

You can find a digital copy of this lesson plan and a co-teaching variation of the plan at [myfairviewbaptist.org/small-groups](http://myfairviewbaptist.org/small-groups)

March 22, 2026

## GLORY: MATTHEW 17:1-13

**Prior to your group time:** Procure a Transformers' Autobot figurine or a picture of one (one as an automobile and one as a humanoid robot). If you don't have access to either, you can simply relay the information below.

**Introduction:** The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the Transformers franchise. Many people grew up watching the cartoon or playing with the toys throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and later the movie series brought the characters to a new generation. Even if you were never a fan, chances are you have encountered Transformers in some form—through movies, toys, or merchandise—over the years.

In the Transformers universe, the Autobots are the heroes. These alien robots typically appear as ordinary vehicles, blending into everyday life. But when the situation demands it, they transform into towering humanoid robots, revealing their true identity and power—something that was always there, but not always visible.

You might be wondering why we are talking about these fantastical creatures. For a moment, let's think about the nature of a Transformer. When an Autobot appears as an ordinary automobile, its true identity is hidden (*show the figurine as an automobile or the picture of such*). In that form, at least in the movies, it can still communicate with people and even help them—but it does so without revealing what it truly is. (*begin rearranging the figurine or show the other picture*) However, when the Autobot transforms into a larger-than-life robot, its true nature is fully revealed for everyone to see.

**Summarize and Transition:** Today, we are going to study a passage of Scripture that may be set apart in your Bible as "The Transfiguration." That word, *transfiguration*, "comes from the same Greek word from which we get our word *metamorphosis*. Another possible translation is 'transformed.'" (ETB LG, 48)

In this passage, Jesus is not changing forms in the way a toy figurine does. Rather, like the fictional creatures we just discussed, He is revealing **His** true nature to the disciples. This event is one of the most well-known moments in the life of Jesus, yet many believers still wonder about the reason for it. As we study this passage, we are going to see two reasons behind this remarkable event.

### 1. TRANSFIGURED (MATT. 17:1-3)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 17:1-3.

**Explain:** Matthew begins by providing the time frame and the location for the event. Each of the gospel writers who record this moment tells us that it took place on a mountain (Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28). The specific mountain is under debate, but its name is not important for us to know. What *is* important is what the location signifies.

In going to the mountain, "Jesus took them as far as possible from other people and from everyday life." (ETBC, 39) Sometimes, if we are going to experience Jesus in a new, fresh, and revelatory manner, we have to get away from distractions. That is what Jesus does here.

Even more important than the geographical setting, however, is the chronological one. Each of the gospels tells us that this event took place about one week after Peter declared Jesus as the "Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16:16; see also Mark 8:29 "You are the Messiah" and Luke 9:20 "God's Messiah.") This timing matters because the disciples are about to receive a Verifying Visage of Jesus. They had already declared that

J Cardinell, 2026

#### Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 14-28* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

## Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

Jesus was both Messiah and God Himself. In this experience, these three privileged disciples will have their faith-filled beliefs visibly and powerfully verified.

**Ask:** Before we examine more, we should consider this point. How have you had your faith in God verified by the experiences of life?

**Explain:** We do not all get to experience what the disciples experienced on this unnamed mountain. But we do experience things that can verify our faith. Answered prayer and miraculous healing are two examples. There are also more mundane, everyday verifications that come as we live lives guided by God's Word and God's Spirit. As we orient our lives around the precepts of Scripture and listen for the Spirit, we experience the faith-verifying fruit of living in such a way.

Just consider what happens after this event. We are not going to study it today, but when these four come down from the mountain, the other disciples experience an everyday—at least for them—form of verification. Peter, James, and John had the mountaintop experience, but the other nine did not. They were still living by faith that Christ was the Messiah. Nevertheless, as soon as Jesus and the three join them, Jesus performs a great miracle by casting a demon from a young boy. Jesus' miracles verify His deity in the everyday lives of the people (Matthew 17:14–21).

But let's back up and climb back to the top of the mountain.

**Ask:** Who did Jesus take up the mountain? (Peter, James, and John)

**Explain:** These three had been chosen by Jesus as His inner circle. We do not know why He chose them for this role, and they were, at times, problematic. We are well aware of Peter's repeated goofs—and we will see another one today. We also know that James and John may have shared something of their father's temperament. They were known as the "sons of thunder." (Mark 3:17)

Despite their flaws, we do know that these men became vitally important to the life of the early church. Peter emerged as a preeminent leader, serving as a spokesperson, missionary, and writer. James was the first of the twelve to be martyred (Acts 12:2). John led churches, endured persecution, and wrote five New Testament books, including the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John, and The Revelation.

But before all of that—before leadership, suffering, and legacy—they experienced Jesus' transformation on the mountain.

**Ask:** How does Matthew describe the transformation? (v. 2 "his face shone like the sun; his clothes became as white as the light.")

**Explain:** Luke describes the change similarly, while Mark's account is more descriptive. Mark 9:3 tells us, "his clothes became dazzling—extremely white as no launderer on earth could whiten them." We have to ask: what is going on here?

Notes:

"The term implies that the outer form now corresponded to Jesus' inner essence." (Quarles in ETBC, 38)

"With the dullness of earthly conditions temporarily stripped away, so that the true nature of God's 'beloved Son' (v.5) can for once be seen." (R.T. France in ETBC, 39)

Hebrews 1:3a  
The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

In this moment, Jesus is transformed into the image of His true self. "It's as if a curtain were pulled back so that the disciples could see Christ's glory in a greater way." (Exalting, 226, See Notes Box for other descriptions.) Previously, the disciples had declared the deity of Christ. Now, they are seeing with their own eyes what they had already confessed with their mouths.

They are seeing what the writer of Hebrews later understood and described. He explains the nature of Christ in Hebrews 1.

**Read** Hebrews 1:3a (See Notes Box.)

**Explain:** This visage of Jesus worked to verify the disciples' faith. However, I think that is a secondary reason for this event. The primary reason relates to what Jesus had been teaching the disciples. Matthew tells us in chapter 16 that after they declared their understanding of His true nature as the Messiah, the Son of God, He began to teach them more openly about His coming death and resurrection.

Luke adds an important detail by telling us that Jesus was transformed on the mountain "As he was praying." (Luke 9:29) He does not tell us what Jesus was praying about, but the contents of the conversation are revealed by Luke in 9:31.

**Read** Luke 9:31 (See Notes Box)

**Explain:** The primary reason for this event is the comfort and direction given by the two prophets to Christ. We will talk more about what these two men represent in the next section. Here, though, we need to recognize that as Jesus was teaching the disciples about His coming death, He was also *feeling the emotional weight of that coming death*.

As the transformation of Jesus reveals, He is God. We should not forget, on the other hand, that He was a flesh-and-blood human being. Philippians 2 reminds us of this.

**Reread** Philippians 2:7-8 (See Notes Box.)

**Explain:** Moses and Elijah had come to speak with Jesus about what lay before Him. We can assume it was meant to be an encouragement. He meets them as the divine Son of God, but they speak to Him as the human son of Mary.

**Discuss:** When have you experienced encouragement or comfort from a God-sent messenger in the from a friend or fellow believer?

**Summarize Transition:** The faith-verifying experience of the disciples was an important yet secondary aspect of this event. We know it mattered because Jesus did not have to take the men with Him, as He often went away to pray in solitude. While their presence was significant, it was secondary to Jesus' primary goal to meet and pray with the Father, and to the Father's purpose of sending the prophets to prepare Jesus for the coming cross.

Let's keep going and see what else is revealed on the mountaintop.

## 2. OVERSHADOWED (MATT. 17:4-8)

Notes:

Hebrews 1:3a

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Luke 9:31

They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Philippians 2:7-8

7 Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, 8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 17:4-8.

**Explain:** At this point, Peter is just babbling on. Luke tells us that the disciples were asleep for most of the conversation between Jesus and the two prophets. But when they were “fully awake,” they saw everything (Luke 9:32). As the conversation was ending, Peter couldn’t hold back and made the suggestion to build three shelters. I am sure he had reasons for this, but Luke is clear that he spoke “not knowing what he was saying.” (Luke 9:33) We have all been there. We don’t know what to say, so we say something stupid. We will come back to Peter’s comment, but let’s take a moment to talk about the two men he saw speaking with Jesus.

Moses and Elijah are two of the most well-known and important individuals in the OT. Moses led the people out of Egypt and received the law from God at Sinai. He then relayed that law to the people, and he also wrote it down as part of his five-part introduction to the Bible that we call the Pentateuch. Daniel Block explains that this work “derives from two Greek words *penta*, ‘five,’ and *teuchos*, ‘vessel, container,’ and refers to the first five books of OT... but Jewish canons label these books collectively as the Torah, which means ‘Teaching, Instruction.’” In English Bibles, these first five books are commonly called “Law.”<sup>1</sup> The books contain more than the law of God, but this helps us see that on the mountain **Moses represents the Law**.

Elijah was also a great prophet in the OT. He “has been called the grandest and the most romantic character that Israel ever produced.”<sup>2</sup> True to his name, which means “My God is Yah,” he preached against idol worship and attempted to help the people return to the true worship of Yahweh God.<sup>3</sup> We see this most dramatically in his encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, recorded in I Kings 18. The Bible also tells us that Elijah related so intimately with the Lord that instead of dying, God took him away in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). On the mountain, **Elijah represents the Prophets**. Generally, the OT writings that are not part of Moses’ five books are referred to as “the Prophets.”

So here on the mountain, we have **the Law and the Prophets**—the entirety of OT teaching represented. We have seen this phrase, “the Law and the Prophets,” before in the book of Matthew. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says, “17 ‘Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.’” Ken Schroeder explains, “Moses and Elijah together represented a way of saying that the whole of the Old Testament revelation found its fulfillment in Jesus.” (ETBC, 40) In a more descriptive assessment, O’Donnell writes, “I see Law (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah) showing up and both shaking hands with the Gospel (Jesus). ‘Hello,’ they say. ‘Nice to finally meet you.’ I take [Matthew] 17:3 as a visual of [Matthew] 5:17.” (Preaching, 469)

Notes:

Teachers’ Note: This technical description of the Pentateuch might seem unnecessary. However, it is one way to quietly slip in a bit of Biblical literacy into your group time. Many people, even if they have been in church for years, have trouble understanding the layout and content of the Bible. Moreover, they will hear people use words like “Pentateuch” and have no idea what it means.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel I. Block, “Pentateuch,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1265.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson Price, “Elijah,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 478.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

A lot is going on in this passage, and I think that explains Peter's thoughtless remark. He is dumbfounded by what he is seeing, and honestly, I think that is why God interrupts him. Matthew tells us, "While he was still speaking," God spoke.

Of Peter's words and God's interruption, Spurgeon writes, "Such wild talk might well be interrupted. What a blessed interruption! We may often thank the Lord for stopping our babbling." (Spurgeon, 233) Another preacher gives us God's view of Peter's words: "It is obvious that Peter has goofed...I don't know what he's thinking. I don't know if he knows what he's thinking. But whatever he is thinking, God thinks little of it..." (Preaching, 470)

**Direct and Ask:** Direct the group to verse 5 and ask, what does God say when He interrupts Peter? ("This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!")

**Explain:** Here, the Father repeats His words at Jesus baptism. Here, though, he adds to those words. To the three disciples, He commands them to "Listen to him!" Now we could read this with several different emphases. We could read it as "*Listen* to him." Here, we might remember that for a Jew to listen means to obey. We might also remember that Jesus has been teaching them about His death and resurrection. So the disciples should take to heart this teaching. We could also read God's instructions as "Listen to *him*!" With this emphasis, we might hear God's instruction to mean listen to Jesus' teachings about the Law and Prophets, not everyone else's. Each of these would be proper. However, because of the presence of Moses, our minds might be drawn to a passage found in Deuteronomy 18 in which Moses is speaking to the people.

**Read** Deuteronomy 18:15 (See Notes Box)

**Read** Deuteronomy 18:18-19 (See Notes Box)

This passage in Deuteronomy is speaking specifically about the prophets that God would bring to guide the nation. However, like many prophecies in the OT, there is a dual meaning. During the 400 years of silence between the OT and the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist, many had begun associating the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 with the coming Messiah. We see this in John 1:21 (*referencing John the Baptist*) and John 6:14 and 7:40 (*referencing Jesus*). The connection between the Prophet in Deuteronomy and Jesus, the Messiah, is drawn most clearly by Peter and Stephen's sermons in Acts (3:22, 23; 7:37).<sup>4</sup>

So, what is going on? The Father is giving **An Audible Announcement** to again verify their faith?

**Summarize and Transition:** In response to the voice of God, the disciples fell down. We can be sure they fell into a posture of worship, but it is also highly likely that they were terrified. The image of Christ's transformation overwhelmed them to the point of befuddlement, and the voice of God coming from a Sinai-like cloud only added to their fear.

Notes:

Deuteronomy 18:15

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19

<sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup> I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Deuteronomy: The Loving Obedience to a Loving God*, Preaching the Word Commentary, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 466-467. J. Cardinell, 2026

Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

In response to that fear, Jesus approaches and touches them as an act of comfort. When they look up, they see no one but Jesus—no prophets, no cloud, no dazzling preincarnate vestige of His glory. They see only Jesus, the Jesus they know, and they are comforted.

In the next passage, they have a lot of questions for Jesus. I would too, but their questions are different from mine. Let's look at that now.

### 3. INSTRUCTED (MATT. 17:9-13)

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 17:9-13.

**Explain:** As they are coming down the mountain, Jesus instructs the disciples on a topic we have encountered before. He tells them not to tell "anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." As we have seen, there are several reasons for this instruction. One reason is the inability of the people to truly understand Jesus' nature and mission prior to the actual events themselves and the coming enlightenment of the Spirit. A second reason is that those who heard about such an event and connected it to the Messiah would likely apply it to a political agenda and use it to foment revolution against Rome.

We should also note that it appears the men did not tell anyone about the event on the mountain before Jesus' resurrection. Nevertheless, when the time was right, they did spread the word. We have no writing from James the Apostle, but we do have writings from John and Peter. In John 1:14, the Apostle writes, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:16b–18, "we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!' 18 We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain."

Like these Apostles, we should tell others about the great things Jesus has done for us. We talk a lot about sharing the gospel, but we should also take opportunities to share the blessings of God, great and small.

**Ask:** What are some ways you can make a point of sharing the blessings of God with others in your conversation?

**Explain:** Many of us do not shy away from talking about the good things we experience. Oftentimes, though, we do not give God the credit. James (Jesus' half-brother, not the Apostle on the mountaintop) tells us "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17)

Let's go back to the text and consider the question the disciples ask Jesus as they descend the mountain (*Read verse 10*). There are several ways to understand both the question and Jesus' answer, but it is helpful to remember what we have been studying over the past two weeks. The disciples confessed Jesus as Lord and God, and Jesus then intensified His teaching regarding His mission. Today, we have seen a **Verifying Visage** of Jesus and an **Auditory Announcement** from God. In the disciples' question, we now see their **Confused Situation**. It appears that, for a moment, they finally understood who Jesus was, which is why they were confused about Elijah. If Jesus is the Messiah, then why did Elijah not come before Him? They understand that

Notes:

Matthew 17:10  
So the disciples asked him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

"Messiah cannot come till Elijah has appeared; // Elijah has not appeared; // Therefore Jesus is not the Messiah." (Spurgeon, 235)

Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

Jesus is the Messiah, but what about the prophecy found in Malachi 4:5? Jesus explains that Elijah had come, and the disciples realize that John the Baptist came as a type of Elijah. We also notice Jesus' unusual use of both future and past tense, which may suggest that He is alluding to another Elijah—or perhaps Elijah himself—who will come before the second coming of Christ.

## CONCLUDE

We began the lesson talking about the fantastical idea of automobiles that transform into robots. In the majestic transformation of Jesus, we see nothing fantastical. Instead, we see something fantastic. Jesus was not only a man who preached a good message. He was God Himself come to save mankind. There are three responses we can make after studying this passage.

1. Have you declared Christ Lord and repented of your sin?
2. Who are you going to reveal the truth of Christ to this week?
3. How are you going to praise the Lord for His blessings and tell others of His greatness this week?

Glory: Matthew 17:1-13

