

A Peek Behind the Veil

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[0 : 00] I feel like this sermon might be a bit shorter than normal. I hope you don't feel ripped off by that. It's quite, there's a lot of stuff in it.

It's quite technical. And a lot of scholars have got a lot of things to say about it. And as I was writing, I was thinking I could get really bogged down in weird, obscure details and just kind of show off a bit.

And so I wanted to make sure I said kind of one thing. And that it wasn't some obscure technical point that you thought was interesting that stayed in your mind, but this kind of one thing.

So I thought I'm going to grab that point and just have that up. Okay, bit of an introduction. So six days previous to this, the transfiguration as it's called here, Peter said to Jesus, you are the Christ.

And he was right in name. Jesus is God's chosen son who would rescue his people. He was right in name, but not in content at that point anyway.

[1 : 04] And then last week you heard about how Jesus very plainly explained to his team how being the Messiah is not what they expected.

That being the Messiah meant pain and suffering and death. And he follows it up by saying, and you guys, if you follow me, you're kind of going to walk into that as well.

That's what you're walking into as well. And it was a stern message. It was a stern message. And so six days later, we find ourselves.

Jesus, up on a mountain. He's taken his inner circle with him, John, James, and Peter. And whilst he's up there, it says in verse 3, Jesus was transfigured before them.

His clothes became radiant, intensely white. One of my best friends is a guy called Matt Stott. He lives in New Zealand. And he visited me a few years ago with his son called Jasper.

[2 : 10] And his son is three. Great name, right? Jasper. And his son is three. And I took him to Science World. And Jasper was just like a madman.

So he was just running everywhere. And I remember thinking about half an hour inside, I remember thinking, Matt, you've got to get your child under control. Like, he's going crazy, right?

So he would just sit somewhere. And I remember being in the kind of the theater there, and the kids just running around, and Matt didn't move. And even though we'd just catch his head bobbing up against, you know, above a seat, and we'd sort of try and track where he is.

And I said, what's happening? And he said, Matt said to me, I'm just really hoping he goes through one of the doors that says, you know, radiation in here, or, you know, staff only, or stay out, or something like that, right?

Because I'm really hoping he goes through one of those doors, and I want to give him enough space to do that, because if he does, I can go through that door to get him. And I want to go through the door because I want to see what's going on behind the door.

[3 : 17] I want to see what's there. Yeah. I basically, so that was his strategy, right? I want to see what no one gets. This is the same guy who I remember emailing me a few, you know, like a couple of years ago.

He's quite well-traveled. He saves up, he works, saves up lots of money, and so him and his wife travel really low budget, shoestring budget in unusual countries. And he emailed me a couple of years ago, and he said, I'm about to take my baby.

Jasper was like one year old at this point. I'm trying to work out how to get Jasper up an active volcano. And I found out later, he just sort of shoved him in his backpack. And anyway, but all right.

So, he let his son run wild so he could get behind one of these doors and see what's going on. And you know, I kind of, I thought about that when I was reading this, thinking about what is the transfiguration about?

And I think that's what's happening here. God is showing us something that no one normally gets to see. He is lifting the veil. Lifting the veil.

[4 : 21] And he's like peeling away Christ's humanness, and so we can see Christ's godness, his glory, and which physically looks like light, like undefiled goodness and beauty, darkness vanquishing pure light.

And then three things happen. Elijah and Moses appear and talk to Jesus, and a cloud descends, and a voice from heaven says, this is my son, listen to him. And then it all stops, and Jesus slips back into his humanness.

Now, as I say these things, we see his godness, and Jesus slips back into his humanness. Please note, it's very difficult to talk about Jesus as 100% God and 100% human in any way, which sometimes doesn't sound a bit heretical.

So the ways I'm describing it is very crass, and it's not quite like this, but I don't know how I'll start, I don't know the grammar of talking about this, because it's such an unusual thing, and we have no, there's no parallel for it.

But essentially, it's kind of what's going on. God is peeling back the veil of Christ's humanity, and we see his godness, and we see his glory. And it's amazing.

[5 : 43] It's incredible. I mean, I think if you had to pick a biblical event that you could have witnessed, there's some big ones to choose from. Parting of the Red Sea, or the Nativity, or David's defeat of Goliath would have been pretty cool, but surely the transfiguration would be up there, right?

If you could see that. It would have been amazing. And obviously, completely overwhelming. Exhibit A, Peter's response. In verse 6, it says, he did not know what to say, which did not stop him.

Maybe you know people like this. And so it's great what he says. Verse 5, Rabbi, it is good that we are here.

I feel like it reminded me of the ubiquitous Father of the Bride speech at a wedding. It's just great that everyone could be here. I know some of you have traveled a long way.

Some of you have traveled through time. I see Moses and Elijah here. That's great. I'm so glad you could be here. And then Peter follows it up by asking if anyone wants any tents.

[6 : 56] Now, that's gold. It's absolute gold. People debate about what's going on there.

He's just, you know, he's not doing a great job at this point. However, you know, would you do any better? I don't know. I don't think so. Like, it's obviously completely overwhelming, isn't it?

What's happening. He doesn't know what to say. He doesn't know how to respond to what he's witnessing because it's unprecedented. So far, what can we make of this? I want you to note something that's really important.

It's this. God is the key actor in this event. It's God that actually does the transfiguring. It's the grammar of the sentence makes it clear that Jesus didn't transfigure himself.

He didn't sort of go, you know, it's like that kind of movie thing. Whoa, hey! Look at this! You know, like, he's up there and God chose to do this to him. Whatever that was.

[8 : 01] He revealed Christ's godness, his glory. God did this to him. Christ did him do it himself. God's cloud of his presence descends, it says.

God speaks these public words, the only sort of command in it, this is my beloved son, listen to him. So why? Why did God do this? Such a otherworldly, alien sort of thing, right?

To happen. Why did he do it? When it's summer in Vancouver and the sun is shining and flowers are blooming and it's warm and you can see the mountains really clearly each day.

every year, about a month into summer, every year, I think to myself, Vancouver, all is forgiven. You know, the months of greyness, they're behind us and the rain and the clouds, well, they were all worth going through for this.

and I think, I think that's what's going on here. Christ reveals his glory to his disciples and it's a glory that is ahead of all of us.

[9 : 23] See, Jesus calls these folks, calls these folks to a very difficult journey and he calls us to a very difficult journey. But the cross is not the end point of that journey. Pain and death that Jesus has been talking about for the last few weeks, they do not have the final word in Christ's life.

They do not have the final word in our life. Beyond that is resurrection and glory and that is for all of us. So I think one of the reasons for the transfiguration is hope.

There is hope at the end of this. There is hope at the end of what difficulties you might be facing right now. Beyond the suffering there is glory.

But we can't get there without going through suffering and death. And it's a big theme in the Bible this and it's picked up famously in Romans 8. Let me read a few verses from Romans 8 to you.

For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

[10 : 42] For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly but because of him who subjected it in the hope that the creation itself would be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

It's all about hope. Hope and pain. Hope for glory. Just one caveat here. I don't want to play down the pain that you might be experiencing in your life right now because it might be acute.

Your Father in Heaven has many things to say about that. One of the things is in this passage, and one of the things is this, is that glory is awaiting, and it is real, and it is glorious.

And the hardness you might be experiencing right now, big or small, it does have an end date, and it is a prelude to resurrection life.

And it's why Christians can afford to be people of great hope in the midst of great pain. Okay, back to the passage. Verse 4.

[11 : 59] We have these visitors. I mean, it's such an unusual passage, right? We have these visitors. Elijah and Moses turn up, and they're recognizable. We don't know how the name badge is.

I don't know. Like, it's just that they're recognizable people, right? But it's very appropriate that these two guys turn up to talk to Jesus. There are a couple of heavy hitters, Old Testament heavy hitters.

Elijah, the great prophet, the archetypal prophet, Moses, the bringer of the law, both men faithful to God's mission despite great affliction and suffering and opposition, and each of them had a mountaintop experience where they witnessed the glory of God.

And you can get quite technical about this part of the passage here, but I think the big point is just that these guys were actually there. They existed, and they were there with Jesus, two very recognizable characters on the other side of death with a glorified Jesus in full communion with Christ, and we can also hope to be there as well.

Verse 7. It says this cloud comes, and this is a cloud from the Exodus story. I'm sure you probably know about this, right? And a voice from heaven says, This is my beloved Son.

[13 : 14] Listen to Him. It's the only command in the passage. This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him. I love the plainness of it.

If this was my last sermon I ever preached here, I'd feel like I've said something good to you. Jesus should listen to Him. Listen to Him. As I've said, God is a key player, and what He's doing here, I think, is He's interpreting the whole event so far.

He's like, Here's my Son. I didn't send down some punter. I didn't send down middle management. I sent my Son, my beloved Son. It's such a beautiful thing to say about His Son, His beloved Son.

And it hints at the fact that God knows that this is a difficult journey for Christ. It is a terrible thing to see your child suffer, and God experienced that, so that's sort of coming out.

This is my beloved Son. See Him glorified. The road ahead. It's difficult for Him. It's difficult for you guys. So you should listen to Him.

[14 : 24] Listen to Christ. Next thing that happens, it's a complex kind of dialogue. It's not intuitive, but basically what's happening here is God, Elijah, and Moses disappear.

Jesus tells His disciples to sort of keep quiet about what's happened on the mountain. And the disciples demonstrate. They don't really understand what's going on here, and they ask a question about Elijah, and they sort of say, isn't Elijah supposed to turn up?

And he just did. It's kind of a weird question, right? Isn't he supposed to turn up just before the judgment? It's kind of an Old Testament motif for this, right? And Jesus says, yes, you're right. And if we read back earlier in Mark, it makes it pretty clear that John the Baptist is the kind of the proto, not the proto, like the new Elijah, the way they describe the way he's dressed.

It's clearly pointing to Elijah. So Jesus is sort of saying, yes, you're right. Elijah does turn up before the kingdom kind of breaks out in the world, and it's happened. It was John the Baptist, and so everything's tracking as planned.

You know, carry on, basically, right? Just a couple of final words. Despair is an awful, awful thing.

[15 : 37] An awful thing. And passages like this, they give our hearts permission to be hopeful, when everything tells us otherwise. Now, that does not mean we cannot be sad about what we might be experiencing.

That's, you know, grief and sadness are wholly appropriate Christian emotions. But because of what God has revealed to us in that moment on that mountain, the glory of Christ ahead for him, ahead for all of us, we can be hopeful in the midst of great grief and sadness, because glory is ahead of us and awaits us.

Amen. Amen. Amen.