

SERMON ON TRANSFIGURATION

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Scripture: Matthew 19:1-8

A group of business leaders and labour union members went up to the top of the mountain and saw Jesus there walking and talking with Lee Iococca and Dale Carnegie.

Lee Iococca was the man who rescued Chrysler Corporation from bankruptcy. He saved thousands of jobs and turned the company around—creating hundreds of new jobs. A good man—used to be a Republican but changed to be a Democrat after he realized that the Chrysler Corporation could only be rescued with the assistance of a massive government grant. He is the kind of economic leader that any country would be glad to have.

Dale Carnegie was the author of the best selling book *How To Win Friends And Influence People*—a guidebook on personal development to achieve social and political success. Millions of people have read his books and taken his courses,

The business and union people on the mountaintop were awestruck to be in the presence of such eminent people. Then 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.” When the people heard this they fell to the ground, but Jesus came and said “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

A group of students went up to the mountaintop and they saw Jesus there walking and talking with Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx—two of the most important and influential people of the modern world.

Sigmund Freud was the founder of the modern psychoanalytic movement. His understanding of human thought and emotions, dreams and fears has been the key to healing thousands of people with psychiatric illnesses. He was a good man although he did not believe in God. He was highly critical of much of the influence of religion but he cared about people and his work certainly helped make life better for a lot of people.

Karl Marx also cared about people. His writings were inspired by the terrible conditions of the working classes in the early period of the industrial revolution. He believed that working people deserved to have more control over their working conditions and a larger share in the profits created by their labours. He was a good man, although he also did not believe in God and was critical of much of the influence that religion has in society. He lamented the fact that poor and oppressed people were offered religion as a consolation in the after life for the harsh experience they had in this life.

The students were awestruck by the greatness of the three people they saw on the mountaintop. Then 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.” When the

students heard this they fell to the ground, but Jesus came and touched them and said: “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up they saw no one but Jesus alone.

Peter and James and John went up with Jesus to a high mountain and saw Moses and Elijah walking and talking with Jesus.

Moses was the founder of the Jewish faith. He was the one to whom God had given the Ten Commandments. He was the one who had led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and across the Sinai desert to the borders of the Promised Land. Moses was the one who was given credit for writing the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures that contained all the laws that the Hebrew people believed to be God’s greatest gift—the gift of guidance for living life as God intended it to be lived. Moses was an awesome person.

So was Elijah. He was one of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel. He was a Spirit-anointed person who was seen as the prototype of the final or Ultimate Prophet—the Messiah, also anointed by the Spirit, who was to come and restore Israel to the greatness that God intends Israel to have.

Peter and James and John were awestruck to be in the presence of these eminent people. Then 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.” When they heard this they fell to the ground, but Jesus came and touched them and said “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white.

The transfiguration of Jesus happens to every one who comes to see him in a different light—everyone who comes to the point of saying Jesus is the one to listen to. Jesus is Lord. I want to go down the mountain with him alone.

We may see different people on the mountaintop than the disciples saw. Whom would you see there, walking and talking in the same league, so to speak with Jesus? Would it be your favourite politician or national leader? Would it be a celebrity that you admire for what they do or what they stand for? Mahatma Gandhi? Mother Theresa? Nelson Mandela? Martin Luther King? Oprah Winfrey? And what would it mean to you if you heard the voice saying “This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him.”

Peter and James and John and generations of Christians after them have seen the Transfiguration of Jesus as the message that Christ is Lord of the scriptures and the law—the scriptures and the laws written by Moses. When Christ is Lord of the Scriptures he is the test or criterion or standard for what is truly the word of God in the Scriptures. There are some things in the Scriptures that do not measure up to the standard of Christ. When Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord because Samuel believed that God required him to wipe out every man, woman and child of Israel’s tribal enemies, the followers of Jesus can say that the word of God that came to Samuel on that occasion was

more likely the voice of the culture in which blood feuds required such mass exterminations of one's enemies. It doesn't fit with the compassion and justice that we see in Jesus after he is transfigured before us.

And in our own time we can say that the laws in Leviticus that require the stoning to death of men who have sexual relations with other men does not seem to fit with the understanding of the possibilities of love that we have come to know in Jesus.

For Peter and James and John Jesus was transfigured to become the Lord of the Spirit as well as Lord of the Scriptures. There were many prophets besides Elijah in the history of Israel. Elisha was the disciple of Elijah, anointed by Elijah. One day Elisha was jeered by a group of street kids who yelled at him: "Go away Bald Head, Go away Bald Head." Elisha turned around and cursed them and two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty two of the children. Strange things have been done in the name of the Spirit of God—in Bible times and in our own times. If Christ is the Lord of the Spirit he is the one by whom we are to test the spirits to see if they are truly the Spirit of God.

Elisha showed a spirit of righteous anger towards the children. Righteous anger is a spirit that says in effect "They deserve whatever they get. They have done things that are wrong, Damn them, fire them, teach them a lesson, let them live on the streets and sleep under bridges, They deserve whatever they get. To Hell with them."

Righteous anger—a common spirit among human beings, but a spirit that often does not measure up to the standards of Jesus' Spirit.

Jesus can be transfigured for us when his Spirit takes precedence over the spirit of righteous indignation or any other spirit, or any other law, or any other social values, or any other philosophies that attract our commitment. Jesus might ask Lee Iococca: "Does my world really need so many new cars? He might ask Dale Carnegie: "Is it more important to be socially successful and win more influence than it is to be faithful and keep your integrity?" Jesus might ask Sigmund Freud "Do you really think the inner world of thoughts and feelings, dreams and fears has no room it for God's Spirit?" And Jesus might ask Karl Marx: "Is money really the most important and powerful force in human history? What about faith and hope and love?"

What does Jesus ask of the people whom you and I see walking and talking with him on the top of the mountain of Transfiguration? Are we listening more to the voice of Jesus or more to the others? Has Jesus been transfigured yet for us?