

April 25, 2004 by Steve Brandon



The Real Jesus

Matthew 16:28-17:9

1. His Kingdom (verse 28).
2. His Glory (verses 1-3).
3. His Honor (verses 4-9).

Before we look at the text this morning, I want to play a game of word association. I will say a name, and I want you to figure out who I am talking about. I'll start easy, and then things will turn a bit more difficult.

Clark Kent, Peter Parker, Bruce Wayne, Colonel Steve Austin, Dr. David Bruce Banner, Dick Grayson, Jaimie Summers, John Reid, Don Diego de la Vega, Lord Greystoke (click [here](#) for the answers)

In each of these cases, we have an ordinary looking person who is actually someone very special, often with very special powers. Clark Kent is a mild-mannered reporter. Yet, when he takes off his shirt and his glasses, he reveals himself to be ... "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!" Peter Parker is a photographer for the Daily Planet. Yet, he has amazing, spider-like powers. He can climb walls, spin webs, and is incredibly strong. Bruce Wayne is CEO of Wayne Enterprises and maintains the public image of a millionaire playboy. Yet, by night, Bruce Wayne is Batman, a super-hero who will stop at nothing to restore order to Gotham city and protect it's citizens. Steve Austin was a NASA test pilot who survived a near fatal crash. Dr. Rudy Wells looked at him and said, "We can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first Bionic man. Steve Austin will be that man. Better than he was before. Better . . . stronger . . . faster." It cost six million dollars to rebuild him. Steve Austin worked underground for "The Office of Strategic Investigations."

Jesus is a bit like each of these men. To many, Jesus appears as a renegade prophet from Nazareth. But, to those who know, Jesus is none other than God incarnate. I'm entitling my message this morning, "The Real Jesus" because we will get a glimpse this morning of who Jesus really is. He is the God-man.

Matthew 16:28 - 17:9

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

The great thing about continuous exposition through Scripture is that each week we encounter a new text. Each week, its application is different. Last week, our passage was very straightforward and very challenging and very applicable to us. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Jesus was very clear concerning His requirements for following after Him. This week, our passage is a bit different. It isn't about us this morning. It isn't about what we need to do. Our passage this morning is about Jesus. And I have been praying that you might see Jesus more clearly than you have ever seen Him before. But, this doesn't mean that this passage isn't applicable to us today. Whenever we come to see, know, and understand Jesus in a greater way, our souls benefit. In fact, today's message ought to increase the weight of my message last week. Its one thing for a guy off the street to tell you, "If you want to come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me." And its another thing when the President of the United States says it. But it is entirely another thing, yet, when almighty God says to you, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me." So today, when you see Christ in all His glory, it ought to bring you back to last week and press the incredible responsibility upon you to forsake all of your life for Him. This morning, I want to begin by looking at ...

1. His Kingdom (verse 28).

Last week I didn't quite get to this verse. Somebody noticed and asked me whether or not I was going to skip this verse. I wanted to skip this verse, as it is filled with interpretive difficulties. One commentator that I read this week laid out seven different possible interpretations of this verse. But, since we're not in the habit of skipping verses, let's take a close look at it. Jesus said,

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).

The difficulty in this verse comes in how you understand the kingdom that Jesus is speaking about. We often consider the kingdom of Christ as something that is off in the distance, and is yet to come. But Jesus said that the kingdom would come before some of His disciples died. Obviously, Jesus isn't speaking about His second coming, when He will come in all of His fulness to judge the world and establish His kingdom with finality, for He doesn't reign in all of His power and authority at this moment. Now, there are some who have suggested that this is what Jesus was referring to. They say that Jesus was simply mistaken. He had expected to return within the lifetime of the disciples, but He obviously didn't. We reject this view, as we believe that Jesus was God and was never mistaken. ^[1]

We must conclude that Jesus was referring to something else when He was speaking about "coming in His kingdom" (verse 28). To give you an insight into what Jesus was referring to, I remind you of Jesus' statement in Matthew 12:28 when He was battling with the Pharisees. They claimed that Jesus was casting out demons by "Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). But, Jesus said that this can't be, for "any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste" (Matt. 12:25). And then, Jesus said this, "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (Matt. 12:28). Jesus certainly did cast out demons by the Spirit of God. So, the kingdom had come upon them in the sense that they had clearly seen the power and authority of Jesus on display in the presence of Jesus. This is the key to understanding how Jesus spoke of the kingdom in verse 28. The coming of the kingdom is related to the powerful movement of God when His kingdom advances (by dethroning Satan's influence, or by many coming to faith, or by other means).

So, we get back to our question about the coming of Christ's kingdom. Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, when His kingdom came in judgement. Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the initial expansion of the church, when the Spirit was moving in the hearts of men in miraculous ways (you can read about this in Acts). Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the event that took place at Pentecost, when the Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon those in Jerusalem in mighty ways (Acts 2). Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to His resurrection, when He once again returned upon the earth. Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the transfiguration which is the event that is recorded in the verses that follow this verse.

In all of these suggestions, the progression of Christ's kingdom is manifested in a powerful way! When Jerusalem fell, it was God's judgment upon unbelieving Israel. When the temple was destroyed, the sacrifices were finished. God used that event to help spread His kingdom beyond Israel. When you read the book of Acts, you see kingdom of Christ advance in marvelous ways. The church spread like wildfire. Many were being saved. God inspired the New Testament to be written. The event at Pentecost was nothing short of miraculous. The Spirit came upon the church in a special way. And the church as we know it sprouted. The resurrection was a clear display of God's power. When Christ was raised from the dead, there is a very clear sense in which Jesus came in His kingdom. He physically appeared to His disciples. He taught them for forty days concerning His kingdom. He sent His disciples out to proclaim His kingdom.

Certainly, all of these interpretations are certainly possible except for the one that says that Jesus made a mistake. However, I'm inclined to focus my attention upon the transfiguration, especially due to its close proximity to this verse. In Matthew, the transfiguration immediately follows this difficult verse, which is also the case in the parallel account of Mark and Luke. Unfortunately, we have a chapter break at this point (which weren't in the original text of Scripture), which may attempt to lead us away from seeing the connection between Jesus "coming in His kingdom" and the transfiguration. But, in Mark's account, this verse begins a chapter. And, in Luke's account, this verse is in the middle of a chapter.

To understand Matthew 16:28 as referring to the transfiguration gets further support when we realize that it helps us to make sense of Jesus' words saying that "*some* of those who are standing here" shall see the kingdom. It's worth noting that the word "some" is used in verse 28 because, as we see in Matt. 17:1, Jesus was transfigured before only three of His disciples, not all of them. *All* of the disciples saw the resurrection and Pentecost and the rapid spread of the early church. But, only *some* of them saw the transfiguration. (Admittedly, this is also true of the destruction of Jerusalem, as many, but not all, of the apostles had been martyred by that time. But, the difficulty of that view is that it is in understanding how the remaining apostles saw "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" at that time. We have no data of people "seeing Jesus" at that time, but the disciples did "see the Son of Man" in the transfiguration) So, I believe that verse 28 has primary reference to what took place on that high mountain when Jesus was transfigured.

This verse calls us to have an expanded view of what is meant by the kingdom of Christ. It isn't simply referring to the second coming of Christ. Sure, the kingdom will be fully established at the second coming. But, even now, the kingdom of Christ has arrived, and it is alive and well. Theologians often call this the "already/not yet" tension. In one sense, Christ has already been seen "coming in His kingdom." Yet, in another sense, the full manifestation of His kingdom has not yet been experienced. If you want to be a good student of the Bible, you need to embrace these "already/not yet" tensions in the Bible.

We've discussed the kingdom of Christ. Let's focus our attention now upon, ...

2. His Glory (verses 1-3).

This is the heart of our text this morning: the glory of Jesus! Verse 1 sets the stage for us, "And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves." The time reference simply refers to our previous section. It's about a week after Jesus told His disciples of the incredible cost of following after Him. Jesus takes with him only three of His twelve disciples: Peter, James and John. Whenever you encounter a list of the disciples, these names are always at the top of the list. Apparently, these three received more training than did the other disciples. Just as Jesus focused His attention away from the crowds and upon the twelve disciples, so also did Jesus focus His attention away from the twelve and upon these three. When Jesus went into the house to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead, He took only Peter, James and John with Him (Mark 5:37). When Jesus was praying in Gethsemane, He told His disciples to sit until He prayed. Yet, He took with Him Peter, James, and John.

Matthew tells us that Jesus "brought them up to a high mountain by themselves." The exact identity of this mountain is debated. He probably took them up Mount Hermon. Jesus had revealed Himself to them while in Caesarea Philippi, which is near the base of Mount Hermon, and it would be natural for them to ascend that mountain. I don't think that they went to the top of Mount Hermon. Not only would it have been a long, hard climb (some 9,200 feet above sea level), but Luke indicates that they spent the night there and came down it the next day (Luke 9:37). Spending a night on the peak of Mount Hermon would be a chilling experience.

I believe that they climbed up high enough to ensure that they were in a desolate place, alone. Indeed, in verse 1, we are told that they were "by themselves." People will often go away on spiritual retreats, in order to reevaluate their life and their priorities. They often try to get away, alone from everybody, that they might focus upon God. It's not a bad idea. Down through the ages, the servants of God have sought a time to get away, alone with God. Several of us men have read the diary of David Brainerd, and how he would often slip away into the wilderness to pray. Jonathan Edwards would ride his horse in the wilderness to meditate and pray. Even Jesus, Himself "would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16). There are times when God uses these opportunities to touch people in a special way. People will often come back from such an experience and say that it was a "mountain-top" experience.

Well, Peter and James and John had the ultimate mountain-top experience. They saw Jesus in His full glory! Verse 2 describes it, "He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." For all practical purposes, these words defy explanation. We are told that Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word used here is *metamorphoo* (metamorphoo), from which we get the word, "metamorphous." His appearance changed in a great way. When you put some water in your freezer, it transforms into ice. When you throw a log on a fire, it changes into smoke, heat, and ash. When a caterpillar enters a cocoon, it metamorphoses into a butterfly. When Jesus was on the mountain, He underwent a great change in appearance.

Matthew describes what His face looked like. At first, it began to whiten. Then, it began to glow. Finally, His face became so brilliant in appearance, that it appeared as if His face were actually a giant, bright light bulb. The light was so bright, that it "shone like the sun." In other words, you could no longer look at Jesus, unless you put on your sunglasses, and even then, it would have been hard to look on Jesus. Surely, Peter, James or John were forced to turn away their eyes from the brilliance of Jesus' shining face. As they did, they would have noticed that their bodies were casting a shadow on the ground behind them.

But, it wasn't just Jesus' face. It was His garments as well. They too began to glow and shine forth. Matthew says that they "became as white as light." I love how Mark describes how bright these garments were. He said that "His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (Mark 9:3). I remember the television commercials that used to advertise for laundry detergent. In them, they always had some Chinese people, whose child was outside, playing in the mud and would come in with filthy, filthy clothes. After using their specific laundry detergent, the clothes would come out as white as ever. And these Chinese people would always be asked how they made these clothes so bright. They would always say, "Ancient Chinese secret." By the end of the commercial, it was always discovered to be Calgon laundry detergent. The "ancient Chinese secret" was no longer a secret. The message of the commercial was that if you wanted to get clothes 30% whiter than other laundry detergent, you should use Calgon. But, upon the mountain, when Jesus was transfigured, His clothes were whiter than any "Ancient Chinese secret" could make these garments. Instead, this was "Ancient God secret." But, its no secret how the garment of Jesus became "white as light." Just as His face "shone like the sun," so we can imagine also that His entire body began to emanate this incredible light. When you place a T-shirt in front of a strong light, the light will shine through the T-shirt and make it "as white as light." And when Jesus' body began to shine, His garments couldn't hold the light in.

The question that might come into your mind is this: "Why did the flesh of Jesus shine like this?" The answer to that question isn't too difficult at all. It's because Jesus is God. The Scriptures say that God "dwells in unapproachable light. ... no man has seen [Him] or can see [Him]" (1 Tim. 6:16). You can't see God, because of the radiance of His holiness is too bright. If you would look upon God, it would be like looking directly into the sun. Except, when compared to God, the sun is about as bright as a candle. God is billions of times brighter than the sun! Upon this mountain, Jesus was allowing His deity to shine through His flesh and blood and bones and muscles that contained His deity. His body parts couldn't help, but to shine forth. In fact now, without flesh and blood, Jesus shines like He did on the mountain. In Revelation 1:16, we read that the face of Jesus is "like the sun shining in its strength."

I remember when we first moved into our house. We moved during July, so it was summertime and the trees were in full bloom. And I remember that when October came around, the leaves began to drop. Within a matter of weeks, our big, luscious trees were simply sticks. For the first time, we could see what was behind our trees. I remember looking out on our back yard and saying, "Yvonne, there's a house behind us! Isn't that strange?" When the trees were in bloom, we couldn't see the house. But, when the trees fell, it revealed the house. The house behind us was always there. We simply didn't see it because our trees were hiding it from it. So also the deity of Jesus. Jesus was always God. But, the flesh of Jesus somehow kept His deity from revealing itself, until He was on the mountain with his three closest disciples.

Do you know the more difficult question to ask? It's not, "Why did the flesh of Jesus shine like this?" It's, "How did the flesh of Jesus keep the radiance of His deity from shining forth?" That's the question that is much more difficult to answer. Jesus was fully God and fully man. As God, Jesus was "the radiance of His glory" (Heb. 1:3). And yet, in the incarnation, Jesus took on flesh and blood like we have (Heb. 2:14) in such a way that His deity was hidden from fully manifesting itself. I don't know how this happened, but it did.

In the transfiguration, the incarnation was reversed. The flesh of Jesus, in some way, lost its translucence and what was inside of Jesus began to shine forth. As eye-witnesses, Peter and James and John caught a full glimpse of His glory. But they weren't the only ones. Verse 3 tells us that there were others upon the mountain with them. "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with them" (verse 3). These two men didn't walk up to the mountain with Jesus and the disciples. They took the elevator down from heaven. They were talking with Jesus.

When you think about all of the things that transpired on that mountain, it is mind-boggling. The simple fact that Moses and Elijah appear is amazing. Moses had died on Mount Nebo some 1400 years earlier at age 120, overlooking the promised land (Deut. 34:5, 6). Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind in the presence of Elisha (2 Kings 2:7-14) about 800 years before the first coming of Jesus. And they

come back, fully alive, and fully aware of what was taking place. They were given bodies in which to come and speak with Jesus. There is resurrection hope in these words. It teaches us that God's saints are alive and well. Though we die, yet shall we live. I believe that God could have chosen any of His people to come down from heaven and appear with Jesus. He could have chosen one of the patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. He could have chosen one of the conquering heroes, like Joshua, Caleb, or Gideon. He could have chosen one of the kings, like David, Hezekiah, or Josiah. He could have chosen one of the mighty prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. He could have chosen one of the great leaders, like Daniel, Nehemiah, or Zerubbabel. He could have chosen a no name, like Jediahiah, Shimri, or Shemaiah (1 Chr. 4:35), names I pulled from deep within the genealogies. God could have brought any of these people back to earth to speak with Jesus. But, He chose the two most prominent representatives of the Old Testament as representatives of His previous revelation. Moses represents the Law. Elijah represented the prophets.

I believe that these men were chosen to demonstrate how the entire Old Testament was anticipating Jesus. Matthew doesn't tell us the topic of their conversation with Jesus. He simply writes that Moses and Elijah were "talking with Jesus." But Luke tells us more. Luke says that they were "speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). They were speaking about His upcoming death, which would atone for the sins of those who believe. It makes sense for this to be the topic of conversation. The death of Jesus was the central point in redemption history. It is what all of the law and the prophets were anticipating.

There were other things to talk about. I think of Moses. God had prohibited Moses from entering the land, because he struck the rock, rather than speaking to it (Numbers 20:8-13). But, now, God grants to Moses what he once denied! Moses is standing in the promised land! But, the promised land looks a lot less attractive when you have Jesus standing right there in front of you. I think of Elijah. Elijah could have spoken of all of the great victories that he had experienced, especially on Mount Carmel. But, your spiritual victories look a lot less attractive when you have Jesus standing right there in front of you.

Certainly, there were other things that were discussed on that mountain. For instance, there must have been some type of introductions being made. Jesus certainly knew who these men were. We might easily expect this from Jesus. But, in verse 4, Peter appears to know who they were. The only way that Peter would have known who these men were is if they were introduced to Peter. They didn't have any pictures of former prophets hanging up in their synagogues. They wouldn't have recognized Moses or Elijah if they had been found walking down their streets. There had to be some kind of formal introduction.

Just try to imagine what it would be like to finally meet your heroes! Perhaps you have found yourself in a similar situation. You might have some favorite politician, or favorite athlete, or favorite entertainer, or (in my case) a favorite preacher. Have you ever found yourself having the chance to meet them? You might have found yourself suddenly standing in front of them and feeling like you need to say something. Perhaps you don't quite know what to say. But, you want to honor them. And so, some words come out of your mouth with an intention to try to honor them, but somehow they get mixed up, which is exactly what Peter does in verse 4.

We have looked at Christ's Kingdom and His Glory. Let's now look at, ...

3. His Honor (verses 4-9).

In verse 4, Peter attempts to give honor to these men when he says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Mark tells us that Peter said this "because he did not know what to [say]" (Mark 9:6). I believe that Peter was well-intentioned enough. Standing before Peter were men to be honored. He wanted them to be comfortable. He wanted to provide for them a nice place to rest. Perhaps even in the high mountain, there was a chill in the air. A tent would help keep these men warm. So, he volunteered to make a tent for each of these men. But, it would have been better for Peter if he had simply kept his mouth shut. Proverbs 17:28 says, "Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise." But, Peter opened his mouth and demonstrated his folly.

I love how quickly God corrects Peter. Look at verse 5. We read, "*While he was still speaking*, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" Before Peter's folly went too far, God corrected him. God was silent about Moses. God was silent about Elijah. God, the Father, gave honor to His Son. He said, "This is My beloved Son. This is the One in whom I am pleased." God had said this on another occasion. He said this when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. It was when Jesus came out from under the water that the Spirit of God descended as a dove and a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). In other words, "When I look upon my Son, Jesus, I have total delight in Him. He has satisfied Me through His obedience His submission to My will has been complete. My blessing is upon Him, like no other man in history." In our colloquial, "He da man!"

But, God, the Father, adds one key phrase here that is different than at the time of His baptism. God says, "Listen to Him!" This is divine confirmation of the words of Jesus. When Jesus speaks, your ears ought to tune into what He says. Have you ever seen a dog, lying on floor, who hears a strange sound? All of a sudden, its ear pops up and tries to identify the strange sound. If it continues, the dog might lift its head to get a good listen with both ears. Then, the dog is up on all fours and investigating the sound. When Jesus speaks, you ought to give your full attention to Him. And so, when Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matt. 16:24) You ought to listen to what He says and evaluate your life. "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46). You should question whether you find Jesus as more precious than anything that you own. "Every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). You should watch your words. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). You should think of your love for Jesus. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 7:19). You ought to check and see if you see any fruit in your life. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). You should run to Him and find your rest in Him. "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

God the Father is giving great honor to Jesus. Look how the disciples react. Verse 6, "And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their

faces and were much afraid." Their reaction is totally consistent with how everyone reacts when they encounter God! Adam and Eve hid from the presence of God (Gen. 3:8). At the burning bush, when Moses heard God speak, he "hid his face" from God (Ex. 3:6). Isaiah saw the throne of God and was undone before Him. He said, "I am ruined" (Isaiah 6:5). Ezekiel fell on his face when he saw God in His glory (Ezekiel 1:28). These disciples heard the voice come from heaven and were on their face in terror! And so, when I say that you must listen to Jesus, do you take my words seriously? These disciples sure took God's words seriously. They were coming to understand more and more who Jesus was. In chapter 16, we saw the disciples retreating to Caesarea Philippi, where they entered learning mode. They were enrolled in Christology 101 -- the study of Christ. It was revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God! (Matt. 16:16). They heard that the Christ must go to Jerusalem, suffer and die. They learned of the incredible cost of following Jesus: It will cost you everything! Now, they are coming to see and understand the deity of Jesus, as they saw "the Real Jesus." His words would come to have more and more authority in their minds.

I'm sure that things are beginning to come into focus. As they saw the radiance of Jesus, they learned that Jesus is greater than they ever imagined. As they heard the Father's blessing, they learned that Jesus is more blessed than they ever imagined. As they heard the Father's admonition to "Listen to Him," they learned that Jesus holds more authority than they ever imagined. It wasn't long before Jesus came to their rescue by touching them and telling them "Arise, and do not be afraid" (verse 7). "And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone" (verse 8). The vision was over. There were no more voices to be heard. Jesus had accomplished His purpose in revealing to His disciples who He really was. And they came down from the mountain. As they did, Jesus said, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). This is just what Jesus told them about His being the Messiah, back in Matthew 16:20, "He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ." His hour had not yet come. And their mountain-top experience was over.

The disciples had been permitted to see His glory in which the deity of Jesus Christ came into full view. They had also seen His Honor when the Father spoke forth of His ultimate satisfaction in His Son. At this point, you might be thinking, "Boy, I wish that I had a mountain-top experience like this. If I saw Jesus in all of His glory, I would certainly believe. If I heard the Father bestow His honor upon Jesus, I would be better enabled to serve Him. It would convince me. Oh, that God would reveal Himself to me like He did the disciples."

But do you know what? What you have seen and heard is better than what Peter, James and John saw and heard. Oh, they may have seen of His glory. Oh, they may have heard of His honor. But what you have seen and heard is better. Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Peter 1. Though Peter couldn't tell anyone about what he saw before the resurrection, he was able to tell others after it. And in 2 Peter, he wrote about His mountain-top experience. In 2 Peter 1:16, Peter writes,

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2. Pet. 1:16)

Peter is saying that these things of which we believe aren't some made-up story. They aren't a "Grimm Fairy Tale," as if it were an imaginary story. Rather, Peter said, "We saw His majesty with our own eyes!"

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" -- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet. 1:17)

Here, Peter described what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. In fact, last night as I was finishing this message, I was looking at what Peter said and was thrilled in my soul. Notice how Peter describes the transfiguration. He said that Jesus "received **honor and glory** from God the Father." This is my outline exactly of the text in Matthew 17! He uses the same words that I used. The **glory** of Jesus was seen as He revealed His deity. The **honor** of Jesus was seen as the Father spoke from heaven. It thrilled my soul, because it confirmed to me that I nailed the key truths of the transfiguration. It's about the "honor and glory" of Jesus. In verse 16, Peter said that he saw the glory of Jesus with his own eyes. In verse 18, Peter said that he heard the honor of Jesus with his own ears.

And now, look at verse 19. I want to read from the margin of the New American Standard. It says, "And we have the even surer prophetic word" (verse 19). The ESV says the same thing, "And we have something more sure, the prophetic word." The KJV says the same thing, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." Peter is saying, "As good and reliable as the transfiguration was, what we have now is even better and more reliable!" It is the prophetic word! It is the Bible! In verses 20-21, Peter explains what he means, ...

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

He is talking about the inspired Scripture. God revealed the glory and honor of Jesus on the mountain. God moved men to write Scripture. And given a choice between the two, it is the prophetic word which is "more sure" than the experience that Peter had.

If you think about it for a little bit, you might realize how confusing Peter's mountain-top experience was. Once he heard the voice of God, the disciples were on their face. After a few moments, Jesus comes over and touches them on the shoulder and tells them to arise and not to be afraid (Matt. 17:7). And when they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone. There were no more clouds. There were no more voices from heaven. Certainly Peter, James and John were confused. Things just don't change in an instant like they did. People just don't disappear as Moses and Elijah did. They were probably disoriented. They probably rubbed their eyes and questioned what they really saw. Was it real? Was it a dream? What does it all mean? Did it even happen?

As they came down the mountain, Jesus commanded them saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead" (verse 9). Jesus told them to keep their mouth shut. Often, when you are confused about something, it helps to begin talking about it.

Sometimes, as you do, you begin to understand. But Jesus was telling his disciples that they couldn't talk with anyone about these things (perhaps among themselves it was permitted). But, they could tell no one, until He rises from the dead. Certainly, this confused them all the more. A few weeks ago, we saw that they didn't understand this whole Messiah dying thing (see Matt. 16:21-23). I don't think that they understood His rising from the dead, either.

But, the incredible thing is this: we understand it. Why? Because we have it explained for us in the "even surer prophetic word" (Verse 19). And so, if I give you a choice between Peter's mountain-top experience, and the Scriptures you hold on your lap, which will you choose? Are you seeking a religious experience? Or are you seeking the truth of God's word? It is the Scripture that is much more reliable than an experience. Trust the truth of the word!

As we close this morning, I want you to take special notice of how verse 19 ends, ...

And we have the even surer prophetic word, ... to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2 Pet. 1:19)

Rock Valley Bible Church, you would do well to pay attention to the prophetic word. It is a lamp shining in a dark place. It is more reliable than all religious experiences that you will ever have. You would do well to read and meditate and pour over the Scriptures, until your heart sees the light. As your pastor, I am so privileged to spend hours and hours each week pouring over the truth of the Word of God. I thank you for allowing me to do this. My desire is to be an example of one who continues to see glories of God in the face of Christ through the words of this book. As you see that light dawn in me, I trust that you will be encouraged to follow my example. Due to your circumstances, I know that you aren't able to spend the kind of time in the Scriptures that I can. But, are you convinced that they are even more reliable than a mountain-top experience? Are you convinced that you need the light to shine in your hearts? If you are, you will be spending time in the Bible, and praying for God to illumine your hearts.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 25, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

Answers to the word association

Clark Kent - Superman
Peter Parker - Spiderman
Bruce Wayne - Batman
Colonel Steve Austin - The Six Million Dollar Man
Dr. David Bruce Banner - The Incredible Hulk
Dick Grayson - Robin, the boy wonder
Jaimie Summers - The bionic woman
John Reid - The Lone Ranger
Don Diego de la Vega - Zorro
Lord Greystoke - Tarzan

[1] After the service, a man from the congregation came up and discussed with me another option that I had not considered (nor seen in the commentaries that I read). He said that Jesus may have been talking about His second coming when He comes to rule and reign in complete sovereignty. This man suggested that Jesus may have been saying that one of His disciples wouldn't experience death until Jesus comes, rather, this disciple would either be miraculously kept alive or be translated into heaven as Elijah was.

This view has some merit, especially in light of how Jesus appears to be speaking of Him coming in His final judgment in the previous verse. There also might be weight added to this view in light of John 21:23, where we find out that a saying "went out among the brethren that [John] would not die." But, the verse is quick to point out that "Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'" (John 21:23). Tradition tells us that all of the disciples, except for Judas, who killed himself, and John, were martyred for Christ. So, John would be the only possibility of not tasting death. Yet, there is no Biblical evidence that John was translated to heaven.

So, I believe that it is best to understand this verse by enlarging our understanding of the kingdom of Christ to include more than simply His second coming. Matthew 12:28 (which I quote in my sermon) gives us ample reason to believe this.