



SERMONS

by

Anthony Baateng

Date: 26 February 2017

Preacher: Anthony Boateng

Bible readings: Matthew 17:1-9 and Exodus 24:12-18

Key aim: 1) Exploring Jesus' Transfiguration 2) Exploring our response after we've seen the glory

Title: *"The beloved; with him, I am well pleased"*

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, your word says that the words that come from our mouths are spirit and they come with power. This morning, we ask that your word will come with authority to feed our spirits. May the words of my lips and thoughts be filled with your wisdom in Jesus' name. Amen.

What does it mean to be transfigured or to encounter God? Let's turn our attention to the book of Matthew 17:1-9, which we heard read earlier. In this reading, Matthew is writing to present Jesus as the Messiah and to convey this truth by emphasizing Jesus' Jewish credentials and linking what happened to Jesus to the Old Testament. Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law (the new covenant) in His final journey to Jerusalem and Transfiguration on the mount.

The Background:

Prior to Jesus' Transfiguration, although the disciples had travelled around with Him and seen Him do many miraculous things, they were still unsure about why Jesus had come. Indeed, leading up to Jesus' Transfiguration, Jesus asked the disciples in Matthew 16: "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said to them in Mark 9, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

Six days later, Jesus fulfilled this promise. Three of His closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, are taken up a high mountain and given a unique foretaste of the kingdom of God. The Transfiguration reveals the divine nature of Jesus. The location or the name of the mountain is unknown but thought to be Mount Tabor near Nazareth, or possibly Mount Hermon.

For a brief moment, we see Jesus the King in all His radiant glory, His clothes becoming dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them, His face shining like the sun. Jesus is seen with Elijah and Moses, the two great heroes of the disciples' faith discussing His departure (His exit strategy) - talking about the cross/death and the trip to Jerusalem, and suddenly the voice of God from the cloud - 'this is my Son, the beloved - listen to Him!' This is the heavenly Jesus - the Jesus we and they didn't know before. Like most of us, the disciples are left terrified and perplexed.

It is right to say that prior to Jesus' Transfiguration, the disciples' craved clarity or a miraculous sign, for they were not sure why Jesus had come or if He was of the same standing as Elijah and Moses or just another prophet.

So what has now changed? First, although not easily apparent, during Jesus' Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John see Jesus as He really is. Not just a rabbi or teacher, a politician, a King, or even just

a prophet – they see Jesus as the Son of God. The embodiment of the Creator, God of Israel, the Messiah.

And this swift change occurred because Matthew says while Peter was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). The clouds that covered them represented the shekinah glory of God which had led God’s people through the wilderness. This is the second time God the Father has spoken noticeably about His Son. First at His baptism, the words of the Father were for Jesus “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22).

On this occasion, the words were intended for the disciples: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). Prior to this, Jesus is seen conversing with Moses and Elijah.

How the disciples responded:

So how did the disciples respond? Caught in a moment of transcendent glory, Peter said: “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (Matthew 17:4). As Peter saw Elijah and Moses leaving, he offered to make them a shelter, one for each person. Peter was submerged with fear and confusion; he tried to prolong the experience – build buildings and perhaps serve refreshments and set up meetings and councils to keep track of who comes in to visit and who stays. This would be perhaps the first property committee of the new covenant, with Peter as the senior property steward. Perfectly rational, right?

How does this relate to us, brothers and sisters? I wonder what you and I would have said if we were there? I think Peter’s response is no different from yours and mine when he says ‘It’s good that we are here, Jesus, because we can build you each a dwelling.’ Like many of us when we first meet first-time visitors at our church, we’re so keen to find out as much about them, ensure we keep them, and attract more people to our church. Or perhaps in this day and age where people are fixated with taking pictures, you would have offered to take a selfie for Facebook or Instagram to capture the moment?

So what does Jesus’ transfiguration teach us, brothers and sisters?

1) First, Jesus is a fulfilment of history. And as Elijah was taken up by the chariots of heaven, as he passed his cloak to Elisha among those marvelling prophets in Jericho and Bethel, so Jesus’ own death and rising will be the hinge of all their history and ours. We’re assured that the Law and the Prophets support Jesus in His redemptive mission.

2) Second, Moses and Elijah are both alive in the presence of God; therefore, life in God’s presence is available to all who have faith in God and heed the words of the messengers God sends.

3) Third, like our first reading, the book of Exodus, the encounter has parallels with Moses, who met with God on Mount Sinai. Just as Moses was accompanied by his successor Joshua, here Jesus brings His closest disciples who will be with Him leading up to the crucifixion.

So what does it mean for us today and how do we respond after we have seen the glory? It gives me great joy to see Amos 5:18-24 permanently engraved on the church wall, for it reminds me of the significance of our vice president of the conference, Rachael Lampard's message when she spoke about the need to let justice run like water and righteousness like a mighty stream. This morning, Jesus' glory comes with justice and freedom, asking us to seek to live justly and righteously. Love and honour God in every way so that the Holy Spirit will be poured out to those around us. Take pride and delight in doing the most ordinary things of our lives - the cups of tea, church council, listening place, even the property committees, stewardship. Jesus' glory is evident in everything we do if we look close enough.

Let me tell you something, brothers and sisters, moments of awesome power and grace do not always come in signs and wonders or on mountaintops. Our response to Jesus' Transfiguration is doing the ordinary things consistently with passion that makes grace visible to all. This morning I believe we have been given a mandate to proclaim the evangelical faith to our brothers and sisters who are yet to encounter God. It can be the smallest, most ordinary, quiet things – being there for a Muslim neighbour; offering hospitality to a refugee, being present when others are facing difficulty; you being here this morning - the most ordinary moments are filled with the glory of God.

I believe we all should ask God questions about how we can practice scriptural holiness, how to make our church more welcoming, and how to use our gifting or skills. Scriptural holiness is about praying and reading our Bibles daily and attending church regularly. It is about making a sacrifice and purposely serving God and participating in His mission.

Therefore, this morning, with the Lent period fast approaching, a time to reflect, repent, and pray as a way of preparing our hearts for Easter, let us seek to renew our practice of Christian discipleship so that we can make God's glory more visible.

Peter, James, and John were stunned by this mountaintop experience. They needed time to reflect upon what they had seen and heard about Jesus. The Jesus they never knew had revealed something of his glory, and they were confused, afraid, and in awe. To make matters worse, only after the resurrection, after the Holy Spirit had been bestowed, could they tell others about what they had seen. Their view of Jesus was changing, and so should ours this morning. In the transfiguration of Jesus, we are given a glimpse of Jesus in all his heavenly glory.

When we encounter the real Jesus, we are not only born again; we are progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ. We no longer stay the same after we meet Jesus; our heart and mind are progressively renewed, and we dedicate our lives to serving Christ and being Christ-like.

As I hasten to a close, I want to say this: we're often guilty of judging on the basis of outward appearance, things like height, weight, colour, class, education, income, status, background, clothing, etc. But this is all shallow and superficial. God searches deep into our hearts. In the midst of all the struggles we're going through, God is with us; our inner being is being renewed daily through our encounter and relationship with God.

At the beginning of my sermon, I asked, what does it mean to be transfigured or to encounter God? Philip Yancey says "No one who meets Jesus ever stays the same. Jesus has rocked my own preconceptions and has made me ask hard questions about why those of us who bear his name don't do a better job of following Him" in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*.

Brothers and sisters, as Jesus was transfigured in our Gospel reading, his presence, God's presence, also transfigures us. May God inspire you this morning to be a living testimony of God's glory in your community and with anyone you encounter over the coming week as you grow to know Him and experience Him like never before, and learn to use your gifting to respond according to His will. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Experience/References

Premier, 22 February 2017. "Archbishop Justin Welby condemns Government decision to end refugee programme" Accessed at: <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/Church/Archbishop-Justin-Welby-condemns-Government-decision-to-end-refugee-programme>

Premier, 22 February 2017. "Christians urged to "love their neighbour, visit a Mosque" Accessed at: <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/Society/Christians-urged-to-love-their-neighbour-visit-a-Mosque>

Telegraph, 22 February 2017. "45 things you might want to give up for Lent" Accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/wellbeing/mood-and-mind/45-things-you-might-want-to-give-up-for-lent/>

Telegraph, 22 February 2017. "When does Lent 2017 start and what is Ash Wednesday?" Accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/ash-wednesday-2017-lent-observed-do-give-things/>