth 1,000 words
 - So let's put words to this picture
- First, Jesus appears glorified, which communicates that He is divine and eternal in His reign
 - He told the disciples they would see the Son of Man coming in His glory to reign, and this is what glory looks like
 - And yet, this was *not* how Jesus appeared to His disciples while on the earth
 - Jesus was transfigured from an ordinary, modest, even unattractive form into a light brighter than the sun
 - His divine appearance was a stunning contrast to His humble appearance
 - That difference begs a question... if Jesus possessed such divinity and glory, then why hasn't He been showing it to everyone now?
 - Why was He hiding behind such plain appearances?
 - That's the question Jesus wanted these men to consider
 - Jesus' first coming wasn't intended to be a period of reigning but a time of sacrifice and suffering

- The dual nature of the Messiah's ministry is succinctly reflected in two verses in Zechariah

Zech. 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zech. 9:10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

And the horse from Jerusalem;
And the bow of war will be cut off.
And He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.

- Zechariah says Israel's Messiah would be just and endowed with salvation as he came humbly riding a donkey
 - But in the next verse the prophet goes on to say that the Messiah would do incredible things
 - He would stop all war, bring peace to all nations and have a dominion stretching from sea to sea
 - Clearly v.9 speaks of Jesus' first coming while v.10 is speaking of His second coming
 - So showing Himself glorified reinforced the truth that His death wouldn't be the end of Him but a transition of sorts
- Secondly, Jesus is seen conversing with two biblical figures to make several more points
 - First, their conversation itself was a lesson for these men
 - Luke tells us that were "speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"
 - The Greek word for departure is exodus, which is a reference to the Passover

- So they were discussing Jesus' plan to fulfill the Passover by dying on the cross
- The conversation was held for the benefit of the disciples and to explain the meaning of His coming death
 - His death wouldn't be a sign of defeat but a fulfillment of the Feast that pictures Israel's victory over slavery and death
 - In the literal exodus, Moses freed the nation from physical slavery to Pharaoh and from the physical death of the 10th plague
 - And in Jesus' exodus, all nations gain freedom from slavery to sin and the spiritual death it brings
- Furthermore, Moses was the redeemer of God's people – the man who brought the nation through the trials of the desert
 - But He died before the journey was complete, and no one ever found Moses' body

Deut. 34:5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.

Deut. 34:6 And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day.

- So Moses becomes a type of Christ in his redemptive work and in how His body will not be found afterward
- Then there's Elijah, and the Bible says Elijah's life ends when God ushers him straight into heaven without passing through death first

2Kings 2:11 As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

- The Bible also says that Elijah returns again to earth under equally mysterious circumstances

Mal. 4:5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal. 4:6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

- We will have more to say about this return in a future lesson when Jesus addresses it
- For now, here's the point: Elijah's sudden ascension into Heaven is connected to His future return in the last days at the end of the age
- So it will be for Jesus as well...they will see Jesus leaving them in a future day, ascending into Heaven, but that won't be the end of Jesus
 - In a future day, they will see Jesus come again at the end of the age
 - And at His Second Coming, the literal physical Kingdom will come too
- So Jesus is seen standing next to these two men because they picture the two-fold nature of Christ's earthly ministry
 - On the one hand Moses pictures Christ's redemption of His people by His death as the Lamb of God
 - And on the other hand, Elijah pictures Jesus' resurrection and ascension into glory
 - Just as God used these men in those ways, so is Jesus going to do the same and much more in His ministry
- But the picture created by these men goes even deeper
 - Seeing these men present in glory reassured the disciples that their own glory wasn't dependent on the Kingdom coming to earth
 - After all, neither Moses nor Elijah lived to see the Kingdom arrive in their day
 - And in fact Moses didn't even have opportunity to enter the Promised Land on earth that God gave to Israel
 - And yet here they were in glory and in the presence of, and in fellowship with, the Messiah
 - So clearly, the Lord's servants will be rewarded with glory even before the Kingdom arrives on earth
 - Predictably, those men didn't catch all that in the moment

[Matt. 17:4](#) Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

- Peter recognized this was an important moment, but as usual he ran too far
- Specifically, Peter assumed the Kingdom was now arriving on earth
- So Peter suggests he make three booths or tabernacles for Jesus and the other two men
 - Peter was applying Old Testament Scripture concerning the Kingdom
 - In the Law the Lord established an annual fall feast for Israel called the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles

[Lev. 23:41](#) 'You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

[Lev. 23:42](#) 'You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths,

[Lev. 23:43](#) so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'"

[Lev. 23:44](#) So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.

- The feast commemorates the wandering of Israel with the Lord in the desert
- And it also pictures God's people living a temporary existence on earth as we await our entry to the Promised Land, the Kingdom
- But all the feasts God gave Israel serve a dual purpose...they all memorialize a past event and picture a future event
 - Passover memorialized the exodus from Egypt but it also pictured the Messiah's death to pay for our sin
 - Likewise, the feast of Tabernacles has a dual purpose
- It memorializes Israel's wandering in the desert and it pictures a time of God's people dwelling with the Lord in the Kingdom

Zech. 14:9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- The inaugural feast of the Kingdom on earth will be the feast of tabernacles
- As the Kingdom on earth begins, we will all be there to celebrate it with Jesus in a feast of Tabernacles
- Because we will truly be dwelling with God
- Peter knew these prophecies from the Old Testament, and so as he witnesses what he believes is the start of the Kingdom, he offers to make booths
 - It's the right idea...but the wrong timing
 - This isn't the moment for celebrating the Kingdom
 - That moment awaits the Lord's return in glory
 - So if the Kingdom isn't here yet, then what is the duty of Jesus' disciples now as we await Jesus' return?
 - And that's the final lesson Jesus wanted to teach these men
 - And that lesson comes through the voice of the Father

Matt. 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

Matt. 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

- While Peter was still speaking, the Shechinah glory of God enveloped all of them, and a voice from Heaven spoke
 - The Father declares this is His Son, in Whom He is well-pleased

- And then He adds “listen to Him!”
- And in response to the voice of God, the men assume the classic position of fear
- Any time sinful mortal flesh enters into the presence of the eternal creator and judge, we naturally fear His presence
- But the point of that moment is found in the command God issued to these men
 - He says listen to Jesus, in other words Jesus is the Father’s witness to the world
 - And therefore their responsibly as disciples was to listen to Jesus
 - And not only while Jesus was with them on earth
 - They must also be prepared to listen to Jesus when He is glorified and away from them in the heavenly realm
 - That’s the mission of a disciple...we can’t bring the Kingdom to earth a day sooner than the Lord intends
 - And we need not worry about saving our life here nor about whether we will see glory in the future
 - Instead, our only concern is whether we are listening to Jesus, in His word by His Spirit teaching us all things
 - And once more the two men standing next to Jesus emphasize this point through illustration
 - The Law of God was given to Israel through Moses, so Moses has come to picture the Law
 - And Elijah was considered the greatest prophet sent to Israel, and so he pictures all the prophets
 - And in Jewish culture, the phrase “Moses and the Prophets” is shorthand for the word of God
 - So imagine the scene again, standing in the center of Moses and the Prophets is Jesus, the Word, the Witness to God the Father
 - Listen to Him...just as you listened to Moses and the Prophets in their day, you listen to Jesus in His day and forevermore

- In fact, these men always were listening to Jesus because the word of God is always from Him
- So let's summarize what this scene taught these men
 - It communicated the two-fold nature of Jesus' earthly ministry, a humble beginning followed by a glorious future
 - And it explained the purpose of His coming death to fulfill the Passover
 - It showed that Jesus would begin His reign in Heaven before the Kingdom's arrival on earth
 - And it reassured these men that their own future glory was not in jeopardy in the meantime
 - Finally, it reinforced the duty of the disciples in the meantime of Jesus' coming absence...to listen to the testimony of the word of God
 - We don't need to see Jesus walking among us in order to know Him and His commands
 - We don't have to see the Kingdom physically on the earth to serve it in the meantime
 - And we don't need to share in Jesus' glory now to share it with others
 - We know those things are coming in a future day, and in the meantime we only need to listen to Jesus' Word (the Bible) to serve Him well
 - Make the pursuit of His word your devotion of duty, taking what you learn and living by it
 - And sharing the good news of it with all you meet...that's the Kingdom Program