

MOODY'S LATEST SERMONS

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SERMON FIVE -

THE TRANSFIGURATION

It is a singular fact that John, the only one of the four evangelists that was with CHRIST on the Mount of Transfiguration, is the only one who does not give an account of it. Perhaps the reason is that the scene was so solemn, so impressive, and so holy that he could not bring himself to write of it. Peter, who was also present, barely mentioned it in his writings that have come down to us. His only reference to the scene is in his second Epistle, written many years afterwards, when he was an old man:

"We... were eyewitnesses of His majesty; for He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount."

There are scenes in our lives that we never like to mention in public. There are times when GOD comes so near to us that we feel that others won't understand if we tell them of it. I believe that the reason why CHRIST told His disciples not to refer to His transfiguration until after His resurrection was that the people would not believe that they had had such a revelation.

BEFORE AND AFTER

It is a good thing to see what happened just before this wonderful scene, and also what followed. In Matthew's account (16:24-28) we read:

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom."

Then He takes them up into the mountain, and the transfiguration scene follows. First, the cross, then the transfiguration, and after that, service, when they came down and found the boy

possessed with an evil spirit.

When GOD gave Moses the law at Sinai, there were thunders and lightnings, and the mount was altogether on a smoke because JEHOVAH descended upon it in fire. Whatever touched the mount - man or beast - was to be put to death. But here CHRIST took His three beloved disciples with Him, and was manifested before them in glory and peace.

MEN OF PRAYER

JESUS took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. Every one of the six men who met on that mountain was eminently a man of prayer. And it was while CHRIST was praying that His face and His garments were changed, and because shining as the sun and white as the light. Then there appeared and talked with Him two men, Moses and Elijah. Many of us have seen people whose very countenances have been changed after a season of prayer, and their whole lives have seemed to be transformed. I believe that is how Moses got his shining face when he had been in communion with GOD for forty days. We cannot be in real communion with GOD without getting more or less of that same glory.

When Andrew Bonar was in America, after Major Whittle had been speaking once on the shining face of Stephen, Dr. Bonar said:

"Did you ever notice that when the Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy against Moses' law, GOD lit up Stephen's face with the same glory that He had given to the face of Moses?"

When men are brought into communion with GOD, He will cause their faces to shine.

FAMOUS COUNCILS

There have been some famous councils in the history of the world.

I remember the excitement when Lincoln and Grant and Stevenson (vice-president of the Confederacy) and one or two others met on the James river at the close of the war to agree on terms. I was nearby at the time. The whole nation was breathless to hear the results of that conference, which would mean so much to a country that had already been wasted with years of bloodshed. Every newspaper was eager to find out what was to be the outcome.

I remember also the excitement in all Europe in 1878 when representatives of the different powers met at Berlin to adjust the Eastern question. The results of that council meant peace or war to all the powers represented.

Earlier in the century, Napoleon of France and Alexander of Russia met at Tilit, after a long and bloody struggle, to settle terms of peace and re-arrange the map of Europe. We are told that, jealous of each other's dignity, they must meet in mid-stream between the two opposing armies; so a gorgeous raft, richly carpeted and beautifully furnished, was built and moored in the river, and in the midst of these evidences of earthly pomp and with the eyes of all Europe upon them, the two monarchs met.

We can recall other critical councils in the history of the world, when the destiny of nations hung in the balance. But never was there held so important a council as this on the Mount of Transfiguration.

There was none of the glamour and grandeur of earthly councils; but the bare hilltop was lit up with the glory of another world.

No one was there whom this world held high in rank and honor; but Moses was there, who was greater than Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt; and Elijah, mightier than Ahab and all the priests of Baal; Peter and James and John, who were to be the founders of an organization that should embrace the whole world; and the Son of GOD was there, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The question discussed was not of peace and war between conflicting nations, but of peace between GOD and man, of reconciliation between Heaven and earth, of the opening up of a way for fallen man to return to His Father's home. Moses and Elias appeared and talked with CHRIST of "**His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.**" Matthew and Mark leave out that sentence, but Luke gives us the subject of their conversation. Men like to talk about what they think the most about, and these men evidently thought more of that event than of anything else that was ever going to take place upon earth. It was nine months before the death of Jesus, and they spoke of that; the shadow of the cross appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration.

ASLEEP

Peter and the others were heavy with sleep; but when they were awake they saw His glory and the two men that stood with Him. I have often thought that those three disciples represent the church of to-day. They fell asleep just before the glory burst upon that scene.

It seems as if we are coming near to the consummation of things: that the glory of the Son of Man is about to be manifested; and yet the bride is falling asleep, instead of watching for the coming of the Bridegroom. Then, as Moses and Elijah were about to depart, Peter said: "**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, not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear Him. And when the voice was past Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.**"

THREE DISPENSATIONS

We may say that three dispensations were represented on that mountain - the law, the prophets, and the Gospel.

When GOD called Moses to go down into Egypt to service, notice how hard he tried to be excused. He made one excuse after another. How many of you have been trying to excuse yourselves from doing what GOD would have you do?

Did you ever think what Moses would have lost if GOD had excused him and let Aaron, or Caleb, or Joshua, or some one else take his place? He never would have been on that mountain with CHRIST fifteen hundred years afterward. Didn't GOD reward him a million times over for all the hardships he endured in the wilderness? And yet here are men and women to-day trying to be excused from GOD's service.

Elisha was another man of prayer; a man who knew GOD intimately. Like Moses, he had been forty days alone with GOD. These two men probably knew more about GOD, and more about man, than anyone in their day or generation.

You remember how Elijah got under that juniper tree and wanted GOD to kill him. He was fleeing from Jezebel, and wanted to die. I imagine that when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration he said:

"Oh, I am so glad the Lord didn't answer my prayer, and let me die under that juniper tree."

The other three men, Peter and James and John, were to take up the work that CHRIST was to leave, in this new dispensation.

GREAT MEN NOT APPRECIATED

I can just imagine when Peter wanted to make three tabernacles, and keep Moses and Elias there, he would have said, if he had dared:

"I wish, Moses, that you would go down to Jerusalem and preach. How the city would be stirred!" A man has got to be dead about a thousand years before he is appreciated. Ask a man in Noah's day to name a great man, and he would say, "Enoch." Noah would have been nobody. Ask a man in Abraham's day who was the greatest man, and he would not have answered "Abraham," but "Noah." In Moses' day it would have been Abraham, in Elijah's day Moses, and in John the Baptist's day Elijah.

Here, on the mount, was a man that was to be used perhaps more than any man that has ever lived in winning people to CHRIST; and that man was Peter. But there wasn't a man in the city of Jerusalem that thought he amounted to anything. He was an unlettered man; but he knew the Lord JESUS. He thought that if he could only get Elijah and Moses to go down to Jerusalem and hold some evangelistic meetings; if Moses would only go down and thunder out the law; if Elijah would go and tell the people how the prophecies had all been fulfilled in CHRIST, how it would stir the whole city! Yet the man to do that mighty work was not Moses or Elijah, it was Peter himself. He did a greater work than Moses, a greater work than Elijah, a greater work in winning souls than even his Master, for JESUS said, "**Greater works than these shall he do.**"

GOD may use you more than anyone who has yet lived in your day. I believe that if we hunger and thirst for power in GOD's service above everything else. GOD will not disappoint us. The idea that others can be more used than we ourselves has been the great hindrance to the church in all ages.

NO INTRODUCTION NEEDED

Notice, too, that these men had not lost their identity. Moses had been gone fifteen hundred years, and Elijah had been gone one thousand years, and yet they were pretty well known. I don't believe that the Lord had to say to Peter, James and John, "This is Moses, and this Elias."

I believe they knew them without any introduction. I think that when I see my Master I shall know Him. Do you ask, How?

I don't know.

I heard of a child whose mother died so early that she could not remember the mother. She did not have a photograph, and never saw her face. After she had come to years of understanding, she was taken sick, and when she was dying, suddenly her face lit up, she seemed to see her mother, and said:

"O mother!"

So I believe that we shall know Moses and Elijah just as those apostles did on that mountain. Let us remember that if we do CHRIST's work, and are identified with Him, the time will come when we shall see the King face to face, and be with Him forever.

GOD SPAKE

Now, notice another thing. GOD the Father spoke on that occasion. It is supposed by Bible students that for four thousand years GOD never said that He was well pleased, from the time of creation before Adam fell, until the second Adam made His appearance on the banks of the Jordan. But when JESUS came up out of Jordan, then GOD could say again that He was well pleased, and He broke the silence of four thousand years. Here on the Mount of Transfiguration He adds another word:

"This is my beloved Son, hear him."

Moses had come to hand over his commission. The law was fulfilled by JESUS CHRIST; his work was done. There was a greater than Moses on that mountain, although Peter, John and James may not have believed it at that time. The Jews looked upon CHRIST as an impostor, as a blasphemer, and wanted to sweep Him from the face of the earth. His disciples may have wavered sometimes, and wondered if He were the true MESSIAH. This whole scene may have been to convince these three men beyond all doubt that JESUS was the long-looked-for MESSIAH. GOD spoke again from Heaven and said:

"Hear Him." The law and the prophets are fulfilled, and the work of Moses and Elijah is done . . . Like the moon and the stars, which fade away, their light eclipsed by the rising sun, so Moses and Elijah now pass into obscurity, for their work is accomplished.

Moses may have represented the dead saints. He died, and GOD buried him. And Elijah, who was caught up in a chariot of fire, may have represented the living saints that will be alive when CHRIST returns.

The Shekinah glory, the voice of GOD, the law and the prophets were here united in testifying to CHRIST.

IF JESUS HAD GONE!

Mr. Spurgeon draws a very vivid picture of this scene. He says: "When the cloud came and received Moses and Elijah out of sight, and they were taken back into the other world, what would have been the result if JESUS CHRIST had gone, too?" What a dark night it would have been if our Lord and Master had been caught up with Moses and Elijah, and no CHRIST had died for our sins. Oh, how JESUS CHRIST lit up this world! But suppose that CHRIST had gone up to Heaven on the other side of Calvary, and had never finished His work. Suppose that GOD in His love for His SON had said:

"I can't let those men spit upon you and smite you; I will take you back to my bosom."

What darkness would have settled down on this world! But Moses disappeared, and Elijah disappeared, and CHRIST only was left, for CHRIST is all. The law and the prophets were honored and fulfilled in Him.

My dear friends, the longer I live the more I am convinced that what this world wants is JESUS CHRIST.

If we preach Him more, live Him more, and love Him more, and let Him be constantly held up to this lost world, we shall accomplish something. All our work that is separate from CHRIST will be just hay, wood, stubble and chaff; it will be burned up, when GOD comes to test our works. What we want is to be out of sight ourselves, so that when people see us they won't think of us, but of CHRIST. We must decrease, but He must increase. When Peter wanted to put CHRIST on a level with Moses and Elijah, then it was that GOD the Father took them away. JESUS CHRIST has no peers; there is no one to be compared to Him. He excels the lawgiver and all the prophets. His name is above every other name under Heaven.

NO COMPROMISE

If you want power with GOD, just get as far from the world as you can. Suppose that Peter had said:

"Lord, if we go down from this mount, can we play cards just as much as ever, and dance just as much as ever? Because we have been in this mount with you, and had such holy visions, have we got to give up all these things?"

Could you conceive of such a thing? It seems to me that if we get one look at CHRIST in His love and beauty, this world and its pleasures will look very small to us. We must be out-and-out for CHRIST, so that there will be no compromise. The cross of CHRIST is suffering more to-day by people trying to serve the god of this world and the GOD of this Bible at the same time, than from anything else. Get near to CHRIST, and you will never want to go back to the world. People may call you narrow, but GOD uses a narrow man and a narrow woman.

WORK AFTER WORSHIP

One thing more: I can sympathize with Peter, for I should like to have been there myself. I should like to have spent a month there, and let Elijah tell me about all the things he had been interested in. Wouldn't that have been splendid? I should like very much to have heard Moses tell of his experiences. But there was a work down below the mountain, and while it is delightful to get a glimpse of the coming glory, there is work to be done.

At a conference a young minister who had been in Palestine used to take every chance he could get to tell about what he saw there. He got to be quite a nuisance. At last Bishop Ames got up and said:

"Brother, I would rather be five minutes with CHRIST, than to be five years where He has been."

As these men went down from that mountain, they met a father who had a son possessed with a devil. When the father went to bring his son to JESUS the devil tripped him up. Like a bad tenant, he tried to do as much harm as he could before leaving. The devil knew that he was going to get orders to get out, and so gave the boy such a throw that he nearly killed him.

The disciples could not cast the devil out. The boy was deaf and dumb, and I presume the disciples said:

"Oh, you know, that is a hopeless case. If he could only tell us how he feels, or if we could only shout into his ear, we might get at him; but we cannot make him hear or speak, and we cannot do anything."

They lacked faith. But the Lord came down, and that father came to CHRIST. "Mark you," Spurgeon says, "he [the father] was a poor theologian when he came to CHRIST. He came and said, '**If thou canst do anything,**' and the Lord rebuked him right there. He said, '**If thou canst believe.**' He put the '**if**' in the right place. '**All things are possible to him that believeth... bring him unto me.**'"

You may have some brother or father or friend whom you want to be converted. You have brought them to Christians, and the devil has not been cast out.

Listen! What did CHRIST say to his father? "**Bring him unto ME.**"

There is a great deal of joy in the thought that CHRIST has power over the devils. Remember that "**all power... in Heaven and in earth**" is given to Him, and don't think for a moment that any man is beyond the reach of GOD's mercy. Don't you think that your brother who is a slave to strong drink is beyond the reach of GOD. "**Bring him unto ME,**" says CHRIST. Get beyond your church, your society, and go right to the Master Himself.

When that mother came and told Elisha that her child was dead, the prophet said to his servant, 'Take that stick and lay it out on that dead child.' Away went the servant. But that woman was

wiser than Elisha; she would not leave him. She was not going to trust in that staff or that servant, she wanted the prophet himself. Some people think that it will do to work for CHRIST without giving themselves to the work.

No. Sometimes our whole life must be given to win a person. Make up your mind that if it costs you your life you are going to do it. When the child was thrown on the ground as if dead, JESUS took him by the hand and lifted him up. The touch of love and sympathy is what most men need.

LOOKING EARTHWARD

I heard once of a man who dreamed that he was swept into Heaven, and he was there in the glory world, and, oh he was so delighted to think that he had at last made Heaven. All at once one came and said:

"Come, I want to show you something."

He took him to the battlements, and said, "Look down yonder; what do you see?"

"I see a very dark world"

"Look and see if you know it."

"Why, yes," he said, "that is the world I have come from."

"What do you see?"

"Why, men are blindfolded there. Many of them are going over a precipice."

"Well, will you stay here and enjoy Heaven, or wilt you go back to earth and spend a little longer time, and tell those men about this world?"

He was a worker who had been discouraged, like Elijah. He awoke from his sleep, and later said:

"I have never wished myself dead since."

Do not wish to be always abiding in idleness on the Mount of Transfiguration, but go down into the world and bring souls to the Master. It is good to be on the mountain top, in spiritual communion, and occupied with JESUS; but it is not good to remain there - we must descend to the plain, and be occupied for JESUS in everyday life.

~ end of chapter 5 ~
