

STUDY GUIDE



CHURCH NAME

MOUNTAIN TOP IN CHRISTIANITY

WHO IS JESUS?

MATTHEW 17:1-13

05/28/2017

MAIN POINT

Jesus' mountaintop transfiguration proved to His disciples that He is God's Son, the promised Messiah.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What constitutes a mountaintop experience for most people?

What is your most memorable "mountaintop" experience, an experience that affected you to your core and changed the way you lived?

A momentous "mountaintop experience" is both life-altering and perspective-changing. Although we are to enjoy these experiences, we're not meant to stay there. Peter, James, and John learned this as they saw Jesus in His full glory and finally understood His divinity when He transfigured before them in Matthew 17.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 17:1-6.

This event took place six days after Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of His death. Why is that important?

What does it mean to be transfigured?

What was the significance of Moses' and Elijah's presence?

A transfiguration is an alteration or transformation into something higher, better, and more beautiful. Jesus was transformed, or transfigured, before Peter, James, and John. Jesus' appearance became radiant: "His face shone like the sun. Even His clothes became as white as the light" (v. 2).

The presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop is significant: Moses was highly regarded by the Jews as a man of God. The Lord used Moses to lead His people out of captivity in Egypt. Furthermore, prophecies of Jesus

identified Him as “the new Moses.” Elijah was a prophet who, through God’s miraculous power, both challenged and defeated the Canaanite god Baal. Elijah never experienced death—he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Why did Peter want to pitch three tents? Why is his desire to pitch tents practical, or understandable?

Upon seeing Jesus transformed, Peter was undone. So impacted by the glorious and heavenly experience that took place at the mountaintop, Peter longed to stay in the glory of Jesus’ forever. His passion and excitement over Christ led him to literally want to pitch a tent, to bask in God’s glory.

Describe a time when you just wanted to pitch your tent and stay in the presence of Jesus?

Todd said we "have to visit the Mountain Top" which is good, "but we can't live there". Why is "leaving the mountaintop" hard, yet necessary?

Jesus most likely took Peter, James, and John with Him to the mountaintop because in Jewish culture at least two witnesses were needed to validate a person’s testimony. Having three men there with Him meant they could all serve as witnesses to His true identity and the events that took place on the mountaintop. This would be important in the days that followed Jesus’ resurrection. Although Peter was excited, Jesus reminded Peter that he had to come down from the mountain. We cannot stay in mountaintop experiences forever—we have to go down in the everyday mud and mire and live our lives—we’ve got Kingdom work to do.

What was familiar about the “voice from the cloud” (v. 5)?

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 17:7-9.

What is significant about the order of events in this passage? What would soon happen to Jesus after this experience?

How does time with the Father on the mountaintop prepare people to face challenges in the valleys of life? Tell about a time God used a mountaintop experience to help you face a difficult time in your life?

Soon enough, Jesus would go to the cross to die for the sins of the world. On this mountaintop, Jesus was preparing to face the brutality of the cross. He knew the value of spending time with God, seeking strength, and gaining boldness. Time with God, reading His Word, praying, and seeking His guidance give us strength, boldness, and courage for what is to come. While we are not outwardly transfigured like Jesus was, we can be inwardly transformed.

Why were the disciples told to keep quiet about this experience until after the resurrection?

Jesus may have instructed them to keep quiet in order to avoid any man-made hindrances to the plan that the Father had laid out for Him. The testimony of this event would be another proof to share about Jesus’ identity after the resurrection. Jesus had made sure that there were an adequate number of witnesses to validate each other’s testimonies about the event.

God is always preparing us for what He has planned to do in our lives. This mountaintop experience was a gracious way to prepare the inner circle of disciples to carry on after Jesus’ death and resurrection. They could move forward with full confidence that Jesus is God’s unique Son. They could draw strength from the memory of hearing God the Father speak to them, and they could serve as witnesses to the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 17:10-13.

What is the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist?

Jesus explained that the prophecies about Elijah being the forerunner of the Messiah had been fulfilled through the ministry of John the Baptist. In other words, John the Baptist had lived out the spirit and power of Elijah. (Read Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17; and John 1:19,21 for further background on their connection.)

Once again Jesus told the disciples of His impending death, yet they did not grasp what He was saying. How is it possible that they could hear Jesus speak the words and still not understand His meaning?

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What can you do to place yourself in a posture to experience a “mountaintop” experience with God this week?

The disciples demonstrated reverence, fear, and awe on the mountaintop. In what ways can you do the same in your life?

Todd mentioned several ways we can come down from the mountain and live out our faith. How is God perhaps leading you personally to "pass on the baton of faith" in the coming week?

PRAY

Praise Jesus for being the promised One, the Messiah. Thank Him for His infallible nature, and His glorious beauty. Ask God to help balance your love of His presence on mountaintop experiences with the endurance to come down from the mountain and live your daily life on mission for Him.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 17:1-13

17:1-6 The reference to six days indicates the rapidity of the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Mt 16:28, but it also may draw a parallel between Jesus' transfiguration and God's revelation of Himself to Moses in Ex 24:13-18. Other parallels include the reference to a cloud, a brilliant light, a mountain, and the separation of a small number of men from the larger group. Moses' face shone brilliantly after he met with God (Ex 34:29-35), so Jesus' transfiguration serves to identify Him as the new Moses. This seems confirmed by the words listen to Him which echo Dt 18:15, a text from the prophet-like-Moses prophecy (Dt 18:15-19). However, the description of Jesus transcends OT descriptions of the glorified Moses. In Ex 34:29-35, only Moses' face was radiant and this radiance was concealed by his veil. Jesus' face had radiance too glorious to conceal and even His clothes became as white as the light. The description of Jesus parallels the description of the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:9-10 and shows that Jesus possessed the glory of His Father (Mt 16:27).

The presence of Moses and Elijah indicates that the necessary conditions for Messiah's coming had been fulfilled (v. 10; Dt 18:15-19; Mal 4:5). Peter's request to build tabernacles unjustly suggested equal treatment for Jesus and His guests. The Father's voice from heaven showed Jesus' superiority to Moses and Elijah. Jesus is God's beloved Son, the object of His delight, and the focus of true disciples. God spoke from heaven only twice in Matthew, both times to express His love for Jesus and His delight in His works (v. 5; 3:17). The disciples' reaction is understandable, for the OT shows that direct encounters with God inspire fright (e.g., Isa 6:1-5).

17:9 The disciples could report the transfiguration only after the resurrection when the nature of Jesus' messianic reign became clear. This is Jesus' third mention of His resurrection in this Gospel.

17:10-13 The view of the scribes was prompted by Mal 4:5. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy since his ministry had many similarities to Elijah's.