

This Is My Son

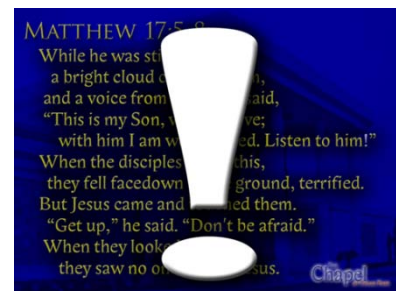
On the historical Church calendar, and on *our* Church calendar for that matter, this is the second Sunday of Lent. We are joining the Church around the world, and throughout the ages, in these 40 days and six Sundays that lead up to the central celebration of the Christian year: **Resurrection Sunday** (Easter).



We are calling these days our *Road to Resurrection*. One way that we are focusing our attention on these special days is through our *Lent Blog* project. I know that many of you have been reading the daily articles; I've received a lot of positive feedback. If you have not been reading them, I'd encourage you to do so; they are really fine articles that do a great job of focusing our attention on Jesus (and give us an opportunity to get to know one another on a new and deeper level). I've held off on scheduling the final weeks of assignments in order to make room for others that may want to jump in on the project. Let me know, today, if you would like to be among the authors.

As for the **sermons** during these special days, our intent is to focus on Jesus: His teaching, His characteristics, and His model life. Today's sermon title is "This is My Son."

It comes, of course, directly from our text, from Matthew's Gospel, that Glenn read this morning. These are the words of God the Father about Jesus.

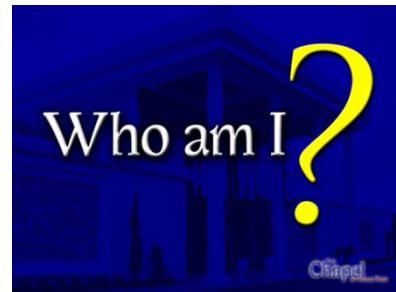


I wonder if you've noticed the *most redundant* part of the passage; do you see it? Maybe I'm just a bit too sensitized, since this is one of my pet peeves. It is the often-overused *exclamation point*. Don't the context and the story provide all the emphasis needed? Could we possibly think that this scene was ordinary and was *no big deal* unless reminded by this exclamation point? A voice from heaven, appearance of Moses and Elijah, Jesus transfigured with glorious light... do we really need an *exclamation point* to *get our attention*?

This event is one of those *exclamation point moments* in the life of Jesus.

Let's unpack this passage and these events.

Throughout the Gospel accounts, we see Jesus revealing just who He is, and God's plan of redemption through Him. Here in these chapters of Matthew's Gospel, just past the half way point, Jesus is now making it very clear just who He is, at least to His closest friends and followers, His Disciples.



At the end of Chapter 16, Jesus poses the question to His friends:

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*”¹

After a brief discussion, Jesus asked a similar question, but one that was far more personal to His friends: ¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”²

The *word on the street* about a person is one thing. Sometimes the **reputation** and the **reality** don't line up. We can't always rely on the reputation and press releases. But the testimony of those closest to us ought to be trustworthy. Those who live and work with us, our closest friends, and family, know the **real** us... *warts and all*.

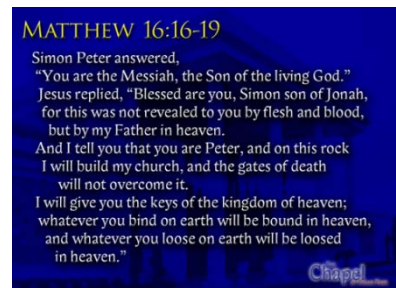
I'm no celebrity, but based on my work here and at Northwest University, I suppose I have above-average notoriety; there is some crowd of people who have some notion of who I am. Most of you all know me quite a bit better than the *crowd*. Those who work close to me know me pretty well; I think I'm pretty transparent to my few closest friends, and Laurie and our boys know me best of all.

If I stopped a random student at the University and asked them “who am I?” they might know me as one of those *Dans* who keeps raising their tuition. If I stopped someone walking out of church over there across the parking lot and asked “who am I?” they might be able to identify me as the pastor of that liturgical church. Both would indicate some familiarity, but neither would be precisely right.

But if I asked Laurie “who am I?” we'd expect an accurate answer. If I asked Steve or Don, we could expect that they would get it right.

Likewise, we can expect Peter, in this passage, to get it right.

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”³



¹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:13.

² *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:15.

³ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:16.

A reading of the Gospels reminds us that Peter doesn't always get it right... but this time he *nailed it*. So much so, that Jesus had to acknowledge that Peter had *help*... supernatural help.

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."⁴

This is not a rebuke, nor even a correction. Peter was at his best when he was responding to the leadership of the Spirit. Like Peter, we too are at our best when we are speaking God's words and doing God's work.

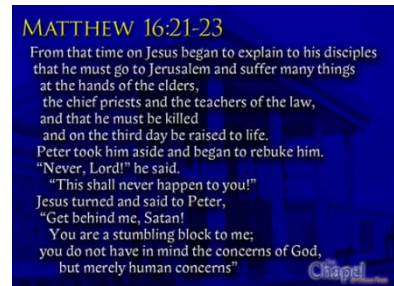
Jesus explained that is was just this sort of thing that would be the foundation of His Kingdom.

¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁵

His Church will be built on, and by, those with this testimony, that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Those empowered by, and responding to, the Holy Spirit of God will build the Kingdom, wielding the power of the Kingdom.

With that lesson understood, Jesus went on to teach a more difficult Truth.

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.⁶



Jesus began to teach them about the Gospel that many of us have come to understand and experience... but this was not the gospel (good news) that His Disciples wanted to hear. They were of the mindset that the Messiah would lead with might and valor... that now that Jesus was revealed as the Messiah to His closest friends and followers, it would not be long before He would reveal His power to all, especially to the government leaders who abused and repressed God's people. With certainty that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Disciples expected a display of power.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:17.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:18-19.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:21.

The idea that Jesus would enter Jerusalem, the rightful capitol of His Kingdom, and be met with anything less than acclaim was ridiculous. The idea that He would be met with suffering, especially at the hands of religious leaders, and then death, was scandalous.

Peter, the one who was quick to speak words of Truth just a few verses ago, was now quick to speak words of correction to Jesus.

²²Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”⁷

But this time Jesus did not have *congratulatory* words for His dear friend Peter... but quite the opposite.

²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”⁸

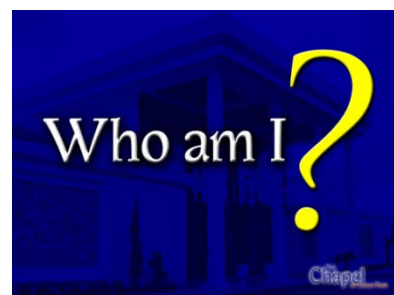
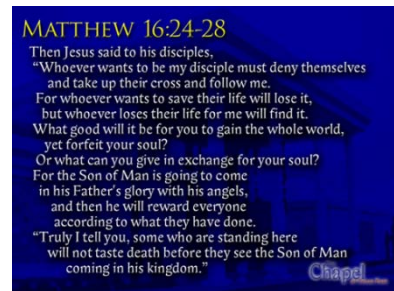
As naturally as Peter spoke words of the Spirit, now Peter is back to speaking from his own flesh-and-blood perspective. One minute, Peter is at his best; the next minute, Peter is at his worst. Can you relate? I certainly can!

Jesus went on to explain that the Way that He was taking, and the Way that He was making, is the Way of suffering.

It is the Way of saying **no** to themselves (ourselves) so that people can say **yes** to God. We celebrate these disciplines, these relatively small sacrifices, during this season of Lent. We do what we can to “take up our cross and follow Jesus” knowing that in so doing we will find True life, our best lives, and eternal life.

So the first lesson in answering the simple question “who is Jesus?” was answered by Peter with the empowerment of the Spirit. The second lesson was that the Messiah’s work may not go exactly as expected, but would come by the Way of suffering.

The passage that Glenn read is a third lesson in answering the question: “Who is Jesus?”



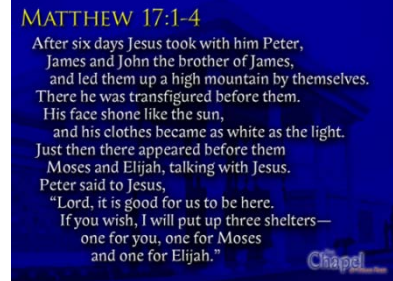
⁷ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:22.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:23.

The text says that after a week had passed, Jesus took His three closest friends on a mountain hike.

While there, they experienced a remarkable miracle.

²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.⁹



- Jesus was “transfigured”, a metamorphosis that changed His form and appearance. In spite of the beautiful depictions of Jesus that we are accustomed to in art, the Scriptures indicate that there was nothing all that special, or beautiful, about the way Jesus normally looked. But now His appearance was spectacular.
- “His face shone like the sun.” Not merely reflected light, but a radiance that burned through from within.
- “His clothes became as white as the light.” This brilliant transformation, this radiant glory that burst forth from Jesus, even overwhelmed the appearance of His clothes.

This was a unique display of the Glory of God in the body and person of Jesus.

As if this wasn’t enough to impress,

³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.¹⁰

God’s messengers were standing there with Jesus.

- Jesus, the very Word of God, with
- Moses, representing God’s law, and
- The Prophet Elijah, representing God’s voice

This is a stunning scene. Enter, again, Peter... so far he is *batting 500*. Will he get it right this time?

⁴Peter 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.”¹¹

What do you suppose Peter was thinking at this spectacular moment?

A logical conclusion could have been *this is it!*

⁹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 17:2-3.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 17:2-3.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 17:4.

Look back, again, at what Jesus said a few verses earlier.

²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward everyone according to what they have done.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”¹²

MATTHEW 16:24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples,
“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me.
For whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for me will find it.
What good will it be for you to gain the whole world,
yet forfeit your soul?
Or what can you give in exchange for your soul?
For the Son of Man is going to come
in his Father's glory with his angels,
and then he will reward everyone
according to what they have done.
“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here
will not taste death before they see the Son of Man
coming in his kingdom.”

Jesus, in His glory, with two messengers (or angels)... what would you think if you were Peter, James, or John? It isn't at all unreasonable for these men closest to Jesus to think that they were those of whom He spoke, those who would “see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” This breathtaking event must have seemed like the beginning of all they had hoped for.

It certainly was the Son of God, displaying His Father's glory, but it was still not the ushering in of the Kingdom that the Disciples might have still hoped for.

It was spectacular... but not permanent. There was no need for Peter to erect any sort of shelter, shrine, or throne.

MATTHEW 17:1-4

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.
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.”

The Disciple's fear and confusion was overwhelmed by yet another spectacular phenomenon.

⁵While 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!”¹³

MATTHEW 17:5-8

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.

Everything that Jesus had said, and was about to say, comes with the highest authority. No more arguing, Peter... no more fantasizing about Jesus fulfilling wishes and dreams.

With this audible voice of God from heaven, there was no more making of plans; with this exclamation point, the Disciples “fell facedown to the ground, terrified.”

And as quickly as it all happened, it ended. With the point made, things returned back to normal and they went on their way.

I suppose that this could be among the most fanciful episodes in the Gospel account. This is the sort of thing that could easily be written off as fairy tale by skeptics. It could be explained away, I suppose, by critics. But for me, there is no question about the integrity of the story.

¹² *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 16:27-28.

¹³ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Mt 17:5.

First, the account appears, in nearly the exact same words, in three Gospel accounts.

Second, we can see the impact of this experience show through in the words of these three Disciples recorded in other parts of the New Testament. Each was New Testament writers, inspired by the Spirit and informed by their experience.

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).¹⁴

Let’s go ahead and ask ourselves “so what?”

This is a fine lesson. There are profound theological truths here.

But what about something we can practically apply to our live, here, and now?



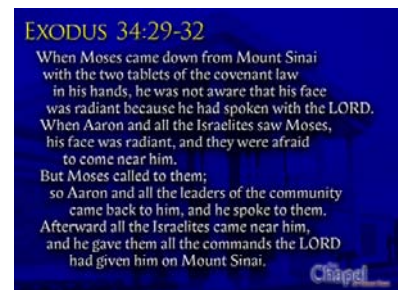
The title of this sermon is “This is My Son.” But we saw earlier in the passages we’ve studied that Jesus said “This is My Church.”

When God the Father spoke these words over Jesus, he was in a spectacular, glorified condition.

When Jesus speaks these words over His Church, is there glory?

There is a certain glory that comes from *exposure* to a dynamic experience with God. Moses, for example, was changed by his meetings with God.

The passage that Glenn read this morning explained that after speaking with the Lord, Moses had a radiance that was even startling to his people; they were afraid to come near him. The change was so pronounced that Moses would wear a veil so that the people would not be so distracted.



Are we different because we’ve been with God? Do we look different? Do *our people* (friends, family, and coworkers) notice a difference?

¹⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989). Mt 17:1.

The Apostle Paul calls us, God's people, Christ's Church, to display that glory. When Jesus says, "this is my Church" it ought to be spoken over a people that radiates God's glory. Here what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17,18

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17,18

Now the Lord is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.
And we all, who with unveiled faces
contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image
with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord,
who is the Spirit.

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¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. ¹⁵

The transfiguration of Jesus, this spectacular story that we've studied, not only teaches us important lessons about Jesus... it serves as a **pattern for us** as Christ's Church. This is the image that God has in mind for His people. God wants to be glorified in and through His people.

More than a mere external glow that might come from some good work or from some external exposure to Godliness, we are called to radiate, from an internal working of the Spirit, the ever-increasing glory of God.

- Through our testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, the very Son of God, and
- Through our disciplines, our own cross bearing

We are called to draw near to God, through Christ Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only to behold the beauty of Jesus in all of His glory, but to radiate that same beauty and glory.

This is the pattern and goal.

As God the Father spoke these words that ring through the ages over a glorified Christ when He said "This is My Son"... Jesus calls for the same Spirit-empowered glory to be present when He says "This is My Church."



Our prayer, today, Lord is that through our testimony and discipline, You would cause Your glory to radiate in and through us.

¹⁵ *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). 2 Co 3:17-18.