

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ministers to spiritual pride. Witness, "I fast twice in the week," while the mortifications prescribed by God humble one to the dust.

Immediately following the warning as to being led astray by anyone "voluntary in his humility" comes the awful list of Divinely prescribed mortifications, to be observed, not merely at stated seasons and then abandoned, but ever to be practised until "Christ, who is our life, shall appear."

"Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry. . . . But now ye also put off all these—anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication—out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. iii.).

These are the mortifications that the Lord has commanded. The fast that He hath chosen, is it not to loose the bands of wickedness and "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," thus truly to deepen the spiritual life, "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"?



The Transfiguration.

BY THE REV. F. W. M. WOODWARD, B.D.

THE Transfiguration is little dwelt upon in the New Testament or in ecclesiastical commemoration. There is truth in a remark made by J. H. Newman that "to many persons this portion of the sacred history may have appeared without object or meaning." Nevertheless, as he proceeds to maintain, it has a real and permanent significance. In discussing its significance it will be convenient—

- (1) To study the context ;
- (2) To treat the narrative as marking an epoch in the lives of the chosen witnesses and of Christ Himself ;

(3) To draw out its permanent message to the Church.

1. The Transfiguration is found in all the three Synoptic Gospels at the same point in the narrative. Despite all that has been urged against its historical character, it seems to be in its right place, and to be a narrative of an incident that actually happened. The account has internal marks of genuineness, and stands in an intelligible relation with what precedes, and also with what follows as Raffaello perceived when painting his picture of the Transfiguration.

Tracing the connexion with the preceding narrative, we notice that the incident is at the close of the Galilean ministry, termed by Professor Sanday "the period of culminations." The faith of the disciples, notwithstanding the lapse of the multitude and the opposition of the Pharisees, has become explicit and intelligent. "Thou art the Christ" (St. Luke adds "of God," and St. Matthew, "the Son of the living God"). "From that time," as St. Matthew significantly says, began a new teaching. Jesus ("the Christ," St. Matthew, κ and B) predicted that the Son of man (the title occurs in all the Synoptists) "must" suffer, and be raised again the third day. This teaching encountered the prejudices of the disciples, and the sternness of the rebuke administered to St. Peter shows how essentially it was bound up with the Messianic vocation. As the three Evangelists relate, the same law applies to the citizens of the kingdom. Taking up the Cross is the condition of discipleship and the gateway to life. All the Synoptists close the prelude with the saying, "Verily I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (St. Mark ix. 1; St. Luke omits "with power"; and St. Matthew says "till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom"). The narrative of the Transfiguration is connected with this saying by a note of time—"after six days" (St. Luke, "about eight days"). Archbishop Trench says that nearly all the patristic expositors and medieval interpreters find in the Transfiguration the fulfilment of the prediction, though they regard it as a prelude and prophecy of the

coming in glory rather than the coming itself. It is difficult to deny all connexion. In any case the Transfiguration follows directly upon the doctrine of a Messiah suffering and victorious over death. This, as St. Luke's narrative says, was the theme of conversation in the Transfiguration itself.

Turning to the sequel, we observe that, whilst St. Luke relates they told none of the things they had seen, St. Mark and St. Matthew inform us that this silence was due to a charge to keep the matter secret "until the Son of man be risen again from the dead." St. Mark says they questioned amongst themselves what the rising from the dead should mean. He and St. Matthew report the conversation about Elijah and the prediction that, as the forerunner had suffered, so also should the Son of man. This looks like a point of contact with St. Luke's account of the conversation of Moses and Elijah. In all the Synoptists follows the healing of the possessed son. St. Mark notes that the multitude was amazed at the mighty power of God (*τῇ μεγαλειότητι*, the word used of the Transfiguration in 2 Pet. i. 16). Then follows another prophecy of the Passion and Resurrection. At this stage St. Matthew inserts the incident of the half-shekel. All three tell the story of the child placed in the midst, and the teaching about true greatness in the kingdom. St. Mark and St. Luke tell the story of the man "that followeth not us," and then St. Luke parts company with St. Matthew and St. Mark. The latter gives the promise of reward to those who give even a cup of cold water, "because ye are Christ's," and reports what measures are to be taken to avoid causes of offence. St. Matthew's narrative is parallel, but he adds the parable of the Lost Sheep, and a long passage on the duty and nature of forgiveness. At this stage there is a break in the narrative marked by a journey to Judæa.

In the sequel there is again the doctrine of a Messiah suffering and victorious, and again teaching that the kingdom has a standard and temper quite different from the world. Whether, therefore, we look at the prelude or the sequel, the chief thoughts are of self-sacrifice and victory through sacrifice in the case of

the Messiah and His followers alike. In the light of the contest the narrative should be interpreted as a representation of "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow."

2. We next ask, What epoch does it mark—(a) in the teaching of the disciples, (b) in the life of Christ Himself?

We notice that the incident occurs precisely when it was needed—viz., at the beginning of teaching about the Messianic office and kingdom which ran contrary to all the inherited prejudices of the disciples. How obstinately they clung to their prepossessions, and how thoroughly their prejudices were undermined, can be seen in the subsequent portions of the Gospels and the earlier chapters in the Book of the Acts. The firm hold that the Apostles have in the opening part of the latter work on the indispensable nature and meaning of the death of Christ was not gained in a moment. It was the result of continuous teaching, giving them a new ideal of the Messiah's vocation and kingdom. After He was risen again, it would burst upon them in all its glory and power. This teaching our Lord began to give explicitly at the time of the Transfiguration. In connexion with it the Transfiguration served a twofold purpose—to confirm the faith, and to correct and spiritualize the beliefs of the disciples. (i.) The faith of the disciples had taken definite shape in the confession that He was the Christ. Meanwhile they were puzzled by the new teaching. The Transfiguration represents the Divine seal and sanction of their faith, given to the most receptive and most representative of the Apostles. They possessed henceforth "a reserve of certitude," which would have its effect on the remainder of the Twelve. This confirmation was given not to those who most needed faith, but to those who possessed it most, and assured them, however strange it might appear, that the Messiah had a real glory and a real kingdom. From this point of view the Transfiguration is a stage towards the teaching of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus of Nazareth, from first to last, in humiliation as well as in exaltation, had the glory of the Word Incarnate. (ii.) In the next place the Transfiguration was intended to correct the disciples'

beliefs and spiritualize them. The Messiah they had confessed was seen to transcend the chiefs of the older dispensation. He is represented as the Mediator of a perfect and final revelation, and declared to be the Son of the Psalmist (Ps. ii. 7), the Beloved of the prophets (Isa. xlii. 1), the Prophet of the Lawgiver (Deut. xviii. 15). As St. Jerome, quoted by Archbishop Trench, pertinently remarks: "Noli tria tabernacula quærere, cum unum sit tabernaculum Evangelii, in quo Lex et Prophetæ recapitulanda sunt." Further, the glory of Messiah is not adventitious. It is in accordance with spiritual laws. "As He prayed," says St. Luke, "the fashion of His countenance was changed." Last of all, there is a revelation that this true glory was His sacrifice of Himself in the conversation recorded by St. Luke with Moses and Elijah: "They spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." "Vocabulum valde grave," says Bengel, "quo continetur Passio, Crux, Mors, Resurrectio, Adscensio." Christ crucified might be a stumbling-block; nevertheless His "exodus" was a theme of absorbing interest to the transfigured Master and to the saints that appeared in glory. The day was to come when it would be seen to be not merely the condition of exaltation, but an exaltation in itself: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

Thus, to the chosen witnesses the purpose of the Transfiguration was not only to confirm, but also to correct and spiritualize, their faith.

When we have to consider the place the Transfiguration holds in our Lord's life and ministry, we have to remember that we are treading on holy ground. We cannot analyze the movements of this inner consciousness, and can but follow such clues as are given us.

The voice of approval recalls the voice heard at the Baptism and the voice heard in Holy Week. It is from one point of view the Divine ratification of His ministry and life. As we know from other passages, the mission in Galilee, disappointing as it might appear, nevertheless represented a real victory. It has been well said that He could not be the Messiah

of popular expectation, because He would be the Messiah of the Divine vocation. At the close of the Galilean ministry He rejoiced in spirit (St. Luke x. 21), and poured out the words of thanksgiving contained in St. Luke x. 21, 22 (*cf.* St. Matt. xi. 25-28), following the thanksgiving, according to St. Luke, with an assurance of blessing to those who had been permitted to see these things, and, according to St. Matthew, with an invitation to the weary and heavy-laden. Of this prayer and the unique relation it implies with the Father, the Transfiguration and the voice from heaven are the counterpart. As He glorified the Father, so the Father glorified Him. His probation had been accomplished, and the Transfiguration is the sign of the Divine approval.

Further, the Transfiguration is a preparation for the Passion, when He was to offer Himself as the perfect Victim. On the eve of the Passion He prayed, "Father, the hour is come : glorify Thy Son"; so possibly on this occasion, when His thoughts were full of the Passion, He prayed the same prayer as He began to approach His priestly work. In that case the Transfiguration would be the answer in outward symbol that this prayer was heard. So Ruskin writes in a very beautiful passage quoted in Dr. Farrar's "Life of Christ" : "When, in the desert, He was girding Himself for the work of life, angels came and ministered unto Him ; now in the fair world, when He is girding Himself for the work of death, the ministrants came to Him from the grave—but from the grave conquered—one from that tomb under Abarim, which His own hand had sealed long ago ; the other from the veil into which he had entered without seeing corruption. There stood by Him Moses and Elias, and spake of His decease. And when the prayer is ended, the task accepted, then first since the star paused over Him at Bethlehem, the full glory falls upon Him from heaven, and the testimony is borne to His everlasting sonship and power : 'Hear ye Him.'"

It is fitting that the Transfiguration should have significance, not only for the chosen witnesses, but also for Christ Himself,

of Divine approval and preparation. He was no docetic or monophysitical Christ. His faith was real, His prayer was truly human, and the strength asked was genuinely vouchsafed. To quote the words of Archbishop Trench : "He did not merely manifest to others that glory that should one day be His, but became more fully conscious of it Himself, and that He already possessed it, however He might voluntarily defer its full manifestation."

3. It remains to draw out the permanent message of the Transfiguration. It may be briefly stated as the glorification of life. This glorification was consummated in Christ Jesus, and it was consummated in Him that through Him it may be fulfilled in us. He had indeed from the time of His coming into the world the glory of the Lord Incarnate. It was the glory of the only Begotten from the Father. He had, to quote the words of Bishop Westcott, "the glory of one who represents another, being derived from Him, and of the same essence with Him." This glory He specially manifested from time to time, and in the Synoptic narrative the Transfiguration is such a special manifestation. What light does it throw on the nature of His glory, and what may we deduce thence concerning our own glorification ?

In the narrative of the Transfiguration there are the three ideas of sonship, sacrifice, and spiritual power :

(1) "This is My beloved Son" are the emphatic words of the Divine approval. The unique glory of the new covenant is the revelation of the Father through the Son. Upon this the eyes of the Church must ever be directed. It is the foundation of the theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Gospel of St. John. Whenever this is forgotten, what is characteristically Christian has vanished. If we ask why, the answer is that the sonship of the Incarnate Son, as depicted in the Gospels, expresses at once perfect apprehension of the will of the Father and perfect conformity with it. These guarantee the finality and truth of the revelation. Of this the Transfiguration is a symbolic representation. It is the outward expression of the inward reality of the glory of the Son.

(2) The second idea is sacrifice. It suffuses the whole context and appears in the narrative itself. In all three Gospels it lurks in the epithet "beloved" or "elect," which points at once to the suffering servant of the Lord, and St. Luke specially mentions the deace that He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. His glory was the full apprehension of the Father's will. The specific object of that will was redemption by sacrifice. To work this redemption was His Messianic vocation. Thus, His death was the revelation, not only of His absolute self-sacrifice, but of the Father's love.

(3) The third idea is power. The word used of His death suggests triumph over death. This triumph is the outcome of the life in which prayer, as St. Luke suggests, was the transforming power, and death was but the condition of greater power. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The final manifestation of power is the Advent, of which the Transfiguration was the prophecy and prelude (2 Pet. i. 16).

He was transfigured that we might be transfigured. In the high-priestly prayer He says of His disciples: "The glory which Thou has given Me I have given unto them." They in Him are transfigured, and find all things transfigured. As is the Master, so are His servants.

(1) The disciple is no longer a slave, but a son. The spring and the power of the Christian life is sonship. The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but the friend or son has the spirit of intelligent apprehension. The saying of St. Anselm is true: "*Testamentum vetus quod datum est per servum retinet in eo vilitatem servitutis, novum vero quod datum est per Filium possidet honorem filiationis.*"

(2) Sonship is realized in sacrifice. "He that loveth his life shall lose it." The Messiah who gave His life in sacrifice has suffering servants who give themselves in sacrifice. In this consists the significance of the narrative following the Transfiguration. Thus the kingdom has the notes of service, humility, and love. By these are lives transfigured and hallowed with a Divine glory.

(3) Sacrifice, again, is fruitful, and ensures power and victory. This victory begins on earth, and is consummated by the resurrection. In prayer the Master was transfigured; so also we, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image" (2 Cor. iii. 18). We are transfigured by the renewing of our mind (Rom. xii. 2). Of this the resurrection of the body is the complete expression. "He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like (conformed) to His glorious body." With true insight the patristic writers saw in the Transfiguration a prophecy of the glory of the saints at the resurrection. Hence, St. Thomas Aquinas termed it the Sacrament of the Second Regeneration.

Sonship, sacrifice, and spiritual power form the glory of the Incarnate Son, and through Him our lives are glorified according to the same pattern. In them is the true glory of life to be found, and because of the unique debt we owe to Him for making this glorification possible, we can pray in the words of the collect for the Feast of the Transfiguration, in the American Prayer Book, "that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in His beauty, where, with the Father and the Holy Ghost; He liveth and reigneth ever one God world without end. Amen."



The Inspiration of the Church.

BY THE REV. A. E. N. SIMMS, B.D.

IT has been generally believed that the first band of Christians, assembled in the upper room in Jerusalem, set to themselves consciously and deliberately the audacious plan of the evangelization of the whole world. The boldness of these inspired fishermen has been cited in reply to the objection that the idea of effecting a corporate reunion of modern Christendom, entertained by some enthusiasts, is confronted with insuperable difficulties. But this theory reposes upon the a priori belief that Christ