

MATTHEW 17:1-9 OPEN YOUR EYES! GET THE POINT!

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

Sometimes things come "into view" in a very striking way. Example: Two firemen are presenting a demonstration at the elementary school. They show how easily fires can start, they show what a person has to do to put out a small fire, they show what a person has to do to get out quickly and safely if it is a big fire, they show how to contact the fire department, they show the steps that the firemen have to take to put out a fire, and they show the devastation that remains after the fire. It's an informative and important presentation, but the real point is—"Don't Play with Matches!" An eye-opener!

Today's text of the Transfiguration also has many striking aspects, but what is the real point? Amazing salvation in Jesus! In the two chapters prior, Jesus has been busy in His ministry (service) to the disciples and many others. He healed every manner of sickness and calamity, He fed 4000 (different from the 5000), He praised Peter for his statement, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!", He told the disciples that He would suffer and die (which Peter found very inappropriate for the Messiah), He told the disciples to be ready to take up their cross and follow Him. ----- Surely they believed He was the Messiah, the Anointed One that God said would come. But how did all this fit?

To aid to their understanding, to open their eyes, to help them get the point, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain (unnamed). "Mountains" in Israel are not mountains like the Rockies, but a lot more like the heights of the Black On the mountain Jesus suddenly was shining out in His divine glory. He was "transfigured" or changed, transformed, "morphed." Actually "morph" is part of the Greek word. His face was like the sun and His clothes, white as light. "Light" is a character description of God—no evil or sin, no lie, no deception, no shadows, no hate, no darkness—only light, love, honesty, truth, faithfulness. Here it was very clear that Jesus was more than a man, He was also True God. The disciples would need that assurance in the troubled days ahead (His crucifixion).

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. They were great prophets of the Old Testament, now gone for hundreds of years. God's Kingdom extends beyond the boundaries of time. The believers of years ago, though their bodies have decayed, have not disappeared. God's Kingdom, the Invisible Church, consists of all believers of all time. It's not just a certain church body, or a certain congregation, or people from a certain time in history. The Old Testament and the New Testament tie together in Jesus.

Moses and Elijah had been sinners too. Moses disobeyed God at the second rock from which God told him to get water. Elijah gave up on the minis God had given to him—He told God it was useless, he was the only one left, and was ready to die. Do you ever directly contradict God's will? Or indirectly? God uses sinners (forgiven sinners!) like Moses, Elijah, Peter, your pastor, and you to serve in His Kingdom. Luke's account tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His "departure," His upcoming death. As little as Peter had wanted to hear about it earlier, now he heard it again. It was important. It was part of the package of our amazing salvation in Christ.

Peter's immediate response was to inquire about building three tabernacles, or tent-like structures. (The Old Testament portable worship center was called The Tabernacle.) Apparently Peter wanted to build three "memorials" or shrines" to mark the spot of this transfiguration and/or to show his own personal dedication for God. Peter was mistakenly focusing on some physical structure to help people to trust in God. It's much like a desire to stand at the exact spot where Jesus was born or the exact spot where Jesus was crucified. Then we would have something "real" to latch onto with our faith—something physical. Faith, however, is not physical. Such a thought is similar to someone saying, "St. John's has been my home church since I was young. If I stay a member there, though I live a thousand miles away, I'm good." A pastor once said, "Such people think they're saved by place, not by grace." Or perhaps Peter also wanted find the "security" of building something for the Lord, like "I want to build Him a church." But to who whose honor is it? To God's honor or the builder's? One's relationship with God is not based on physical things. --- We compliment Peter. Peter made his request to Jesus in terms of, "If You wish." It's what God wants, not what we want—true in every aspect of life!

Peter's question was answered immediately. *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* It was God the Father, declaring His presence and providing Peter's answer. "Forget about structures or physical locations. It's all about My glorious Son!" Actually, what could anyone build that would be appropriate for the Son of God? Solomon, at the dedication of his great Old Testament Temple, acknowledged, "The heaven of heavens cannot not contain Thee, much less this temple which I have built (I Kings 8:27). In our Christmas hymn we sing:

Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
It yet were far too poor to be,
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee. (TLH 85:10)

God said, This is My Son. My *beloved* Son, My most special One. God loves man, but think how special His love is for His Son!

In Him I am well pleased. God's good pleasure and good will are enwrapped in His Son. In Jesus, God showers His pardon upon mankind, upon the disciples, upon you. In Jesus, who is true God, who came to step-in for your sin, who went to and through cruel death for sin, in Him God expresses His "good pleasure" and saves fallen, sunken man, and you! God said the same thing at Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The night of Jesus birth, the multitude of angels proclaimed to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest! On earth peace! Goodwill to men!" "Goodwill" is of the same Greek root-word as "well-pleased." At the birth of Jesus, God was extending His gracious goodwill to men, to sinners on this earth. Jesus came to earth to restore peace between God and sinners. Your relationship with God is not about physical structures or places. It begins and ends with Jesus, His Son, dearly beloved, who embodies and brings to man, God's goodwill of forgiveness. His amazing salvation is not based on what you think or do.

The voice then said, *Hear Him!* To be at peace with God means to cling to His Son. Therefore, Hear Him! The Son has said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). "Peace be unto you" (Luke 24:36). ---- Jesus is God's "Word" of Truth. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28 Keep Jesus, the "Word" in your heart. The Bible, the "Word," centers in Jesus. The Bible is not just a book of history, or poetry, or philosophy—but the Word of rescue and salvation in Jesus! God had said the same that same thing through Moses. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The three disciples fell with faces to the ground in fear, realizing how unfit they were. You also are unfit to stand before God! ---- *But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.* In Jesus, there is no fear—only comfort and safety. When you stand before the throne of God with your sad performance, Jesus your crucified Savior is there! Peace! --- *Then as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."* Now they had the whole picture! Jesus would indeed die, but Jesus would indeed rise—the glorious victorious Savior from sin and death. That's the message they would proclaim!

What an eye-opener! The three had their eyes and their minds opened. They would need this for the hard days ahead. They could see the point The Kingdom of God for which Jesus had come to earth is all about Jesus, the crucified and risen Son of God in whom God's good pleasure comes to man. The Transfiguration dramatically says it and shows it. If you came to church this morning to add another board to the shrine you are building for Him, you do not get the point. Let your eyes be opened: The Bible and Church are not about what you can do for Him, but what He has done for you.

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---