

Book Study – Matthew 16:1 - 17:13

Jesus Predicts His Death – The Transfiguration



Before We Begin Our Journey...

1. What are some ways people try to "find themselves"?
2. What is the most spectacular event you have ever witnessed?
3. If you received an all-expense-paid trip for four to Europe, who would you take with you?



Do Some Digging and Pre-planning...

4. What is required of the one who would follow Jesus? (16:24)
5. What two ways can a person lose his or her life? (16:25)
6. A person's soul is more valuable than what? How? (16:26)
7. Where did Christ and his three disciples go? (17:1)
8. What happened to Christ on the mountain? (17:2)
9. How did the disciples react when God spoke out of the cloud? (17:6)
10. What was the topic of conversation on the way down from the mountain? (17:9-13)



Sort, Organize, Gain Understanding...

11. What does it mean to you to "take up your cross" and follow Jesus?
12. In what situations do you find it difficult to follow Christ?
13. What memories or insights do you think Peter, James, and John took home with them from this incident?
14. In what way is it difficult for us to worship God?
15. How might seeing Christ in all His glory prompt us to obey Him more completely?
16. In what ways does God reveal Himself to us today?



Application for the Journey...

17. What could you do over the next three months to become more adept and more faithful in worshipping God?
18. What change in your weekly schedule could you make to better reflect what God considers important?



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A prayer for your journey...

"Lord Jesus, as I walk through this coming week, help me prepare for my journey by reading my Bible more regularly, seeking help as I need it from my Christian friends and focusing on the needs of others instead of myself. Help me to demonstrate my faith by stepping into the unknown, untried, and untested areas of my life." -Amen

TRANSFIGURATION

A display of God's glory in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). Peter cites the Transfiguration as historical proof of the true gospel of Christ (2 Peter 1:16-18).

It is hard to imagine what Jesus looked like when He was transfigured, or changed in form. The gospel writers speak of His face becoming bright like the sun, and of His clothes being dazzling white. Peter explains that God gave Him honor and glory (2 Peter 1:17).

Moses and Elijah appeared also. Both of these were Old Testament figures who did not have a normal death and burial. Luke indicates they discussed Jesus' approaching death which He was going to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Throughout his gospel, Luke emphasizes that Jerusalem was the city of destiny for Jesus, who carefully accomplished all that the Old Testament prophesied and all that God wanted him to do. Jesus was destined for the cross.

Peter offered to make three tabernacles-one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He may have been thinking that the Jews would have a final great celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles when the Messiah came. However, this was not the time for that, because Jesus still had to endure the cross.

A cloud overshadowed Jesus during His Transfiguration. This has symbolic as well as historical significance. It is a subtle reminder of the Exodus and the appearance of God to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 24), when God also spoke from a cloud. The Transfiguration occurred about a week after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi; Moses had to wait on the Mount about that long. Both Moses and Jesus were accompanied by three companions on their respective experiences. The word deace (Luke 9:31; exodus, KJV) occurs in the conversation of Moses and Elijah. Thus the Old Testament Exodus points forward to Christ and His redeeming work.

At the same time, symbols of the SECOND COMING of Christ are also present in the Transfiguration account. Jesus will come with clouds and be revealed as God's chosen one. He will stand on a mountain, the Mount of Olives. The Feast of Tabernacles was associated in Jewish thinking with the return of the Messiah as well as with the journey in the wilderness after the Exodus. Moses gave the Law, yet also symbolized Jesus, the great prophet of the last days (Deut 18:15). Elijah too, was expected by the Jews to come in the last days (Mal 4:5-6). The Transfiguration calls to mind both God's redemption through the Exodus and the future return and glory of Christ, His Son.

The Transfiguration concludes with God's voice speaking from the cloud, which marked God's presence (Ex 40:34-38). When the disciples heard that Jesus was God's beloved Son, the chosen one with whom He was well pleased, they probably remembered Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1, and possibly Gen 22:2. All Scripture focuses on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Transfiguration God showed clearly that Jesus is His one and only Son, superior even to the two great Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah. His disciples are to listen to Him. At the conclusion of the Transfiguration, no one is seen but Jesus. He alone is worthy.

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TRANSFIGURATION

The transfiguration of our Lord on a "**high mountain apart**," is described by each of the three evangelists (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). The fullest account is given by Luke, who, no doubt, was informed by Peter, who was present on the occasion. **What these evangelists record was an absolute historical reality, and not a mere vision.** The concurrence between them in all the circumstances of the incident is exact. John seems to allude to it also (John 1:14). Forty years after the event Peter distinctly makes mention of it (2 Peter 1:16-18). In describing the sanctification of believers, Paul also seems to allude to this majestic and glorious appearance of our Lord on the "holy mount" (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).

NOTE: **The place of the transfiguration was probably Mount Hermon** (q.v.), and not Mount Tabor, as is commonly supposed.

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MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

1. Not Olivet or Tabor: It is quite evident that the tradition placing the scene on the Mount of Olives must be dismissed. Another tradition, dating from the 4th century, identifies the mountain with Tabor. It was indeed possible in the time indicated to travel from Caesarea Philippi to Tabor; but there is nothing to show why this journey should have been undertaken; and, the mountain top being occupied by a town or village, a suitable spot could not easily have been found.

2. Mt. Hermon: In recent years the opinion has become general that the scene must be placed somewhere on **Mt. Hermon**. It is near to Caesarea Philippi. It is the mountain par excellence in that district (Luke 9:28). It was easily possible in the time to make the

journey to Chasbeyah and up the lofty steeps. The sacred associations of the mountain might lend it special attractions (Stanley, S and P, 399). This is supported by the transient comparison of the celestial splendor with the snow, where alone it could be seen in Palestine (ib, 400).

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MT. HERMON

— a peak, the eastern prolongation of the Anti-Lebanon range, reaching to the height of about 9,200 feet above the Mediterranean. It marks the north boundary of Palestine (Deut 3:8,4:48; Josh 11:3,17; 13:11; 12:1), and is seen from a great distance. It is about 40 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It is called "the Hermonites" (Ps 42:6) because it has more than one summit. The Sidonians called it Sirion, and the Amorites Shenir (Deut 3:9; Song 4:8). It is also called Baal-hermon (Judg 3:3; 1 Chron 5:23) and Sion (Deut 4:48). There is every probability that one of its three summits was the scene of the transfiguration (q.v.). The "dew of Hermon" is referred to (Ps 89:12). Its modern name is Jebel-esh-Sheikh, "the chief mountain." It is one of the most conspicuous mountains in Palestine or Syria. "In whatever part of Palestine the Israelite turned his eye northward, Hermon was there, terminating the view. From the plain along the coast, from the Jordan valley, from the heights of Moab and Gilead, from the plateau of Bashan, the pale, blue, snow-capped cone forms the one feature in the northern horizon."

Our Lord and his disciples climbed this "high mountain apart" one day, and remained on its summit all night, "weary after their long and toilsome ascent." During the night "he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun." The next day they descended to Caesarea Philippi.

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REVELATION

God's communication to people concerning Himself, His moral standards, and His plan of salvation.

God is a personal Spirit distinct from the world; He is absolutely holy and is invisible to the view of physical, finite, sinful minds. Although people, on their own, can never create truth about God, God has graciously unveiled and manifested Himself to mankind. Other religions and philosophies result from the endless human quest for God; Christianity results from God's quest for lost mankind.

God has made Himself known to all people everywhere in the marvels of nature and in the human conscience, which is able to distinguish right from wrong. Because this knowledge is universal and continuous, by it God has displayed His glory to everyone (Ps 19:1-6).

Some Christians think that only believers can see God's revelation in nature, but the apostle Paul said that unbelievers know truth about God: The unrighteous must have the truth to "suppress" it (Rom 1:18); they "clearly see" it (Rom 1:20); knowing God, they fail to worship Him as God (Rom 1:21); they alter the truth (Rom 1:25); they do not retain God in their knowledge (Rom 1:28); and knowing the righteous judgment (moral law) of God, they disobey it (Rom 1:32). The reason the ungodly are "inexcusable" (Rom 2:1) before God's righteous judgment is that they possessed but rejected the truth which God gave them.

What can be known of God from nature? God's universal revelation makes it clear that God exists (Rom 1:20), and that God, the Creator of the mountains, oceans, vegetation, animals, and mankind, is wise (Ps 104:24) and powerful (Ps 29; 93; Rom 1:20). People aware of their own moral responsibility, who know the difference between right and wrong conduct and who have a sense of guilt when they do wrong, reflect the requirements of God's moral law (the Ten Commandments) that is written on their hearts (Rom 2:14-15).

What is the result of divine revelation in nature? If anyone lived up to that knowledge by loving and obeying God every day of his life, he would be right with God and would not need salvation. However, no one loves God with his whole being and his neighbors as himself. People worship and serve things in creation rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). The problem does not lie with the revelation, which like the Law is holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12); the problem is with the sinfulness of human lives (Rom 8:3). The best human being (other than Jesus Christ) comes short of the uprightness God requires.

Because of God's universal revelation in nature, the philosopher Immanuel Kant could say, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe...the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

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