

The Horizon of Christ - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Transfiguration represents a climax and a new phase in Jesus' life, marking a transition from the way of the cross to the glory of God's Son.

Duration: 48:23

Scripture: Matthew 16:13

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses various significant moments in the life of Jesus that are connected to the divine purpose of God. These moments are likened to mountain peaks, starting with the birth of Jesus, followed by his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. The focus then shifts to the transfiguration, where Jesus reveals his heavenly nature and receives acceptance and testimony from God. However, the speaker acknowledges that after such moments of revelation and commitment, there often comes a period of darkness and doubt, where the initial vision seems to fade and the circumstances become disconcerting. The speaker emphasizes the importance of holding onto the initial revelation and not discarding it, as it is a test of its authenticity and will eventually come back with even greater glory.

Transcript

Especially for those who join us for the first time in this conference, let me say that we are in these gatherings moving within God's eternal appointment of His Son, our Lord Jesus, as the horizon, the utmost range of all His activities and His interests, to comprehend everything in His Son and to make His Son the nature and character of everything. This was established before the world was. This divine decision was the cause of an upheaval first in heaven, a revolt and a rupture which brought its repercussions into creation to man and had its fruit there in the rupture in earth between man and God.

God commenced in history, moved on the line of His Son in spiritual principle and law. The Old Testament is a record of God so moving. On the one side by discipline to undo the mischief, on the other side to constitute according to His own mind.

The Old Testament closes in failure. People chosen, dealt with, with that divine purpose failed God and then in the fullness of the times God sent forth His Son, made in the likeness of sinful flesh. The embodiment of all His thoughts and intentions and the expression of His own nature to which He will conform all those who come into the way of the Son, the way of a complete repudiation of all rebellion, of all departure, of all insubmission and insubordination, way of the Son, utter capitulation to the will of God.

God will proceed with His twofold work in a new spiritual nation in this dispensation, not an earthly nation this time, but a spiritual nation. We call it the church or the New Testament calls it the church. Leave the title for the moment and see it as this new people chosen by God to be the vessel in which all His thoughts as summed up in His Son are to find expression and in the end the whole creation to manifest the nature of His Son and to be entirely governed by that character.

That in brief, in very few words, is what has occupied us now for these two days. We have been latterly looking at some of those epochs in the life of the Lord Jesus which are related to this great purpose of God. They are like a series of mountain peaks.

The birth touched by heaven, the baptism touched by heaven, the temptation in the wilderness reaching far beyond the wilderness and out into the cosmic realm of the prince of this world. Tonight we come to the next peak, the transfiguration. We must note that from each of these peaks the next one comes into view in related sequence.

That is, when you contemplate the birth of the Lord Jesus, its meaning, purpose, nature and association, it is not difficult to foresee that the time will come in the life of that child when a great act of renunciation, a great act of committal, a great act of utter yieldedness to the will of God on redemptive lines will come about. And so surely the baptism is related to the birth as the sequel of the birth. The baptism is His full and complete committal to the will of the Father.

From that point, by the descending spirit upon Him, to abide upon Him, to rest upon Him, He was bound as a bond-servant to the will of the Father. It is not difficult to see from that peak of the baptism that it is all going to be very definitely challenged. The sequel to that committal is going to be conflict, and not only personal conflict but cosmic conflict.

The whole world and its surroundings are going to be involved. Kingdoms of this world and their ruler will become involved in this committal, the baptism. And so in quite natural sequence from the baptism we move to the temptation in the wilderness.

The issue of that we read was then Jesus would turn full of the Holy Spirit, in the power of the Spirit, turn from the wilderness, take up His work to which He had there committed Himself to the will of the Father. The battle for which He had initially gained a victory, was not the end of the battle. Impressive that the end of that temptation is then the devil leaveth Him for a season.

You can almost see the devil defeated, crestfallen, looking over his shoulder and saying, but I'll be back again, I'll be back again. So it was many times right to the hour of His death on the cross. Now we come to the Transfiguration, the next mountain peak.

You will like to have 16th and 17th chapters of the Gospel by Matthew open before you. You want to check me up as I go along. There it is.

Transfiguration is not an isolated incident in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is a link in the chain and it must be seen from the standpoint of the temptation. You cannot understand rightly and sufficiently the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus unless you do view it in the light of the temptation in the wilderness.

Because, for one thing, the Transfiguration was a climax. It was a climax and it was also the beginning of a new phase. There is a very real and true sense in which at this point, so far as He Himself was concerned, it could have been the end of the journey.

He could have gone through into glory. Come back to that again in a minute. This is the climax of all that has preceded.

It's Christ glorified. That is the climax. The end.

That is the ultimate issue of birth for which He was born. Of committal for which He so utterly surrendered Himself. Of trial and temptation, conflict and suffering of soul.

Climax had to be glory. So far as He Himself was concerned. And if it had been just Himself, that would have been the end of His earthly story.

I was saying you have to see it in another context. Connection. Beginning of a new phase as well as the end of one.

New phase is not only personal. It's a way that He need never have gone for Himself. Well, let us look at this.

It's a great pity that these chapters are divided into 16 and 17. Only for convenience, but certainly very inconvenient for understanding. They ought to run right on without any break.

And it is to be noted that the three writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all record this and all put it at the same point in the life of the Lord Jesus and all give the same associated features. They don't do that about everything, but in this they do. And there is therefore something to take account of in that thing.

You notice how the thing begins. It begins in verse 13. Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is, or that I the Son of Man is? They said some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, Son of the living God. Everything for the future hung upon who Jesus was. That is basic to everything.

Key to everything. And He knew it. And until that was established by Him, and that was settled, He couldn't go any further.

Who Jesus was. Who Jesus is. Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? There is a very, very deep reason for that seemingly strange question.

No one else in the human race dare talk like that. What would you think of any man? Who do you think I am? Who do people say that I am? What do you say about me? Well, we just wouldn't tolerate it, would we? No. But He could do it because He knew how much hung upon their recognition of who He was.

Everything. God had made Him and He knew it. The horizon of everything.

It's very necessary, therefore, for those who are to be within that horizon to know the identity, the character of the one who forms that horizon. Something has got to be done that is going to survive a terrible ordeal. You'll see that in a minute.

And the only thing that will survive the ordeal through which they were about to pass and through which all of us will have to pass is the real inward knowledge of who the Lord Jesus is. An adequate knowledge. A clear and definite knowledge.

Do you have any doubts about Him? We'll not survive. We are not clear on this matter. It may sound foolish to be talking to Christians like this.

But you'll see in a minute that there was very, very good reason for talking to these very disciples. The point is at the moment that He had to challenge them on this matter as to His person. Had to draw out from them a committal.

A confession and a committal. Simon got it by revelation. Thou art the Christ, Son of the Living God.

Very well. Very well. Notice what follows immediately.

The next step. From that time Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed that they be raised up. And Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall never be unto thee.

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Nothing like that could happen to you. Now here is a terribly disconcerting thing.

On the part of the Lord. He has drawn out this confession. He has established Himself and His identity with them as the Son of the Living God.

And now in this most disconcerting way right at that point He begins to talk about going to Jerusalem and being treated in this shameful way and being crucified. It's quite clear that the very pronouncement itself challenged the confession. Went right to the heart of this declaration Son of the Living God into the hands of men to be treated like this.

How could they? How could it? It was a terrible shock to these men. Make no mistake about it. Such a shock that Peter lost his morale.

Took him and began to rebuke him. Such a shock that Peter at that moment fell out of the Lord into the way of the devil. Jesus turned and said to Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan.

Thou art a stumbling block unto me. Now mind this, not the things of God but the things of men. What a fall.

What a shock it must have been after having made a confession like that to have this stunning statement about Jerusalem and what would happen there. After six days Jesus take it with Him Peter, Peter and James and John, his brother bringing them up into a high mountain and here was the transfiguration before them. How gracious.

How merciful. How redeeming. How saving.

How confirming. Shall we pause to put something in parenthesis? Something we said this afternoon in another connection.

How often it is when a committal has been made to a challenge from the Lord a surrender to His will to His way to His purpose that submission and that acceptance of the will of God a position has been taken a stand has been made and we have declared ourselves declared ourselves how often it is that there comes something so soon afterwards that is absolutely disconcerting so that the vision, faith all that all that which

came from the open heaven flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee but my Father which is in heaven that which came by way of an open heaven seems to have come into eclipse now the whole picture changed glory and wonder and ecstasy and suffering and sorrow and disappointment and loss and we would say tragedy tragedy was it all true? was it all right? now dear

friends this is very true to spiritual history it's true to individual spiritual history and it is true in the history of the church and the churches God gives a revelation a vista a presentation he opens up a heavenly revelation concerning his son and there is a reaction of acceptance and embracing and committal of testimony and then there comes a phase and a period the features and characteristics of which are so difficult and so dark that you wonder if ever it was the truth if ever it really was God's truth at all not accepted some illusion something which for the time was very wonderful but now is it right? is it all right? have you gone that way? a time when you seem to be just disintegrated torn to pieces you don't know what to say you think it's this is all wrong my dear friend

this is all wrong, it can't be right it's so contrary to what we were led to expect altogether other than the vision that we embrace the wonder glory of the Lord Jesus why broke upon our hearts as from heaven and we committed ourselves and now and now has it all gone? the dark clouds gathered over it you asking questions as to the past whether it was right that it was true that it was of man or just yourself your own response every revelation of the Lord Jesus will be sooner or later subjected to a tremendous test and a trial a trial of seeming eclipse and you can doubt it all now what is the point of the transfiguration Calvary is not the end the cross is not the end the darkness the shadows are not the end the testing and the trial the suffering the eclipse of everything is not the end

the end is glory the end is magnificence the Lord Jesus just puts the transfiguration or God the Father puts the transfiguration there I don't know that the Lord Jesus went up into the mountain knowing that he was going to be transfigured he just withdrew into the mountain one of the writers says it was for prayer with his disciples and while he was there he was transfigured but God took this in hand to show that although there must be this cave of the cross this terrible thing represented by Jerusalem all that was centered in Jerusalem that's not the end it is not the suffering and the shame and the reproach that is the horizon of God it's the glory of his Son his Son glorified on the way to that you may go by Calvary but the end is transfiguration and do not forget dear friends that

this transfiguration of the Lord Jesus has a counterpart in believers Paul writing his second letter to the Corinthians said we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says the same thing in other words we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor bringing many sons to glory Peter so many years after this wrote his letters he he's got through the darkness now through the clouds through the shadows got through all the perplexities he said and this voice we heard when we were with him in the Holy Mount and there came from the excellent glory such a word sees it all clear now not be clouded by the cross transfiguration is there not only as an isolated incident or epoch in

the life the son of man it's there as representing the horizon of God for all his redeemed ones transformed and transfigured and glorified with his glory let us believe let us ask the Lord to strengthen us to believe that if all that to which we did commit ourselves the full belief that it was heaven's revelation to us has passed into the shadows and the clouds surrounded with questions difficulties seems no longer to be so gloriously real as it once was there's a meaning in this face but the end the end is not this face the end is the glory the mountain top of transfiguration Christ transfigured is the horizon of God's redeemed creation

nothing less than that whatever may intervene in the meantime but here while that ultimate horizon is brought into view as glory the way to its

realization is the way of the cross it is the way of the cross it cannot be otherwise but this is something to note when you or we really do get something from God it really does come from God if it could truly be said the flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my father if it is not just a mental apprehension which will not stand up to the oddity it is not just an acceptance it is not just an acceptance of an ascent to some doctrine, some truth which will not carry us through but if it can be said truly if it is a fact that the thing came from God to our hearts right from God the Father something is done something is done and there may be a period of dark eclipse deep sorrow and suffering and perplexity and bewilderment but that something done will survive will come back again

look at Peter as representative he got it from the Father the very story of Jerusalem thoroughly threw him off his balance disconcerted him broke him to pieces and then the fact that the awful story isn't it we read it this afternoon that story in the court the denial the denial the forsaking, it's a terrible story the ordeal is a terrible one cross is something most devastating to the natural man but something has been done put within that is going to come up again out of that depth survive and Peter will forget the intervening darkness and the Mount of Transfiguration and his own spiritual position will be linked and this voice we heard when we were with him in the Holy Mount and there's no reference at all to what came between Jerusalem he's himself on that spiritual mount or on that

mount spiritually now you read his letter his letter full of glory full of glory full of grace something's been done this is why the cross must come in or one of the reasons why this devastating experience must come to find out and prove that God has done something in us if you and I can go back upon anything that we in the past have called a revelation from God something shown us by the Lord and we can just throw it overboard and write it off and say well that belongs to the past it doesn't hold good any longer let it be understood that that never came into us by revelation of the Holy Ghost you cannot you cannot depart from something that God has done in you no matter what the trial, the testing yes the devastation a pain perhaps long drawn out you can't depart from it, it's something

done it's yourself become a part of yourself you cannot say well I've left that now or I've gone beyond that now or that is something that I once thought was very good but I can dispense with that now nothing that comes from God even though it might be in first stages elementary things from which you have got to move forward nothing nothing in the future cancels out cancels out anything that God has done so I see this man crying with his committal and confession thou art the Christ son of the living God and then I see that same man broken, shattered devastated and then I see that man afterward transfigured the thing that was done on that mountain has perhaps not in his consciousness during the ordeal has nevertheless survived the ordeal that's how it must be oh do take that to heart do

take it to heart it will be the test of reality whether it has been real or imitation artificial something less than revelation into our very being can you give it up can you let it go can you discard it can you write it off can you write it down and God almighty never reveal that to your heart he can it will hold fast though it may all seem to have gone it will come back with glory this is the foundation which is laid deeper deeper than our human frailty deeper than Peter's human frailty say all that you like about Peter and his weakness and breakdown and all that yes it's all true all true and Peter would be the first to confess and admit it that something has been done deeper than human frailty thank God if it were left to our strength it would be a poor lookout for the truth God must

do something that is stronger than all the forces in us and outside of us to try it now then we close and you can see in the last phase of this transfiguration the great principle coming up again the great principle of the horizon and its realization we have said that had it been for the Lord Jesus himself personally and alone there could have been his way into glory other men on lesser ground had gone into glory the two men who appeared with him on this mount Moses had not seen death had been gone into glory Elijah was caught up in a chariot of fire they went in but they never made anything perfect they went away with their work still imperfect they had their personal reward of glory all right I'm good to have a personal reward of glory but at that point when he could have gone through

and you know that some translators translate that word who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despised the shame some translated who instead of the joy set before him endured the cross whether the translation is correct or not the fact is there at that very point when on his own account by his own merit in his own right he could have gone through glorified son of man he turned round from the glory and came down you know what was there a world in suffering in sorrow, in misery a devil devil torn world renounced the glory again said no to the open door into a heaven for himself and in effect said I can't accept that alone, I must bring many sons to share it with me I must go down for that's why I came God's horizon is not myself individually or personally, it never is

with any of us God's horizon is mankind to be brought to glory so he came down accepted the cross accepted all that shame and that sorrow that ignominy we are more amazed every time we read the story of his trial and death all that accompanied it and then think this is God incarnate this is the lord of glory this is the prince of life this is the eternal son of God it's beyond us why? simply because he knew that he had not come for his own glory he had come for the glory of his father which was to be manifested in the mankind that he had made God had made man and God is not going to be satisfied to have all men as they are he'll only be satisfied when men are glorified men can refuse to be glorified and accept God's horizon can refuse Christ God realm and sphere and miss it all you and I

dear friends are called says the word unto his eternal glory that is where the father will be satisfied and having committed himself to the will and pleasure of the father he must come down from the mount of all personal satisfaction that's the principle the servant spirit for the father for man the servant spirit shall we be born with it we repeat when the great end is finally reached and all things as the word says are gathered together summed up in Christ God reaches that end where everything is not only horizon as a range but as a character by the Lord Jesus the chief the chief feature and characteristic of heaven will be this abandonment to serving one another and serving that's what it'll be I like to think that it's like that that it'll be like that everybody, everybody thinking of

what they can do for somebody else without any thought of what they're going to get out of it either praise or exaltation or reputation reward or anything else just abandon to the interests of one another all the time for the Lord's sake as unto the Lord this is foreshadowed in the word we're told to begin that now everything as unto the Lord in the church as unto the Lord well may the Lord bless His word

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