

Matthew 17:1-9 **“The Transfiguration”**

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Hymn: Breathe on me, breath of God <https://youtu.be/M5keJHZdWYM>

The age of space, like most new ages that come, carries with it a vocabulary all its own. Words like “lift off”, “countdown”, “deceleration” would have sounded like silliness to an earlier generation. Nowadays this kind of language is commonplace because we hear it and read it regularly. The recent lift-off of Space X to the International Space Station used all of these words just last week. The term “re-entry” is another such word which will be used in the not so distant future when some of the astronauts (another one!) return to earth.

Scientists tell us that it is one thing to put humans into space, but it is quite another to return them safely to earth (as the Space Shuttle Challenger showed us all too horribly). Scientists remind us that earth’s atmosphere consists of a film of vapour and gas which increases in density near the surface of the earth. When a spaceship re-enters the atmosphere it faces the hazard of fantastic heat; and the faster the craft descends the more heat it encounters. John Glen’s re-entry capsule for example encountered temperatures of up to 50,000 degrees F, nearly five times the temperature of the sun’s surface!

The problem of re-entry is complicated further by the fact that the spaceship must enter a “corridor” of earth’s atmosphere that is only seven miles wide. If it misses the “corridor,” the forces of gravity and heat will be too much for either human or materials to endure. Both would be demolished. All of this means simply that,

in space travel, the problems of re-entry are deep and complicated, and the best scientific minds of our day are constantly working to deal with these problems.

There is also a “re-entry” problem in the realm of Christian living. Consider for example, the problem of “re-entry” that faced Peter, James and John after their breath taking experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. High on a mountain (we’re not sure which one) the Master revealed to his three closest friends precisely Who he was, and what He intended to accomplish. They were privileged to see not just Jesus honoured by His Father’s voice (“This is my son, with Whom I am well pleased, listen to Him”) but to witness his fellowship with Moses and Elijah in a “cloud like” vision. It was as close to Heaven as the three had come and quite understandably it left them filled with wonder and a desire to stay there forever.

There are times, and I wish there were more, and I wish that everyone experienced them, when the Spirit comes close to us. Maybe it was at a Christian camp, or youth group event, maybe it was a special retreat weekend with your church, maybe it was in worship itself, when the hymn, or the prayer or the minister’s message for the day touched our hearts deeply and we “felt” a sense of the “Other”. God has moved among us and we feel ourselves transformed for a time into a higher place. I’ve felt it, I know others have as well. These are precious times, they are important times for our faith. For those who come to faith in Jesus for the first time there is often a profound and physical sense of the love of God over you. And then, as it always comes, there is a time of “re-entry” back to the regular life. And then comes the “pressure” to re-conform to the way you were before the “transfiguration experience” or “time with God” event happened. Like you lived in one world with the Lord, and had to come back to the real world of the day.

But Jesus was forever reminding his disciples that they were citizens of two worlds; they may have been living in one world, but they belonged to another. This is the language of faith in Christ. We live in one world, but we belong to another. And Jesus intends that it is from the world of His Father that we must draw our strength and inspiration to live in this world not as unchanged and unaffected by our mountain top experience, but as entirely transformed and living under new management. In other words, our Lord’s solution to the “re-entry” problem, our Lord’s way of relating the world of the Spirit to the world at the foot of the mountain, was *to take the world of the Spirit with Him, and to allow it to transform the world at the foot of the mountain*. This is why his next words to his disciples informed them that they were now “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”!

Jesus does not intend for us to be unchanged by our mountain top experiences or by our “re-entry” into life. He intends for us to be those who live in this world by the Spirit of our heavenly world. We are to be salt and light, those who bring life and flavour to the world in which we live today. May the Lord bless you as you

bring life to this world in His name. Peace be with you, Rev. John

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the memories of Peter, James and John that led to them recording the story of Your transfiguration experience. Lord, was it as wonderful for You as it was for your friends? Did you know they would never be the same after that night?

Lord, we thank you for the memories that we have of the times when your Spirit has touched us, even briefly, and left us breathless and profoundly moved by the moment. Lord, like Peter and James and John we too want to stay in the moment, or on the mountain, forever. But that is not where You would have us live. There is a world that is lost that we live in as salt and light because of You. May your grace and love be in us as we live out our calling to be salt and light and may we never forget the preciousness of the moments of transfiguration that have given us a glimpse of Your glory. Bless us Lord today with Your presence. Amen.