

MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCES Sunday School- February 21, 2010

Unifying Topic: WITNESSED BY DISCIPLES

Lesson Text

I. The Transfiguration Of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-4)

III. The Strength Of God's Presence (Matthew 17:5-8)

III. The Strength Of The Resurrection (Matthew 17:9-12)

The Main Thought: And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. (Matthew 17:2, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People sometimes seek special spiritual experiences. Which experiences are authentic? Three disciples experienced a spiritual encounter that confirmed Jesus as the son of God.

Lesson Aim: Jesus went up a mountain with three of His disciples, revealed His glory to them, and then returned to ministry. Christians should get away for a retreat because retreats provide a special chance to meet with God.

Life aim: Christians must yield to God, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

17:1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

17:2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

17:3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

17:4 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.

17:5 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.

17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

17: 7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

17: 8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

17:9 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.

17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

17:12 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.

HISTORY:

Chapter 16:28 - Jesus made a mysterious statement to His disciples: *"And some of you standing right here now will certainly live to see me coming in my kingdom."* Since all the disciples died before Christ's return, many believe Jesus' words here were fulfilled at the transfiguration when Peter, James, and John saw His glory. Others say, they refer to Pentecost and the beginning of Christ's church. In either case, certain disciples were eyewitnesses to the power and glory of Christ's Kingdom.

LESSON:

Matthew 17:1-4: The Transfiguration Of Jesus

What a blessing it must have been, spending time with Christ during His earthly ministry. He took three disciples, Peter, James, and John with Him and climbed a high mountain. Note this event took place six days after drilling His disciples with the fact of His coming death and resurrection. This was an isolated place where they would not be interrupted. Four major things drove Christ to get alone with God. The same things should always cause us to get alone with God for an extended time:

1. Pressure (from facing the cross).
2. A momentous decision (to bear the cross).
3. Intensive training.
4. The need for renewed strength.

Why did Jesus take these three? They formed an inner circle around Jesus. Jesus revealed more to these three men than to the other disciples. They were with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter, when He was in the Garden

of Gethsemane, and here on the Mount of transfiguration. Each was chosen for a very special leadership role. They were not aware of it yet, but they were to fill unique positions.

1. Peter was to be the leader of the early church, the one who was to open the door of the gospel to both Jew and Gentile after Pentecost (Acts 2:1;10:1).
2. James was to be the head of the first great church which was to be at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).
3. John was to receive The Revelation from God to close out the Scripture.

17:2 -They beheld His Majesty! At the top of the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. That word in Greek is "Met-am-or-FO-o," from which we get our English word "metamorphosis."It means to change physically, like the metamorphosis which takes place when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, or a tadpole becomes a frog. This change affected His face and clothing. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became as white as the light shining, exceedingly white, like snow, more than any launderer can whiten them - white and glistening. Apparently the glory of His Godly nature was allowed to shine through His body. The transfiguration strengthened Jesus.

17:3 - And He was visited by two saints from Heaven. Moses and Elijah suddenly appear on the mountaintop and begin talking with Jesus. Why did Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus? There seemed to be two reasons:

1. To discuss Jesus' death. Jesus needed to be strengthened to bear the weight and pressure of the cross, the Garden of Gethsemane experience and His cry on the cross.
2. To show that Jesus was the true Messiah. He was superior to the Law and the Prophet. Moses represented the Law, and Elijah, who was considered the greatest of the prophets, represented the prophets. These two men were honoring and ministering to Christ. By such they were symbolizing that the Law and the Prophets found their fulfillment in Christ.
 - a. Christ was the One of whom the Law and the Prophets spoke of.
 - b. Christ was the One of whom the Law and the Prophets pointed to.

POINT:

Christ was soon to fulfill His prophetic and priestly offices. Moses and Elijah were symbolically transferring the old prophetic and priestly offices.

17:4 – There was the strength of a heavenly experience. The three disciples were tasting glory. They were in the very presence of God Himself and were tasting some of heaven's joy, peace, security, fulfillment, and perfection. They did not want to leave this hallowed ground. Peter wanted to build three tabernacles, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah hoping to extend the stay of the heavenly guests and the glorious experience.

POINT:

A deep spiritual experience with God is always a glorious time. Nothing can compare to a session of deep communion with Christ, and there is always the wish that we could remain in His presence. But such is not our calling, not now. Our present call is to bear the cross and its message, not to wallow around in deep spiritual experiences. Our spirits do occasionally need to be spiritually renewed, but they are always renewed for a purpose: to strengthen us for going out and bearing a much stronger witness for our Lord.

Matthew 17:5-8: The Strength Of God's Presence

While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them and the Father interrupts him saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*"

- The cloud was "a bright cloud." This was the Shekinah glory, the cloud that symbolized God's presence. It was the cloud that guided Israel out of Egypt and that rested upon the tabernacle (Ex.40:34-38) and above the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place.
- The voice speaking actually says in the Greek, "*This is my Son, the Beloved One.*" Christ is God's Son and He is the Beloved One.
- A clear intense sense of God's presence has them fall prostrate in their faces before the Lord.
- The Lord stood there alone. The representatives of the Old Testament and covenant (Law) had faded away. The bondage and darkness and terror of the law were now gone. Christ now stood in the law's place. The new covenant was soon to take effect.

POINT:

How often God would grant a clear, intense sense of His presence, if we would only get alone with Him for long sessions of meditation and prayer!

The command was, *"Hear Him!"* It implied that God would begin to speak through His Son, not the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). The rule and reign of God would be exercised through His Son, as He would be given all authority in heaven and earth. This explains why He told them to tell no one the vision until after His resurrection (Matt. 17:9). What they had witnessed was a foretaste, a foreshadowing of His coming glory and rule in His kingdom! After hearing the voice, falling on their faces, *"Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid."* They lifted up their eyes, and only Jesus was present.

The revelation was not given to strike fear in the disciples, although all revelation should bring the response of fear and obedience because of the fact that the sovereign Lord of glory has made Himself known to us and has called us to obey. But the revelation was given to the disciples to convince and to encourage and to strengthen them in their faith and obedience. And because of this, Jesus *"touched them."* A touch from the Master! The touch was not simply proof that He was real, but that they were His friends and accepted by Him. It was a reassuring touch, followed by the words, *"Do not be afraid."*

Matthew 17:9-12: The Strength Of The Resurrection

On the way down the mountain Jesus cautioned the disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man was raised from the dead. If news of the transfiguration spread prematurely, it would be misunderstood, and perhaps the many followers of Jesus would try to enthrone Him before He went up to Jerusalem to die for their sins. The disciples then want to know why the teachers say that Elijah was first to come. They had seen Christ in His glory; they had seen Moses and Elijah; but they were not to say anything about it until Jesus died and rose again.

Jesus' answer was that *"Elijah comes and will restore all things."* Jesus added what we call the "already," by saying, *"But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize Him."* He was speaking of John the Baptist, of course. The teaching about John in no way teaches re-incarnation. The Lord simply is saying that John came as the fulfillment of the prophecy that *"Elijah"* should first come. Just as John, in the spirit and power of Elijah, preached repentance before Jesus' first visit, so too Elijah will preach repentance before Jesus' second coming (Rev. 11:3-13). But it was not yet time for the fulfillment of all things.

The point is that Jesus will also be seized and put to death. Jesus was telling the disciples that before the crown there was the cross. And both John and Jesus had to suffer at the hands of wicked people.

SUMMARY:

¹Just as Moses went up the mountain with three companions (Exo.24:1-9), so Jesus also took three disciples with Him, who would later be with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Great revelations are received by those who separate themselves to meet God. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. The white robe and the shining face indicate the splendor, the radiance of the heavenly bodies. Jesus' glory, which did not shine upon Him from without, but from within, indicates that for a moment, he received a glorified heavenly body. Moses and Elijah came to talk with Jesus. Peter suggests making three tabernacles for the three heavenly guests, so that they would have a place on earth to stay and to prolong the glorious experience. But the transfiguration was not meant to stay. First, Jesus' departure, His death, must be accomplished. Before Peter had finished speaking, he was interrupted by the Lord God, who appeared in a shining cloud as He had done in former times. This is my Son, whom I love. God spoke to strengthen and confirm the disciples' faith. God had said the same thing at Jesus' baptism (3:17). Listen to him is aimed at the disciples. When the disciples hear the voice of God, they are overcome by an overwhelming fear because of the nearness of God, and fall to the earth. Jesus came and touched them. Moses and Elijah disappeared, but Jesus remained. Don't be afraid and don't tell anyone until I've been resurrected.

It is easy for Christians to want to experience again and again a mountaintop experience which made their experience of the Lord so powerfully real, however, you still have to come down, even Jesus had to go down the mountain after what we described as the Transfiguration. However, the lesson learned should always be brought down with you.

APPLICATION:

At every turn the revelation of God confirms to us that Jesus is our Lord: that our faith is not in vain, that we need not live in fear, but that we should live by faith in Him.

¹ <http://www.elim.nl/en/theology/matthewmatthew-17.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>