

# Matthew 17:1-13 | Bill Howell

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[ 0 : 00 ] So good to be with you and continuing your study in Matthew 17. So turn there if you have a Bible and follow along the passage.

! We have a board meeting coming up November 16th and we have a winter retreat for teens, December 26th to the 31st.

If anybody's interested in a road trip at that time, an adventure, a winter adventure, come on up and join us. Teens are kind of into these exciting things, aren't they? Winter driving up to northern Minnesota.

So in chapter 16, the Lord's up north with his disciples. He brings before them his death and then three days later his resurrection.

And he talks with them about his coming again following his departure. And it concludes with the Lord saying, And then we have that fulfilled as we read in opening verses in chapter 17.

[ 1 : 29 ] Now after six days, Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with them. 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.

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. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise and do not be afraid.

When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 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.

[ 2 : 33 ] And his disciples asked him saying, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Jesus answered and said to them, Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished.

Likewise, the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist. Father, help us to recall something from this passage, to apply it to our lives in a way that would honor you.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So, in verse 1, we have the Lord taking the inner circle, Peter, James, and John, up to a high mountain.

I think of, you know, James is always mentioned first, so he must have been the older brother between him and John. And they go up there, and in Luke's account, chapter 9, it says they're going up to pray.

And in verse 2, he's transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became as white as the light.

[ 3 : 44 ] And so, again, as Luke's account says, as he was praying, this transfiguration happened. He was seen in all the splendor of his kingdom glory. Shining face, brighter than the sun.

Garments radiating a whiteness they'd never seen before. This may well be how he appears in his millennial kingdom, as the Lord of glory. It wasn't how he appeared when he came down in his first advent.

And it wasn't how he appeared after his resurrection, with his glorified body. You know, you recall at one point he was walking with the disciples, some disciples on the road to Emmaus. He was

following them.

He caught up with them, and they didn't recognize anything special about him until he started speaking. And then their hearts burned within them, as he shared with them of himself and of the Christ, as revealed in the Old Testament.

Verse 3, And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. So, all of a sudden, we have Moses and Elijah joining him on this holy mount, as Peter would later describe it.

[ 4 : 49 ] How did the disciples know that this was Moses and Elijah? Well, it's likely they had pictures in their Old Testament Bible. And here's Elijah going up to heaven in a chariot of fire, and Elisha's startled with his mouth open.

And then, of course, the picture of Moses would have to be holding the Ten Commandments up and ready to bang them down to the ground. So, I'm sure that's...

No. Probably, they just got this information because the Lord enlightened their thinking. And I think this may well be how we know people. When we come into the kingdom, we enter heaven.

Then, the Lord just gives us an understanding of who they are, even though we've never met them before. God will let us know this, so we won't have to wear name tags.

So, they're talking with them. What are they discussing? Well, Luke tells us they were talking about the death which he would accomplish in Jerusalem. A death that was an accomplishment.

[ 5 : 56 ] That can't be said about us, can it? The death was an accomplishment. Death for us kind of reveals who we are. Yes, now everybody knows I'm a sinner.

I've experienced physical death. But, we have the hope of glory. For us believers, and for our loved ones who've passed on, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And so, we grieve as our loved ones pass, but it's not without hope. I listened to an audio book some time ago, and it was called The Unknowns.

And it was a history of soldiers in World War I, or those who served in the armed forces, who ended up carrying the original casket of the unknown soldier to the tomb in Arlington Cemetery.

Just talked about their background and history. And, also what I didn't know was each war after that point, there's unknown soldiers' remains added to that tomb.

[ 6 : 59 ] And some of these men, well, they would say maybe all of them died for their country, that there might be freedom and help. And, you know, we hear about the soldier who dives under grenade, and his buddies in the foxhole are preserved because he gave his life.

And so, there is a sense in which a man can give his physical life to help others retain their physical lives by the grace of God. But there's only one man who could die to extend spiritual life, eternal life, his own life, the life of God to anyone and to everyone who would trust him for this.

And that's our Lord Jesus Christ. You wonder, as Moses and Elijah were talking with the Lord, were the disciples listening?

Or were they so excited about meeting Moses and Elijah in person that they were simply in awe of this occasion? You know, Moses can remind us of believers who die and experience the resurrection.

Elijah can remind us of believers who will be raptured, caught up to heaven without experiencing physical death. Moses may have excitedly talked with the Lord about how he was so thrilled that the Lord fulfilled the law.

[ 8 : 17 ] He was 100% morally pure. He fulfilled the sacrificial portion of the law, the last sacrifice, God, the last blood sacrifice to end all sacrifices that would be to God's satisfaction.

Elijah may have spoke representing the Old Testament prophets and how he was thrilled that the Lord Jesus fulfilled all that was said about the Messiah whom the Old Testament prophets brought before the people as being their hope and anticipation.

Isaiah 42, Isaiah 61, some beautiful passages about the Messiah. But was anybody listening? Well, I don't think Peter was paying that close attention.

He was coming up with his own plan. And so he speaks in verse 4 and says to the Lord, Lord, it is good for us to be here. Well, that's good. But then he goes on to say, if you wish, let us make here three tabernacles.

One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And we think this is probably the time of year when the Jewish people were celebrating the ingathering of the harvest with the Feast of Tabernacles.

[ 9 : 29 ] This would be a time when the Israelites would dwell in makeshift tents made out of leafy branches. And this way they'd commemorate the nation's wilderness travels and remember how the

Lord brought them through the desert into the promised land.

The feast also reminds us New Testament believers of the Lord's plan to gather us his good wheat and take us home to himself, home to heaven in a day soon to come.

However, a problem here is that Peter seems to be putting the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the same level as Moses and Elijah.

Had the disciples' attention moved away from the Lord of glory who's there? And had their attention moved on to these servants of the Lord?

You know, in the Old Testament tabernacle set up, God occupied the tent in the middle of the camp. Everybody else, all the other tribes dwelt around his tent.

[10:34] And there he was in the Holy of Holies, represented in the Holy of Holies. And Moses and his brother, Aaron, they did not reside in the Lord's tent.

They resided with the rest of the people surrounding the tent of the Lord who was given supremacy at that time. You know, man still lives with the problem of exalting men.

And this problem will always be with us, even in the Christian world. We have those who call themselves Lutherans. Would Martin Luther approve?

Others call themselves Wesleyans or Calvinists. And this isn't new. In the first century church in Corinth, men were defining themselves by who their favorite preacher was.

Peter, Paul, Apollos. Paul rebukes them for this. Now, I'd like to share some thoughts about pastor.

[11:40] And in some sense, I'm going to be preaching to the choir here. You all have a good arrangement of shared leadership. But sometimes a local church, it's not too uncommon in our day to be led by one who's referred to as pastor.

And the local church should never be dependent upon one man. And yet sometimes people make the local church. They want their pastor to do everything. And praise God for those who ignore the title and humbly do the job and the role the Lord has for them.

But it can lead to stirring up pride in man that he has a certain title. And if people allow, have him make the final decisions and everything, and he wants everything to go his way, and when they don't, then he throws a fit and this and that.

But the truth is that in all things, the Lord might have preeminence. When we think of the word pastor, it's only used once in the English Bible and the King James.

And it's the same word that's translated shepherd three other times in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus is referred to as the chief shepherd.

[13:04] Peter talks about returning to the shepherd and guardian or bishop of your souls. And we also have the Lord Jesus referred to as the great shepherd.

And that's what the word pastor refers to. It refers to a pastor. But you know the one who wrote about the Lord Jesus as the chief shepherd?

It was Peter. 1 Peter 5.4. It was the first pope who wrote about... Well, some people say he was the first pope. Peter. What does Peter say about himself? He says in chapter 5, verse 1, I'm a fellow elder.

The Lord's the chief shepherd. The Lord's the great shepherd. The Lord's the one we want exalted. And we won't even talk about how some in Christendom promote Mary as superior to Jesus, the Son of God, and demean God the Father and God the Son by thinking, you've got to have a woman's touch to calm those men down.

Because you know how men, they get angry and blow up at times. You need a woman's... Come on. That's demeaning for our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior.

[14:17] Now, the Lord does give gifted men to the church. And this includes the pastor teacher. I think that's the same person that's referred to when we read the Lord's gifting the church in Ephesians 4.11 with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers.

These seem to have been given to the body of Christ that go beyond the local church. Just as the apostles are given for the training of the saints, they go beyond the local church to, well, a worldwide ministry.

They wrote basically the New Testament. And we thank the Lord for this ministry. But titles can be dangerous. You know, sometimes we talk about the apostle Paul.

Well, Paul never talks about himself that way. Paul writes about himself, and Peter does too, and in many of the letters that he opens with, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He talks about the job the Lord's giving him, the role the Lord wants him to play. An apostle is a sent one, and he was sent out. And so are the 12 for the glory of the Lord Jesus.

[15:33] We read one verse in Hebrews. We read about the apostle and finisher of your faith. And, of course, the apostle and finisher of your faith.

It's the Lord Jesus himself. Hebrews chapter 3. You know, you and I have been blessed with some believers who have a nationwide, even a worldwide ministry.

You've profited from their messages through the internet, on TV, through their written ministry. I, Karen and I, and Sally were profited this last weekend in Branson to hear one of these brothers. I'm not going to name the brothers. But you know who's been a blessing to you. And a brother had a message down in Branson, very good message. And then, after, at the break time, I went out and bought one of his books.

I regularly read books that this brother's right because it's been profitable to me. You also know there are worldwide fakes who Lucifer, the angel of light, props up as deceivers to promote a false Christianity.

[16:34] But when it comes to the local church, no one man is adequate to do all the pastoral work. And it's nice when more than one brother is able to share in the ministry of teaching God's word.

You know, pastoral work, it's caring for the sheep. And as a local, I don't know, pastor, leader, elder in our home church, I'm concerned that the sheep get good food.

I don't want just any brother standing up who wants to, I got something to say. Well, I want brothers to be able to be there who can share the word of God, who can teach the word of God, who can give good food to the sheep who are hearing the word of God.

And we're also told, take seriously this responsibility. For those of us who have the privilege of sharing the word of God, may we recognize what James says, let not many of you become teachers knowing that you have a greater responsibility.

For we all stumble in many ways, and especially with the tongue. And I'd also like to mention that pastoral work is not just the work of church leaders.

[17:48] All of the Lord's people have the privilege of caring for their fellow sheep. Take a meal to the sick. Visit. Teach Sunday school.

Help with Awana. Send an encouraging letter or text. You know, preparing coffee, snacks. There's so many ways that we can all be involved in pastoral work.

When the Lord talked to Peter on the evening before his crucifixion, we'll read some verses in Luke 22.

The Lord said, Simon, Simon, indeed, Satan has asked for you that he might sift you as wheat. He wants to grind you up and spit you out. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.

But he said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death. Then he said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know me.

[18:53] And we have that fall of Peter recorded in the Holy Scriptures. It's interesting.

The Lord didn't say, well, Peter, I'm not going to let Satan touch you. No. He says, look, he's going to tempt you, and it's going to be a learning experience in your life, but I'm praying for you, and you're not going to be wiped up and washed out.

I'm going to pray for you, and you're going to be strengthened, and come back to strengthen your brethren. And that's the way it is with us, too. You know, the Lord lets us go through trials to humble us.

Peter needed to be humbled, and for his own purposes, that we might appreciate him all the more, give him all the glory all the more, and be more ready, a vessel fit for the master's use.

There's so many ways that you can care for the sheep. You know, when the Lord places an idea on your mind as to how to strengthen your brethren, follow through with it.

[20:02] Don't wait. Don't delay. Follow through with it. You think of the Lord in dealing with Peter in John 21. And again, so this Luke 22 is before the fall.

John 21 is after the Lord has risen. And again, restoring Peter, strengthening Peter. And aren't you glad the Lord daily lives to intercede for you?

Where would you be? Where would I be without his continued ministry in that regard from the right hand of the throne of God? But you know, there he asked Peter three times, Peter, do you love me?

And each time Peter says, yes, Lord, I love you. Lord, you know I love you. And the Lord's response, if you love me, take care of my sheep. Feed the little ones. Shepherd my sheep. Feed the sheep. Care for the sheep is the Lord's counsel. So, you know, I think regarding the tendency to think too highly of men, I have to confess, I've gotten worried about the election.

[ 21 : 05 ] And what's going to happen if so-and-so becomes president and when I worry about it, I'm thinking too highly of men and too highly of the impact of men.

You know, I love hearing songs and singing songs about the Lord. Behold our God, seated on the throne. Come, let us adore him. Seated on the throne.

Has never abdicated the throne. Has never stand up in pace because what do I do next? It's such a mess down there. The Lord is on the throne. One of the songs we sang when we were in Branson or sung to us, we sang with it, Kings and kingdoms shall all pass away.

But there's something about that name. Verse 5, back in Matthew 17. 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. And so God the Father speaks from heaven as he does a couple other times that are recorded in the New Testament. And he lets Peter know, hey, it's time to listen.

[ 22 : 21 ] And not time to be giving your own counsel. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, James counsels us through the Spirit of God.

How often do we say things when we're excited or fearful or startled? Things that we later regret. Again, quick to hear, slow to speak, that's the Lord's counsel.

Who was the one the scripture said spoke unadvisedly with his lips? That's King James. And it's from Psalm 106.

And many of you know who I'm talking about. I just read those verses. Psalm 106, verse 32. They angered him. Mine has, it capitalized, referring to God.

Also at the waters of strife so that it went ill with Moses on account of them because they rebelled against his spirit so he spoke rashly with his lips. Remember that occasion?

[ 23 : 21 ] Moses, the friend of God, the servant of God. And yet, he blew up at the time when he was supposed to give the Lord the glory for providing water for the people.

You rebels, must we provide this water for you? Smashing the rock. The Lord says, Moses, that was bad and that's going to keep you out of the promised land. And we think, what?

Really? What about me and the things I've said? Well, the Lord lets us know his perspective but here's Moses, servant of God and yet, he spoke unadvisedly with his lips at the wrong time.

and then, what about Elijah, the other person who's with him on the mount? Well, he was the one, Lord, they've killed your prophets and I'm the only one left.

He was depressed but this came out of his mouth more than once, at least a couple times as recorded, this was what his thinking was. The Lord says, no, no, Elijah, you're emotionally distraught.

[ 24 : 26 ] Well, he didn't say that directly but he said, you know, you're off on this. I've got 7,000 other men who have not bowed their knee to Baal. So, Moses didn't always say the right thing.

Elijah didn't always say the right thing. We know one who always said the right thing. Who never said anything wrong, who never had to apologize or take back his words.

Perfect in his actions, perfect in his thoughts and perfect with his lips. The only one, our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, one advantage of getting older is that I usually don't blurt out the first thing that comes to my mind.

I hold on to it, I swallow it. Say if, if we're at a board meeting and John says something crazy. And, and that's not typically the case.

But if there's something at a board meeting, storybook board meeting that I, I might feel strongly about for or against, I just keep my mouth closed, let the board members talk, and usually it works itself out.

[ 25 : 43 ] Now, any of us at any time can blurt out a wrong response, whatever our age. you know what, what that can be like, but it's, uh, I want to be quick to hear, slow to speak.

In Mark's account, chapter 9 of this event, he says, Peter was afraid and didn't know what to say. Well, that didn't keep him from saying something. Peter often thought he had to say something. In Luke's account, chapter 9, he says, Peter didn't know what he was saying.

That's the Lord's evaluation of Peter's idea. Now, Luke's account also says that Peter and his buddies were just waking up when they realized the Lord was blazing with glory and discussing God's future plans with Moses and Elijah.

Hey, any of you ever go to sleep in a prayer meeting? It was early morning. Peter, James, and John, they were sleeping and all of a sudden there was commotion. I mean, the Lord's praying and all of a sudden they went, whoa, look what's going on.

Hmm. This happened another time too? Yeah, a late night prayer meeting in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Lord asked Peter, James, and John to stay awake with him because his heart was breaking and he was agonizing and they fell asleep again.

[ 27 : 06 ] Well, I know kind of what that's like to fall asleep in a prayer meeting and maybe some of you do too, especially near the end of the summer and some people are, if we're praying around the table and I'm the last one, I can get a little drowsy.

So, Luke tells us that Peter's suggestion came when Moses and Elijah were preparing to depart. He wanted to keep them there but he'll reunite with them at some date in the future.

So, then God the Father embraces the three disciples in the cloud to get their attention and emphasizes their need to listen to his beloved son. Did they listen to Jesus better after this experience?

Well, am I listening to him? Or am I doing too much talking or making too many suggestions to how to run my Christian life? Am I listening to God's plan or wanting him to listen to my plan? Your clock's a little fast here.

Boy. So, we've got the next, the next three verses we found, we find the Father's words end and the cloud lifts and only Jesus remains.

[ 28 : 25 ] And they were fearful as any of us could be, will be before in the presence of God but he put his compassionate touch on them to fear not. Have you felt his spiritual touch of comfort at times when you've been fearful and don't know what to do?

Well, other people, they can be mostly a blessing to us as our Christian brethren most of the time, I believe, but only Jesus never fails.

Those who trust in him will never be disappointed. So don't let yourself get too far away from your Bible because that's where you're going to see the best understanding of Jesus, who he is and what he's done and how he wants to communicate with you.

Oh boy. Okay, one other point. You know, the Lord tells him in verse 9, tell this vision to no one until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

He told a lot of people, don't talk about this. And they went out right away and talked about it. And yet it appears here that Peter and James and John, we don't read about them talking about this ahead of time.

[ 29 : 35 ] but Peter counsels us in his letter, his second letter, his final letter and he says, he speaks of this instant, he says in verse 15 of chapter 1, moreover, I'll be careful to ensure you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

He talks about putting off his tent in verse 14. You ever talk about that way of dying, putting off your tent? Well, Peter says, I'm just putting off my tent. I'm going to get a new body that's a permanent building one of these days.

But he says, we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father, honor and glory when such a voice came to him from the excellent glory.

This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. And so, we have the prophetic word confirmed which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart.

So he says, this experience I went through confirms what God has said in his word. And he talks about another way of putting this is we have a more sure prophetic word in the Bible than the experience I had on the mountain.

[ 31 : 01 ] You know, it's better to have the written word of God than to have a religious experience. And yet, what are people looking for today?

They're looking for experiences, something they can feel. And many are disregarding God's written word. Don't go there.

Experiences can be forgotten. God's word never changes. religious. You know, John can say to Peter, Peter, do you remember that time we saw the glorified Jesus on Thursday on the mountain? And Peter would say, wait a minute, John, it wasn't a Thursday, it was a Friday. You husbands and wives know what that's like. The day, what actually happened in the event you're trying to recall and so forth.

You know, experiences, they can be forgotten. And yet, if the word of God disagrees with your religious experience, throw out your religious experience.

[ 32 : 00 ] Keep, hold on to the word of God. So, he talks in these other verses about the coming of Elijah and Malachi 4 talks about the coming of Elijah and some people feel, well, that was fulfilled in John the Baptist.

Others feel Elijah is still coming. He may be one of the two prophets mentioned in Revelation 11 who preached for three and a half years until their time was up. And, well, the Lord knows exactly what's going to happen, but the Lord's main point in the last four verses is that he's going to suffer. John the Baptist suffered. He's going to suffer. And we're so glad that he's finished his earthly suffering and will someday be revealed in the glory that he's always deserved. Father, I thank you for your word.

Thank you for my brethren here. Thank you for the cautions and warnings you give us. Help us not to exalt men above the Lord or not to think they're so important that we need to fear them.

Help us to pray for whoever the next president is. Pray daily and regularly and trust you that you have plans that are bigger than anything we have seen and we read that your plans are good for your people.

[ 33 : 19 ] I thank you for my brethren here. I thank you for your mercies. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.