

Men Whose Eyes Have Seen the King - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being transformed into the same image as Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, and that this transformation is a lifelong process that involves suffering, trial, and beholding Christ.

Duration: 48:05

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-2, Matthew 17:5-6, Matthew 17:9, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 4:7

Topics: "Seeing Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of Christ as the perfect pattern for believers to follow. He explains that Christ was tested in every aspect of life and through suffering, he perfected his character and obedience. The Holy Spirit is then described as working in believers to progressively manifest the character of Christ. The speaker also expresses concern that his teaching may not have been fully lived out by those who have received it, emphasizing the need for teaching to be practical and integrated into personal experiences with God.

Transcript

We just look again, not more than a glance at Matthew chapter 17, part of this account of the Transfiguration. And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light.

Verse 5, in the middle, And behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him. And then, in the second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3, at verse 18, We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit, or, margin, the Spirit which is the Lord.

Of course, the link between the two passages is in one word. Unfortunately, slightly obscured in translation in your King James Version. It is our change into the same image.

In the Revised, it is our transform into the same image. The Revisers certainly have made a slight improvement on the other. And perhaps with a fine sensibility, sense of fitness, they avoided putting the true translation, made this slight change into transformed.

But the fact remains that the same word is here, as is used, what happened on that mount, and was transfigured before them, and that is the same word exactly, as is here translated, alternately changed and transformed. Therefore, the exact rendering here would be, are transfigured into the same image, so that the children of God have a transfiguration as the Lord Jesus had. His was an event, an act, a thing, shall we say, as of a moment.

We don't know how long this lasted, but it was at a time point. Ours is a long process. Indeed, from the beginning to the climax of our Christian life, this is what is supposed to be going on with us.

We are being transfigured into the same image from glory to glory. That at once is very challenging to us, to our Christian history, life, progress. There may be, and I am always conscious of being on very delicate ground in making a comparison between the Lord Jesus and ourselves, or anyone else, there may be something different about him.

It has been said that his transfiguration was the outshining of his deity. I have no quarrel with that. If that were so, all right.

Doesn't affect the issue at all. But then again, we have reason to believe that it was something other than that also, that it was the perfecting of his humanity, and the outshining of the glory of an absolutely perfect man. We do believe, we feel we have ground for believing that something like that was God's intention for all men when he said, let us make man in our own image.

And when there is so much about the glory and the glorifying, which is the consummation of our pilgrimage, surely there is something in the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus which is not altogether isolated from what the Lord intends for us. And I put my emphasis upon that this afternoon, that is the point. Earlier in our meditation on this matter, we said that.

We said that the glory which took hold of him, and emanated from him, filled him, transfigured him, was the glory of his personality as utterly satisfying to God. His personality as utterly satisfying to God. Because God's satisfaction is always the ground of glory wherever you look in the Bible.

Wherever you can find in any place that state of things with which God can be well pleased, you will find glory there. The glory fills and breaks forth. That is supremely the case in the Lord Jesus.

And that is why this point, the voice from heaven attested him, marked him out and said, in whom I am well, completely satisfied. I repeat then that it was the glory of his personality as the Son of Man, or almost in association with that. He spoke about his coming again as being the coming of the Son of Man in the glory of the Father.

This, so far as his perfecting was concerned, was not something that took place on the mount. The mount was the mark of the consummation of his perfecting. I don't mean the matter of sinfulness or lessness, but the perfecting of his character.

Perfecting of that inner man which we call personality. Personality is a strange thing, an elusive thing, something you can't get hold of but you cannot mistake. It is the person within, the man inside.

Now he, in that inner life of his, had worked out this matter, this whole matter of God's pleasure, God's satisfaction through his life. There was the divine approval at his baptism in similar words, indicating probably that his thirty years were approved, certainly indicating that the step that he was now taking right

out into public with the cross accepted for his baptism certainly implied that. That was approved, that brought the word from heaven, my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

But now this period between the baptism and the cross is concluding, and what a period, what a period. One writer says that he was tempted in all points, like as we, prior then into a short three years, a few months. Yes, hell tested him, the world tested him, in a sense heaven tested him.

He was tested, he was put through it in every detail, and won through. He, in that time, made profit through suffering. Learning obedience by the things which he suffered in that time brought that inner life, that inner character.

That inner personality to perfection. Now you'll see why I'm saying this at the outset. It's not new to you, it's not fresh, I don't suppose it strikes you anything very, perhaps interesting.

But it's basic to everything else, you see. That's the point. Now when the apostle takes hold of that very word and says, we all, I'm glad he uses the middle word with it's so comprehensive meaning, we all, we all, talking only about himself and his fellow workers, brothers in the world.

Talking about the Corinthians and all believers, we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory, the glory of the Lord, our transfigured into the same image. He takes hold of that same word and brings it over to all saints. A making of that which had been perfected and completed in the Lord Jesus.

A process, a continuous process in the life of believers. He is thus saying, what had been completed and perfected in that one has now to be reproduced in us progressively. That perfection, that character, that personality, the personality of the Lord Jesus, perfected, brought into us, developed in us, manifested through us.

If you don't like the word personality, it sounds too technical, too like character. Now the first thing to say about this, which is of course so helpful and encouraging, is where the apostle finishes this statement. As by the Spirit who is the Lord.

Dear friends, all that we know about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, all the effects of the Spirit's advent and indwelling, let us recognize this as supreme. The inclusive work of the Holy Spirit, that is whatever he does, all that he does, his manifold activities, the inclusive work of the Holy Spirit is one thing, to reproduce the Lord Jesus in a people. Now when again you pray about the Holy Spirit and you speak about the Holy Spirit, remember that, remember that.

The Holy Spirit's supreme and comprehensive object is to reproduce the Lord Jesus in his character, his personality, his perfected manhood, humanity, in a people. This is very testing to you and to me. We really contemplate it and it has challenged my own heart to the point of making me very hesitant to speak freely.

The test of the Holy Spirit having his way in your life and mine, the proof that he is there and he is doing his work, is our transfiguration, is our transfiguration. In other words, is what Christ is in his perfect humanity becoming more and more true in our natures, in our hearts, in us and others. The real test of a Spirit-governed life lies here, the progressive, the progressive increase of the character of Christ.

We are going to meet one another as really Spirit-governed lives, men and women. What we must meet in one another is the Lord Jesus. And that must be not just today and then it stops, not at one time in our life, there it ended, but going on, going on all the time.

That is, that is the test and the proof and the challenge of the Holy Spirit's presence and the Holy Spirit's liberty to work. You see, the Apostle says that here, just in the sentence earlier, where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty, there is liberty. He is, of course, making a comparison or a contrast with the old dispensation of the law, Moses coming down with the law.

There it was all compulsion, there it was all so, you must and you must not, bondage, fraud and limitation, suppression, repression, and anxious, fretful, striving. Now, all that is gone and the Spirit, the Spirit comes and has his way. And whereas in the case of Moses as representing that order of things and that dispensation, he had to put a veil over his face, not to hide the glory, but to hide the departure of the glory and pretend, pretend, and you know it was a dispensation of pretending on the outside.

That's what the Lord Jesus was up against in his day with the scribes and the Pharisees, called them hypocrites, that is, pretending to be something that was not true. It was all put on the outside. The glory which had gone was not seen, this veil of pretense.

But all that, says the Apostle, has gone with Christ, the Spirit has come and come within, and now we are set free from all that sort of thing, it's spontaneous. The Spirit is Lord, it's liberty, it's spontaneous, it's free, it just happens. Don't have to make, believe, strive, fret, worry, and suppress, it happens if the Holy Spirit is there.

And what happens? What happens? The glory of the Lord, that is, the perfection of his manhood begins and goes on to express itself in us spontaneously. That is the life of the Spirit. It's the life of the Spirit.

It is normal, something subnormal, if it's not up to that, and something abnormal if you're putting on that. But the normal is that the Holy Spirit, having his way, does this one thing, makes Christ more and more manifest in our mortal bodies. So that is the heart of this.

Now, it's the work of the Holy Spirit, that's the point, the moment, the work of the Holy Spirit. That helps us very much. The Holy Spirit has taken into his own hands responsibility for this.

Dear friends, you and I have not to strive to be Christ-like. With all due respect for Thomas A. Kempis, it is not an imitation of Christ. It is not an imitation of Christ.

Something that we try to do. It is this, that it is as natural to a true child of God, who is not putting something definitely in the way of the Holy Spirit, it is as natural to the true child of God to become more Christ-like as it is to breathe. Now, you don't stop to discuss the question of whether you're going to breathe, how many more breaths you're going to take, and whether you will breathe now or save it up till later on, and make a theory of it.

You just do it without thinking, and it's as natural as that, because the Holy Spirit is our breath, is our life. We set that over against the many difficulties that people find to be Christ-like. Now, what is said here is these two things.

First of all, there is the pattern, perfect, complete, Christ-glorified. The Holy Spirit comes to work that pattern out progressively in the children of God, in believers. Comes for that purpose, to take it over and to do it.

Now, we are not allowed to say how he shall do it. He chooses his own way. That leads me to this next thing.

Here again, the unfortunate break in the narrative by chapter numbers. The apostle goes on. We have this treasure in vessels of fragile, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.

Now, listen. How is it going to be done? How are these vessels of fragile clay going to contain and increasingly contain and manifest this glory of the character of Christ? How? Not in the way that we would think, perhaps, or choose. We are pressed on every side.

We are complex. We are pursued. We are smitten down.

We are always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus. We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. Death worketh in us as rather a disconcerting, discouraging view of things.

But that's how the Spirit does it. The fact remains, whether we like it or not, that it is justice being pressed on every side that presses us into something more of the Lord Jesus and presses something more of the Lord Jesus into us. To gather it all up, all these things, it just means this, that you and I, you and I would never come to this, this transfiguration, only through these trials and these adversities.

These are the Holy Spirit's means of our perfecting, of our growth in Christ. It's a pity that it has to be like that. A great pity that we can't be Christ-like without being put into difficulty and trouble, trouble and suffering, but that's just it, you see.

It's like that. It's like that. Give people absolute exemption from all kinds of difficulties and troubles and see what kind of people they are.

Self-centered, self-sufficient, self-assertive. You know, people who are never ill have very great difficulty in being sympathetic with the sick and understanding. They have to at least make a great effort to be patient with them.

That's why I like doctors to be ill sometimes. Perhaps that's the wrong way to say it. We ought not to like anybody to be ill.

But you know, sympathy, understanding, patience come to us along this line of experience and painful experience. It's a matter of character, isn't it? And so the Apostle puts alongside of our transfiguration all these difficulties and adversities. And in effect he says, this is the Holy Spirit's material.

These are the Holy Spirit's instruments for working Christ into us. It works out that way if we are not rebellious, if we don't allow bitterness to creep into our spirit, it works out that way. So suffering and trial, difficulty and adversity under the government of the Holy Spirit will affect us.

But then the Apostle checks us here. He says, we all with unveiled face beholding as a mirror. The revisers have some difficulty here as the translators of the authorized version had.

And they have not settled a question, a difficulty. Here's the matter, they did not really know what Paul exactly meant. So they put it in these different ways.

What we have in the text and what we have in the margin. Did he mean, did he mean we are a mirror, the image is thrown upon us as a mirror and then rebound? Is that what he meant? Or did he mean that Christ is the mirror and we are looking into him and he is reflecting the glory of God? I think that's what he meant. He spoke about the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I think the word face there is just another word for mirror. I agree with you, Greek scholars, this isn't the same word. It's just another word in meaning.

It's in the face of Jesus Christ and we behold him as in the face of Jesus Christ. That's what the Apostle is talking about here. And the word beholding is a strong word.

It's not just taking a look, it's fixing our gaze. Fixing our gaze, that is what the New Testament means by behold and beholding. We all fixing our gaze upon Christ.

Upon Christ as he mirrors in his own person the glory of God, the satisfaction of God, the mind of God in perfection. This fixed gaze. Point is, you and I must contemplate the Lord Jesus in spirit and be much occupied with him.

We must have our holy of holies where we retire with him. We must have a secret place where we spend time with him. And not only that, in given and special seasons, but we must seek as we move about ever to keep him before us.

Looking at the Lord Jesus, contemplating him, we shall be changed into the same image. The Holy Spirit will operate upon our occupation. You become like that which obsesses you, which occupies you.

Isn't it true? You see what people are occupied with. You see the obsessions of people and you can see their character changing by their obsession. They're becoming like that thing which is obsessing.

They're changing. They're becoming different. Something has got a grip on them and they can never think about anything else, talk about anything else.

Changing their character. Now Paul said, for me to live is Christ. For me to live is Christ.

Being occupied with him. It's a long word to use, but nevertheless it would be a good thing if he became our obsession. Our continuous occupation.

At any rate, beholding, steadfastly fixing our gaze upon him. The Spirit changes us into the same image. Now one further word and we close for the present.

You notice the context of these words in 1 Corinthians. The apostle here is mainly concerned. You notice the context of these words in 1 Corinthians.

The apostle here is mainly concerned with the effect, the effect of the life of believers in this world, on this earth. He calls it this ministry. This ministry.

Now perhaps that word needs transfiguring for us. Here, note, note, that when he says we all, beholding, we all. He covers all believers by that word ministry.

It's all believers that he's speaking to about ministry. And here is a tremendous difference. Our technical, professional conceptions of the ministry are mostly external.

That is, you give a title. You more or less put on a uniform. You are the minister.

It's all put on the outside, therefore it can be artificial. I don't take offense at that, anybody, but leave it. What he is saying, what the apostle is saying here, the ministry is not something that you put on, it's something that comes out.

It just comes out. We are all, you, my brothers and my sisters, are called to the ministry. You are called to the ministry.

Any special application of that word would only be permissible in the New Testament in measure, not in kind. In measure. That is, some have a special ministry, a special ministry.

And they are God's ministers in that particular way, with that particular measure. It is not that they are a class called ministers and other people are laity, not a bit of it. Such ideas are foreign to the New Testament.

Here it is that we all, beholding, have the ministry, resultant from the beholding. We are therefore all called to the ministry. It's the effect of our being here.

Now what is the apostle saying about this? He's saying so clearly that the personality and the ministry must be one. How certain that is, but how very meaningful. The ministry must not be something, preaching, teaching, and all those things which are called ministry.

Done, and the man is different. The person is a part. What Paul is saying so emphatically here is this.

That when you meet a truly spirit indwelt and spirit governed man or woman, what they say comes out of their life, is a part of their life. Their teaching, their teaching can be seen to have been brought into their history and experience. It is known when that man or that woman seeks to teach, to minister, to say something to someone else of a Christian character, that has come out of some secret history with God.

Something that the Holy Spirit has done in them. Their ministry and their character are identical. That's very important.

It's very important indeed. It is indispensable. That is why the Holy Spirit is so meticulous about character, so careful about the personality, about the inner man, the inner life.

Why, if we do, if we are under his government, Mark you, it doesn't apply to everybody who ministers and is in Christian service, but if we are really under the government of the Holy Spirit, if we in word exceed, exceed what is true in our own lives, the Holy Spirit will soon take us up on that, soon take us up on that. And in effect we'll see to it that we are brought abreast of our teaching. Things kept in correspondence and balance.

Have you ever said something, the Holy Spirit checked you up and said, is that true of you? Is that true? Or is that something you said? Like that. It's very important. We wouldn't really have it otherwise, would we, if we were honest? We want it to be like that, but you know, this is something that involves the glory.

That's the point. It involves the glory. There is such a thing as the power of the Holy Spirit in the glory.

We were speaking of it yesterday as impact. The impact of the transfiguration upon those men. And the impact of a singing of the Lord by anyone afterward.

But it will register, of power. Now you and I perhaps covet and crave as much as anything that there shall be impact in our lives. There shall be power.

We shall register. That we shall not just leave things as they were. We do crave, do we not, that as we go on and when we have passed on, something will have been left of an impress by either our ministry or by

our presence.

That it shall remain. Yes, impact is a very good word. Well now, you see, that is bound up with the glory.

That is the glory. It registers. Something that remains.

It remains. Things may come. And for a time the glory may be veiled.

But it is something there that will come up again. I confess to you, and yet there is some understanding because we are all made alike. But I confess to you that I have had difficulty in understanding how three men, and one of them in particular could be on the Mount of Transfiguration, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and that one amongst them by revelation of the Father could declare Jesus the Son of the Living God.

How that man could deny Him with oaths and kisses. How they all could forsake Him, flee for their very lives. Well, if we didn't know our own natures and hearts, we would not have any understanding of that.

But it is a bit difficult, isn't it? And yet it was only a veiling for the time being. It came up afterward. It came up with Peter as we know.

Many years after at the end of his life he referred to we were with Him in the Holy Mount. It remained. It was something that they did not forget.

There was a temporary eclipse which God forbid should never be true of us. Perhaps we will never have to go quite the same way as they went. But the thing is there.

What I am saying is that a permanence, a permanence about this matter, an abiding effect of really, really having Christ revealed in the heart, and by that inward revelation of Him, a manifestation of His character, something that remains. Now we cannot say that, can we, of all that is called ministry. It's a sermon, an address, something given and it passes.

And it goes on like that in rota week after week and week after week. But that of course is why we are saying this. We don't want it like that.

We really do not want it like that. What we should come and do should be just passing things. Don't leave any abiding now.

There is an impact bound up with this. And so it's not a matter of what we call the ministry, something external. The ministry with Paul is nothing less, nothing other than what is true of Christ coming out of the life of His servant, of His people.

Being there and coming out. And it is possible, of course, or will not. See, as our brother said this morning in his word to the children, we can be looking and criticizing the servants of the Lord and taking account of natural features and occupied with that.

Well, all right. We are disposed to do that sort of thing. We may miss something.

We really may miss something. But if at all we are without prejudices or preoccupations and all that kind of thing, criticisms, looking, looking for what is not glorious, if we are disposed to see what there is of Christ, it ought to be possible to see that the profession is supported by a possession. These words are backed

home by experience.

The teaching is not a teaching only. It's something that has been wrought. Now, dear friends, it's got to come back to that.

I'm tremendously exercised about this in these days, wondering whether I haven't done too much teaching. Not that it hasn't been real, but that it hasn't become real and living as it should be in those who have received it. And that is a proper kind of concern and exercise.

We may seek always that the teaching should be as practical as possible and brought down to human life very closely. But, of course, we can't make people into what we say. But it should be our exercise, and this is why I'm saying this, it should be the exercise of every one of us that that should not just remain some truth, some teaching, something that we hear, something that goes on in certain places, something that we know in its phraseology and verbiage.

But, if that is God's truth, it should be real. It should be our life, it should be our character. For only so shall we have this ministry.

Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, even as we have obtained malice, have we renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, its character through words, and no words without character. And the character is the character of the Lord Jesus. May it be more true.

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