



Matthew 17:7–9

7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”
8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 9 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.”

Reflection

Peter, James and John have their faces pressed into the ground. They're lying face down, as though dead, they're so terrified. Theirs' is an elemental fear, they're frightened to their very core by what they've just witnessed; even more so by what they've just heard. Moments before Jesus had been transformed, his face shone like the sun, his travel-worn cloak became like the raiment of angels, as white as light. Then Moses, who'd parted the Red Sea with his staff, who'd entered into God's presence on Mount Sinai and come down with the Ten Commandments, who'd led God's people out of Egypt and to the border of the Promised Land – Moses was there. And Elijah, who'd stood up to the wicked King Ahab, one prophet of God left against 850 prophets of Baal and Asher-

ah, he'd taunted them, called down fire from heaven to prove that there is only one true God and then called down fire from heaven two more times to destroy the soldiers that were sent to kill him. Finally, God sent a chariot of fire that took him up to heaven in a whirlwind, that is until he came back down to earth to stand before them in this instant. Jesus, transfigured, blindingly bright like the sun, Moses, Elijah, each hundreds of years old, still living and come down from heaven to stand before them. Then as if this wasn't enough thick cloud descends, and God himself speaks. They felt his words with every cell in their bodies, felt his divine presence as the ancient prophetic words from Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42 were fulfilled in his words, in front of them, as they lay terrified in the dirt:

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

The next thing they felt was the gentle touch of Jesus, with these words of comfort,

“Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”

They had been in the presence of God and in the presence of the future kingdom of heaven – and they had lived to tell the tale. In fact, as they would eventually learn, they had lived *in order* to tell the tale. Jesus had been transfigured for them, so that they might witness him in all his glory. This scene of heaven come to earth, Jesus shining like the sun, Moses, Elijah and God the Father himself present,

had been for them, a private viewing just for them, so that God might impress these words into their hearts and minds forever,

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

And so that later, and for the rest of their lives, they might impress these words on others, being eyewitnesses to what had occurred that day.

As they were walking back down the mountain, still reeling, terrified but filled with awe, Jesus instructed them,

“Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

With God's final words still ringing in their ears I'm pretty sure they listened to Jesus. But why did Jesus tell them to keep this a secret until he had been raised from the dead?

In fact, this is the fifth and final command to his disciples to be silent. Jesus has said much the same in chapters eight, nine, twelve and sixteen. Only this time he adds to keep this secret until he's been raised from the dead. Why? If the Messiah is finally here, and this has just been attested to so powerfully by God the Father himself, not to mention both Moses and Elijah, then why keep it a secret?

Most likely for a few of reasons. We've seen right throughout Matthew's gospel a misunderstanding by God's people in

terms of their expectations surrounding the Messiah. From the Old Testament they'd understood the strands of prophecy of Jesus being God's anointed king, the rightful king of the Jews who would reign on David's throne forever. David was the greatest military leader of Israel and their greatest king who had set up his son Solomon's reign to be the greatest in Israel's history. However, Jesus' contemporaries had completely disregarded the other major strands of Old Testament prophecy about him from Isaiah, that he would be a Suffering Servant, who would cryptically seem to die on behalf of God's people only then somehow to live forever. In telling his disciples to keep this a secret Jesus is simply not wanting to add fuel to the fire of these wrong expectations. He doesn't want to be made king by force.

He doesn't want his journey to the cross to be hindered in any way, and more than that it is crucial that Jesus' message must be understood to focus on the forgiveness of sins through his suffering on the cross. His mission isn't about politics and military action, but sin. He wants to be understood by, and remembered for, the cross not the transfiguration. It's his resurrection that will speak most powerfully as to who Jesus is, the Son of God in power, come to die for the sins of the world, and to be the firstborn from the dead; the one the righteous will follow through death to eternal life by faith in his name.

Think & Pray

To close this morning I'd like you to think about the significance of the moment that

Jesus reaches out and touches his disciples. In Matthew's gospel it's almost always people reaching out to touch Jesus to be healed, or forgiven, or saved in some way. But here, Jesus is reaching out and touching them. They're terrified, faces pressed into the dirt in worship but mostly in fear at having encountered the Living God. And then the Living-God-become-man reaches out and gently touches them and says, 'Don't be afraid.' God came to us, reached out, touched us so that we need no longer be afraid of death or anything else. Not a terrifying voice of elemental power to be obeyed out of fear; but a man who became one of us, living the life we should have lived, and dying the death we should have died – so that we don't have to. Jesus is the exact representation of God, he bears the exact imprint of his nature,

he is the image of the invisible God. He is God, the God who came down so that we could know him as more than smoke, fire, power, justice and holiness. Come down so that we could know him most fully and relate to him most intimately, as flawed human beings relating to the representative human being. The way it was always meant to be before sin ruined everything. Not out of fear, but out of love. The bible says a bruised reed Jesus will not break, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, that his yoke is easy, his burden is light and in him we will find rest for our souls. He's the good shepherd, who calls little children like us to him, and promises that he will care, and provide for, and ultimately lay down his life for his sheep. That's the Jesus who reaches out to reassure his disciples in our passage and that's the

Jesus who came to us, reached out and touch us too, and who we now know as the best and fullest picture of the God of the universe. And the reason we need no longer be afraid of death or anything else.

Thank God this morning for Jesus, the final and fullest revelation of himself. No longer fear and awe on a mountain, but fear and awe overwhelmed by love on a hill called Calvary. Jesus was glorified on this mountain, but received far greater glory on that hill outside Jerusalem, it wasn't a cloud that descended that time, but darkness, as death died for all those who have faith in his name. Thank God that we can truly know him this morning through Jesus.