

Pastor Matthew Ude

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Transfiguration Sunday

## Jesus Stood Alone

**Matthew 17:1-9** Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; <sup>2</sup> and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" <sup>6</sup> And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup> When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. <sup>9</sup> Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

### The Mountain Was Gone

Everyone remember the story of Icarus and Daedalus? Daedalus was supposedly a Greek inventor who built wings from birds feathers for himself and for his son. They flew away from the Island in which they were imprisoned. Icarus flew up too close to the Sun and his wings melted and he died. This story is absurd of course for many reasons not least of which is that even as flying as high as possible you would never come anywhere near the sun. The sun is 93 million miles, the outer limits of earth's atmosphere is 62 miles.

The White-Throated Needletail flies up to 105 miles per hour horizontally. Assuming you could fly that fast upwards towards the sun it would take you 101 years to reach the sun. Imagine running 105 miles per hour your whole life and then you might just make it to the sun.

As ridiculous as it is that a human could fly with bird feather wings up to the sun, it is even more ridiculous that humans could ever climb high enough to reach God.

Nevertheless they had been trying. For 6,000 year they had been trying, both literally and metaphorically. The people of Babel tried to build a tower to God. The monks of Nepal and Tibet try to place prayer flags as high up the mountains as possible. Even the Jews went up the mountain to worship God.

In a metaphoric sense men try and try and try to climb up the mountain to God. Trying with works, and with fasting to make themselves worthy of God.

After so many years of trying to climb mountains in a vain attempt to reach God what does our text say? When they opened their eyes there was Jesus alone and He came down the mountain with them.

No more attempts to climb up the mountain, Jesus was alone and he came down to be with us.

This is probably the greatest moment of this story. They saw Jesus alone and He came down the mountain with them.

Jesus left behind the glory of the Father. Jesus left behind the richness of heaven. There on the mountain He was shining with the glory of God and had fellowship with Elijah and Moses. But He set his face towards Jerusalem and went down the mountain, out of the glory of the Father into the suffering of the cross. He went down the mountain of glory to go up the mountain of suffering.

After so many years of trying and failing to climb up to God, Jesus left heaven and came down to us in order to suffer and die for our sins.

### **The voice from heaven was gone**

When Peter, James and John looked up they saw Jesus alone, no more mountain, no more vain attempts to climb up to God, but also no more voice, no more shining glory, no more fear.

We have probably all been in Peter's place. You're scared, you're nervous, maybe it's your first date, so you just start talking. You realize later you really should have kept your mouth closed and just listened. The voice of the Father stops Peter's thoughtless chatter. "This is my beloved Son, listen to him."

You can understand how Peter and James and John would be a little intimidated by the glory and the cloud and the voice, but then it is gone and there is only Jesus. And Jesus touches them as if to say, "it's ok, you don't need to be afraid it's only me."

God the Father when he speaks from heaven is terrifying. God the Father with the voice of thunder and with the white hot lightning makes us cower in fear with our faces on the ground as did Peter, James and John.

When God spoke his law from the top of Mount Sinai, the people cowered in fear. A little while after that in Numbers chapter 15 the people found a man collecting sticks on the Sabbath. This man had violated the Law of God not to work on the Sabbath. They bound the man and Moses asked God what ought to happen to him. God said the man should be stoned. So all the people took him outside the camp and threw stones at him until he was dead. All because he picked up sticks on the Sabbath. God is serious about sin and the punishment of sin is death.

Imagine you have a test to take but the punishment for getting one thing wrong is death. Maybe there is a blade hanging over your head and as soon as you make a mistake on that test the blade will fall and plunge into your head.

Peter, James and John cowered in fear before that voice, but then Jesus touched them and he was alone. No more thundering voice from heaven, no more demands, no more test, no more law.

In place of the voice of the Father was Jesus, saying it's ok I accept the punishment for you. It's okay I accept the anger and wrath of the Father for you. In the place of the voice of the Father is Jesus' touch of love, be calm be still, your sins are forgiven.

### **Moses and Elijah were gone**

When Peter, James, and John looked up they saw Jesus alone. All three gospel Matthew, Mark, and Luke really emphasize this point. The mountain was gone the voice and glory of the Father was gone and so also were Moses and Elijah.

Moses and Elijah were there as representatives of the whole old testament, but now they were gone and Jesus was left there alone.

Which is better old or new? That depends doesn't it? Depends on what you are talking about and whom you are talking to. An old 10 year aged cheddar cheese is so good. It just melts in your mouth. On the other hand a casserole that has been in your fridge for ten years is probably not so great.

Some people like their old lazy boy. It's nice and broken in and has an imprint that fits you perfectly. Others want a new one. One that has a built in cooler to keep their beer cold.

In this case the new is definitely better than the old. The old was filled with all these regulations. Give ten percent. Journey to Jerusalem three times a year. Every time you sin sacrifice a bull. Don't eat bacon.

But now Moses and the Law that God gave through Moses are gone. It is only Jesus alone that remains. The Old testament with all its regulations is gone, Jesus remains who says to you, you don't have to sacrifice a bull, your sins are forgiven because I died for you.

If Moses was a representative of the law, Elijah was there as a representative of all the prophets. All the prophets who called down fire from heaven and went into lions dens without being destroyed. Prophets who lived three days in the belly of a fish, who held up their hands and opened the red sea, who healed leprosy, who with super human strength pulled down the roof of a great temple on the enemies of God. Concerning the deeds of these prophets I could go on and on and on. And the deeds were great and amazing and we might think that would be cool, if we had such powers.

But in the place of Elijah and all the prophets of the old testament we have Jesus alone, and what did he do? He set his face towards Jerusalem, and he went down the mountain in order to suffer and die in our place, and He rose again from the dead.

All of this was there partly to teach the apostle and us that the old has passed away, the new has come. And the new things is Jesus Alone.

When they looked up they saw Jesus alone. No more mountain. No more trying to climb to God. Jesus came down to us. No more voice of the Father. No more terror in the presence of God. Instead God became man and came down to be with us. No more Moses or Elijah. The law was gone. The prophets were gone. Jesus alone stood in their place.

Amen.