

I want to convince you of something. I thought I would tell you ahead of time so you know my agenda. I want to convince you to choose Jesus. I want to convince you, not by arguments, but by telling you about a strange experience that happened to Jesus and three of His disciples. By the end, I hope you will choose Jesus by seeing something different in your everyday experiences.

For many of us, we decided at some point to choose Jesus. Maybe you can pinpoint the moment in time. Maybe you've told the story many times over the years. But here's the interesting thing about choices you may not realize—choices are ongoing decisions. Think about marriage. If you are married, you made a decision to marry your spouse. But every day, through your words and action, you “choose” to be the husband/wife God has called you to be. Or think about work. There was a day when you chose to take your job. But every day, you “choose” again through being engaged, present, and working diligently.

My hope is you will choose Jesus in your everyday, ordinary moments. This matters because we're going to see that our ordinary moments aren't necessarily ordinary. We can choose to see glory in the ordinary.

We're going to reenter our study of the gospel of Matthew. What I love about our study of Matthew is you can read the words and experiences of Jesus for yourself.

As we begin again, a bit of background on where we are in the story. Matthew is writing to an audience of Jewish followers of Jesus around the middle of the first century. Matthew's purpose is to show Jesus brings together the story of God's people. Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of Jewish hope for God to bring about a new world. In our story, we will see multiple links back to the Jewish story. Specifically to our passage, Jesus has just told His followers that He would go to Jerusalem to die. They don't understand yet what that means and how this event will connect to God's purpose. But the passage below brings it into focus.

**After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.  
(Matthew 17:1–2)**

### **For Them**

Jesus had multiple circles of people around Him. He had the crowds, who watched from a distance. He had the 5,000, who would spend hours listening to His teaching. He had the 72, who

were committed to propagating the way of Jesus. He had the 12, who gave up their way of living to learn from Jesus. And He had three—Peter, James, and John—with whom Jesus taught in unique ways. Jesus takes these three close disciples with Him on a journey up a mountain. We shouldn't miss this point. What happens next could have occurred without any else around. But Jesus invites His close disciples to join Him. There is something about what happens next that is for their benefit.

### **Transfigured**

What happens next is strange but infused with meaning. Jesus is transfigured in front of the three disciples. “Transfigured” is the Greek word, *metamorphoo*, which means to change form. Think of the English term, metamorphosis. In other words, it's the same Jesus, but, for that moment, something about Him changed. He shined with the glory of heaven. He was the same Jesus they traveled with; ate alongside, laughed together, but “the dullness of earthly conditions [had been] temporarily stripped away.” Glory changed His ordinary appearance while they watched. It is such a profound experience that Peter later writes about it, saying that he was an eyewitness to “majesty, honor, and glory” (2 Peter 1:16–18).

**Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (verses 3–4)**

Then things get interesting, and if you were a first century Jew, a bit strange. Moses and Elijah—two of the great leaders of Israel's past—suddenly appear and talk with Jesus. What did Moses and Elijah have to do with what happened to Jesus?

If you were Jewish in the first century, you had a belief that God wasn't done working in the world. As bad as things were, God would set the world right. And this new world God would bring about would start with Moses and Elijah. The Torah declares that one day a prophet like Moses would arrive (Deut. 18:15–19). The prophet Malachi announced that Elijah would return to prepare the way for the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). You can see how embedded this is into the cultural expectation when John the Baptist was hugely popular and was asked, “Are you Elijah? The Prophet [like Moses]?” (John 1:21).

So, if your Rabbi takes you up a mountain, and has an encounter with glory, and then Moses and Elijah show up, whom you would expect to show up at the dawning of a new type of world, you

know something profound is happening. If you're a first century Jew hearing this story, you can connect the dots to Israel's godly leaders of the past and know something profound is happening.

Peter gets this, and he wants to build three booths. These booths were temporary shelters built each year during the Feast of the Tabernacles, one of the holiest feasts in the Jewish culture. The purpose of the feast is about both the past and the future. The Feast is a celebration of God rescuing His people from slavery in Egypt, and also it looks forward to the future arrival of the Messiah and God's ultimate freedom for His people. Peter saw the great leaders of the past (Moses and Elijah) and saw Jesus was connected to heaven and part of something future. The past and the future were coming together in Jesus.

There's a sense that Peter doesn't want this moment to end. We can understand that. You've had moments you wish could last forever—a vacation, a special event, a meal with family and friends. Peter saw glory, and he didn't want to go down the mountain to ordinary things. He saw purpose in the past and the future coming together in Jesus, and he didn't want to go down the mountain to the problems and divisions of the everyday life. Glory is always more enjoyable than ordinary. But what if "transfiguration" tells us there is a new relationship between glory and ordinary things. Watch what happens next.

**While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

**When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. (verses 5–8)**

## Cloud

In the midst of Jesus' radiance and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, a bright cloud enveloped them. In the Jewish scriptures, a cloud was a symbol of God's presence. The perhaps best-known example was when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to meet with God. A cloud covered the mountain for six days (Exodus 24:18), and then Moses went up the mountain. On Mt. Sinai, God spoke to Moses from a cloud (Exod. 19:9; 24:16; 34:5), and that it is what happens here.

## Voice

This is the second time that the Father has done this; He did the same at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 4). Why does God speak? On Mt. Sinai, God spoke so people would recognize Moses' relationship with God and listen (obey) to Moses as a leader. He spoke now so the disciples would recognize Jesus' relationship with the Father and listen (obey) to Jesus. Here was not merely a leader, but the Son of God, whom God the Father loves.

But don't miss the implication behind this command. Obeying Jesus wasn't meant for the mountain, but instead, it was meant for the ordinary. They were not going to have trouble obeying Jesus when glory was shining in their eyes. But it's when their eyes are dulled from the murkiness of the everyday, ordinary things that they needed to choose to see glory. It's the same for us today. What if your purpose, mission, calling—whatever term you want to use—isn't on the mountain of grand, but in the ordinary things? What if your most significant act isn't in one grand moment, but in a thousand of unseen acts of faithfulness? This happens when you choose to see glory in the ordinary things.

**As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."**

**The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"**

**Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. (verses 9–13)**

So Jesus and the three disciples came down the mountain. That is what they were meant to do after the experience of glory. As they walked, Jesus tells them not to speak about what they experienced. Why? Maybe Jesus wanted to avoid division with the other nine disciples who didn't make the trip. The disciples tended to boast and claim privilege over each other. Or maybe Jesus wanted to avoid distraction. Living only by stories of glory could distract them from living out glory in the everyday. Later, after the resurrection, this event would inspire rather than distract. But Jesus was with them, and there was work to do in bringing the glory of heaven in the ordinary of the everyday.

But the disciples had a question. I'm sure they had plenty of questions after what just happened!. How did what just happened relate to the prophecies of the past and what God would do in the future? Remember from earlier in our story; the Jewish expectation was that Elijah would prepare the way for God's Messiah. Was what they witnessed the coming of Elijah? If so, how does this relate to Messiah? Or did the Bible scholars have it wrong?

Jesus said that Elijah already came—and everybody missed him. John the Baptist was the Elijah figure the prophet spoke about. The one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. And if John was the Elijah figure, for whom did He prepare the way? Jesus was the One who started God's new world. And just as they mistreated (killed) John the Baptist, they would do the same to Jesus.

## Transfiguration and Crucifixion

To talk of death after a moment of glory doesn't seem like a happy ending to the story. But these two events—the mountain of glory and the hill where Jesus later died—are perhaps more connected than we realize. Here on a mountain, Jesus is revealed in glory; there on a hill, Jesus is revealed in shame. Here, His clothes are shining white; there, His clothes are stripped off. Here, He is surrounded by the holy figures of Moses and Elijah; there, two common criminals surround Him. Here, a bright cloud announces His Sonship; there darkness covers the earth at the death of the Son of God (N.T. Wright).

Coming down the mountain meant Jesus would face the worst of humanity against Him. But even the worst of humanity could not stop glory. Jesus died so you could be alive. Paul later put it this way in one of his letters: *“you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...”* (Ephesians 2:1–5). Even in the darkness of death, Jesus brought glory to life for anyone who will put their faith in Him.

If Jesus is the promised Messiah—the collision of glory and ordinary—that means God is not done putting together your story. There is hope where it seems hopeless. You have a future where the present may look bleak. It means that the good of your past is leading to something even better. And it means God will work for good the non-good of your past. It means all of the ordinary

things—sitting in a meeting at work, getting the kids dressed, going for a walk, having a conversation—all of it matters because glory comes down a mountain to ordinary, everyday places. One Bible commentator put it this way, “The moment of glory does not exist for its own sake; it exists to clothe the common things with a radiance they never had before” (William Barclay).

So maybe we need to ask ourselves this week, “How is glory working through the ordinary of my every day?” This is where prayer can have a new force for you—ask God to show you the glory in the ordinary. We too easily relegate certain tasks as more special than others. But what if glory is shining in everything that we do? What if no hour is wasted, but rather is an opportunity to see God in a new way? One modern day writer put it this way, “Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace” (Frederick Buechner). Choose to see grace in your ordinary, everyday life. God is calling you up the mountain to see a glimpse of glory and invite you into a closer relationship with Him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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