

Christ, and Christ Alone

Matthew 17:1-8

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A. Jesus, THE Christ (vs. 1-3):

1. Christ took with Him Peter, James, and John – Christ did not consult with them; He physically demanded that they come with Him. Following Christ means being willing to surrender to His will, even when we do not have a clue where He is leading us. This is after the disciples said what the people were thinking, Elijah or Jeremiah. This is after God, through Peter, said Jesus is the “*Christ the Son of the living God.*” (Matt. 16:16) This also occurred after Peter was rebuked with “*get behind me Satan.*” (Mt. 16:21-23)
 - a) After six days. So also Mk 9:2. Luke’s “about eight days” (9:28) counts the termini as well as the interval. Peter, James, and John. These former business associates (Lk 5:10) were granted special privileges on two other occasions (Lk 8:51; Mt 26:37). Can it be that they had more spiritual perception at this time than the others?¹
 - b) The glory of His kingdom. At the close of His sermon about cross-bearing, Jesus promised that some of the disciples would see “the Son of man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). He selected Peter, James, and John as witnesses to this event. These three friends and business partners (Luke 5:10) had been with Jesus in the home of Jairus (Luke 8:51), and they would go with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion (see Matt. 26:37). Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, p. 61). Victor Books.
 - c) For once he keeps Mark’s historic present, probably considering that emphasis is appropriate here at the point which marks the correlation between 17:1–9 and 16:28. The loss of articles before the names of James and John (but not of Peter) is likely to highlight the continuing role of Peter from the preceding chapter; it also prepares for his distinct role later in this account. John is identified more precisely as ‘his [i.e., James’s] brother’, as in 4:21; 10:2. For Matthew ‘John’ is otherwise John the Baptist. These three disciples form a group in Matthew only here and in 26:37 (using ‘the two sons of Zebedee’), but they are three of the four in 4:18–21 and three of the first four in 10:2–4. Their role here mirrors and perhaps in part undergirds their significance in the leadership of the early church. As ‘the sons of Zebedee’, James and John play a further role in 20:20–28. Otherwise, apart from texts dealing with the roles played by Peter and Judas, 17:1 is the only place where a named set of disciples has a distinctive

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Mt 17:1). Moody Press.

part in Matthew (contrast Mark). The foundational nature of the experience here is thereby underlined.²

2. Led up to a high mountain, Offer, bore, brought them - When Christ continually impressed on these three disciples to come with Him, the word 'led' here means His entire purpose was for them to do nothing else but totally focus on going to a place of worship.
3. He was transfigured before them – Jesus Christ was completely transformed from the inside out so that His body was like a glorious light before their eyes. They can recognize that He was Jesus, but His countenance was glorious.
 - a) He was transfigured before them. The word “transfigured” is the translation of *metamorphoomai* (μεταμορφοομαι). The simple verb refers to the act of giving outward expression of one’s inner character, that outward expression coming from and being truly representative of that inner character. The prefixed preposition signifies a change, here of the outward expression. The translation expanded, thus reads, “The manner of His outward expression was changed before them, that outward expression coming from and being truly representative of His inner nature.”³
 - b) The radiance of His glory was evidenced in His face and in His garments that became as white as the light. Moses and Elijah appeared from heaven in some visible form and talked with Jesus (thus demonstrating that conscious existence follows death). Luke wrote that Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about His coming death (Luke 9:31).⁴
4. His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light - Unlike Moses, Jesus did not speak to God before this transfiguration took place. Jesus did this on His own. Moses’ face was a reflection from God’s presence. Jesus, on His own, had a bright light radiating from his face, with His garments gleaming so white that it appeared as a light. Jesus manifested who He is, “*the Light*” (John described Christ in this manner most likely because of this experience; John 1:6-9; 1 John 1:5-7), as John would represent in Revelation 21:22-24.
 - a) 17:2 For this verse Matthew initially follows Mark closely, using ‘and he was transformed in front of (ἐμπροσθεν) them’ and ‘his clothes became ... white’;

² Nolland, J. (2005). [*The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (pp. 698–699). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 174). Eerdmans.

⁴ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). [*Matthew*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 59). Victor Books.

otherwise Matthew goes his own way. Whereas for Mark *Jesus* was transformed and *his clothes* changed colour to a dazzling white, for Matthew ‘he was transformed’ serves instead as a general statement which is then spelled out in terms of what happened to Jesus’ face and to his clothing. For vv. 2–3 the disciple group are passive witnesses (the action happens in front of them), but they gain an active role from v. 4 on.⁵

5. He was transfigured before them – Because Jesus, on His own initiative, took them up the mountain and, without hesitation, revealed His glory in this magnificent way, it must be something Christ intended to prepare them for future ministry. This event occurred after God revealed to Peter that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” (Matthew 16:16) It also followed the disciples’ earlier wonder in Matthew 8:27, when they asked “*What kind of man is this...,*” and their worship in Matthew 14:33, when they saw Him walk on water – an awe-inspiring moment for seven seasoned sailors who had faced many storms.
 - a) Believing in Jesus Christ is one thing, but trusting Christ to be all that He is becomes a totally new experience of complete worship every day.
6. He was transfigured before them – Gaining a rich understanding of Christ’s powerful and magnificent nature is essential to executing His agenda in a world that is quick to turn on His disciples. Peter would plant the New Testament church and immediately experience resistance from the Jewish leaders. The same would be Paul’s experience.
 - a) Many years later, John recalled this event as the Spirit guided him to write: “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In his Gospel, John emphasized the deity of Christ and the glory of His person (John 2:11; 7:39; 11:4; 12:23; 13:31–32; 20:31).⁶
7. Behold Moses and Elijah appeared talking to Him - Before the disciples could even process what they were witnessing, Moses and Elijah appeared. Christ did not command them to be with Him. They appeared, as if such a meeting were completely natural. This suggest, at least implicitly, that this may not have been the first time they met with Him.
 - a) Moses was the representative of the Law, and Elijah was the representative of the prophets. Moses had died, and Elijah had departed from this world in a chariot of fire. Luke tells us they were discussing Jesus’ decease in Jerusalem—“And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory,

⁵ Nolland, J. (2005). [*The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 699). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 61). Victor Books.

and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30–31). The Law and the prophets bore testimony to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷

- b) 17:3. Jewish people understood Scripture as denying that Elijah had ever died; God himself had buried Moses. Jewish people expected the return of both Elijah and Moses at the end of the age (Deut 18:15–18; Mal 4:5). Both of them (Ex 24:15–16; 1 Kings 19:8) heard from God at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb).⁸

8. Behold Moses and Elijah appeared talking to Him - The presence of Moses and Elijah before three Jewish disciples - men who clearly recognized and deeply revered them based on their nation’s history, was so astonishing that it seemed as though time itself stood still.

- a) They were talking with Jesus. We have a periphrastic construction here. It consists of the verb of being in the imperfect tense and the present tense participle. The emphasis is upon durative action. Mark wishes to convey to the reader the impression that the conversation with these two heavenly visitors was a protracted one.⁹

9. Behold Moses and Elijah appeared talking to Him - These men did not talk with the disciples they only talked with Jesus.

- a) Its purpose was to reveal the breadth of God’s kingdom and Jesus’ position within it. Jesus “shone like the sun” (17:2; cf. Exod. 24:1, 16; 34:29–35). Moses and Elijah were the surrounding figures who functioned to show how much superior Jesus the Messiah was (Matt. 17:5). Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah), especially with regards to his work as the suffering Messiah.¹⁰

B. Be Willing to Learn (vs. 4-6; Eccl. 5:1-2):

1. Peter said to Jesus Lord – It is interesting that the text says, “*Peter said to Jesus...*” and then adds, “*Lord.*” Peter transition from seeing Christ merely in His humanity to recognizing His divinity. Jesus was no longer someone Peter could pull aside to rebuke for speaking of His death (Matthew 17:21-23); He is now the One with all authority,

⁷ McGee, J. V. (1991). [*Thru the Bible commentary: The Gospels \(Matthew 14-28\)*](#) (electronic ed., Vol. 35, p. 55). Thomas Nelson.

⁸ Keener, C. S. (2014). [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Second Edition, p. 88). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 175). Eerdmans.

¹⁰ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [*Tyndale concise Bible commentary*](#) (p. 413). Tyndale House Publishers.

power and might and is the King of Kings who must rule over their lives every day. Lordship is essential for the discipleship process to be life changing forever.

- a) The most significant changes are: 'Lord' in place of 'Rabbi' ('Rabbi' has negative overtones in Matthew; 'Lord' has already been used several times by Peter⁵⁷); introduction of explicit deferring to the will of Jesus with 'if you wish'; 'I will make' for Mark's 'let us make' (probably having in mind the distinctive role that has emerged for Peter in chap. 16); and an extra 'here' after 'I will make' underlining Peter's interest in freezing this moment of glory.¹¹
 - b) He calls our Lord "Master." The Greek is *Rabbei* (Ραββει). The Greek word is the transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "much, great." It was a term of honor and respect among the Jews, meaning "My great one, my honorable sir." The Jews used this term when addressing their teachers, and also honored them by using it when they were speaking of them.¹²
2. Good – Peter's response reveals the purpose of this meeting. When Peter says, "*it is good for us to be here*" he acknowledges that what he and the other disciples are witnessing brings completeness to their understanding and relationship with Christ. From their earlier amazement – "*What kind of man is this?*" (Matthew 8:27), to recognize, "*He must be the Son of God*" (Matthew 14:33), and confession, "*You are the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16), they now can fully esteem Christ for who He truly is.
- a) It is good for us to be here. There are two words for "good" in Greek, *agathos* (ἀγαθος) which speaks of intrinsic goodness, and *kalos* (καλος) which speaks of goodness as it is seen from without. The word *kalos* (καλος) has also the idea of "beautiful." It was used by the Greeks of anything so distinguished in form, excellence, goodness, usefulness, as to be pleasing. Hence, it can refer to anything which is handsome, useful, excellent, suitable, commendable, excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well adapted to its ends. The latter is used here.¹³
3. If you wish I can make three tabernacles - Peter suggesting the three disciples go to work to build three tabernacles exposes the paradoxical nature of Peter's spiritual development. Peter put Christ, Moses, and Elijah as persons who should be worshipped in the same manner while at the same time saying Christ, not Moses or Elijah, is Lord.
- a) He saw in this event the fulfillment of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which looked two ways: backward to the wanderings in the wilderness for 40 years, and forward

¹¹ Nolland, J. (2005). [*The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 702). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 176). Eerdmans.

¹³ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 176). Eerdmans.

to Israel's full enjoyment of God's blessings when He would gather His people to the land. Peter was correct in his understanding of what was taking place (he saw the kingdom) but he was wrong in his timing.¹⁴

- b) The offer to build three "shelters" may recall the tabernacle, since the same word (*skēnē*) is used in the lxx for the tabernacle (Ex. 25:9), though the same word is also used for the shelters erected during the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:42). Peter, trying to make sense of this overwhelming transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of these great Old Testament figures, apparently wishes to make some sort of memorial.¹⁵
- c) *Peter answered, i.e., responded to the situation.* A desire to prolong this experience prompted Peter to offer to erect (I will make) three brush tabernacles, such as worshipers built for the Feast of Tabernacles. In response, the Divine voice came out of the cloud acknowledging Jesus as God's beloved Son, and commanding the disciples, Hear ye him. Moses and Elijah had nothing new to impart (Heb 1:1, 2). 6-9.¹⁶

4. If you wish I can make three tabernacles - Even though Peter, in his excitement, often says or does the wrong thing—whether stepping out of the boat to walk on water or challenging Christ about His death after God revealed to him that Jesus is the Christ—his passion, commitment to action, and willingness to engage purposefully are admirable qualities.
5. If you wish I can make three tabernacles - When Peter begins to speak, Moses and Elijah fall silent, and it appears they have departed from the mountain. Peter interrupts the moment, attempting to keep everyone together, which prompts Christ to respond. When we are invited into the presence of the Lord, it is wiser to "not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought," and to remain silent rather than "to offer the sacrifice of fools." (Eccl. 5:1-2)
6. If you wish I can make three tabernacles – As we grow spiritually and come to a greater experience of the Lord, we must not allow the presence of others distract us from our passionate devotion to our Lord, so that we worship Christ and Christ alone.
7. While he was still speaking – While Peter continuously kept speaking, as if to direct the worship service, a "cloud overshadowed them" a powerful symbol of God's divine presence and ownership of the meeting (Ex. 40:34). Before Peter could take the moment further in the wrong direction, God intervened through His overwhelming presence.
8. Behold a voice out of the cloud said – God takes over the conversation, commanding complete attention. Christ is no longer speaking, nor Moses and Elijah. God is now

¹⁴ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). [Matthew](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 60). Victor Books.

¹⁵ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke](#) (Vol. 1, p. 107). Zondervan.

¹⁶ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Mt 17:3). Moody Press.

verbally establishing that He is in charge. Out of His love for the world (John 3:16) He sent His son who, once crucified and raised from the dead, would have “all things under His feet” and be “head of all things” (Phil. 2:8-11). Until that time, God speaks at key moments – at Christ’s baptism and now on the Mount of Transfiguration.

- a) This authentication of the Son of God by the voice of God carried great significance for the disciples. Years later when Peter wrote his second epistle he referred to this event (2 Peter 1:16–18). This authentication of Jesus by the Father caused the terrified disciples to fall on their faces. When the Lord Himself told the disciples to get up ... they saw no one except Jesus, for Moses and Elijah had departed.¹⁷
 - b) A bright cloud enveloped them (17:5). The bright cloud is reminiscent of the way God often appeared in the Old Testament—to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:29–35); God’s Shekinah glory filling the tabernacle (40:34–35); the cloud guiding the Israelites during their wandering in the desert (13:21–22; 40:36–38); the cloud of the glory of the Lord filling Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:10–13); and the Branch of the Lord bringing restoration to Jerusalem, as the cloud of the glory of the Lord shelters Zion (Isa. 4:1–6). Jewish literature recognized the cloud of God’s glory as the time when the Lord would gather his people and reveal the location of the ark of the covenant (2 Macc. 2:4–8).¹⁸
9. This is My beloved Son – Jesus belongs to God, having been begotten through the virgin Mary. He is “dearly beloved” of God, so regardless of having no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:18-22), or the grim reality of His death, Christ remains “well loved” by His Father.
 10. Whom I am well pleased - God takes pleasure in everything Christ is and does. There is no fault and there is nothing Christ does that does not comprehensively complete God’s agenda. Peter does not need to add anything, such as questioning Christ’s death (Matt. 16:21-23), nor worship anyone else.
 11. Whom I am well pleased - To please God and be welcomed into His presence, we must confess that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” (1 John 4:2) True worship service must only be offered to Him and cannot take place unless these disciples accept what God revealed to Peter, that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16)
 12. Listen – God demands that these disciples provide their full attention, with a commitment to completely understand all that Christ teaches. This commitment is meant to lead them to surrender their hearts and obey all that He instructs – not Moses, not Elijah, and no one else (John 17:13-24).

¹⁷ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). [Matthew](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 60). Victor Books.

¹⁸ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke](#) (Vol. 1, p. 107). Zondervan.

- a) Hear Him. The verb is present imperative, speaking of continuous action. “Be constantly hearing Him.” The verb “hear,” *akouō* (ἀκούω), in this context, does not merely refer to the act of hearing, in the sense of listening to, but to the act of obeying what is heard.¹⁹

13. When the disciples heard this - The disciples completely understood all that God said. The mood of this verb teaches that this was the main reason for this meeting. God wanted to confirm once for all, not just Peter hearing from God in Matthew 16:16, but two other witnesses that without question Jesus is the Christ, not just a great Rabbi (a great teacher), someone like Moses or Elijah; without any uncertain terms He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, the begotten Son of God, the ‘Son of man’ that Daniel spoke of (Dan. 7:13) and the King of Kings. When Christ is all these things, there is no one else to listen to, worship or follow – it is Christ and Christ alone.

- a) John got this message as a fore-runner, announcing only to the Jews, now John’s disciples need to take this message to the world.

14. Fell face down to the ground – After God revealed to the disciples who Christ truly is, there was no need to build three tabernacles. The disciples were totally convinced there is only one person worthy of worship, and Moses and Elijah offered no disagreement. With that, the meeting concluded.

15. Terrified – Upon hearing God speak, the disciples responded with profound reverence and awe. This moment of worship had assumed its proper perspective (Hebrews 12:28-29). There was nothing left to say, only to offer heartfelt respect and adoration.

c. It’s All About Him (vs. 7-8):

1. Jesus came – With the disciples completely overwhelmed by the presence of God—Christ revealed in His glory, Moses and Elijah beside Him, the overshadowing cloud, and the voice of God speaking—they demonstrated total reverence for Him. Then Christ alone approached them. From that moment, there was no longer any question about whom to follow. Peter and John would follow Christ even to the inquisition, and John would remain faithful all the way to the cross.
2. Touch them and said get up – The disciples were so consumed by what was happening. Wholly absorbed in their worship of God, that Christ had to intervene physically and verbally to get their attention. These men were now completely focused on Him. A crucial moment, especially with His death drawing near.

¹⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 177). Eerdmans.

3. Do not be afraid - Christ commands these disciples to recognize this as the beginning of their new life. There is no need to be terrified (Moses and Elijah were not terrified) because they have now been brought into God's inner circle, just as He would later do in the Garden of Gethsemane. Fear and faith cannot coexist; their reverence and trust in God would now guide and shape their service before Him. mix.
 - a) The words "sore afraid" are the translation of *ekphobos* (ἐκφοβός). The verbal form means "to throw into violent fright." Peter certainly did not know what to say, for he was terribly frightened. But he was not called upon to say anything. It was an occasion where silence would have been the wisest procedure.²⁰
4. Lifting their eyes and saw no one except Jesus Himself alone – The disciples responded to Christ's voice and rose to their feet, and in that moment, they clearly and fully comprehended everything that had just occurred.
5. Lifting their eyes and saw no one except Jesus Himself alone – Once the disciples heard and understood all that had taken place, there was no need for further explanation, their attention was now wholly fixed on following Christ and Him alone. If Christ were to ask them "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" (Matthew 16:13), without question that conversation would now be irrelevant. The opinions of others about Christ no longer held any sway in their minds.
6. Lifting their eyes and saw no one except Jesus Himself alone –When we become fully absorbed in Who Christ is, we learn to listen only to His voice, respond with a surrendered heart, and live to worship Christ and Christ alone.

²⁰ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 176–177). Eerdmans.