

# THE TRANSFIGURATION

Outline of a sermon preached in Chickering Hall, by the Pastor of the Church of Christ (Scientist) Boston.

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And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. Mark ix. 2—9.

**The** Transfiguration belongs to Christianity; its interpretation, however, belongs to Christian-Science alone, for nowhere save in Christian-Science can we gain the understanding that will unfold its glories. Theology, as we have heretofore understood that term, has never been able to bring within our grasp the marvelous spirituality which belongs to this subject. Human learning and speculation are utterly inadequate to comprehend it, — in fact, any knowledge belonging to the five personal senses is at a loss when attempting to express it to men. It is holy ground on which, like Moses, we should put our shoes from off our feet.

The account of the Transfiguration is given in all the synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke), and what is not a little surprising is, the three authors not only give the same

facts, but relate them in almost precisely the same language. It is usually the case that, when called upon to tell of some event or deed in the life of the Lord Jesus, each takes his own way and style in which to give it; but in their account of this event, they seem to have lost all sense and expression of individuality, since they tell it in words which appear to be given unto them. How profound an impression it must have made on them, to take away their ordinary powers of speech, so that they are impelled to employ words which the Spirit imparts to them. Luke does indeed mention one circumstance which escaped the notice of the others, at least to which they do not refer. He tells us that Jesus went up into a mountain to pray, and that while praying, the fashion of his countenance became altered; thus showing that it was in this hour of Jesus' great realization of Spirit and its laws that this sublime manifestation came upon him. Mark, also, speaks of his raiment becoming white so as no fuller on earth could white it; and, while under the same spell-bound condition which held the others, he yet does impart to his account a certain artistic grace which is one of his noticeable characteristics.

Beginning our exposition at this point, let it be noticed that Jesus withdrew apart into a high mountain. What mountain was it? What useless attempts have been made to ascertain upon which particular mountain peak the Master was transfigured! The lofty, snow-capped Hermon, far to the north of the sea of Galilee, has been deemed by many to be the place where it occurred. Others again, reflecting that Jesus seldom went so far away from the abodes of men, have thought it very probable that it took place on Mount Tabor, which was in close proximity to the scenes of most of Jesus' sayings and doings. It follows, then, that no one really knows where the Transfiguration did occur. Does this not suggest a fact of some consequence to us in estimating its lessons to the world? The disciples, in narrating the events in the life of the Master, usually tell us where these took place, and quite often the time at which they occurred; but why this expressive silence here? — a silence so profound that it would seem the Holy Spirit had guided their withholding these minor details, lest in after times men should make pilgrimages to the spot and deify what could be only an accessory.

Doubtless, the Transfiguration did have a "locus"; but this is of small consequence beside the vital fact that its chief significance consisted in its taking place in the glorified consciousness of those who were exalted to be its witnesses. Let it be conceded that the Master did actually go upon some mountain elevation, as a concession to the needs of these three disciples who were still very material in their consciousness; but, suppose that some of our worldlings had been with them on that mount of transfiguration, would these same worldlings have been able to perceive what the three disciples finally saw? Certainly not; for what can mere altitude do for one whose thought is wholly gross and material? True, our human sense does say that there is uplifting, inspiration, in being taken to high altitudes; yet, the hour will come when it will dawn upon us that to be with Christ in the Spirit, is in itself a transfiguration-mount whereon to behold all the glories of earth and of Heaven.

Proceeding a step further, notice that he takes with him only Peter, James and John; while the other nine are not permitted to be the observers of their Master's exaltation. Why this omission? Does it not seem that some slight was put on the nine; had they no cause for grievance? From our standpoint of sense, it would certainly appear so. It does look, on the face of it, as a case not only of favoritism, but of extreme partiality. We ourselves would be apt to bitterly resent such treatment. Two things may be said in reply:

First — An oft quoted remark among Scientists — that he took the three who were nearest to his thought; the ones who would be most apt to see and interpret aright the true meaning of the glorious scene. In other words, he took those who had demonstrated the highest; for to have taken the others before they could have caught some glimpse of its real significance, would have been no real gain to them. They would have been so dazzled that practically he would have been without witnesses at all. Even the three he did choose to be with him, were at times utterly unable to understand aright what its real import was. Imagine the material Thomas to have been with them, he who so soon after that event was utterly skeptical about his Master having risen from the

dead — so much so, that unless he could put his finger into the print of the nails and thrust his hand into his side, he would not believe— does it look as though this well-meaning, but doubting, disciple was quite ready for the uplifting and revelation which took place on that mount of exaltation? Peter, James and John he had often taken on previous occasions when something demanded the presence of those who could be of real use as witnesses; as, for instance, at the raising of Jairus' daughter.

Second; The chosen three who did accompany him represent those qualities which the glorified man possesses; and so we may say that they were all there “in esse.” Look closer, and see what each disciple represents in himself? Peter, after his restoration, stands for earnestness, firmness, zeal, devotion and constancy; the cool-headed James expresses qualities of the glorified man such as solid sense, tact, experience, sagacity and wisdom; while John represents those qualities of intuition, spiritual insight and Christly Love, which are the very highest manifestation of man's nature. In this complete combination of qualities is to be seen the rounded, symmetrical expression of that which is to be manifested not only in these disciples, but also in every man when,— the mortal and material sense having disappeared,— the spiritual sense becomes disclosed in divine loveliness and beauty. In taking these three who had reached a point whence they could perceive what the transfiguration did signify, the Master really took not only the other nine but all mankind with him on that mount of glory. We ourselves actually were taken thereon; —not this sick, sinning, dying nature, but that complete, glorified sense of the real, immortal man who always was, is, and forever shall be. Humanity virtually went with Christ to witness the transfiguration, and these three disciples were the forerunners, the *avant-couriers* of our exaltation. The glorified man was seen by them later on in this transfiguration scene,— though its full significance did not wholly appear to them until after the resurrection, at the day of Pentecost.

Passing on, notice that the Master's raiment became white and glistening, while his countenance became changed before them. How are we to interpret this? This change, taking place before their eyes, is one in which they are beginning to catch a clearer view

than had ever dawned upon them. It is the person of their Master which they are still beholding, but in a new sense,— not in the old sense in which they formerly regarded him. Up to this very hour they had seen him as a man of sorrows; weary, footsore and subject to all the limitations of mortal man. Now they begin to catch a glimpse of something more glorious, something nearer the divine and exalted Being which their Master really was. Are they not also gaining a first glimpse of themselves — that is, of the glorified, the real man who was, is, and forever shall be? This is what they saw, and what we must see in this transfiguration-story. Yet, it is the personal Jesus which they see at this precise point, for they have not risen high enough to discover the impersonal Saviour. The impersonal Jesus will become more apparent later on in this history of man's true unfoldment.

This entire scene of the transfiguration, as it appears to me, is an unfolding in successive disclosures of man's real being. At this particular time in the narration, they had reached a middle plane whence they could look down upon what had, up to this hour, been their conception of the Master; while there was also placed before their vision the fact that there were still heights to which they must attain, ere they could understand all that it taught them; and this we ourselves must perceive, or we shall miss its divine import. There are successive stages of revealing throughout this marvelous event. *They must gain the highest sense of the personal man, before they would be enabled to discern the impersonal Man.* We must not mistake the manifestation at this precise point for what it is not. They have risen high enough in thought to perceive that all of their former conceptions of Jesus were misleading and false.

This suggests the very natural inquiry: How long was this scene of the transfiguration in taking place; that is, as we compute time? All that can be said is, that our conceptions of time have no value at all. Whether it consumed an hour or a month, the main point to know is, that it sufficed to work a complete change in their consciousness; that it sufficed to prepare them, as it did their Master, for the stirring events and severe trials

which, according to mortal sense, they were soon to encounter, so that, in spite of the ordeal of the crucifixion, they did not become permanently separated from their Master.

Proceeding with the account, there appear two celestial participants in the scene which occurred on this mount of vision. Who are these participants, and why are they here? The record tells us all we can know, until we ourselves have gone high enough in understanding to have every thing revealed to us. They are Moses and Elias, come to discourse with their Master on what was to be the crowning manifestation of his earthly career. It requires the highest Love and Wisdom to reveal what this is, so we will not attempt to portray it; yet we may dwell on two features of this visit to our Lord and Leader. Can we not see that Moses stands for the expression of Majesty and Power which, in its spiritual sense, the word Law so fittingly represents; while Elias, in like manner, represents the prophetic and inspirational element which Prophecy or Poetry should express? History and prophecy, the past and the future, unite in the sacred personalities of these two in a way that expresses the highest unity and harmony.

I have called them sacred personalities — but were they persons at all? Yes; in the ascending scale of unfoldment to these disciples, it seemed that they were persons; yet they are to reach a point, ere they descend that mount of vision, whence this false sense of personality begins to disappear. From beginning to end, it is a rapidly shifting scene wherein they go from height to height of spiritual perception. The Moses and Elias who are persons to us, just as at this point they were to the disciples, will finally disappear with everything which savors of the human and the material; and we shall discover that they are not material personalities, — that they are the embodiment of Law and Prophecy in the infinitely higher manifestations of the Spirit.

At this stage, there occurs something which has puzzled all who have ever attempted to explain it by the current theological methods of interpretation. We are told by these enraptured narrators that their eyes became heavy with sleep. Nothing has so perplexed me as this statement. The usual explanations have never satisfactorily accounted for this condition in which the three found themselves. Do men usually fall

asleep amid scenes such as this of the transfiguration must have been? How was it possible for the disciples to do so? What can its real interpretation be? The only one suggesting itself as any proper explanation, is the one which would occur to a Christian-Scientist, viz: they were passing through a heavy "chemicalization," so that they were unable at this point to apprehend all that the transfiguration meant. Its full realization did not dawn on them. They were overwhelmed by its significance; overcome completely!

They certainly were not asleep in the common meaning of that term; but were undergoing that spiritual transformation which must come to every one passing out of darkness into light. There must have been such a stirring up of "the old man" in them, that they were completely overpowered by it. All the errors of their past lives were coming to the surface: so that the lusts of the fleshly nature were beginning vividly to show themselves to their awakened sense. This blinded them to the higher significance of what was taking place before their eyes; but that they did emerge from it afterwards, and saw the higher lesson which this transfiguration scene contained, is made apparent by the last point which remains to be considered.

They have reached a plane where, on looking up, they saw no man but Jesus only; but who is the Jesus whom they now perceive? Is it the one seen at the commencement of the glorious unfolding? No; for to them that Jesus has disappeared, — or rather their former sense of that Jesus has faded away. They now are beginning to gaze upon the impersonal Lord and Master, — a higher manifestation of the Christ than had ever been disclosed to them. You remember it has already been declared that these three disciples went up onto the mount of transfiguration with no sense of their Master other than the human, material one, which is held by the world to-day, — the impression entertained by the religious world. Little by little this has faded out, until they reach a point whence they are beginning to catch a sense of him as he really is.

In the higher unfolding Moses had disappeared, Elias had disappeared; showing that Jesus alone remained to express the perfect idea, or conception of a complete, rounded, symmetrical man — the real man of God's creating who forever has existed.

In the divine individuality of Jesus, they beheld united their fragmentary sense of Moses and Elias; but in larger, more spiritual manifestation, so that they became better able to discern who and what the real Man is. The Christ now made manifest to their purified vision is shown to them to be the only begotten of God — the spiritual Man. Thus Jesus became the "elder brother," and "princely leader."

Out of many practical suggestions which could be drawn from this lesson, but one is offered. The transfiguration is for us, and for all mankind. Its significance is to impress upon our feeble, sick, sinning, dying senses that *these senses* cannot behold the real Christ. He is to be discerned only as we rise completely above the illusions of the material mind which is of the flesh. The Jesus of human speculation and human systems is not the Jesus who reveals the Christ of God. That Jesus is divine, perfect and immortal and he is the way-shower out of the mortal and sinful senses which the mind of man conceives itself to be. The transfiguration is taking place to-day, no less than it did eighteen hundred years ago. It is taking place in our own consciousness, if so be that, with eyes open to behold its illuminated meaning, we discern in the Christ therein revealed the Jesus who is revealing to us the only perfect, complete sense of manhood and womanhood. Thus it is, that the transfiguration becomes a revelation, an unfolding of the spiritual creation.