

# The Transfiguration

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Date: 22 March 2020

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So friends, we are in week four of a series called Into the Wilderness, Finding Jesus in the Wastelands and the Mountaintops. And I don't know if you've noticed, but I think all of us have now been thrown into the wilderness. All of us have now been thrown into unknown, new, bizarre, weird, unprecedented places, and we are in a new kind of wasteland. Over the past three weeks, we've talked about the testing of Jesus. Jesus being sent out to the desert, out into the wasteland, and going toe-to-toe with the devil himself. And so week one, Becky talked about our appetites and how they can, they were formed for our good, but they can be used for our evil. Week two, Angela talked about making Jesus perform for us, how oftentimes we will put ourselves into the story of Jesus in the wilderness, and we will put ourselves in the person of Jesus, as if we are the ones who have to go toe-to-toe with the devil. And Angela challenged us by saying, what if we're the devil in the story? What if we're the ones who are always trying to make Jesus perform? Week three, Pastor Richard talked about ambition, both good ambition and holy ambition. And let me give you a preview of where we're going. In weeks four through six, we're going to talk about the transfiguration this week and next. And so we're going to do some comparing and contrasting of Jesus in the wilderness and Jesus going to the mountaintop and being transformed. On April 5th, it's going to be Palm Sunday, and so we're going to talk about the transfiguration and the cross. And then on April 12th, it's going to be Easter Sunday, and it's going to be probably a weird Easter, because we're all still going to be streaming, and we're going to be far away from each other. But we can still celebrate the resurrection and what Jesus is up to today.

So that's where we've been. That's where we're going. What we're going to do now is we're going to read some scripture. So if we were all here together, I would have introduced a new habit for us, which is to stand up for the public reading of scripture. I'm still going to encourage you to do that. So if you're in the room, there's a few of you, you're going to go ahead and stand up for the public reading of scripture. If you're in your homes, if you've got kids with you, if you're by yourself, go ahead and stand up. My friend Brandon talks about how when a bride or when someone is getting married and they come to the center aisle, everybody rises to attention. And we're doing the same thing for scripture, for God's word for us. So we're in the book of Matthew, chapter 17. If you've got a Bible, you can flip it open, you can turn it on, or you can just follow the words on the screen. This is the book of Matthew, chapter 17. This is what it says.

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And there Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. And 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. And while Peter 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. And when the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. Get up, he said. Don't be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You can be seated. So we have been talking about wilderness. We've been talking about wastelands. We've been talking about these hard, difficult places and how we often find ourselves there. And maybe we're supposed to learn something. Maybe we come out the other side changed in some way. And I want to continue on that theme because wilderness is a little bit broader, a bit more expansive than maybe what we're used to hearing. And we're going to talk about specifically wilderness in the Old

Testament. Wilderness is a theme that shows up again and again in the Old Testament. It's a place where people, groups of people, individuals, solo, whatever, find themselves. And big things

happen in the wilderness. So I just want to run you through a couple of examples. Genesis chapter 16.

We have the story of Abram and Sarai. Abram is told that he's going to be the father of many nations, but he hasn't had any kids yet. So he takes things into his own hands. He has a baby with his wife's maidservant. His wife Sarai gets mad. And so we pick up the story here in Genesis 16. It says, Sarai mistreated Hagar. And so Hagar fled from her master. And the angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the wilderness. And it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And so Hagar runs away.

[ 4 : 52 ] She finds herself in the wilderness. And that's where the angel of the Lord shows up. It's where God comes and speaks to her and gives her promises, reaffirms her own calling, her destiny, the destiny of her child. This is where God shows up. Let's keep going. Exodus chapter 3. Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. Moses, at this point, he has been brought up as a prince of Egypt. He's killed somebody. He's now ran away, found a wife. Now he's a shepherd.

So he's tending the flock of his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to, listen, the far side of the wilderness. So not even the wilderness, but like deep into the wilderness.

And came to Horeb, which is Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. And listen, there the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. And Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. Moses' burning bush vision of God, seeing God's presences in the far side of the wilderness. Exodus chapter 19. This is after the 10 plagues and the 10 commandment movie and all of that. It says, on the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt, on that very day, they came to the, you guessed it, wilderness of Sinai. And on the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning. And with a thick cloud over the mountain, pay attention, clouds are also important, thick cloud over the mountain, a very loud trumpet blast, and everyone in the camp trembled.

And so Moses has led the Israelites past the Red Sea, deep into the wilderness, to the mountain of God, Mount Sinai, sometimes called Mount Horeb. And there the Israelites encounter the living God.

Now, this story continues on for a bunch of chapters in Exodus. So we're still at Mount Sinai, we're still in the wilderness, and it says, Moses said, now show me your glory. Moses has had this experience with God where he's getting the Torah, the law for the Israelites, and Moses is getting a little presumptuous. And he says, show me your glory. So the Lord, he always says, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you. I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence, but you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live. There is a place near me where you will stand on a rock, and when my glory passes by, I'll put you in the cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. And so Moses is in the wilderness, he's on the mountaintop, he wants to see God, and God says, kinda, but I'll hide you in a rock before I do it. One more thing, 1 Kings 19, Elijah. Elijah has had this wonderful encounter where fire, moving Yahweh is the one true God, but now the king is after Elijah. He wants to take his life, so Elijah runs far, far away. And Elijah went a day's journey into the, you guessed it, the wilderness. And he traveled 40 days and 40 nights until he reached, there it is again, Mount Sinai, or Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Lord said, go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.

[ 7 : 54 ] So wilderness, an important theme in scripture. It's where people go and find God himself, to be in the very presence of God. We can learn a few things from these passages. Number one, we can be led to the wilderness, or we can get there by accident. We can be led to the wilderness, or we can get there by accident. Either one is fine, God will use it, whether you meant to get there or not. Number two, wilderness is both the wastelands and the mountaintops. We often think of the mountaintop experiences as the ones that we want to get to, as the ones that we want to concoct and make happen on our own. We put together worship sets, and we put together sermons and conferences so that we can create mountaintop experiences. But in God's view, it's still a version of wilderness. Because once you get so far up the mountain, the air gets thin. Number three, God tends to show up in the wilderness.

wilderness. The very place that maybe we don't want to be is the very place where God is. So that's the theme of wilderness in the Old Testament. Take all of that in mind as we now turn our attention back to Matthew 17 and what Jesus is doing with his disciples. It says in verse one, after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high

mountain by themselves. Now remember, we're still in the wilderness. It's a mountain, but it's a high mountain. It's a wilderness. It's a place where nobody else is. Jesus is going to do something special and unique with just these three folks.

And he wants it to be a place where no one else can get to. It's wilderness. Now, high mountain, that maybe should ring a bell from our past three weeks of preaching. Because if you look back at Matthew chapter four, we see this, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain. So the devil, when Jesus was being tested, takes Jesus to a high mountain and tries to tempt Jesus, fails, but tries to tempt Jesus with power and approval and all those things. Now the tables have turned and Jesus is going to take his disciples up to a high mountain, but not to tempt them, not to test them, but to show them something true about himself. Verse two continues, and Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word is metamorphosize.

He is transformed. Jesus is a caterpillar and now he's becoming a butterfly. Jesus is transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his clothes become as white as light. Now, what's the transfiguration about? Why is Jesus doing it? What is the purpose, the meaning of this? If you were to go online and start googling around, you would find some answers. So Christianity.com has to be trustworthy with a name like that. This is what they say about the transfiguration. So the transfiguration of Jesus Christ was a powerful demonstration of his divine nature and manifestation of his glory, which Jesus possessed prior to coming to earth in the human body. So if you're not familiar with like some Christian theology, the idea is that Jesus has always existed, that he always was God, and at some point in the incarnation, he was born of Mary and was God and human at the same time. And what the transfiguration is doing is briefly taking away that human fleshly veil and showing Jesus in his full divinity. That's what this is basically saying. There's another quote from the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia. It's an encyclopedia. It's got to be trustworthy. This is what it says. This dazzling brightness which emanated from his whole body was produced by an interior shining of his divinity. This is what I want to talk about tonight though. The transfiguration is not about Jesus's divinity. I'll say it again. The transfiguration is not about Jesus's divinity. Now why do I think that? Let me give you some reasons. Probably the most obvious one. The one that we kind of glanced right over comes right out of Matthew 5. So backing up about 12 chapters, Jesus is giving his famous Sermon on the Mount, and he's talking about the people of God. Talking about his followers. Talking about what their role is meant to be. And this is what Jesus says, Matthew 5 14. He says, you, not supposed to point a finger at a camera, but I'm going to do it.

[12:23] You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others. Now we know that Jesus is the light of the world. Gospel of John, if you're familiar with that, talks about that a lot. But Jesus actually says that you, people, followers of Jesus, created by God, are the light of the world. Interesting. Let's keep going. Matthew 13 talks about this. Is it still Jesus talking? He's talking about the return of the Messiah. And it says, then when the Son of Man comes, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

When the kingdom of God appears in its full glory, in its full manifestation, the people are the ones that shine. Now Jesus isn't making this up. Be fine if he did. He's God. He can do that.

But he's not. He's actually quoting from an Old Testament book from the Hebrew scriptures called Daniel. Daniel chapter 12 talks about the kingdom of God coming. It says this, there were going to be a time of distress such as not happened from the beginning of the nations until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake. Resurrection stuff. Resurrection is going to happen. Some to everlasting life.

Some others to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise, listen, listen, listen, will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. Now, this means that when God comes in his kingdom glory, resurrection is going to happen. And the shining and the brightness and the beam like stars in the sun is not language talking about God, not talking about Messiah. It's talking about God's people. They are the ones who are going to shine like the sun. Okay, transfiguration, Matthew 17. Just a couple verses before, this is what Jesus says to his disciples. This is Matthew 16 verse 28. Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led him up a high mountain.

So what the transfiguration is trying to show is that God's kingdom is showing up. And if you were a Jew, if you were growing up in those times and you're looking forward to the kingdom of God, you knew some things to look out for. Things like

Daniel chapter 12. When the kingdom happens, there's going to be resurrection and the righteous will shine like the sun. God's people will shine like the stars. Now, some of you still are convinced that this is not about Jesus's divinity, that this is about people. So I'll give you one more little proof. If we look at the Luke version of this story, so there are four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all share some of the same stories from different perspectives using different words. And if we look at the Luke version, he also tells the story about Jesus leading some disciples up a high mountain and being changed before them. And this is what Luke says. He says, as Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes become shining white.

[ 15 : 48 ] And two men, Moses and Elijah, listen, appeared in glorious splendor. So if we think that transfiguration being shining and white and dazzling and pretty and going from catechlear to butterfly, is about Jesus's divinity, then why on earth are Moses and Elijah shining too? It's not about Jesus's divinity. This is rather a picture of what humanity is meant to look like. The transfiguration reveals God's intention for every human being. I'll say that again. A transfiguration reveals God's intention for every single human being. When we make every one of Jesus's miracles about his divinity, then we give ourselves excuse after excuse to not do the things that Jesus did. I'll say that one again too. When we make every one of Jesus's miracles about his divinity, then we give ourselves excuse excuse after excuse to not do the things that Jesus did. To not live the life that Jesus lived, to not say the things that Jesus said. We just make it like, well, he's God, only he can do that, so I'm not going to bother. But this is not what Jesus has called us to. If we see the transfiguration not as about his divinity, but as rather about God's intention for every single person, then all of a sudden we can become much more aware of our own potential, of what God wants for every single one of us. And we are called to some crazy things, some mighty, mighty things. Just John chapter 14. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I'm going to the Father. And we look at John 14, Jesus saying this to disciples, I'm going to do greater things than Jesus. And we think there's no way, that's not possible. He's God, I'm not, I can't do those things. But if we make everything about Jesus's divinity, of course we think we can't do it. But if Jesus is rather the picture, the example, the model of what every human can be like, then all of a sudden our calling seems much higher. First John chapter 2 says this, whoever claims to live in Jesus must live as Jesus did. And so when Jesus goes up that mountain and is changed before the disciples' eyes, it's showing what every human is capable of, what every person created by God can look like. First John chapter 3, dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he truly is. I neglected to choose the scripture reading for the worship set earlier this evening. And so Jessica had to do it for me. And I don't, I don't know where she got it from, but it was perfect. Nailed it. I told Jessica that my negligence was used for good by the Holy

Spirit as usual. So that's good. And what was the passage? Ephesians 4? Who read it? 5. Thank you. It says this, Ephesians 5.8, for you were once in darkness, but now, and this is one of those passages that like I've misread for years. You were once in darkness, but now you are in the light? No. For you were once darkness, but now are light in the Lord? Live as children of light.

The transfiguration shows us God's potential for every single being, God's intention for every single human person on the face of this planet. And when we make it about Jesus's divinity, then we're letting ourselves off the hook. N.T. Wright puts it like this. He says, humanity itself is a glorious thing.

And Jesus says, perfect humanity provides the model for the glory which all his people will one day share. C.S. Lewis puts it like this. He writes, there are no ordinary people. You've never talked to a mere mortal. Nations and cultures and arts and civilization, those are mortal. And we have felt that like never before this week. And their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals that we joke with and work with and marry and snub and exploit. Immortal horrors are everlasting splendors. Friends, the transfiguration shows us what life can be like. And not just that we would be like shining little, I don't know, Edward Cullen vampires or something like in the sun. Rather, that we are glorious things created by God. And that we have the potential to look like Jesus and to be transformed into the image, into the being, into the character, into the likeness of the Son of God.

So let me conclude with just a few implications. And I think these would be great conversations to have with your partner, your family, your kids, your neighbor, six feet apart. Somebody talk these through. Three implications. Number one, this is going to sound a little woo-woo, but like you should go into a mirror, look at it, and say,

I am the light of the world. Some of you are going to think that's the weirdest thing you've ever done. But it's true. Jesus said it. You should believe it. Look into a mirror and say, I am the light of the world because that's how God sees you. You were once darkness. You are now, Ephesians 5, not in the light.

[ 21 : 38 ] You are light. If you are in Jesus, you are the light of the world. So what's the implication for that? How does that change how you view yourself? How does that change your own desire for self-love and self-care and being able to care for yourself in a meaningful way so you can go out into the world and look and do and be something beautiful? Number two, you have never met a mere mortal, to quote C.S. Lewis.

You have never met someone who God did not intend for everlasting splendor. You have never met someone that God did not intend to look like the transfigured Jesus. And so how does that change our interactions with people and neighbors and enemies and loved ones and everyone in between? If we've never met anyone who God did not intend to look like a glorious, shining being? And certainly the way I talk to people on the internet should change. Certainly the way I talk to people on Slack should change. Certainly the way I talk to people on the highway should change. Certainly everything about my interactions with everybody I know should change. Number three, the wilderness may be the very place where you meet God. It may be the very place where you discover who you truly are.

All of us are in some form of wilderness right now. And many of us are in a place of deep wilderness. We're like Moses and we've gone deep on the other side of it. And so we're dealing with loneliness and we're dealing with despair and we have plans that were canceled. We had things that we wanted to do, people that we wanted to be with, and they're gone. What if that wilderness was a place where God wanted to meet you and say, this is who you really are in me? So those are the three questions I would ask you to think about. What does it mean for you to be the light of the world? How does that change your perception of yourself? What does it mean that you've never met a mere mortal? How does that change your perception of others? And what if this season, no matter what season you're in, is a place where God himself wants to meet you? And I invite the worship team forward as we pray together.

Father, almighty and everlasting God, we thank you for the person of Jesus Christ who did perfectly show us what it means to be God, but more than that, perfectly showed us what it means to be human.

[ 24 : 18 ] Father, may we see the example of Jesus and may we follow it, may we recognize it as not something so far off and so distant that we could never possibly attain it, but rather as your intention for each and every one of us. God, I pray for everyone watching, for all the networks and families that we represent. Give us hope, God, in a time of despair. And may that hope come first and foremost from a church that wants to look like you. We pray these things in your name. Amen.