



HG272: Mountain Top Experiences
Tabor: Mount of Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-13

Home Group Study Notes

25 February 2024—Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you,
along with any previous notes and other resources which
might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Is there anything you would like to change about
yourself?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing
Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well
as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Introduction Transfiguration in its simplest form means a change in appearance. Jesus' clothes became as white as the light and his face shone like the sun, and the glory of Christ was revealed to Peter, James and John. He revealed to them that just as he was fully human, he was also fully God. He is God first and became human later. And although this is about Jesus' appearance changing, Jesus himself did not undergo any actual change, he was as he had always been, but now he appeared to the disciples as he actually was. According to St John of Damascus, at the moment of transfiguration Christ *“was not assuming something that he was not, nor changing into something which he was not, but manifesting what he was to his own disciples.”*

Jesus is the Glory of God Moses represented the law of God given to him on Mt Sinai in Ex 19 and where God revealed himself, albeit in a veiled form to him in Ex 34. Moses's face shone as a result as he reflected the divine glory. Elijah proclaimed God's glory on Mt Carmel in 1 Kings 18 and where Elijah learned that God reveals himself not only in impressive displays of power but in the still small voice. Both men had been shown God's glory and both men were changed as a result. Here on Mt Tabor Jesus did not reflect or proclaim God's glory, he *is* the divine glory of God, he *is* the splendour of God, and in witnessing the transfiguration of Christ the disciples' lives would also be changed. Some years later when he had reflected on what happened that day, John wrote in Jn 1:14 *“The Word became flesh. We observed his glory.”*

The Presence of God A cloud overshadowed the mountain. God was in the cloud, just as he was in the cloud that led the Israelites through the desert, Ex 13 21-22, that descended on Mt Sinai as Moses received the Law, Ex 19 9,16, that enveloped the tabernacle on completion, Ex 40 34,

and in the cloud at the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings 8 10-11. The glory of God now descended again in the cloud at the transfiguration, revealing the Presence of God unveiled in Christ.

Jesus is God's Pleasure A voice is heard from the cloud saying *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,"* the same thing that God the Father had said at the baptism of Jesus, Matt 3.17. God's delight and his pleasure in Jesus is clear. Peter wanted to erect 3 tabernacles, but in doing so he was putting Jesus on a par with the two prophets. But only Jesus is worthy, and only Jesus radiates the splendour and the glory of God. God was quick to rebuke Peter, commanding him, *"listen to him."* Matthew is pointing to Jesus as the one who fulfils the prophecy in Deut 18.15 about a coming prophet promised by Moses, *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to him."* Following months of misunderstanding the disciples would now see Jesus as he really is and understand that he is the prophet promised by Moses. It was a vital experience for the disciples but equally important and vital for Jesus because soon he would face and experience unimaginable cruelty and suffering as he identified with us in our sufferings in order to bring us salvation. Jesus needed that time of affirmation, encouragement and of God's love and pleasure in him for what lay ahead.

Jesus was misunderstood Throughout the Gospels we see how Jesus was misunderstood by the Roman authorities and the Jewish religious leaders who felt threatened by him and condemned him to death for being a troublemaker and a blasphemer. Sadly they also openly tell of how his friends, disciples, and even his family misunderstood him too. Jesus said to his disciples in John 6 35-36, *"Those who believe in me will never thirst. But you haven't believed even though you have seen me."* They didn't understand even though he was right there in front of them. See also v 60-66, Luke 2 49, and Philip's question in John 14.8 reveals their ongoing failure to understand who Jesus is when Phillip said *"Show us the Father and we will be satisfied. Jesus replied, "Philip don't you even know who I am after all the time I have been with you?"*

Ivor Moody, currently Vice Dean and Canon Pastor of Chelmsford Cathedral talks about how Jesus was misunderstood, and how vulnerable he was at times in his book *Songs for the Soul*" and which I'd recommend to you. It is about *"finding the sacred nestling in the apparently secular."*

Ivor looks at 6 songs that over the years have sold countless copies and in which he argues are *“found a treasury of blessings and which signpost the spiritual.”* The first song he looks at is *“Don’t let me be misunderstood”* sung by Nina Simone who was herself a victim of racism and segregation. The song makes the appeal *“to not misunderstand a soul who is human and who only wants the good for other people.”* The assertion is that *“we are all human and that we all share an equal state and a need to be understood that demands tolerance and compassion.”*

We see clearly in the Gospels what can happen when someone is completely misunderstood, because other people’s false and incorrect assumptions about Jesus and his motives led to violence, injustice and finally his death. There is an old saying *“what we don’t understand we fear and what we fear we seek to destroy.”* It was incredibly important to Jesus to know that his disciples *did* understand who he was; it was necessary for their future ministry and their ability to take the gospel to the nations.

Jesus had a conversation with Moses and Elijah up the mountain, the content of which we are not told of here in Matthew but Luke suggests in 9.30-31 that they were talking about Jesus’ death which he was on his way to in Jerusalem. *“Two men Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendour talking with Jesus. They talked about his departure which he was about to bring fulfilment at Jerusalem.”* We can only imagine what they said, but perhaps their mission was to encourage Jesus and to spur him on, to let him know that the whole of heaven was watching and cheering him on and waiting to welcome him home.

Jesus would have needed that encouragement because his last meal with his friends must have been marred by knowing that one of his closest friends would deny him and another betray him. And again in the garden of Gethsemane where he agonised and struggled with his fear and doubts, sweating drops of blood, his friends were too tired to stay awake, being more concerned about their own needs and discomfort rather than his, and there we see first hand the aloneness and loneliness of Jesus. But just as he had been misunderstood by many during his life, was it possible that what went through Jesus’ mind at that critical and testing time was the thought that, just maybe, Jesus himself had misunderstood his mission and purpose? Was God really asking him to suffer in such a way; had he got things wrong?

Jesus would shortly go from the heights of glory and intimacy with his Father up that mountain to the depth of despair and isolation. He would hang alone in agony and confusion, and suffer the silence of his Father and experience being deserted in his time of greatest need. He would face his greatest fear and challenge alone without the presence of his Father because His Father would withdraw and watch his Son suffer and die on his own in order that he might take our place and set us free. It's not only Jesus who knows our suffering, feels our pain and understands grief. The Father does too, because there at the cross we learn of a father's grief, one that we are all united in on Good Friday. God the Father knows what an aching heart feels like, and as Ivor says in his book, *"Bereavement one day will be the cost of our loving."*

A Glorious Encounter What happened upon Mt Tabor for Jesus was a glorious and timely encounter with God his Father and 2 of the greatest Old Testament prophets, and when we read this and understand the truth of who Jesus is, of what he did and suffered for us, our response can only be one of worship, there can be no misunderstanding as to who he is. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, our Glorious Saviour and Lord.

Our own Transfiguration Shortly before the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration, see Matt 16 23 and Luke 9 22-24, Jesus told his disciples that in order to follow him they must deny themselves, take up their cross and lose their lives for his sake, but they did not understand. He wanted them to know that there is no glory without first walking the path of grief and suffering—no resurrection without the cross. The life of faith is always presenting us with choices offering us opportunities to die to self. This passage is not just about the transfiguration of Jesus but of the transfiguration and transformation of the disciples and also of ourselves. 2 Cor 3:18 says, *"we all with unveiled face are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, this is from the Lord who is the Spirit."* The more we spend time with him and the more we listen to him, the more we are transformed into the image of Christ, and unlike Moses the Christians' experience of beholding and becoming like Christ doesn't diminish but increases with time; we become more like the One we worship and the life of Christ begins to transform how we feel, believe, act and worship.



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Can you think of a time when you have been misunderstood; how did it make you feel?

2. Up to this time the disciples had witnessed Jesus perform many miracles and listened to his teachings; why do you think they found it difficult to understand who he was?

3. Jesus says in Matt 16 24, "*If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" What would you say you have denied yourself or given up for Christ?

4. Is it difficult, (or wrong), to think that Jesus may have needed encouragement to carry on with his journey to the cross?

5. We are left in no doubt as to who Jesus is and God's pleasure in him; how should that affect our worship of and service for Jesus?

6. What changes have you seen in yourself since you have been a Christian? What changes would you still like to see and what can we do to bring about those changes?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins)

Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)

Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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