

The Shadow of a Bright Cloud

Thomas Robinson, *The Suffering & Glory of Life in Jesus*, 3, July 6, 2014

Matthew 17:1-13

¹ And after **six days** Jesus took with him **Peter** and **James**, and **John** his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

² And he was **transfigured** before them, and his **face** shone like the sun, and his **clothes** became white as **light**. ³ And behold, there appeared to them **Moses** and **Elijah**, talking with him.

⁴ And **Peter** said to **Jesus**, "**Lord**, it is good that we are here. If you wish, **I will make three tents** (tabernacles) here, one for **you** and one for **Moses** and one for **Elijah**."

⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, **a bright cloud overshadowed them**, and a **voice** from the cloud said, "**This is my beloved Son**, with whom **I am well pleased; listen to him**."

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they **fell on their faces** and were **very afraid**.

⁷ But Jesus came and **touched** them, saying, "**Get up and don't be afraid**."

⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but **Jesus only**.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "**Tell no one** the vision, until **the Son of Man is raised from the dead**."

¹⁰ And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first **Elijah** must come?"

¹¹ He answered, "**Elijah does come**, and he will **restore all things**. ¹² But I tell you that **Elijah has already come**, and they did not recognize him, **but did to him whatever they pleased**. So also **the Son of Man will certainly suffer** at their hands."

¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of **John the Baptist**.

Matthew 16:15-16, 21, 24-25

¹⁵ Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the **Messiah**, the **Son of the living God**." ...

²¹ From that time **Jesus** began to **show his disciples** that he must **go to Jerusalem** and **suffer** many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and **be killed**, and on the third day **be raised**. ...

²⁴ But he turned and said to **Peter**, "**Get behind me, Satan!** You are a **hindrance** (*skandalon*) to me. For you are **not thinking the things of God**, but **the things of humans**. ²⁵ For whoever would **save his life** (*psyche*) will **lose it**, but whoever **loses his life** (*psyche*) for my sake will **find it**."

Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶ And **when Jesus was baptized**, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the **heavens were opened** to him, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;

¹⁷ and behold, a **voice from heaven** said, "**This is my beloved Son**, with whom **I am well pleased**."

Matthew 12:17-21 – Isaiah 42:1-3

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet **Isaiah**:

¹⁸ "**Behold, my servant** whom I have chosen, *nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;*
my beloved with whom my soul is **well pleased**. ²⁰ *a bruised reed he will not break,*

I will put my Spirit upon him, *and a smoldering wick he will not quench,*
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. *until he brings justice to victory;*

¹⁹ *He will not quarrel or cry aloud,* ²¹ *and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*"

Matthew 11:13-15

¹³ "For all the **Prophets** and the **Law** prophesied until **John**, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, **he is Elijah who is to come**. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Malachi 4:5-6

⁵ “Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers....”

Suffering and Glory – God’s Strange Redefinitions

Jesus is pushing his disciples (and us) to think in a fundamentally different way, to see life, ourselves, our problems, our hopes through a new lens. That lens is Jesus. Peter is us. Like him we think the things of humans, not of God. Like him we can make dolphin leaps out of our ocean of deception. The leaps are wonderful, but we plunge back.

Peter affirms Jesus as Messiah – God’s anointed king, the kingdom of God, victory over evil, driving out oppressors. Jesus can heal, feed thousands. Nothing can stop him. God is in him. The impossible thing is that he suffers and is killed. That negates everything. Defeat! Loss! But Jesus insists. Messianic victory and glory are in the suffering; victory in/through death.

The reversals of meaning spread. Does Jesus teach selfishness or unselfishness? He says the stuff you do in normal selfishness will kill you. It’s really anti-self. If you lose your life for me (=unselfish?), you find your life (true self-ish). The lens of Jesus turns things right side up.

Jesus takes Peter (!), James, and John to a mountain (like Sinai). They (we) get a glimpse of his glory (face like the sun, clothing of light). Also Moses and Elijah. Both encountered God on Mt. Sinai; both faced opposition, both anticipate the Messiah; they embody the whole story of Law and Prophets. The signs are thick. What do we see? No interpretation is given.

Lord, I’m Glad We’re Here to Help You...

Peter: “This is wonderful. I’m with you completely. I want to help. What do you want? I’ll build three tabernacles, places of meeting/encounter. It’s a start. There’s much more to do...”

Maybe we would have been quiet. We’ve been brought into a realm outside our understanding and control. None of this is possible in my ordinary world. But it’s strangely understandable; signs fitted for me. Life is bigger than I have been living it. God’s realm is not far off but right here all the time. I need to be a listener, learner, disciple. God is working. Jesus is more! On a scale I haven’t even imagined. Moses, Elijah, such names! With Jesus! What am I seeing?

A bright cloud cast a shadow over them. A voice: “*My beloved son!*” – like Peter’s confession. “*Well pleased!*” Like Jesus’ baptism. Like the servant of the Lord in Isaiah, who embodies Israel and is also the suffering servant to deliver Israel and the Gentiles. His glory and suffering are interwoven. Stop talking, disciple. “*Listen to him.*” You can’t help yet. Learn!

The uncanny voice, interrupting Peter. Total fear, collapse. Jesus’ touch: “*Get up; don’t be afraid.*” Only Jesus is there. No fear. But what did we see, perceive? My world is deeply God’s world.

Starting to Read the World from Jesus

As with the confession, Jesus instructs them not to tell ... till after resurrection! They don’t understand, but Jesus is planting a seed that will sprout later. But they are starting to think. Jesus is Messiah! Who Jesus is and what he does defines Messiah; defines God’s work, purpose.

We work backward and forward to understand everything from that central realization/lens.

What about Elijah? We just saw him. Scripture says he comes before the Messiah [Mal 4:5].

Where was he? Jesus points to what he’s said before. Seeing how God fills up prophecy requires discernment. Elijah is John the Baptist. His death points to the Messiah’s suffering.

The adventure begins. Seeing everything, life, choices, hopes, challenges through a new grasp of reality in Jesus’ suffering & glory, cross & resurrection. The dolphin grows wings to fly.