

The Gospel According to Matthew



Part 1

Thanks to the pastoral team and staff for their encouragement, and to you, Four Oaks Killearn for your welcoming attitude and constant kindness.

General Editor

Joe Donaldson

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King Jesus Walks on Water

Matthew 14:22-33

Why walking on water?

It is a good question. Many of Jesus' miracles seem to serve other people. He heals people, exorcizes demons, calms the storm to ensure the disciples' survival, and, as we have just seen, miraculously feeds thousands by divinely blessing the food. These miracles are done in the face of need. Even the turning of water into wine could be said to be done in service to others, though not meeting a need exactly.

Then there is walking on water. Now, water itself is a sign for something. Throughout the Scriptures, water is a metaphor for chaos. To someone in the ancient Near East, as the Israelites were, the most destructive and unpredictable force was water. The ancient Babylonians had a chaos goddess named Tiamut who was pictured in liquid terms.

But this would only make sense of taming the seas. Here Jesus walks on the seas.

Let us get weirder. Jesus lets them go on ahead, and they leave, knowing He does not have a boat. Why are they surprised when He walks by them? Perhaps it was the time of night.

Whatever the purpose, this all drives to a point: Jesus is the "Son of God." It moves the disciples to greater levels of faith and worship. He answers in divine self-disclosure. To their question, "Who is it?" He simply says, "I AM." The One who holds all things together is the One who can turn water into a sidewalk. Moses could part the waves to lead the people, but Jesus can walk on them. He is the greater Moses, the greater Prophet, and the One sent from God.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Read the text 2-3 times.

How do we see both Jesus' power and tenderness on display in this text?

GROW

How can you display the power of Jesus in your own life so that others may say that He is truly the Son of God? Does your life display that sort of authority and majesty?

GO

In what ways is God calling you to step out in faith and you are doubting? How can you better fix your eyes on Jesus to go where He calls?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a story about a frightening storm. What were the circumstances? How did it impact you and your faith? What did you learn about God?
2. After Jesus dismissed the crowds, He went up to pray by Himself. Why was this significant? How might Jesus' practice of prayer speak to you when you're weary?
3. What were the circumstances surrounding Jesus' miracle? Put yourself in the disciples' shoes—how would you have felt?
4. How does Peter respond to Jesus? How are you similar or different from him?
5. What do we learn about Jesus from this story? How is Jesus inviting you to "step out of the boat" right now? Spend some time praying for one another as a group.

Additional Reading

by John Calvin¹

"...But now, without the wings of faith, Peter desires to fly at will; and though the voice of Christ has not its due weight in his heart, he desires that the waters should be firm under his feet. And yet there is no room to doubt that this longing sprung from a good principle; but as it degenerates into a faulty excess, it cannot be applauded as good... Let believers, therefore, instructed by his example, beware of excessive haste. Wherever the Lord calls, we ought to run with alacrity; but whoever proceeds farther, will learn from the mournful result what it is to overleap the bounds which the Lord has prescribed.

¹Calvin, John, trans. William Pringle. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. Logos Bible Software, 2010.

Yet it may be asked, Why does Christ comply with Peter's wish? for by so doing he seems to approve of it. But the answer is obvious. In many cases God promotes our interests better by refusing our requests; but at times he yields to us, that by experience we may be the more fully convinced of our own folly. In this manner, it happens every day that, by granting to those who believe in him more than is actually needed, he trains them to modesty and sober-mindedness for the future.

Besides, this was of advantage to Peter and to the other disciples, and it is of advantage to us at the present day. The power of Christ shone more brightly in the person of Peter, when he admitted him as a companion, than if he had walked alone on the waters. But Peter knows, and the rest see plainly, that, when he does not rest with a firm faith, and rely on the Lord, the secret power of God, which formerly made the water solid, begins to disappear; and yet Christ dealt gently with him by not permitting him to sink entirely under the waters. Both of these things happen to us... the Lord indulges our weakness, and stretches out his hand, that the waters may not swallow us up altogether. It must also be observed that Peter, when he perceives the unhappy and painful consequences of his rashness, betakes himself to the mercy of Christ. And we too, though enduring just punishment, ought to betake ourselves to him, that he may have compassion on us, and bestow the aid of which we are unworthy.

King Jesus and Human Tradition

Matthew 14:34-15:20

We are more cognizant of germs and disease than ever before, and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 exponentially increased this awareness. Then and now, we see more hand sanitizer stations, more masks on faces, and more signs warning us of keeping our distance. The message is clear: something outside of us can come inside and make us ill. An exterior infectant is to be kept at bay.

The Pharisees did not know modern epidemiology and germ theory. But in the Torah, God reiterated to them again and again concepts of purity and impurity. Over the centuries, this developed into a rigid code on handwashing and cleansings to rid oneself of defilement.

Every other human being before Jesus seemed to be defined by our ability to be infected. Some outside contagion enters in, and somehow it defiles you, makes you sick, or worse.

But Jesus upends these categories. While we are infected by the outside, Jesus heals from the inside. Whereas we enter an unclean space and are defiled, Jesus enters the same space and cleanses.

By His Spirit, He enables and teaches us to do the same. That we could be cleansed and purified from the inside out, and from a renewed heart, bring healing and cleansing to a defiled and sinful world.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Read the text 2-3 times.

How does this event point forward to Jesus' death and resurrection?

GROW

The Pharisees emphasized their traditions over the Word of God. What are some things you feel must be true of a Christian? Of the church? Evaluate these by the Word of God and repent of the ways you are placing tradition above love of neighbor.

GO

Our world teaches that what is outside defiles. How is the kingdom of God different? How does this reframe your posture towards the world?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions:

1. Share a time when you got really dirty and messy!
2. This passage speaks of laws of defilement, washing, and clean/unclean things. What was this all about? Can you relate it to anything common to us?
3. How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees' concerns about washing hands? What can we learn from Him about God's view of outward vs inward purity?
4. Jesus says that what comes from the heart is what defiles a person. What does that mean?
5. What is currently in your heart that's proceeding from your mouth? How might your group pray for you?

Additional Reading

by Grant R. Osborne¹

“Human teachings must always be judged on the basis of their adherence to the truths of God found in his Word. In every Jewish and Christian movement certain historical hobbyhorses are raised to the level of dogma, both in the areas of theory and praxis. I grew up in a fundamentalist tradition where it was essential not to go to movies, play cards, dance, or drink wine.

In and of themselves those are not necessarily bad things to avoid, but they became the external signs of a true Christian. Moreover, many of those who assiduously kept those rules failed to observe the weightier matters of God's Word, like love, compassion, and mercy. I saw many of their children rebel against Christianity because they observed the hypocrisy of their parents. Our lifestyle as well as our doctrinal system must at all times flow out of the demands of God's revealed truths, not just out of church tradition.”

¹Osborne, Grant R. *Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Zondervan, 2010.

King Jesus Welcomes Our Boldness

Matthew 15:21-28

The Prayer of Humble Access (*Book of Common Prayer*)

We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table; but you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

As Americans, we often cling to our rights. “I have a right to X.” Our guaranteed privileges though can be from a stance of pride rather than humble selflessness. We can demand our lawful rights without regard for anyone else.

As American Christians, we can assume we have the right to faith. While we have the right to practice religion, we do not have a right to faith. Access to God is not a right, but a privilege granted to us as his people through Christ alone.

If we take a further step back, we can lose sight of the fact that we were “Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’... separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12). The sudden shift came in the death and resurrection of Christ. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

Our story today finds a woman asking for blessings ahead of time. Her confidence is not rooted in rights, but in her knowing the goodness of God. Her posture is one of humble access, and our Lord asks likewise of us.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Re-read the text. Now read Mark 7:24-30. What details does Mark include that Matthew leaves out?

Does Jesus' response to the woman surprise you? How so?

GROW

What can we learn from the Canaanite woman's persistence?

GO

Think of people the church today perhaps treats as "dogs" not worthy of the food of grace. How can we as a church reach such people and show them God's goodness is even for them?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were desperate for the Lord to answer you. What were the circumstances? How did God respond to you? What did you learn about Him through this difficult time?
2. What were the circumstances of the woman in this story?
3. How does Jesus initially respond to this woman's plea for help? Why do you think He responds this way?
4. How does the woman respond to Jesus? What does it reveal about her faith?
5. How might this story speak to your situation right now? What do you think the Lord is trying to teach you? How might you persevere in waiting on Him? Spend some time as a group praying for one another.

Additional Reading

by Timothy Keller¹

In other words, [the Syrophonecian woman] says, "Yes, Lord, but the puppies eat from that table too, and I'm here for mine." Jesus has told her a parable in which he has given her a combination of challenge and offer, and she gets it. She responds to the challenge: "Okay, I understand. I am not from Israel, I do not worship the God that the Israelites worship. Therefore, I don't have a place at the table. I accept that."

Isn't this amazing? She doesn't take offense; she doesn't stand on her rights. She says, "All right. I may not have a place at the table but there's more than enough on that table for everyone in the world, and I need mine now." She is wrestling with Jesus in the most respectful way and she will not take no for an answer. I love what this woman is doing.

¹Keller, Timothy. *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God*. Penguin, 2013.

In Western cultures we don't have anything like this kind of assertiveness. We only have assertion of our rights. We do not know how to contend unless we're standing up for our rights, standing on our dignity and our goodness and saying, "This is what I'm owed." But this woman is not doing that at all. This is rightless assertiveness, something we know little about. She's not saying, "Lord, give me what I deserve on the basis of my goodness." She's saying, "Give me what I don't deserve on the basis of your goodness--and I need it now."

King Jesus Provides for Our Needs

Matthew 15:29-39

“How many times do I have to repeat myself?”

Anyone who has taught or raised kids have uttered such similar words. Humans are notorious in this regard for being “thick.” It seems that no matter how many times something is repeated, many of us will never learn.

It is easy to read Scripture and to laugh at the thickness and difficulty of people. Abraham makes the same mistake twice, which Isaac repeats. The wilderness generation saw God’s power and provision, yet they still complained and wanted to go back to Egypt. The disciples are another great example: no matter how much Jesus says something or does something, it does not sink in.

Our story today does not mention such a phenomenon but is nonetheless an excellent example. Despite a similar miracle in the previous chapter, the disciples still do not know where to acquire food. Despite seeing Jesus’ wonder-working power in the very moments before, they wonder where enough loaves and fish can be found.

Jesus in his compassion not only feeds the hungry crowds but also does not rebuke the thick-headed disciples. He asks for the same compassion from us. He asks us to analyze our own hard-hearted, stiff-necked, and thick-headed ways, and then to repent before his patient and repeated care.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Re-read the text. Now read Mark 14:13-21. What are some differences between the stories? How are the same?

Note the compassion of Christ in v. 32. How has He sustained you at times where you almost fainted on the way?

GROW

What are some needs you may be neglecting in your own community? How can you meet these needs with the compassion of Christ?

GO

What are some physical needs in your community you can meet? These can often open a door to the gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time God performed a miracle (small or big) in your life. What were the circumstances? What did you learn about God? How did your faith grow?
2. This passage includes many miracles. Imagine what it must have been like for the crowds.
3. Jesus miraculously feeds 4,000 men, plus women and children! What is similar and different about this story compared to the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14? What do you think was Jesus' intent with this miracle?
4. Where do you long for God to do a miracle? How might this passage give you hope for now? For the future when Jesus returns?
5. Spend some time in prayer as a group for one another.

Additional Reading

by Scott Harrower¹

“The stories of the feeding of the five thousand and the good Samaritan demonstrate God’s kind and merciful disposition toward those victimized and brutalized by horrors. They also illustrate the kind of kindness and care that Jesus’ disciples should demonstrate...

An important question for the followers of Jesus is whether his images will follow his teaching on this. Will they extend his care for others? One way that we may contribute to this kind of caring attitude is the cultivation of habits that contemplate God’s care. This occurs at its best when it is sourced in contemplation on the nature of God and his grace... Contemplation, particularly of God’s nature and grace in spite of the presence

¹Harrower, Scott. *God of All Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of This World*. Faithlife Corporation, 2019.

of horrors in the world, is likely to lead to love and actions of charity. Such contemplation may renew Christ's disciples to the point that they may perform even small actions (such as giving, distributing, or collecting food) that serve as vehicles of the Trinity's loving service of humankind."

King Jesus Confronts Religiosity

Matthew 16:1-12

During the coronavirus epidemic, there were many trends that popped up while we stayed at home. People started homeschooling and stayed homeschooling. Work became more and more remote. And, of course, we all became bakers.

At one point in the pandemic, we started to run out of flour. Stores put a two-bag limit in place. Searches related to baking on Google went up five times what they were before. King Arthur Flour in 2019 got 10,000 social media messages in total. By March 2020, they had 22,000.

What once was a weird analogy to us in Matthew 16:1-12 is now familiar. Leaven? Bread? Yeast? Flour? We got you, Jesus.

The Israelites knew what Jesus was talking about. They didn't have leavened bread during the Passover because it represented the leaven of evil.

But now Jesus turns the tables. That evil is not outside of you, the Israelites, the Chosen People, it is the false teaching by your very leaders. That is the leaven you must be wary of now.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Re-read the text. A Good Shepherd protected his flock. How is Jesus protecting his people with these words?

Re-read Matthew 12:38-43. What is the sign of Jonah? Why do you think that story is so critical to Jesus' self-understanding?

GROW

Consider what the Pharisees and Sadducees taught concerning Christ. What was so wrong?

GO

What does it look like for you to engage with false teaching with compassion and grace?

Discussion Questions

1. Like the disciples, we are so prone to forget! Share a story when you forgot something and what happened as a result.
2. Jesus has a similar conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees about looking for signs (see Matthew 12:38ff). It's like they forgot! What does this reveal about their hearts? About Jesus' heart in His response?
3. Jesus warns the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What does He mean? How might we apply His instructions to our own lives?
4. Jesus connects the disciples' lack of faith with their forgetfulness. How does one impact the other? How might your forgetfulness be impacting your faith right now?
5. Take some time to remember what God has done for you. Now, spend some time as a group in prayer to both give thanks for how He's helped in the past and to ask for His help in the present and future.

Additional Reading

by Stanley Hauerwas¹

Jesus has previously criticized the Pharisees for their failure to do what they profess. Indeed, Jesus will soon recommend to the crowd that they should do what those who “sit on Moses’ seat” teach, but “do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach” (Matt. 23:2–3). Jesus demands, as we have seen from his Sermon on the Mount, lives of integrity. To see the truth, to recognize the signs of the kingdom, requires that we be rightly formed by the virtues acquired by following Jesus. To know the truth requires the acquisition of the habits of truthfulness. Knowledge and virtue are

¹Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew: Brazos Theological Commentary*. Brazos Press, 2007.

inseparable.

Jesus' refusal to give the Pharisees and Sadducees a sign has profound implications for how Christians understand truth. We believe that the truth of the gospel cannot be separated from the kind of lives required for the recognition of that truth. Because we are aware of the inadequacy of our faithfulness to Christ, we are tempted to separate the truth of what we believe from the way we live. But Jesus refuses to allow us to abstract our knowing from our living. The gospel is not information; it is a way of life.

King Jesus Builds His Church

Matthew 16:13-20

Ecclesiology is the word for the area of theology that deals with the church. This text is perhaps one of the most significant passages on ecclesiology anywhere. The Roman Catholic church bases its idea of the pope on Matthew 16:18, so one could say whole denominations are built on this!

But lost in all the discussion of ecclesiology, of how we do church, is the start of the passage, which begins with the simple question, “Who do you say that I am?”

This question indeed is at the heart of all discussions of church. Based on how you answer this question, determines whether you are in the church, or outside the church. Is Jesus a good teacher? A prophet? Or, is he who the Bible presents him to be, the only-begotten Son of God, the Son of Man, the Passover Lamb, God-in-the-flesh? Those whose eyes are opened through the Spirit by the Father are the ones who see Jesus who He truly is.

Against these words, nothing can stand, not even the gates of hell. By these words, Jesus builds a community of people who love Him and serve Him as their Lord and Savior. And that is what is ultimately most important about any person.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Who is Jesus to you? Re-read the text. Analyze your statement based on what the text says.

GROW

In the church, those that confess Christ are blessed. What does this mean for us here at Four Oaks? How can we grow in affection towards our fellow believers who see Jesus as we do?

GO

Salvation is Trinitarian: the Father chooses, the Spirit opens our eyes, and the Son is revealed. Who has God placed on your heart to pray that their eyes may be opened? How can you show them Christ?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. If someone were to ask you who you really are, what would you say?
2. Jesus asks His disciples who people say that He is. Talk about the different answers and what they revealed about their understanding of Jesus and the Scriptures.
3. Peter calls Jesus “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” What does this title mean and why is it significant? If Jesus really does fulfill this title, how should that reality impact your life today?
4. Jesus responds to Peter’s reply with some weighty words. What do they mean? What do they not mean? How have you seen them fulfilled thus far? How might they give us hope for the future?
5. Of all the truths revealed in this passage, what is most important to you right now and why?

Additional Reading

by C.S. Lewis¹

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great

¹Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. Harper Collins, 2003.

human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

King Jesus Challenges Us

Matthew 16:21-28

“What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.” — Flannery O’Connor

In American Christianity, we can sometimes lose sight of how radical Christianity is. By the blessing and providence of God, we are safe to practice Christianity. For a while, it was even easy and socially acceptable.

We can also sentimentalize Christianity. We can quote the comforting verses, talk about how much Jesus loves us, and forget what exactly we believe and what exactly it means to be a disciple.

Maybe that is changing, and easy Christianity is becoming more impractical and impossible. Maybe it is not. The point remains, for no matter our context, Jesus calls us to follow Him, and pick up our cross. The Christian life is one of daily dying to ourselves, and choosing to live the way our Master calls us to.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Re-read the text. Is Jesus worth the cost to you?

Jesus also says his yoke is easy (Matt 11:29). Reconcile these statements.

GROW

Paul calls us to bear each other's burdens. How can we help bear the cost of discipleship with each other?

GO

As we do evangelism, how do we accurately communicate the cost of discipleship?

Why is it essential that we do so?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you knew God was calling you to do something hard. What were the circumstances? What did you learn? How did God bring good out of it?
2. Jesus reveals to His disciples that His pathway to glory would come through the cross. What are some different responses people have to this message, including Peter's?
3. When did you first understand the gospel? Why was it so special to you then and now? Who do you long to believe the good news right now?
4. Jesus says that anyone who wants to be His disciple must take up his cross and follow Him. What does it look like for you to follow Jesus today?
5. Jesus also says that He will reward those who follow Him. How might that promise help you to persevere right now?
6. Spend some time praying for unbelievers to come to faith in Jesus and for one another to follow Jesus in the midst of suffering.

Additional Reading

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹

Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, he has only got to pick it up: there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection. But each has a different share: some God deems worthy of the

¹Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship, Revised Edition*. The MacMillan Company, 1968.

highest form of suffering, and gives them the grace of martyrdom, while others he does not allow to be tempted above that which they are able to bear. But it is the one and the same cross in every case.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise godfearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die: it may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life.

King Jesus Shows His Glory

Matthew 17:1-13

Of all the key events in the life of Christ, perhaps the most neglected is the Transfiguration.

Perhaps it is because it feels like such a world away from us. The event seems strange to our modern audiences. Jesus is glowing? Moses and Elijah? What is the deal with the tents? Is Peter right or wrong to ask?

Some of this may have to do with our position as Americans. “We don’t do kings,” someone once quipped. This event though may have to do with coronation, or exaltation.

In Matt 16:28, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” The Son of Man is one of Jesus’ preferred names for himself. It may be very well that in the final verse of chapter sixteen, Jesus is telling us that the next event is his coming in his kingdom.

The Transfiguration is not just a foretaste of the resurrection, but it is also a coronation. If there was any doubt about his being the Son of Man, given authority by the Ancient of Days (cf. Daniel 7:13-14), it is overcome. A cross awaits him though, showing that even at the peaks, the valley awaits before our final victory.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE

Re-read the text. Reflect on a mountaintop experience you have had. What was it like? Was it difficult to come down from?

How do we see the glory of Jesus in this passage? What do we learn about him?

GROW

Jesus took three disciples with him up the mountain. Who are your core friends? How can you be fully open to them, just as Christ was to his?

GO

Elijah and Moses are there witnessing to Jesus. How can we use the whole Bible as a witness to Christ?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions:

1. Share a story where you had a mountaintop experience with Jesus. What was that like? How did it change you?
2. Moses and Elijah figuratively represent the whole Old Testament. What has your experience of the Old Testament been like? How have you interacted with it?
3. What would change about your relationship to the Old Testament if you viewed it as all witnessing to Christ?
4. Jesus and the disciples must leave the mountain. How are you struggling to face the realities of life? How do you need to come down from the mountain?
5. Spend some time praying for those in the group and in your networks who are in the valley, both that God would give them relief in temporary mountaintop experiences, and that he would bring them home to the ultimate mountaintop experience with him forever.

Additional Reading

by NT Wright¹

Suppose that, after all, the ancient Jewish story of a God making the world, calling a people, meeting with them on a mountain – suppose this story were true. And suppose this God had a purpose for his world and his people that had now reached the moment of fulfillment. Suppose, moreover, that this purpose had taken human form and that the person concerned was going about doing the things that spoke of God's kingdom

¹Wright, N. T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. Harper Collins, 2011.

coming on earth as in heaven, of God's space and human space coming together at last, of God's time and human time meeting and merging for a short, intense period, and of God's new creation and the present creation somehow knocking unexpected sparks off one another. The earth shall be filled, said the prophet, with the knowledge of the glory of YHWH as the waters cover the sea.

It is within some such set of suppositions that we might make sense of the strangest moment of all, at the heart of the narrative, when the glory of God comes down not to the Temple in Jerusalem, not to the top of Mount Sinai, but onto and into Jesus himself, shining in splendor, talking with Moses and Elijah, drawing the Law and the Prophets together into the time of fulfillment. The transfiguration, as we call it, is the central moment. This is when what happens to space in the Temple and to time on the sabbath happens, within the life of Jesus, to the material world itself or rather, more specifically, to Jesus' physical body itself...

What the story of Jesus on the mountain demonstrates, for those with eyes to see or ears to hear, is that, just as Jesus seems to be the place where God's world and ours meet, where God's time and ours meet, so he is also the place where, so to speak, God's matter – God's new creation – intersects with ours. As with everything else in the gospel narrative, the moment is extraordinary, but soon over. It forms part of a new set of signposts, Jesus-shaped signposts, indicating what is to come: a whole new creation, starting with Jesus himself as the seed that is sown in the earth and then rises to become the beginning of that new world.



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