

## Matthew 17:1-13

### From Catena Aurea:

#### 17:1-4

1. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
2. And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.
3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.
4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

**JEROME.** It is made a question how it could be after six days that He took them, when Luke says eight. (Luke 9:28.) The answer is easy, that here one reckoned only the intervening days, there the first and the last are also added.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** He does not take them up immediately upon the promise being made, but six days after, for this reason, that the other disciples might not be touched with any human passion, as a feeling of jealousy; or else that during these days' space, those disciples who were to be taken up might become kindled with a more eager desire.

**ORIGEN.** Or because in six days this whole visible world was made; so he who is above all the things of this world, may ascend into the high mountain, and there see the glory of the Word of God.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** He took these three because He set them before others. But observe how Matthew does not conceal who were preferred to himself; the like does John also when he records the pre eminent praise given to Peter. For the company of Apostles was free from jealousy and vain glory.

**HILARY.** In the three thus taken up with Him, the election of people out of the three stocks of Sem, Cam, and Japhet is figured.

**JEROME.** Such as He is to be in the time of the Judgment, such was He now seen of the Apostles. Let none suppose that He lost His former form and lineaments, or laid aside His bodily reality, taking upon Him a spiritual or ethereal Body. How His transfiguration was accomplished, the Evangelist shews, saying, And his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became white as snow, For that His face is said to shine, and His raiment described to become white, does not take away substance, but confer glory. In truth, the Lord was transformed into that glory in which He shall hereafter come in His Kingdom. The transformation enhanced the brightness, but did not destroy the countenance, although the body were spiritual; whence also His raiment was changed and became white to such a degree, as in the expression of another Evangelist, no fuller on earth can whiten them. But all this is the property of matter, and is the subject of the touch, not of spirit and ethereal, an illusion upon the sight only beheld in phantasm.

**ORIGEN.** Mystically; When any one has passed the six days according as we have said, he beholds Jesus transfigured before the eyes of his heart. For the Word of God has various forms, appearing to each man according as He knows that it will be expedient for him; and He shews Himself to none in a manner beyond his capacity; whence he says not simply, He was transfigured, but, before them. For Jesus, in the Gospels, is merely understood by those who do not mount by means of exalting works and words upon the high mountain of wisdom; but to them that do mount up thus, He is no longer known according to the flesh, but is understood to be God the Word. Before these then Jesus is transfigured, and not before those who live sunk in worldly conversation. But these, before whom He is transfigured, have been made sons of God, and He is shewn to them as the Sun of righteousness. His raiment is made white as the light, that is, the words and sayings of the Gospels with which Jesus is clothed according to those things which were spoken of Him by the Apostles.

**GLOSS.** (e Bed. in Luc.) Or; the raiment of Christ shadows out the saints, of whom Esaias says, With all these shalt thou clothe thee as with a garment; (Isa. 49:18.) and they are likened to snow because they shall be white with virtues, and all the heat of vices shall be put far away from them. It follows, And there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with them.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** There are many reasons why these should appear. The first is, this; because the multitudes said He was Elias, or Jeremias, or one of the Prophets, He here brings with Him the chief of the Prophets,

that hence at least may be seen the difference between the servants and their Lord. Another reason is this; because the Jews were ever charging Jesus with being a transgressor of the Law and blasphemer, and usurping to Himself the glory of the Father, that He might prove Himself guiltless of both charges, He brings forward those who were eminent in both particulars; Moses, who gave the Law, and Elias, who was jealous for the glory of God. Another reason is, that they might learn that He has the power of life and death; by producing Moses, who was dead, and Elias, who had not yet experienced death. A further reason also the Evangelist discovers, that He might shew the glory of His cross, and thus soothe Peter, and the other disciples, who were fearing His death; for they talked, as another Evangelist declares, of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Wherefore He brings forward those who had exposed themselves to death for God's pleasure, and for the people that believed; for both had willingly stood before tyrants, Moses before Pharaoh, Elias before Ahab. Lastly, also, He brings them forward, that the disciples should emulate their privileges, and be meek as Moses, and zealous as Elias.

**HILARY.** Also that Moses and Elias only out of the whole number of the saints stood with Christ, means, that Christ, in His kingdom, is between the Law and the Prophets; for He shall judge Israel in the presence of the same by whom He was preached to them.

**ORIGEN.** However, if any man discerns a spiritual sense in the Law agreeing with the teaching of Jesus, and in the Prophets finds the hidden wisdom of Christ, (1 Cor. 2:7.) he beholds Moses and Elias in the same glory with Jesus.

**JEROME.** It is to be remembered also, that when the Scribes and Pharisees asked signs from heaven, He would not give any; but now, to increase the Apostles' faith, He gives a sign; Elias descends from heaven, whither he was gone up, and Moses arises from hell; (Is. 7:10.) as Ahaz is bidden by Esaias to ask him a sign in the heaven above, or in the depth beneath.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Hereupon follows what the warm Peter spake, Peter answered and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. Because he had heard that He must go up to Jerusalem, he yet fears for Christ; but after his rebuke he dares not again say, Be propitious to thyself, Lord, but suggests the same covertly under other guise. For seeing in this place great quietness and solitude, he thought that this would be a fit place to take up their abode in, saying, Lord, it is good for us to be here. And he sought to remain here ever, therefore he proposes the tabernacles, If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles. For he

concluded if he should, do this, Christ would not go up to Jerusalem, and if He should not go up to Jerusalem, He should not die, for he knew that there the Scribes laid wait for Him.

**JEROME.** Yet art thou wrong, Peter, and as another Evangelist says, knowest not what thou sayest. (Luke 9:33.) Think not. of three tabernacles, when there is but one tabernacle of the Gospel in which both Law and Prophets are to be repeated. But if thou wilt have three tabernacles, set not the servants equal with their Lord, but make three tabernacles, yea make one for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that They whose divinity is one, may have but one tabernacle, in thy bosom.

### **17:5–9**

5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

7. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

**JEROME.** While they thought only of an earthly tabernacle of boughs or tents, they are overshadowed by the covering of a bright cloud; While he yet spake, there came a bright cloud and overshadowed them. (Exod. 19:9, 16.)

**CHRYSOSTOM.** When the Lord threatens, He shews a dark cloud, as on Sinai; but here where He sought not to terrify but to teach, there appeared a bright cloud.

**ORIGEN.** The bright cloud overshadowing the Saints is the Power of the Father, or perhaps the Holy Spirit; or I may also venture to call the Saviour that bright cloud which overshadows the Gospel, the Law, and the Prophets, as they understand who can behold His light in all these three.

**JEROME.** Forasmuch as Peter had asked unwisely, he deserves not any answer; but the Father makes answer for the Son, that the Lord's word might be fulfilled, He that sent me, he beareth witness of me. (John 5:37.)

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Neither Moses, nor Elias speak, but the Father greater than all sends a voice out of the cloud, that the disciples might believe that this voice was from God. For God has ordinarily shewn Himself in a cloud, as it is written, Clouds and darkness are round about Him; (Ps. 97:2.) and this is what is said, Behold, a voice out of the cloud.

**JEROME.** The voice of the Father is heard speaking from heaven, giving testimony to the Son, and teaching Peter the truth, taking away his error, and through Peter the other disciples also; whence he proceeds, This is my beloved Son. For Him make the tabernacle, Him obey; this is the Son, they are but servants; and they also ought as you to make ready a tabernacle for the Lord in the inmost parts of their heart.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** Fear not then, Peter; for if God is mighty, it is manifest that the Son is also mighty; wherefore if He is loved, fear not thou; for none forsakes Him whom He loves; nor dost thou love Him equally with the Father. Neither does He love Him merely because He begot Him, but because He is of one will with Himself; as it follows, In whom I am well pleased; which is to say, in whom I rest content, whom I accept, for all things of the Father He performs with care, and His will is one with the Father; so if He will to be crucified, do not then speak against it.

**HILARY.** This is the Son, this the Beloved, this the Accepted; and He it is who is to be heard, as the voice out of the cloud signifies, saying, Hear ye Him. For He is a fit teacher of doing the things He has done, who has given the weight of His own example to the loss of the world, the joy of the cross, the death of the body, and after that the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

**ORIGEN.** The voice out of the cloud speaks either to Moses or Elias, who desired to see the Son of God, and to hear Him; or it is for the teaching of the Apostles.

**JEROME.** Their cause of terror is threefold. Because they knew that they had done amiss; or because the bright cloud had covered them; or because they had heard the voice of God the Father speaking; for human frailty cannot endure to look upon so great glory, and falls to the earth trembling through both soul and body. And by how much higher any one has aimed, by so much lower will be his fall, if he shall be ignorant of his own measure.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** But when before in Christ's baptism, such a voice came from heaven, yet none of the multitude then present suffered any thing of this kind, how is it that the disciples on the mount fell prostrate? Because in sooth their solicitude was much, the height and loneliness of the spot great, and the transfiguration itself attended with terrors, the clear light and the spreading cloud; all these things together wrought to terrify them.

**JEROME.** And whereas they were laid down, and could not raise themselves again, He approaches them, touches them gently, that by His touch their fear might be banished, and their unnerved limbs gain strength; And Jesus drew near, and touched them. But He further added His word to His hand, And said unto them, Arise, fear not. He first banishes their fear, that He may after impart teaching. It follows, And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only; which was done with good reason; for had Moses and Elias continued with the Lord, it might have seemed uncertain to which in particular the witness of the Father was borne. Also they see Jesus standing after the cloud has been removed, and Moses and Elias disappeared, because after the shadow of the Law and Prophets has departed, both are found in the Gospel. It follows; And as they came down from the mount, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell no man this vision, until the Son of Man shall rise from the dead. He will not be preached among the people, lest the marvel of the thing should seem incredible, and lest the cross following after so great glory should cause offence.

**HILARY.** He enjoins silence respecting what they had seen, for this reason, that when they should be filled with the Holy Spirit, they should then become witnesses of these spiritual deeds.

### **17:10–13**

10. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the Scribes that Elias must first come?

11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

**JEROME.** It was a tradition of the Pharisees following the Prophet Malachi, that Elias should come before the coming of the Saviour, and bring back the heart of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, and restore all things to their ancient state. The disciples then consider that this transformation which they had seen in the mount was His coming in glory, and therefore it is said, And his disciples asked him, saying, How then say the Scribes that Elias must first come? As though they had said, If you have already come in glory, how is it that your forerunner appears not yet? And this they say chiefly because they see that Elias is departed again.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. lvii.) The disciples knew not of the coming of Elias out of the Scriptures; but the Scribes made it known to them; and this report was current among the ignorant multitude, as was that concerning Christ. Yet the Scribes did not explain the coming of Christ and of Elias, as they ought to have done. For the Scriptures speak of two comings of Christ; that which has taken place, and that which is yet to be. But the Scribes, blinding the people, spake to them only of His second coming, and said, If this be the Christ, then should Elias have come before Him. Christ thus resolves the difficulty, He answered and said, Elias truly shall come, and restore all things; but I say unto you, that Elias has already come. Think not that here is a contradiction in His speech, if He first say that Elias shall come, and then that he is come. For when He says that Elias shall come and restore all things, He speaks of Elias himself in his own proper person, who indeed shall restore all things, in that he shall correct the unbelief of the Jews, who shall then be to be found; and that is the turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, that is, the hearts of the Jews to the Apostles.

**AUGUSTINE.** (Quæst. Ev. i. 21.) Or; He shall restore all things, that is those whom the persecution of Antichrist shall have overthrown; as He Himself should restore by His death those whom He ought.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** But if there shall so much good arise out of the presence of Elias, why did He not send him at that time? We shall say, Because they then held Christ to be Elias, and yet believed not on Him. But they shall hereafter believe Elias, because when he shall come after so great expectation announcing Jesus, they will more readily receive what shall be taught by Him. But when He says that Elias is come already, He calls John the Baptist Elias from the resemblance of their ministry; for as Elias shall be the forerunner of His second coming, so was John the forerunner of His first. And He calls John Elias, to shew that His first coming was agreeable to the Old Testament, and to prophecy.

**JEROME.** He then who at the Saviour's second coming should come in the truth of His body, come now in John in power and spirit. It follows, And they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they would, that is, despised and beheaded him.

**HILARY.** As he announced the Lord's coming, so he was also to foreshew His passion by the example of his own suffering and wrong? whence it follows, So also shall the Son of Man suffer of them.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** He takes the opportunity from the passion of John to refer to His own passion, thus giving them much comfort.

**JEROME.** It is enquired how, seeing that Herod and Herodias were they that killed John, it can be said that Jesus also was crucified by them, when we read that He was put to death by the Scribes and Pharisees? It must be answered briefly, that the party of the Pharisees consented to the death of John, and that in the Lord's crucifixion Herod united his approval, when having mocked and set Him at nought, he sent Him back to Pilate, that he should crucify Him.

**ORIGEN.** That He says of John, Elias is already come, is not to be understood of the soul of Elias, that we fall not into the doctrine of metempsychosis, which is foreign to the truth of Church doctrine, but, as the Angel had foretold, he came in the spirit and power of Elias.

## **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures:**

### **17:1 Jesus Takes Peter, James and John to a High Mountain**

#### **After Six Days.**

Hilary of Poitiers: Indeed, in this type of event, reason, harmony and example are served. For after six days the appearance of the Lord's glory is revealed. No doubt, with the cycles of six thousand years having unfolded, the glory of the heavenly kingdom is prefigured. And the three were taken up in analogy to the descent of the three, Shem, Ham and Japheth. By this the coming election to divine favor of the people is shown. 17:1 On Matthew 17.2.1



### **The Counting of Days.**

Jerome: Now it is asked how after six days he took them and led them separately onto a high mountain, whereas the Evangelist Luke established the number at eight. The answer is easy because in Matthew the days in the middle are counted, but in Luke the first and last are added. <sup>2</sup> For Luke does not say after eight days Jesus took Peter and James and John but “now about eight days after.” <sup>3</sup> Commentary on Matthew 3.17.1.4

### **Why Only Three?**

Chrysostom: Why does he take only these three with him? Because each one of these three was elevated above the rest. Peter showed his preeminence by exceedingly loving him; John by being exceedingly loved by him. James showed his superiority by his ready response to his brother: we are able to drink the cup <sup>5</sup> and by his works and by doing what he said. For so earnest was James, and grievous to the Jews, that Herod himself imagined that he had bestowed a great favor on the Jews by killing him. <sup>6</sup> The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 56.2.7

### **17:2 Jesus Transfigured Before Them**

#### **The Sun of Righteousness.**

Origen: But some may ask, when he was transfigured before those who were led up by him into the lofty mountain, did he appear to them in the form of God or in the preincarnate form that he earlier had? Did he appear to those left below in the form of a servant, but to those who had followed him after the six days to the lofty mountain, did he have not the form of a servant but the form of God? Listen carefully, if you can, and at the same time be attentive spiritually. It is not simply said that he was transfigured, but with a certain necessary addition. Both Matthew and Mark have recorded this: he was transfigured before them. Is it therefore possible for Jesus to be transfigured before some but not before others? <sup>8</sup>

Do you wish to see the transfiguration of Jesus? Behold with me the Jesus of the Gospels. Let him be simply apprehended. There he is beheld both “according to the flesh” and at the same time in his true divinity. He is beheld in the form of God according to our capacity for knowledge. This is how he was beheld by those who went up upon the lofty mountain to be apart with him. Meanwhile those who do not go up the mountain can still behold his works and hear his words, which are uplifting. It is before those who go up that Jesus is transfigured, and not to those below. When he is transfigured, his face shines as the sun, that he may be manifested to the children of light, who have put off the works of darkness and

put on the armor of light. <sup>9</sup> They are no longer the children of darkness or night but have become the children of day. They walk honestly as in the day. Being manifested, he will shine to them not simply as the sun but as he is demonstrated to be, the sun of righteousness. Commentary on Matthew 12.37.<sup>10</sup>

### **His Garments Became White as Light.**

Jerome: Certainly the Lord was transformed into that glory with which he would afterwards come in his own kingdom. The change accentuated in splendor. It did not diminish his outward appearance. Let it be that his body had become spiritual. Even his garments were changed, which were white to such a high degree that as another Evangelist would say, “And his clothes became dazzling white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them.” <sup>11</sup> What the mortal bleacher on earth is able to make is material and subject to touch, not supernatural and heavenly, which mocks the eyes and is only seen in a vision. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.2.<sup>12</sup>

### **His Face Shone Like the Sun.**

Augustine: Indeed, Jesus himself shone as the sun, indicating that he is the light which illuminates every one who comes into this world. <sup>13</sup> And this is the sun to the eyes of the flesh, that is the sun to the eyes of the heart. His garments are a type of his church. For garments, unless held up by the one having donned them, fall. Paul was like the lowest hem of these garments. For he himself says, “For I am the least of the apostles,” <sup>14</sup> and in another passage, “I am the last of the apostles.” On a garment, the hem is the last thing and the least. Just as that woman who touched the Lord’s hem was made well, so the church which came out of the Gentiles was saved by means of Paul’s preaching. Sermon 78.2.<sup>15</sup>

## **17:3 Moses and Elijah Appear**

### **Readiness to Die.**

Chrysostom: He is transfigured to manifest the glory of the cross, to console Peter and the others in their dread of the Passion and to bring their minds to elevated understanding. Those who went up with him did not hold their peace but were destined to speak of the glory which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem—of his Passion and the glory of the cross.

And not only did Jesus elevate their understanding, but also he brought their virtues to a higher level, so that they could meet the requirements expected of them. He had just said, “If any man would come after

me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”<sup>16</sup> He then set before them Moses and Elijah, who were ready to die ten thousand times for God’s decrees and for the people entrusted to them. Each of them, having lost his life, found it. For each of them both spoke boldly to tyrants, the one to the Egyptian, the other to Ahab. They spoke on behalf of heartless and disobedient people. They were brought into extreme danger by the very persons who were saved by them. Both desired to lead people away from idolatry. These were not eloquent men. Moses was slow of tongue and dull of speech.<sup>17</sup> Elijah had the crudest sort of appearance.<sup>18</sup> Both were strict observers of voluntary poverty. Moses did not work for worldly gain. Elijah did not possess anything more than his sheepskin. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 56.3.<sup>19</sup>

### **There Appeared Moses and Elijah.**

Jerome: While the scribes and Pharisees were testing him, he was unwilling to give signs from heaven to those demanding them; however, he silenced their perverse demand with a prudent response. Here, indeed, so that he might increase the faith of the apostles, he gave a sign from heaven. Thereupon Elijah descended from the place to which he had ascended. Moses rose from the lower regions. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.3.<sup>20</sup>

### **17:4 Offering to Make Three Booths**

#### **I Will Make Three Booths.**

Jerome: You go astray, Peter, just as the other Evangelist attests: you do not know what you are saying. Do not seek three tabernacles. Seek only the tabernacle of the gospel in which the law and the prophets are to be recapitulated.<sup>21</sup> By seeking three tabernacles you appear to be comparing incommensurably the two servants with the one Lord. Seek only the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, for in these there is one God, who is to be worshiped in the tabernacle of your heart. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.4.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Peter Said to Jesus.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Peter didn’t know what he was saying, for before the Savior’s Passion, resurrection and victory over death and corruption, it was impossible for Peter to be with Christ and to be permitted into the tents which are in heaven. These things would happen only after the Savior’s resurrection and ascent into heaven. Fragment 200.<sup>23</sup>

## **17:5 Hear My Beloved Son**

### **A Bright Cloud Overshadowed Them.**

Origen: I think that God, wishing to dissuade Peter from making three tabernacles, under which so far as it depended on his choice he was going to dwell, shows him a better tabernacle, so to speak, and far superior: the cloud. It is the function of a tabernacle to give shade to one who is in it and to shelter him, and the bright cloud overshadowed them. So God made, as it were, a more divine tabernacle, inasmuch as it was bright, that it might be to them a pattern of the resurrection to come. For the shining cloud gives shade to the righteous and at the same time protects them, gives them light and illuminates them. What would the shining cloud that gives shade to the righteous be? Is it perhaps the Father's power, from which comes the Father's voice saying that this is his Son in whom he is well pleased, urging those that are shaded by it to listen to him and to no one else? He speaks—just as of old so also for all times—through those whom he wishes. Perhaps the shining cloud is the Holy Spirit, giving shade to the righteous and announcing the words of God at work within it and saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." I would even venture to say that the shining cloud is our Savior. Commentary on Matthew 12.42.25

### **This Is My Beloved Son.**

Jerome: Because Peter had asked imprudently, he does not merit the Lord's answer. But the Father answered for the Son so that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled: "I do not bear witness for myself, but the Father who sent me, he bears witness for me." <sup>26</sup> The cloud appears bright and shades them, so that those who were looking for a material booth made from boughs or tents might be protected with the shade of a shining cloud. The voice of the Father speaking from heaven is also heard. It provides testimony and teaches Peter the truth with error removed, and in fact through Peter teaches all the apostles: "This is my beloved Son." It is for him that you must build the tabernacle, him you must obey. "My Son" is distinguished from his servants, Moses and Elijah. They, along with you, are to prepare a tabernacle for the Lord in the inner sanctum of their heart. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.5.27

## **17:6 The Disciples Filled with Awe**

### **Filled with Awe.**

Chrysostom: Why was it that when they heard these words they were dismayed? For previously a similar voice had spoken in Jordan and a crowd was present, but no one felt anything like this; and afterwards, again, when they said that it thundered, they did not feel anything like this. <sup>34</sup> Why then did they fall on their faces on the mountain? Because there was solitude, and the height of the mountain, and great quietness, and a transfiguration full of awe, and a pure light and a cloud stretched out; all of these threw them into great alarm. Amazement arose on every side, and they fell on their faces in both fear and adoration at the same time. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 56.6.<sup>35</sup>

### **They Fell on Their Faces.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Through their speaking together it shows that the old prophets also spoke the same things as Jesus, even if enigmatically. In great awe the disciples fell on their faces, and the Savior raised them up. This shows that if Jesus had not been incarnate and had not been Mediator between God and humanity and strengthened his own nature, he would not have endured to hear the voice of God. Fragment 199.<sup>36</sup>

## **17:7 Rise, and Have No Fear**

### **Jesus Came and Touched Them.**

Jerome: For three possible reasons they were petrified with fear: either because they knew they had sinned or because the bright cloud covered them or because they had heard the voice of God the Father speaking. Human weakness is not strong enough to bear the sight of such great glory but trembles with its whole heart and body and falls to earth.... "And Jesus came up and touched them." Because they were lying down and could not rise, he mercifully came up and touched them so that through his touch he might put to flight their fear and strengthen their weakened limbs. "And he said to them, 'Rise, and don't be afraid.'" Those whom he had healed with his hand, he heals with his command, "Have no fear." First fear is expelled so that afterwards doctrine may be imparted. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.6–7.<sup>37</sup>

## **17:8 When They Lifted Their Eyes**

### **They Saw Jesus Only.**

Origen: Consider the details of this passage. See if you can also say this: The disciples understood that the Son of God had been speaking with Moses. It was Moses who had said of God, "No one shall see my face and live."<sup>38</sup> The disciples understood the testimony of Moses about God. They were not able to endure the radiance of the Word. They humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God.

But after the touch of the Word, they lifted up their eyes. They saw Jesus only and no other. Moses, the law and Elijah the prophet had become one with the gospel of Jesus. They did not abide as they formerly were as three, but they became one. Think of these things in a spiritual sense. Commentary on Matthew 12.43.<sup>39</sup>

## **17:9 Tell No One the Vision**

### **Until Jesus Is Raised from the Dead.**

Chrysostom: For the greater the things said about him, the harder it was for the many at that time to accept them. And the offense of the cross increased all the more thereby. Therefore he told them to be silent about the transfiguration. He again reminded them of the Passion, and he almost mentioned the reason why he told them to be silent. For he did not command them never to tell anyone but "[to wait] until he is raised from the dead." Saying nothing about the painful part, he told them only of the good. What then? Were they not going to be offended after this? Not at all. For the silence that was being demanded was only for the time before the crucifixion. After this they were thought better prepared to receive the Spirit. They had the voice of the miracles advocating for them, and everything that they said from then on was easier to receive. For the course of events announced his power more clearly than a trumpet, and no stumbling block interrupted these events. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 56.6.<sup>40</sup>

### **Tell No One.**

Jerome: The preview of the future kingdom and the glory of his triumph had been shown on the mountain. So he does not want this to be told to the people in case it should be deemed incredible because of its greatness and also so that after such great glory the event of the cross that follows should not cause untaught minds to stumble. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.9.<sup>41</sup>

## **17:10 First Elijah Must Come**

### **The Scribes' Teaching.**

Jerome: Unless we know the reasons why the disciples asked about the name of Elijah, their questioning seems foolish and extraordinary. For what does asking about Elijah's arrival have to do with what was written above? The Pharisees' tradition, following the prophet Malachi of the twelve minor prophets, is that Elijah comes before the end. <sup>42</sup> He turns the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers and restores everything to its ancient state. So the disciples think that the transfiguration of glory is the one that they have seen on the mountain and say, "If you now have come in glory, why does your precursor not appear?" especially since they had seen Elijah disappear. But when they say, "The scribes say that Elijah must first come," by the word first they are saying that unless Elijah comes, it is not the advent of the Savior according to the Scriptures. First they are saying that unless Elijah comes, it is not the advent of the Savior according to the Scriptures. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.10. <sup>43</sup>

## **17:11 Restoring All Things**

## **17:12 Elijah Has Already Come**

### **They Did Not Know Him.**

Origen: The disciples who went up with Jesus remembered the traditions of the scribes concerning Elijah, that before the advent of Christ, Elijah would come and prepare for him the souls of those who would receive him. But the vision on the mountain, in which Elijah appeared, did not seem to be harmonized with what had been said, since Elijah seemed to them to have come with him rather than before him. So they say this thinking that the scribes were wrong. To this the Savior replies, not denying what was handed down about Elijah but saying that there was another coming of Elijah before that of Christ unknown to the scribes. In [this coming] "they did not know him but did to him whatever they pleased," as though they too were accomplices in his imprisonment by Herod and execution by him. Then he says that he too will suffer what they did to Elijah. The disciples asked these questions as though about Elijah and the Savior replied. But hearing the Savior's words, "Elijah has already come," and what followed, they took it as a reference to John the Baptist. Commentary on Matthew 13.1. <sup>45</sup>

### **Fulfilling Elijah's Ministry.**

Chrysostom: They did not know this from the Scriptures, but the scribes used to tell them, and this saying was reported among the ignorant crowd, as also about Christ. Therefore the Samaritan woman also said, "The Messiah is coming; when he comes, he will show us all things." <sup>46</sup> And they themselves asked John, "Are you Elijah or the prophet?" <sup>47</sup> For this opinion was strong, as I said, both the one about Christ and the one about Elijah, but they did not interpret it as it should have been. For the Scriptures speak of two comings of Christ, both this one that has taken place and the future one. Paul spoke of these when he said, "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world." <sup>48</sup> Behold the first advent, and listen to how he declares the coming advent: "Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." <sup>49</sup> The prophets also mention both advents; of the one that is second they say that Elijah will be the forerunner; John was forerunner of the first, John whom Christ also called by the name Elijah, not because he was Elijah but because he was fulfilling Elijah's ministry. For just as Elijah will be the forerunner of the second advent, so John was of the first. But the scribes, confusing these things and perverting the people, mentioned that coming alone, the second one, to the people, and said, "If this is the Christ, Elijah ought to have come first." That is why the disciples also say, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 57.1.50