

The transfiguration

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I'd like to read a few verses, please, in Matthew's Gospel, in the sixteenth chapter.

Verse twenty-one. Matthew sixteen, verse twenty-one.

From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things, of the elders, chief priests, scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took it and began to rebuke it, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee. [00:01:10] But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me. For thou savourest not of the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what does a man profit if he shall gain a whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? [00:02:01] For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them. And his face was as bright as the sun, and his raiment was white as the night. Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

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. [00:03:11] While he had spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud that said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came, and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man save Jesus the Lord.

I wish to speak a little tonight on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[00:04:11] An elevated place, above the clouds of earth. Many lessons to be learnt in this scripture.

But I thought we would limit ourselves to just three. Now I'd like to look at this scripture, first, as a little preview of the coming kingdom.

Secondly, as a window into the heart of the Lord Jesus. And thirdly, the practical lessons for

ourselves.

[00:05:02] Now I think it should be evident to everyone that this is a most important incident in the gospels. It's repeated in all three of the synoptics, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

It doesn't occur in John. It's often been said, in that gospel, the Lord is transfigured throughout. The deeper glories of the person of the Christ come before us in that gospel, there is no transfiguration in John. But the scripture also includes a reference in Peter's epistle, the second epistle. And Peter, who was present on this occasion, recalling it, he says, concerning this mount, it was a holy mount.

And concerning the Lord Jesus, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And then he says, and there came such a voice, this is my beloved son. Evidently left a very deep mark upon the apostle Peter.

[00:06:22] And we borrow from his epistle the first of the headings for our address tonight, a preview of the coming kingdom. Remember he says in his epistle that it was a picture of the power and coming of the Son of Man.

Here we have, in wonderful picture form, that kingdom which is very shortly going to come into display. We notice, just to point out one or two of the things, and of course we can't look at them all, that in Matthew's account, as well as in Mark, it was after six days. [00:07:12] And you remember how, in the creation story, God rested the seventh day. In Hebrews, they remained there for a rest unto the people of God. Perhaps it's a little picture of that rest that is coming to this poor world when Jesus reigns. In Luke's account, it was about an eighth day, and there are elements here, as those of you who are instructed well know, elements of new creation. But we will just briefly allude in this scripture to the five characters that we see in this story, and just add a brief little word in regard to them all.

[00:08:06] Now the first one, and hymn central, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was transfigured before them. Wonderful moment.

The Lord Jesus is King. He was born a King. He died a King. King of the Jews, King of Israel. And in the coming day, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Here, we are reminded, in Matthew's account, that his face did shine as the sun. Contrast, is it not, with the morning star.

Interesting, isn't it? The Old Testament ends with the sun, and the New Testament ends with the star. [00:09:04] In the night of the Lord's rejection, the eye is turned heavenward and sees the star, the half finger of the coming day. But it's the sun that rules the day, and the picture that is presented to us here is that wonderful day when the Lord Jesus reigns. His face did shine as the sun, and his garment white as the light. White and glistening, Luke. White as no fool on earth could white it, Mark.

And if the garment speaks of that which is associated with him, be assured, not the defiled shall enter into that kingdom. Those who are associated with him will take character from Christ. His train fills the day. [00:10:02] Well, it would be attractive to spend all the night in this particular section, but you will remember that it's always and ever been in God's mind that God should rule.

What he creates as God, he rules as man. Exodus 15, the Lord shall reign forever. And looking around for the one who will rule, here he is.

It's not his deity that is stressed here, but the perfection of his manhood. He takes up this right rule in the perfection of his manhood. He's the son of David. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David. He'll rule over the house, Jacob, forever. In his kingdom, there shall be no end.

[00:11:14] There shall be no end. He's the son of David. But he's also the son of Abraham. That's the way the New Testament begins. Son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham was the depository of unconditional promise. Not only territorial promise, but also in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. This is promise that is confirmed by oaths established in resurrection, Genesis 22. Stars and dust and sand, the heavenly company, the earthly company, the Jew and the nations. Everything is secured in Christ. All the promises of God are in him, yea, and amen. [00:12:04] And to the glory of God by us, he is the son of Abraham. But he's also the son of man. Genesis 1, 26. Adam, figure of him who was to come, let him have dominion.

Let him have dominion. Fish of the sea, birds of the air, cattle of the earth, and everything that creeps upon it. And here, the Lord Jesus is presented as the son of man. Psalm 8. Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth. Wonderful subject, isn't it? But he's also the son of God. But they're also found associated with him, Moses and Elias. Who are these?

[00:13:02] Now in the coming kingdom, there are those who partake in the first resurrection. Revelation 20, verse 4. Four groups are there. The assembly, saints of the Old Testament, the souls slain under the altar, fifth seal, and those who lose their lives in the time of Jacob's troubles. All these destined for heavenly blessing. And we know very well that some die, like Moses, and some of us won't die, like Elijah. And these two set forth the heavenly company who are going to share the reign and the rule of the king in the coming days, Moses and Elias.

[00:14:01] And then there's a company on earth, glad of their heavenly visitors, Peter, James, and John. Lord, it is good to be here. And these heavenly visitors, they're seen in contact with the inhabitants upon earth. And Peter, James, and John set forth the Jews. And at the bottom of the mountain, which we didn't reach quite, there are the nations. And in the coming day, there'll be the Lord at the top and the heavenly company associated with him. Those on earth, the Jews, and they'll be the head, not the tail, and they'll be the nations seen in association with the Jews. Has God cast off his ancient people in their wives? He that scattered Israel will gather them. Wonderful subject which we could spend a lot of time on. The ten tribes, the two tribes, he will bring them in, in blessing. And at the bottom of the mountain, there'll be the Gentile nations. And the Jew will be seen in relation with them.

[00:15:27] Wisdom's delights, you know, are with the children of men. Peace on earth, goodwill to men. And in the coming day, yes, the Gentiles will be blessed. We get a little picture of it, don't we, in connection with the Queen of Sheba. You remember when she came up to Jerusalem, proving Solomon with hard questions. She's a picture of the Gentile nations who are going to come up to Jerusalem. And oh, what a picture she presents when she looks round. [00:16:04] When she sees the wisdom of Solomon, the house that was built, and all the rest. And in a sense, why there was no more spirit in her. And then of course, the fifth voice that we hear is the Father's voice. This is my beloved Son, to whom I am well pleased. The Kingdom's wonderful display, but there's something beyond the Kingdom. Truly our fellowship is with the Father, with his Son, Jesus Christ. In the enjoyment of eternal life, there opens up to us what is the particular and distinctive portion of the assembly. It isn't my privileged proportion tonight to dwell on that, but at least there's an allusion to it here in this wonderful picture. [00:17:01] Now with that sort of framework in our minds, I'm going to

mention five other points that will help to fill out this picture, this preview we have of the coming Kingdom. Or that the Spirit of God might write it clearly on every heart. We don't want to be vague in these matters. No, the Scripture delineates this coming Kingdom with the most vivid and clearest terms. Let us try and understand it. Five points. There's one person who isn't mentioned here. Did anybody pick it up? Did you? Well, I'll tell you who he is. He's the God and he's the Prince of this world. He's a murderer from the beginning.

[00:18:02] He's a liar. Who is he? Well, let's give him his full title. He's the dragon. He's the old serpent. He is the devil. He is Satan. As the dragon, he's the destroyer. As the old serpent, he's the deceiver.

As the devil, he is the accuser. And as Satan, he is the opposer. Where is he? An angel has come down from heaven with a chain and a key and he's laid hold on this enemy of our souls and he's confined him to the bottomless pit.

He's out of the way for a thousand years that he might deceive the nations no more. Are you conscious of him? This one of whom I now speak? If you aren't, I think there's a good possibility you're still under his power. [00:19:17] Very active, Satan, today. But in that day, he'll be out of the way. And the second feature of the kingdom is that which we enjoy in the Spirit's power now, righteousness, peace, and joy. We've got it now in the Spirit's power, but in that day, it'll be an actual manifestation, righteousness. That'll be the feature of the kingdom. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. A king shall rule in righteousness. Princes shall rule in judgment. [00:20:01] Righteousness will be the girdle of his loins, faithfulness, the girdle of his reins. In righteousness shall he judge the meek. Wonderful feature.

There'll be no miscarriages of justice in that day. No, no. A sinner being a thousand years old, a hundred years old, he'll be accursed. I will not know a wicked person. Yes, he's going to purge the heavens, this king. He's going to purge Jerusalem, this king. He's going to purge the land. There won't be a wicked person left. Righteousness will be the feature of that day. And listen, in his days shall the righteous flourish and the abundance of peace so long as the moon endures. That's the second feature, peace. [00:21:05] Prince of Peace. Could we try and understand this? He maketh wars to cease to the end of the earth, breaketh the bone, cutteth the spear in sunder, burneth the chariot in the fire. Men shall beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up nation against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. He'll bid the whole creation smile, hushed glow, peace, wonderful peace, so long as the moon endures.

Joy. Difficult to describe the joy of that coming day. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness. They shall speak of the glorious majesty of thy kingdom. [00:22:09] The ransomed of the Lord shall return, come to Zion, songs of everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, sorrow and sigh, flee away. How God's going to wipe away all tears from all faces. What a time of joy that'll be. Righteousness, peace and joy. There'll be peace even in the animal kingdom.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, little child shall lead them. Wonderful language, isn't it?

[00:23:17] The cow and the bear shall feed, lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. Sucking child, play on the hold of the ass.

No child put his hand on the cockatrice dead. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Wonderful, isn't it? Bounty, plenty, the curse will be removed. Let the earth bring forth its increase. The wilderness shall rejoice, blossom as a rose. [00:24:02] The sower will overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed. Why, even on the tops of the mountains there'll be a handful of corn. Wonderful, isn't it?

Wonderful, isn't it? Pictures. Where have I hatched this up from? We haven't followed cunningly devised fables. We've been eyewitnesses of his majesty. And the fourth feature of this coming kingdom will be the atmosphere of praise. Thank God, everyone that hath breath shall praise the Lord.

It's not going to be a selfish scene. Now hearts are going to enjoy it, but they're going to respond to our God. He will satiate the souls of the priests with fatness. [00:25:02] They will be satisfied with my praise. The children of Israel are saying, into his gates with thanksgiving, into his courts with praise. Praise the Lord with my whole heart.

The Lord prayeth. Can't you catch something of it in the Psalms? The Hallelujah songs. Stringed instruments, organs, symbols, high sounding symbols.

It almost seems that they just can't express all that's in their hearts. It won't be a question of saying, know the Lord, all shall know him from the least to the greatest. And God's spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. Where are we in all this? A deeper, yet a calmer joy. The Father's love to raise. And every heart finds sweet employ in his eternal praise.

[00:26:17] Round and round and round. How often we get it in the book, you know. I'm sure our hymn writers must have made some visits to this place, and given the benefit of it in the Psalms. How grateful is this ascending! Why, you can catch something of the atmosphere, can't you, of the current kingdom. And what's the fifth point? Listen. The fifth point, in regard to that kingdom, is that it will be the occasion when the Lord gives his rewards. The Bible speaks a good deal about rewards. Crowns, crowns of righteousness, crowns of life, crowns of glory, incorruptible crowns.

[00:27:21] The crown of Philadelphia, the crown which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give in that day. Rewards. The noble one has gone into the far country to see to himself a kingdom and to return. And when he comes, ten cities, five cities, many things, well done, good and faithful servant. Yes. If the Bible clearly delineates the administration of the world to come, and it does, and we could spend a little time on that. [00:28:01] The picture in Revelation 21, 22, when the glory of God lights that city, and the land is the light thereof. That light, why the nations of the earth are going to walk in the glory of that light.

And the administration will be in the hands of those who are associated with it. The overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3, 2 and 3, they're rewarded in nearness to Christ and in administration in the country. We don't need to be vague about it. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Well, there's an infinity of detail I haven't opened out to you. All that I had in mind tonight was to leave a framework in your mind. You fill in the detail, take it home, work on it, because this is the glory that's immediately before us.

[00:29:28] What I want to do is to spend a little time on sections 2 and 3, and I ask your attention please. I would like to see the Mount of Transfiguration as a wonderful window into the heart of the Lord Jesus at this particular moment.

Have you looked at it like this? It's quite clear that where we started to read begins a new section in Matthew's Gospel.

[00:30:09] Chapter 16, verse 21, from that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go unto Jerusalem, etc. From that time, you see.

Now, doubtless, the Lord, on the Mount of Transfiguration, had testimony borne to him as to the excellence of his manhood.

But I think we ought to just notice what a moment it was for him at this particular time.

[00:31:04] The Lord Jesus was rejected.

His genealogy given, presented to the nation, John the Baptist, mighty in word, Sermon on the Mount, and indeed the ten miracles of chapters 9 and 10.

Sent out to twelve disciples, in chapter 11 he stands rejected. Now, let's try and get into this. The Lord Jesus is rejected.

And all of the Gospels pay the clearest testimony to this. In John, as we all know, he's rejected from the outset. He came to his own, his own received him not. Now, this is the second point. Have you ever pondered, and if you haven't, I ask you to ponder it now, how lonely the Lord Jesus is at this moment in his history.

[00:32:19] So far as I can make out, there was nobody on earth who understood the necessity for the cross.

No one. Not a single soul.

You'll find when he further spoke in chapter 17 to the disciples, at the end of verse 23, they were exceeding sorry. Listen now to the language on the earth road. We thought it had been he that would have restored Israel. [00:33:03] Listen after the instruction even of his resurrection in Acts 1.

Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel? I say, and I hope I may get the point over, there was nobody on earth at this time who understood the necessity for the cross. No one.

Clear as testimony to the fact that he would die, a sword shall pierce through thine own heart also. His mother knew it. She pondered these things in her heart. The angels, they desired to look into these things.

The prophets of old, they bore testimony to the sufferings of Christ. Did they understand? They bore testimony to the sufferings of Christ. Did they understand? Or Peter's epistle tells us which things they couldn't understand.

[00:34:08] They searched their own writings, what it meant. They were put into the scriptures for your benefit and mine. And if we do understand them, and our understanding of them is very feeble indeed, I think there are two reasons only why we understand. Firstly, now that the Lord has been to the cross, we have the probation of man completed and the utter incorrigibility of man away from God.

Sin in the deepest character of sin has now been demonstrated at the cross. That's point number one. Secondly, the gospel is preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

[00:35:08] Apart from the illumination of a divine person, we just cannot understand that sent across.

Now at this moment, at the mount of transfiguration, I don't believe there was anybody on earth realized the necessity for the cross. And that's why it says, I venture to say, in Luke's gospel, that he went up to the mountain. What to do? To pray.

Nobody understood him on earth. He went to the place where he could have communion with his Father. He understood. Wonderful comfort that, you know. As a dependent man, he knew where he could find the consolation and he went up to the mountain to pray. [00:36:06] And oh how the Father took care of him. Peter, you've got your iron Moses and Elias. Great men, doubtless, in regard to Israel's economy. Listen now. What does the Father say? I won't allow my son to be put on a power with these men. No, no. This is my beloved son, in whom I have found delight.

Zion's king, God's son. Jehovah's servant, in whom he found pleasure. There's going to be no rival for my son. The Father took care of the glory of Jesus. Hear him. It's not Peter, your delight in Jesus.

It's the Father's delight in him. The delight in Jesus is the Father's delight in him. [00:37:03] Give him his unique place.

But in addition, he also heard the converse of Moses and Elias. Interesting that, isn't it? Ponder it. On the holy mount, there appeared with them Moses and Elias. These heavenly visitors. And they were communing with Jesus. What a picture! What a picture of the joys that are in store for their coming kingdom. They spoke with Jesus. It wasn't a question of Jesus speaking to them, but they spoke to Jesus. What was the topic of their conversation? They spoke concerning the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. Have you ever thought that's just exactly what we do on the Lord's day morning. [00:38:01] We speak with Jesus of the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem. What a comfort that must have been to Jesus. And what a comfort it is to him now. Do you want to be ambitious? Be ambitious to speak to him at the supper of the decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem.

We are the brethren today who can move our souls as did our forefathers. In relation to the sufferings of Christ. Oh that God, the Holy Spirit might move us. You have to have your life, mind in accord with those sufferings. But if it is, what a foretaste of heaven it is when we are in his presence and speak to him.

Of the exodus which he accomplished at Jerusalem.

[00:39:03] Wonderful window, isn't it? Into the heart of Jesus at this time. Now this leads me to the final point.

Can we see here a practical lesson for ourselves?

A practical lesson for ourselves.

Jesus showed to his disciples how he must go into Jerusalem, suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed. And be raised again the third day.

Look at verse 22.

[00:40:03] Peter took him, took him aside. He began to rebuke him. Now this little word for rebuke, if you look at it in the original, it is not really quite strong enough. It is elsewhere translated in the noun form as punish. What a sight we have got here. Peter took him aside and began to punish him. Be advised, what a situation.

Jesus turned and said to Peter, get thee behind me, sir.

Thou art an offense unto me. Now just notice this. Thou savourest not of the things that be of God, but of those that be of men.

Here the Lord is showing a contrast.

[00:41:04] The things which are according to God, the things which are according to men.

The things that are according to God are predicated by this word must. The son of man must.

The son of man must go up to Jerusalem, must suffer, must die, must be raised again.

That is the pattern according to God.

Peter says, be it thou from me.

Jerusalem is the very last place you ought to go to. Suffer? Why?

It looks as if he is being so considerate for the Lord, doesn't it? He is really being considerate for himself. [00:42:02] The cross? No!

Well, I'll tell you something, Peter. There'll be no glory for you either. You'll be saved, so is my fire. There's an important matter here, isn't there? Let's bring it home to ourselves. How far, do you think, we present the picture of the things that are according to God, or the things that are according to man? How far has the cross been applied to your life and mine? To your home and mine?

To your children and mine? I may not have any natural ones, but I've got some spiritual ones. To my time!

[00:43:03] How do I apply the cross to my time? How do I apply the cross to my time? To my holidays, to my clothes, to my possessions, how far? It comes pretty closely to us, doesn't it? We live in perilous times, we know it. Men, lovers of their own selves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. The whole drift is away from God. We live in difficult times. How, how, how

are we going to get help? I think I can hear some heart say, Oh, give me some help. Oh, give me help for those that I am caring for. I think Peter can help us, you know. [00:44:05] He was showing up badly here, wasn't he? But he showed up wonderfully well in his epistles. When no heart converted, strengthen the brethren. How did he go about it? Well, first of all, he expressed a deep desire for those that he loved, that he might have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He desired with all his soul that everybody should not only be saved, but have an abundant entrance into that everlasting kingdom. Not only to scrape in, but to go in with the ship at full sail.

I hope that's suitable for Newcastle. Rich, rich toward God. And then he puts his finger on the spot. [00:45:03] He says, if you don't, it's because you're blind and you cannot see afar off.

To those coming kingdom glories, fire and water, to those coming kingdom glories, fire also. Do they?

Well, Peter, sixteen times in his epistle speaks of glory. There are seven references to the Lord speaking of his sufferings in these sections. But each time he says, and the third day be raised from the dead.

The actual man gets his eye on the cross. But the opened eye looks beyond the cross to the coming kingdom. [00:46:01] Sixteen times Peter speaks of suffering. Sixteen times he speaks of glory. And I think the message is clear and plain that if the claims of discipleship are upon us, if the cross faces us, if it means suffering, if it means walking in the steps of Jesus, on the other side there's glory. And this is the alone means of shifting you and me from that selfish life that marks us as belonging to Adam's race as we keep our eyes on the Lord and see what's on the other side, we'll say, Whatever, Lord! Lead on, almighty Lord.

You know, this was the pattern of the Lord Jesus, may I say, [00:47:02] who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high. As a dependent man down here, he had the glory shining before his soul, and in the light of it he was glad to go forward to the cross, not my will, but thine be done. And oh, he sets us an example that we should follow in his steps. Well, that was the message that was on my heart. I hope it might have come over clear and plain. Can you remember the points? The Mount of Transfiguration, it's a preview of the current kingdom. It's an opportunity for looking into the heart of Jesus. And oh, what a challenging word it is [00:48:02] to you and me that we should order our lives in the light of that coming day. May the Lord help us to do so, for his name's sake. Now, I have a request to make. It may not be necessary to make it, of course. When our brother Doherty was alive, oftentimes, you know, we had quite good meetings in those days. Power in the world. But it used to distress our brother, and after the meeting it was rather more of a disturbance that after the meeting it was rather more like a football match than like a gospel meeting. [00:49:03] Now, I think if we've really paced up to the matters that we've been talking about tonight, it shouldn't really be an opportunity for hubbub. Could I ask, please, that the brethren, well, just consider soberly what we've been talking about. You see, we'll all stand before that judgment seat. We'll all find our place in that coming kingdom, if we're the Lords. These matters are very practical matters, and at this stage in our meetings, I think we're needing to face up to it. Some of us were in a different part of the world recently, and in a conference of 700 when the meeting reached the point all those 700 brothers and sisters, young and old, were down on their knees [00:50:01] in humiliation and exercise before God. Now, this is the sort of thing, of course, that brings the blessing. And one's exercise is that we don't

let the word just go in that ear, out of that ear. May we solemnly face up to the matter, get the divine answer, and let his word, as our consciences are brought into his presence, search our hearts that there might be a practical answer in our hearts. Now, having said that, I want you to sing, please, and sing with all your hearts this wonderful hymn number 202. What will it be to dwell above and with the Lord of glory reign, since the blessed knowledge of his love so brightens all this weary place? [00:51:01] No heart can think, no tongue can tell what joy it will be with Christ. Well, now, I'm going to ask you, Murray, could we have sojourn? Do you know the tune? Please, let's sing the whole hymn 202. One. What will it be to dwell above and with the Lord of glory reign, since the blessed knowledge of his love so brightens all this weary place?