

“TRANSFIGURATION: THE TAKE-HOME POINT”

by Steve Hammond, Sunday, March 3, 2019

Mark 9:1-13 at NFBC

//7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.//

—Mark 9:7-8 NIV

Jesus and his disciples have been on the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi and the foothills of Mt. Hermon for Peter’s confession of, “You are the Christ!” So then, afterwards, when Jesus introduced his teaching that the Son of Man must suffer and die, Peter and Jesus had a big exchange of rebukes. Afterwards, Jesus teaches his disciples about following him, specifically including the idea of taking up one’s cross in the process.

He ends with a statement about some among them seeing the kingdom of God come in power. (9:1)

Six days pass.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain. (Some believe it was Mt. Tabor back near Nazareth, while others think it was Mt. Hermon. It’s not crucial either way. But I do have a beautiful picture of Mt. Hermon... so...) And there, as he was praying, something utterly supernatural happens. It’s as if the truth of Jesus physically manifests itself in an unmistakable and undeniable glory. Everything about him is brilliantly white. Mark says whiter than anyone could “bleach” them, while Matthew compares the whiteness to lightning and adds that his face shown like the sun.

Two pivotal Old Testament figures appear with him, Moses and Elijah, and they talk about Jesus’ departure, or exodus. And that’s about when Peter tries to be helpful by building shelters for everyone so they might be able to make this go on and on.

Next thing you know, a cloud moves in, obscures everything and everyone. God’s voice speaks out saying: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Then, as if to illustrate the point, the cloud lifts and leaves the three disciples standing there looking at Jesus. And only Jesus.

This is a huge event. This alone seems like it should not only be the fulfillment of Jesus' statement in 9:1, but should be fully satisfying for a permanent beachhead for this Kingdom of God. This is the kind of event we imagine every person on earth should experience. Because here everyone could literally see the truth of Jesus. So surely everyone would become believers in that truth. Their eyes would be opened, so ... isn't that what everyone wants? Isn't that what everyone needs? Remember the blind man? Isn't it just a matter of opening up his eyes.

Well, evidently not.

Surely you've experienced, more than once, a time when someone has been shown a truth their eyes can see, only to have the eyes of their heart or mind refuse to accept it.

ILLUS: I just saw where a Flat Earth believer was making a video to prove that the earth was flat. He lined up three sheets of wood with a three inch hole in each of them. They were spaced such that if the surface was flat the Flat Earther would see a light shining through and onto a TV screen as the light was held at chest level beyond the furthest hole. But if the surface was curved, one would have to hold the light above one's head in order for the light to shine through. The Flat Earth believer looked at the screen. In the dark of night there was no light coming through the holes. Over the radio he asked if the light was on. Yes it was. Where are you holding it? "At my chest," came the answer. "Hold it over your head," the Flat Earther said. Suddenly the light rose up to be seen. "Humm. That's interesting," he said.

I don't know the end of that story. But knowing us humans, it could go either way. Our looking at truth does not automatically transform us into seeing truth.

And sometimes, even with willing hearts, looking at the truth can be overwhelming if one is not ready for it. You notice Jesus didn't take all of his disciples, nor even all of his apostles. He only took three. And even they had a difficult time with it. Not just with taking in what was happening, but in taking home what was important.

There is a ton of truth pressed into these few verses. We could do lengthy word searches on the Bible's use of light, white light in particular; Moses and Elijah pretty much represent virtually *everything* in the Old Testament; the cloud isn't just a cloud, God moves and manifests himself in what one of my professors called a "glory cloud" throughout the OT; and the same could be said about God's use of mountains. He does very special things on mountains. There's even a reference in Malachi, one of

the last voices in the Jewish scriptures predicting both Elijah and the coming of God in a burning, cleansing brightness that not everyone will survive..., you know that book? I found a reference there to “bleach” of all things. Actually it said, “fuller” as it was in the RSV. A serious soap is what it was, same as Mark mentions when he sees the whiteness of Jesus. Here it is in the ESV:

3 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. –Malachi 3:1-4

Everything about Jesus here is awesome, overwhelming. It’s all coming together. Elijah, even Moses, the Messiah, the glorious light, the fulfillment of the Old Testament – everything! But if we stop here, if we get bogged down here oooing and awwwing at all the glorious details, then we will be missing the main thing. That’s what Peter was doing. That’s what most people, even sincere people, would be tempted to do.

But God knew what he was doing. And he made his most important point in the end.

The real point, the take home point, the most important point of all is simply Jesus. “Listen to him!” God said. In my Rock Johnson version God shouts it out for good drama. But even if he didn’t actually shout, I’d say the cloud and actual voice of God speaking and then the fact that only Jesus remained standing there amounted to something very much like a shout.

Ever notice that the Gospel of John doesn’t have the Transfiguration in it? It’s easy to miss that sort of thing. But once you see it, you might ask yourself why? After all, he was one of the eyewitnesses to it all. And all the other Gospel writers included it. Well, John wrote later than the others and he didn’t include a number of things you might have expected him to include, like the temptation of Jesus, any casting out of demons, the narrative kind of parables, and the Last Supper. Along with the Transfiguration. So, obviously John was called to have us read the Gospel in a way quite different from the “similar” Gospels (synoptic means similar)

But more specifically, I wonder if John, knowing the Transfiguration has already been faithfully recorded, is actually giving us a faithful rendition of the main message of the Transfiguration by his *not* including it in his Gospel. As monumentally impressive as the event was, one of the lessons learned there was that one need not camp out there permanently. The permanent lesson to take with you from that mountain top experience was to “listen to Jesus.” And John’s Gospel is all about our “listening to Jesus.” Jesus is our take home lesson. Not his glowing. Not Moses and Elijah. Not the glory cloud. It’s important those things be done and revealed, but it is even more important that Jesus be followed. Followed *down* that mountain, into the valley, and on to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be arrested, beaten and crucified for the sake of our cleansing from sin.

For those of you who are reading Jonathan Cahn’s *Book of Mysteries*, you’ll want to check out Day 88, for it tells us how we can have our mountain and move it, too. It’s called “The Portable Mountain Top” and it’s about how the Mount Sinai experience of Moses was extended into the valley through the building of the Tabernacle (The Tent) of God. His glory cloud joined them that way and went with them. And as you know where God goes, so goes the whole center of the universe. His whole throne is portable; his mountain is portable. It all depends on Him and where He is. And as John says in the beginning of his Gospel:

And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth. --John 1:14 (YLT)

It’s Jesus. Jesus is our take home point today and every day. He’s our portable mountain top our tabernacle. So long as we’re following him and not just the fancy stuff around it all. It’s Jesus.

In this way God is not only with us, he *goes* with us, and we go with him as we follow Jesus. We see mountains move every day we follow Christ, for surely the “portable mountain” idea is but a small metaphor for the actual reality of God and his movement with us – through the valleys, through the ups and downs of life, every step of the way God answers our prayers, forgives our sins, accepts our thanksgiving and praise, listens to our intercession for others, abides with us in sweet communion! . . .