THE TRANSFIGURATION WAS A TRUE MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

1. The depth of Christ’s love
2. The glory that will be ours
3. The path of discipleship until that time

Usually we reserve the expression **mountaintop experience** for some great uplifting personal event. Our wedding day or the birth of a child or grandchild, for example, would qualify as a mountaintop experience. Or maybe even a particularly beautiful and meaningful worship service.

With that phrase, we are saying that there are some events that raise us up and transport us to an emotional height far beyond the routine. And while we soon forget other things, mountaintop experiences remain with us for a long time.

Besides the emotional high, another feature is the perspective and clarity they often provide. Have you ever been on top of a mountain or an observation deck and looked down? What did you see? You saw miles and miles of surrounding territory in every direction. You saw where everything was in relation to everything else.

So it is with mountaintop experiences. From a lofty emotional height we are able to survey our lives and see more clearly what is behind and ahead of us. Our sights are raised and sometimes we see how things fit together, how this relates to that in the big picture of our lives.

For Jesus and three of his disciples - and through them, us - **THE TRANSFIGURATION WAS A TRUE MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE** not only in the obvious physical sense (our text takes place on mountain) or even the emotional sense (it was a unique experience for all involved), but in the way it provides us with clarity and perspective on the depth of Christ's love for us, the glory that will be ours and the path of discipleship until that time.

We are told: **After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.** What was about to transpire happened six days after Jesus plainly told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem where he would suffer and die for the sins of the world. After clearly spelling that out, Jesus then took his inner circle of disciples to a mountain.

This is what happened next: **There he was transfigured before them.** In other words, he was changed. In what way? **His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** Even for disciples who had seen miracles happen on an almost routine basis this was new. They had never experienced anything quite like this. Here the disciples - and us - are given a glimpse of the true glory of God. We are given just a peek at the radiance which emanates from pure holiness.

But there was more. Two heavenly visitors arrive on the scene: **Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah.** Why did these two particular Old Testament figures join the glorified Christ on the mountain? Why not, say, Abraham and Isaac, or David and Isaiah?

We are not told. It is speculated that Moses, the **law-giver** and divinely inspired author of the first five books of the Bible symbolized the Law; while Elijah, that powerful Old Testament prophet and reformer, symbolized the Prophets. Together they represent the **Law and the Prophets**, a Scriptural term used to designate the entire Old Testament.

Their presence underscores the fact that the entire Old Testament with its hundreds of Messianic prophecies looks forward to Jesus and talks about his coming and work. All those prophecies found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And now the ultimate prophecy - that God would provide the once-and-for-all sacrificial Lamb to take away the sins of the world - was just about to play itself out.

One early church father suggested another reason these two appeared was primarily for the sake of the three disciples. Six days earlier Jesus had explained the necessity of his
impending suffering and death. At that time he also spoke about what it means to be his disciple; how true discipleship would call for sacrifice and a willingness to die, rather than deny Christ. Moses and Elijah were sterling Old Testament examples of those who faced adversity in the name of their God and remained strong, committed and steadfast. Soon the disciples would be called upon to do the same.

At any rate, in response to such an unearthly scene, we read: 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. If this seems a bit odd or even silly - after all, why would heavenly beings need shelter? - Mark's Gospel provides this added info: He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.

What happened next frightened them even more: While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped 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 on the ground, terrified. In the Old Testament God often made his presence known in a cloud. And so from a cloud, bright with his holiness, comes the approving voice of God the Father. In words similar to those spoken at the baptism of Jesus as he began his ministry, he speaks again to usher in the last stage of that ministry.

Along with this pronouncement, he issues the disciples then - and all true disciples of Jesus now - this single command: Listen to him! Meaning: Listen to everything Jesus has to say about himself. Hear the way of eternal salvation through faith in him. Believe in him. Trust him. Obey him.

The extraordinary exposure to holiness came to an end for the disciples just as quickly as it had begun. Our text concludes: But Jesus came and touched them. Get up, he said, do not be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. Recognizing that the world would not understand what’d happened unless it was viewed in the light of his resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples orders not to tell anyone what they had heard or seen until he had risen from the dead.

Let's talk about the general overall effect that the Transfiguration had for all involved. First of all, it was helpful to Jesus. The Transfiguration gave him comfort, strength and renewed resolve for the suffering and shameful death he would shortly undergo in our behalf. Here on this mountain he was given a token of the glory which had been and would again be his eternally with the Father. And we can surmise that at this point in his ministry, Jesus needed this special encouragement.

From his miracles, his claims about himself and his glorious resurrection, we know that Jesus is God. But we must never forget that Jesus is also a true man. And as a man, Jesus had no greater desire than you or I would have to be mocked, ridiculed, beaten, and finally crucified. Jesus was not a robot. There was no switch to throw to turn off his humanity and place him exclusively in God-mode.

Recall the anguish he went through in the Garden of Gethsemane as he asked his Father, if at all possible, to spare him the cup of suffering he was about to endure. That suffering was real. It was, of course, necessary. It was God's plan to offer his Son as the substitute payment for our sins. But it was not an easy road to walk. This glimpse of glory and the encouraging company of Moses and Elijah strengthened our Lord.

And it clearly declares the depth of his love for us. Let us always remember that coming to planet earth, living out 33 years in a largely hostile environment, suffering under Pontius Pilate and then dying on a cross was not mandatory. It was voluntary. Jesus did not have to do this. He chose to do this because he loves us.

You know, there are many mysteries of faith and challenges to our intellect in the Bible. But no mystery is deeper or harder to understand than Christ's love for us. Here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see Jesus choosing us over his personal comfort and physical well-being.
Here we see Jesus resolving to go forward into a future he knew would end up on a Roman cross. On the Mount of Transfiguration, just like on Mt Calvary, Jesus put us first, himself second. He did it so we might share in his glory forever. When Jesus was transfigured on that mountain, Peter wanted to capture the moment forever. That is probably why he offered to put up three shelters. There was fear in his voice, but there was also desire - the desire to continue basking in the glory and standing in the presence of God. He had tasted it, and he did not want it to end.

And someday it won’t. The glory they experienced momentarily we will all enjoy eternally. Because of the choice Jesus made for us, glory is our destination. Heaven is our home. We know how the story of our lives will end. And it is a happy one.

But in the meantime, like the disciples who eventually came down from the mountain to the plain below, we now walk the path of discipleship. And for disciples of Christ, it will not always be easy. But knowing what lies ahead certainly makes our pilgrimage through life easier.

The Transfiguration motivated and encouraged these disciples in continued service and perseverance. They knew what they had seen. They knew they had someday share in that glory. They knew what had been momentary on that mountain would someday be theirs eternally. And that knowledge made a difference in their lives.

It does in ours, too, when we take the time to think of it. Viewing our lives in light of the Transfiguration puts everything into its proper perspective.

Are there going to be hardships and disappointments in life? Certainly. I do not have to tell you that. And those hardships and difficulties will come in various forms and for various causes. Although we live under the umbrella of Romans 8:28 - the assurance that God works everything for our good - he does not promise us immunity from the disease and crime and pain and tragedies and hardships that accompany living on a fallen planet. We deal with them just like everyone else. Other hardships we bring on ourselves through our own weakness and sinful decisions. And some hardships come to us purely because of our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

But that is not all there is. Our lives are not defined by hardship. On the contrary, through trials we triumph. The Apostle Paul put it this way: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

In other words, the present - as good or as bad as that may be – does not compare with the future. And the Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of that future.

And that future, dear friends, will be one eternal mountaintop experience. Amen.

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