

Transfiguration

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[0 : 00] So we're looking at this event that is often known, it's got the title in your Bibles as the Transfiguration. It is the last major event, perhaps you might call it, before Jesus begins, the long road to Jerusalem, eventually to the crucifixion.

It happens really far north, quite, in Israel. It's known as the Transfiguration. Now one of the things I love to do, I don't do it as much as I used to, I really enjoy still going to the cinema.

As I say, I don't get as much time to go there, but one of the things I enjoy, and this might seem slightly odd, because most people try to get these out of the way, is I still really enjoy going to see the trailers.

Slightly odd, but I want to see what movies are going to be released soon. And normally, you do see all the best bits. If it's a terrible movie, they make it look great.

But trailers are there, aren't they? Trailers are there to entice us to see the real event, to see the real movie, to see the full thing. And in our Bible passage this morning, we're looking at an event, as I mentioned, it's come to be known as the Transfiguration.

[1 : 14] And in many ways, it is very much like a trailer. It is a preview. Because what we see is we encounter Jesus' unveil. We see a foretaste of Jesus dressed in his future glory clothes, and what he will look like when he returns.

But also, we see, of course, the startled responses of the disciples to Jesus as well. And it leaves us reflecting, perhaps, do we want to see the full movie?

Do we want to, after seeing the trailer of Jesus in his glory, do we want to know more about this Jesus? And what he has in store? And importantly, it helps us to reflect on who Jesus is.

Who is Jesus? There's three things that we're going to think about, about who Jesus is, that come up. We're going to think about Jesus is God. Fear him. Jesus is God's son.

Listen to him. And Jesus is the king. The suffering king. Hope in him. So let's look at our first point. Jesus is God. Fear him. In the Bible, whenever anyone goes up a mountain, watch out.

[2 : 29] You know something big is going to happen. Always happens up a mountain. Classically, we've got Mount Sinai. Moses speaks with God. And we've got the giving of the law. Jesus here is leading his three close friends.

The sort of inner group, you might say, of the disciples. Peter, James, and John. The select group. But what we think is Mount Hermon, which is in the north. It's just a few days walk of where they'd been six days before.

This is the live trailer. It's the preview of Jesus in his future glorified state. In all his radiant brilliance. Look with me at the end of verse 2. There he was transfigured before them.

His clothes became dazzling white. Whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. There's echoes here of what happened when Moses met God up Mount Sinai.

You'll remember what happened. You'll remember some of the imagery that's used. The lightning. The thunder that made the whole mountain shake. And the glory cloud descending on top of the mountain.

[3 : 36] You might even remember how after Moses had been speaking with God. His face shone reflecting God's glory. Yet here, here, Jesus is not reflecting the glory of God like Moses.

Rather, he himself is the source of dazzling white brilliance. And he appears with Moses and Elijah. The startling thing in all of this is Peter's response that is most striking.

Look with me at verse 5. Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

He did not know what to say. They were so frightened. There's a video on the internet. It's from a few years ago. I was laughing earlier with a couple of the guys about using football illustrations.

Well, I'm going to use one. It was Ronaldo when he was in his prime years at Real Madrid. You might have seen this. You can get it easily on YouTube. And he puts on a disguise as a homeless man.

[4 : 47] He has a fat suit and a beard. And he's in the middle of Madrid. Nobody knows who he is. And he starts doing tricks. He starts playing football with local people. Coming in and out of work on their lunch hour.

And near the end, he starts passing it back and forth with a young lad. And then after a while, he goes down, picks up the ball. And he's still dressed in all his gown. And he signs it. He signs the football. He gives it to the young lad. And then after he's given it to the young lad, he pulls off his beard. And takes off his wig and everything.

Revealing who he is. And the little lad's face is just beaming. And you can imagine what he thinks. He doesn't know what to do with himself. What we see in that illustration, I think, catches something of what we imagine is happening with the response of Peter, James, and John.

They don't know what to do. Verse 6. He said, he did not know what to say. They were so frightened. They think they're just going for a hill walk with their pal.

[5 : 56] And then all this happens. But notice with me how they're not corrected for their reaction. They're not corrected for it. The reason, I think, that they're not corrected is because their response is totally appropriate.

What we see is the fear of the Lord. Jesus is one of their best friends, a close pal. And when we read about the fear of the Lord, it is not that they're suddenly scared of him.

It's the type of fear you have when you're nervous about meeting someone you respect. The nervousness you feel is because you place value on who they are.

The fear is not being scared of them. But actually, it is a fear of doing something stupid yourself in front of them. Saying something ridiculous or embarrassing.

There is nervous tension to the point where we get dry mouths. Can't get the words out. Tremble when shaking their hand. Maybe even get sweaty palms. Or maybe like Peter, say the first thing that pops into our heads.

[7 : 05] And then afterwards think, why on earth did I say that? It is a right fear of the Lord. You can picture that's how they would feel. With Jesus shining like the sun.

Stood talking to the heroes of their faith. All three disciples are fearing God. And frightened of acting the fool. One day, we will meet Jesus.

And we will meet him as he is here. Shining in all his radiant glory. And when we see Peter's response, I can't help but think that that's what I might be like.

Sweaty palms, nervous wobble on my voice as he speaks directly to me. Which begs the question. It does beg the question.

If this is how we will or may respond when we meet Jesus face to face, should that influence or at least have a bearing on how we respond to Jesus today?

[8 : 06] Because it's the same Jesus. The glorified Jesus who will return is the same man who tells you to follow him today. He's the same God that we should fear rightly.

Not by being scared, but trembling and admiration. In admiration of who he is. Because he's present all the time.

He's with us now by his spirit. And he's with us at every turn in our lives. Jesus is God. Fear. The second thing I want us to consider is Jesus is God's son.

Listen to him. This event is without question. It is for the disciples. When God the Father speaks in verse 7, he's not speaking to Jesus, but he's speaking to Peter, James and John.

Look with me. This is my son whom I love. Listen to him. They broke the mountain because the living God has a message for them about his son that they are to listen to.

[9 : 18] And even the appearance of Elijah and Moses is there to amplify that message. The last two verses of the Old Testament are about Elijah. You listen to what the prophet Malachi says about Elijah.

He says, see, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents.

About Moses, he writes, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among the fellow Israelites and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.

At some point in Israel's future, God would intervene to bring about the day of the Lord. That was widely known and it had been taught to the disciples since they were wee whippersnappers. When they saw these two talking with Jesus, this is what they would have thought. The day of the Lord has arrived. Jesus is the promised Messiah.

[10:21] The king's come and he's here to establish the kingdom of God. All the Jews anticipated and were waiting for the return of Elijah and the promised Messiah's arrival.

Yet the disciples don't join the dots together how they need to be. Verse 7 and 8 make it clear for us, but still not so clear for the disciples.

Look with me. Verse 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. Surely when they looked, suddenly when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

And this is the point. The point is someone greater than Moses and someone greater than Elijah is here. Because only Jesus is left out of the three.

The other two are silent. They don't speak. And they've failed. There's even more echoes from Sinai. On Mount Sinai, God gave the law, the Ten Commandments.

[11:26] But now God says, this is who you are to listen to. This is my son. His words are my words. His words have equal authority because they are the words of the living God.

When I was at school, I had a head teacher called Mr. Weir. He was the only, I don't know if you, everybody had a teacher like this.

He was the only teacher that when he talked, no one else spoke. He commanded respect. He had a presence around the school. And if he spoke, then you didn't. And you listened.

You paid attention. You showed it by doing what he said. And we're all able to admit and show that level of respect to someone who has authority.

And if we're able to show that level of attention to a head teacher or maybe someone else in society, how much more, how much more do we need to listen to the one whose words are the words of Almighty God?

[12:28] Now, we don't have the voice of the Lord coming to us from a cloud on top of a mountain. It would be a lot easier if we did. But we have something that is just as powerful and just as authoritative and true.

We have the word of God, the scriptures, the Bible. When you open it, Jesus, the living God, is speaking to you. He's telling you about yourself. He's telling you more about who he is.

And he's saying it in language so that we can understand. His words are true. They have authority and they don't change. And they're applied to our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you want to hear from God today or tomorrow or this afternoon, you only have to open your Bible and start reading. It's not a mystery as to what's going on. It is supernatural because your creator is having a conversation with you.

It is as real and as near and as active as the voice that the disciples hear on the top of the mountain. Jesus is God's son. Listen to him.

[13:34] Finally, Jesus is the suffering king. Hope in him. You can imagine that what happens next for the disciples is a bit of a letdown.

I've mentioned they're expecting the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord would be when the Lord would come in judgment and bring everything back to restore all things to how it should be.

But verse 9, they come down from the mountain. Jesus, we presume, he's gone back to the state he was in before he got transfigured. And he says something that throws them.

Look with me, verse 9. Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the son of man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead meant.

It throws them because of the talk of death. This is the last thing they expect to come up. And so they quiz Jesus. Verse 11, they asked him, Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?

[14:35] They're essentially asking, Why are you talking about rising from the dead? Because we've been told that Elijah comes. And we know that when he does, he'll restore all things.

And they've just seen him. What they can't piece together is how death and the restoration of all things are connected. They seem like these things are miles apart.

And doesn't it seem that way? Death and restoration are incompatible characters, are they not? They've just seen Elijah. Surely restoration is the next step.

What they expected was a literal Elijah to come. Yet, the restoration of Elijah had already begun years earlier.

It wasn't a literal happening. You see, there is a man who came before Jesus, who began the process of restoration years earlier. Who began the process of the restoration of the people of God.

[15:33] Jesus doesn't fully let on. I don't know if you can guess who it is. It is John the Baptist. You remember him? The ministry in the wilderness looked a bit crazy. They ate locusts and honey had camel's hair for clothes, but preached repentance.

That was the beginning of the start of the process of restoration. He came in the spirit of Elijah. Many people came to him from the cities.

They came out to the wilderness. They heard his preaching and they turned to the living God. They completed that word that we heard from Malachi. Many people came to him and restored.

Verse 13, Jesus says, But I tell you, Elijah has come. When he came, it didn't take away death. They've done to him everything they wished, just as it was written about him.

What did the leaders of Israel do? They chopped off his head. John the Baptist. They executed him. Jesus is telling them that John the Baptist's execution is going to foreshadow his own.

[16:37] The same fate awakes Jesus. They did to him as they wished and they will do the same to the Messiah. The anointed king must suffer. To Jewish ears, this made no sense.

It made no sense at all. Suffering and glory were incompatible. We know that today, to some degree, don't we, in a war or a battle, we've seen all the bloodshed on the news in wars today.

That when, whatever side you're on, the side that loses the most men through death, are often, normally, the side that lose in a war.

There is no victory. Israel knew that as part of their own history, and we know that in modern warfare. The gospel of Jesus flips that logic.

The logic flips because the enemy is not flesh and blood. This is the heart. It is the key to understanding the gospel that the true enemy, the true enemy is death itself.

[17:39] And the only way to beat death is to rise above it. To conquer it. So that death itself dies. Death itself dies. It ceases to exist.

Which is the gospel promise. Because if death itself disappears, then everything can be restored, so it is no longer affected or impacted by the curse of death. Death is beaten because Jesus rises. That transfigured glory. Jesus shining that radiant white. Momentarily revealed for Peter, James and John to see.

It will be made permanent because of the suffering that Jesus goes through. Not in spite of the suffering, but because of the suffering. Jesus must suffer and be rejected.

He must go the way of his fall and a John the Baptist. To bring about the day of the Lord and our restoration. Our resurrection. That is the gospel. The good news promised to you today.

[18:37] That you worship Jesus who is God, who is God's son, but is a suffering king. He suffered to purchase your restoration. Your future would not be the same without it. It would be bleak.

The glory of Jesus we see on the mountain. He gave up so that we in town could be glorified like he is. That is our great home. That is our great home.

He promises a future when we'll know him fully and completely. And be like he is when we will rise out of death and be made perfect. Your future is secure. And if your future is secure.

We're not just talking about a distant future on your deathbed. But it means every day is secure. It means your tomorrow is secure. It means the curse of sin and the curse of death has no hold on you.

Not just on your deathbed. But it has no hold on you today. And it has no hold on you tomorrow. Jesus is the suffering king.

[19:40] We're coming into that. Jesus is God for you. If we tremble before him, you will be wise in how you know it. If we tremble before him, you will be wise in how you know it.

Jesus is God's son. If you listen to him, if you listen to him in his word, you'll hear the voice of the almighty today in your life. Jesus is the suffering king. Hope in him.

We hope in him. He'll give us a secure future and a secure tomorrow. It's the curse of sin and death. Your restoration has begun.

And will be completed when we see him in his glory. Amen. Almighty God, we do give you praise and thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that his gospel is our secure future. It is our gospel. And so we praise your great and glorious name. We lift your name on high.

[20 : 40] We celebrate all that you've done for us. We celebrate your restoration and resurrection. And we ask that we know it more increasingly every day that you bless us. That we live out of the light of what is true for our eternal future.

And so bless us now. We want to celebrate all that you've done. And we thank you that you are the living one. You are the one who reigns as king on high.

And so help us to fear you. To listen to you. And to put our hope in you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.