

When Did They Know? Matthew 17:1-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I have always found it curious that Jesus told the disciples with Him that day when He was transfigured, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Why not tell anyone? What was the reason Jesus made this adamant request for secrecy about this awesome event which revealed to Peter, James, and John, Jesus' Divinity – that He was true God? You would have thought that Jesus have told them to go tell it on the mountain, but He does not. Instead, Jesus tells them to tell no one.

There are a couple possible reasons Jesus told them to tell no one.

First, if the story was told, the people listening would not understand it. They would want to be caught up in the glory and the glitz of the event, "Jesus, show us your glory, just as you did to Peter, James, and John."

Secondly, at this point, these three disciples do not fully "get it," they did not know exactly what Jesus was all about. There was a good possibility that they might use this event to push the case that they were the three special disciples, and that they'd deserved special treatment from the others. Or, if nothing else, it would have awakened a jealousy in the others who were not there that day.

They also didn't understand that this glory was a glimpse of the future, and that for the future glory to come to them, some not so nice stuff needed to happen first.

Transfiguration takes place six days after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus applauded this correct response. But He also immediately warned the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ. Why?

Peter got the answer right, but he didn't get it. Peter was not with the program yet. Immediately following Peter's confession, *Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Peter didn't understand. He heard Jesus teach, He saw the miracles, he knew that only God could do such things. He wanted Jesus the miracle worker. He wanted to be a part of the new kingdom, the greatness of this Son of David's reign. But God had other plans. The great victory was coming, but it wasn't like Peter thought. Glory would happen and it would last for eternity, but it wasn't the glory of this life.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. 16:21-28)

We like the idea of earthly glory, power, might, and wealth. We like to think that since God created all - and sustains all - and can bless all - then as His followers, His modern day disciples, we should have what our hearts desire.

Maybe you have heard those so-called Christian preachers who make a big deal out of God's omnipotence and mercy, claiming that God wants us to "have it all." The love to make grand promises of what your life will be like if you are a faithful Christian – you can have it all. If you pray the right prayer hard enough, read enough of their books, dedicate your lives to the right projects, then God will bless you with the desires of your heart. And if life is not great, then you obviously are not praying enough, and your faith is not strong enough.

Do not believe it.

Peter, James, and John are there on the mountain that day and given a glimpse of the glory that is Christ's. It is a glimpse also of the glory which Moses and Elijah share, for they had faith in the coming of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. But, Jesus told them to "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Peter needed to have his sinful pride utterly destroyed - he needed to hear the cock crow in the courtyard of the high priest. John needed to run away in fear from those arresting Jesus, abandoning Jesus and even his own cloak in their hands. James needed to understand completely how sinful his arrogant pride was to think he deserved to sit upon either Jesus' right or left hand.

The sinfulness of these men, expressly chosen by Jesus, needed to be exposed in them so that they might know precisely why Jesus needed to endure the sufferings He had told them of. And then the voice from heaven humbles them, for they know that they are not worthy to stand in the presence of God.

So, Jesus tells them to rise and have no fear.

But even then they still do not fully understand. "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

This isn't the most important mountain in the life of Jesus, that mountain lies ahead. For the disciples to understand and enjoy the glory of the mountain of transfiguration, Jesus must endure the hill called Golgotha.

So, did the disciples get it when they were at Dark Gethsemane? They ran away in fear and then

lied about being His followers! Did they come to understanding at Golgotha? They were there, but they were filled with sorrow, hiding in a upper room behind locked doors for 3 days following, even after it was reported that Jesus had risen.

After that Sunday, for forty more days, Jesus walked with them, being seen by them. He told them that they must proclaim His suffering, His death, and His resurrection - repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His name must be proclaimed.

When did the disciples know what this was all about? When did they understand?

It is evident that they understood it when they had been arrested, brought before the Jewish council, *beaten, and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then let go*. You know they understood, for it was then that they left the presence of the council, *rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name [of Jesus]*. *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.* (Acts 5:40-42)

It doesn't really matter when those three on the mountain with Jesus that day knew, when they finally understood. God gave them the understanding in His time and what is recorded is recorded that you might hear the proclamation of this Gospel and come to know the truth that Jesus is our Christ.

The disciples would endure grave hardship for the name of Jesus. In fact, all but John would die horrific deaths as martyrs rather than deny the truth that is Jesus Christ.

Today, you are given a glimpse of Christ's glory in the account of His transfiguration. This is no cleverly devised myth. This is made known to you so that you may know of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You may know life under the cross now, some trial, tribulation, or suffering may be assailing you. You may wonder where God is in the midst of it all. You'd like to be there upon the mountaintop – safe in a booth with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

But had they all stayed there, you would never be able to enjoy that glory. Jesus descended that mountain in order that He might be led up another and crucified there for our sinful pre-occupation with earthly glory.

Lest you become despondent though, our text is given to us. Dearly beloved of God in Christ Jesus, that transfiguration glory is yours. That glory is nothing more than what you will enjoy, at the right time.

We enter pre-Lent next week and in three weeks, the season of Lent itself. To many, that is the weary road to the cross. Transfiguration is a glimpse of the glory that we will share with Christ, for by baptism we have been united to His death and His resurrection - His glory is our hope and expectation.

Know this now, we may have to come down from the mount of Transfiguration, but Christ is not building booths for us there, but mansions in His eternal kingdom. That glory was fleeting, the

glory we will receive will last forever.

Until that day, we are given glimpse of that glory in the Word which comes to us. We are given tastes of that glory when we gather around the table at which Christ presides - both in heaven and in our midst.

Like that day on the mountain, we gather with Jesus, with Elijah and Moses, with Peter, James, and John. We are also joined by my parent, and all our loved ones who have preceded us in death, abiding in the faith. We come and are joined with Christ, given a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed in us, and by it, strengthened for our daily life. Rise, and have no fear - for you are in Christ Jesus. Amen.