

Adult Teaching Resources

February 19, 2023



Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

February 5, 2023—Matthew 5:13-20—“Demanding Action”

February 12, 2023—Matthew 5:21-37—“Getting Serious”

February 19, 2023—Matthew 17:1-19—“Keeping Secrets”

Season of Lent: What Faith Produces

February 26, 2023—Romans 5:12-19—“Unearned Righteousness”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Keeping Secrets

Matthew 17:1-19

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5)

Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group. Ask everyone to share their idea of what Jesus looked like when he was transfigured on the mountain. Scripture says, "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light," what else would they add to that description? What images or paintings of the Transfiguration have they seen? How would they describe that event to someone who wasn't familiar with it?

Spend some time in conversation and discussion, focusing on the visual image of what they think the disciples saw, before moving on to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

Who did Jesus take with him up the mountain? (Peter and James and his brother John)

What happened to Jesus? (he was transfigured before them)

What did the transfiguration look like? (his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light)

Who appeared on the mountain? (Moses and Elijah)

What did Peter say to Jesus? (Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah)

What happened while he was speaking? (a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came from the cloud)

What did the voice from the cloud say? (This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!)

What did the disciples do when they heard the voice? (they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear)

What did Jesus do when they were overcome? (he went to them and touched them, saying,

Reading the Bible *continued*

“Get up and do not be afraid.”)

What did they see when they opened their eyes? (no one except Jesus himself alone)

What did Jesus order them to do as they came down the mountain? (Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.)

What did the disciples ask him? (Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?)

What was Jesus’ response? (Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things, but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.)

Who did the disciples understand Jesus was talking about? (John the Baptist)

What did the man in the crowd say to Jesus? (Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy and suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.)

How did Jesus respond? (You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.)

What did Jesus do? (Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured from that moment.)

What did the disciples ask Jesus privately? (Why could we not cast it out?)

Making Connections

Where do you go when you want to be alone to pray? Why is that spot so special? How often do you go there?

Have you been in the middle of prayer and something unexpected happen? What were you praying? What happened?

What does “transformation” mean to you? Have you experienced any kind of transformation? What was it? How did you change?

In talking about the Transfiguration, our Lesson Writer tells us, “Matthew says “his face shone like the sun.” What the gospel writers seem to be suggesting is that Jesus, who had been disguised as a Galilean peasant, threw off his human image and reverted to his heavenly, glorified appearance. Perhaps his clothes shone so brightly because his body, like his face, was shining through. If the event took place at night, as we might suppose, the effect would have been especially impressive.” How would you react if you witnessed that event? What would you know to be true about Jesus? What questions would that event raise for you?

When have you been so overwhelmed and stunned by a situation that your words stumbled out and you sounded a little silly or foolish? What was the situation? What did you want to say? What did you end up saying?

Making Connections *continued*

How have you heard God speak to you? How did you know it was God? How have you responded?

When have you been in God's presence and been afraid? Where did you find comfort and security?

Have you ever had some wonderful information, but been told to keep it a secret? What was the information? Who wanted you to keep it a secret? What do you think was their motivation for keeping it a secret? When were you allowed to share what you knew?

So What?

Have everyone remain in the large group. On the board, write this for everyone to see:

6-years-old
16-years-old
26-years-old
36-years-old
56-years-old
76-years-old

Ask everyone to share where they were physically and spiritually at these ages. (Stop at the highest age of your class members.)

Then, ask everyone to share the process of their spiritual transformation through the years.

Share that Jesus' transfiguration and transformation was a quick, spectacular event. We, on the other hand, have the luxury of being transformed over a longer period of time.

The Challenge

This week, think back through your life and consider how you have grown and changed and matured in your relationship with God. What do you hope to achieve next on your faith journey?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the spectacular transformation and transfiguration that Peter, James, and John saw on the mountain. Thank you that Jesus revealed his true nature to those disciples. Thank you that we are also in the process of being transformed. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Superman—The concept of Superman was created by Cleveland, Ohio high school students Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster in 1933. They sold the idea to “Detective Comics” (the forerunner of DC Comics) for \$130 and a contract to continue providing material. Superman hit the comic book stands in 1938.

Transfiguration—The unusual word “transfiguration” derives from Jerome’s fourth century translation of the Bible into Latin. The translation was known as the Vulgate, because it was in the language of the common people (the Latin word meaning “common people” was *vulgus*). Jerome translated the Greek word *metamorphōthē* with *transfigurato*. Normally, the word is translated as “transformed,” or “changed,” as in Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18.

Three versions—All three gospels contain stories of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-10, Luke 9:28-37), each with distinctive characteristics. Matthew says that “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” (v. 2). Mark mentions only Jesus’ clothes, which “became dazzling white, as no one on earth can bleach them” (Mark 9:3). Luke also speaks of dazzling white clothes, and says that “the appearance of his face changed” (Luke 9:29). All three accounts say the three disciples were terrified, but Matthew is the only gospel to include Christ’s comforting words and touch (17:6-7).

Mark speaks of Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus, while the other two synoptics list Moses first. Perhaps Mark’s prophetic interest was paramount, while Matthew and Luke followed the chronological appearance and relative importance of the two by putting Moses before Elijah. Mark is also more likely to point out the disciples’ foolishness or failures. He alone tells us that Peter “did not know what to say” when he and the others were frightened by the overshadowing cloud (9:6).

Luke (9:28-36) tells the longest story, and his version alone preserves the tradition that the disciples were so sleepy that they could barely hold their eyes open when Jesus’ transformation took place (9:32). This gives more of a dreamlike quality to the disciple’s experience, emphasizing its visionary nature. Luke is also the only gospel to divulge the contents of Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah: he says they were talking about Jesus’ imminent “departure” (literally, his “exodus”) from Jerusalem—a departure that would come by way of the crucifixion (9:31).

At night?—Luke’s account says “Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him” (Luke 9:32). The disciples’ sleepiness suggests the end of a long day and the possibility that Jesus’ transfiguration took place at night.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Shining like the sun—The gospel of John does not include a story of the Transfiguration, but it does speak metaphorically of Jesus as the light of the world (John 8:12, 9:5). How do you think the image of Jesus’ shining countenance may connect with other images light related to Christ, his word, and his work?

Did Moses die?—The book of Deuteronomy says that Moses went up Mount Nebo alone, where God allowed him to see the Promised Land, though he would not be allowed to enter it. “Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD’S command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day” (Deut. 34:5-6).

While the NRSV translates “he was buried” as passive, the Hebrew word, as preserved in the traditional Masoretic text, is in the active voice, and should be translated “he buried him.” The implication is that, after Moses died at God’s command, God buried him.

Some later manuscripts make the verb plural, so that it would read “they buried him,” but it’s hard to imagine that the Israelites would have buried their great leader Moses without leaving a clearly marked burial site. That Moses was alone with God and died “at the LORD’S command,” along with the observation that “no one knows his burial place to this day” led to a tradition that Moses had been taken to heaven by God, whether dead or alive. Evidence of this is found in Jude 9, which says the archangel Michael and the devil disputed over Moses’ body, and in the pseudopigraphal writing known as “The Assumption of Moses.”

Imagine this—Consider responding to this lesson by spending some time with eyes closed, imagining what it would have been like to be present with the disciples as Jesus was transformed, with Moses, Elijah, and the cloud of Presence witnessing to his divinity. “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” God said. “Listen to him.” Spend some time thinking about what Jesus might be saying to you.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Why were the disciples so terrified by the cloud?

The disciples were Jewish, and they would have been familiar with stories from the Hebrew Bible, and many of those contained many references to God appearing within a cloud. The thick cloud terrified them because they believed God was in it.

Recall some of the many stories. Memorably, God was thought to be present within a “pillar of cloud” that led the people of Israel in the wilderness, with fire in its midst during the night. The cloud would rest on the tabernacle as long as God wanted them to stay in one place, and when it lifted, they would venture on (Exod. 13:21, compare Exod. 16:10, 40:36-39; Num. 9:15-22, 10:11-12, 34).

God appeared to Moses in a “dense cloud” (Exod. 19:9-16) when the people arrived at Sinai, and again when Moses climbed up to meet Yahweh, when “the cloud covered the mountain, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain” (Exod. 24:15-18).

When Moses entered the tent of meeting, “the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses” (Exod. 33:9-10). When Moses returned to the mountain, “the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, ‘The LORD’” (Exod. 34:5). When the tabernacle was dedicated, “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle,” to the extent that even Moses was unable to enter (Exod. 40:34-35). God told Moses to instruct Aaron not to come into the holy of holies, lest he die, “for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat” (Lev. 16:2).

When Moses grew weary of leadership and uttered an agonized prayer, God promised told him to call out 70 elders to help share the load of settling disputes. “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders ...” (Num. 11:25).

When Aaron and Miriam complained against Moses because his wife was a “Cushite” and because they believed God had spoken to them also, God summoned all three to the tent of meeting. “Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called to Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward” (Num. 12:5). Yahweh strongly rebuked the pair for resisting Moses, leaving Miriam leprous for seven days (Num. 12:6-16).

These are a few of the many references to God’s characteristic appearance in a cloud during the wilderness period, later recalled by Nehemiah (9:12, 19), in the Psalms (78:14, 97:2, 99:7, 105:39), and by Isaiah (4:5).

The Hardest Question *continued*

These were not the end of God's "cloudy" appearances, however. When Solomon's temple was dedicated, "a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10-11, compare 2 Chr. 5:13-14).

In Ezekiel's inaugural vision of God, he described "a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber" (Ezek. 1:4). In a later vision of the temple, Ezekiel also spoke of a cloud as indicating God's presence (10:3).

The psalms could describe God as being surrounded by "clouds and thick darkness," and prophets used the image in a threatening manner. In describing judgment that would come on the "day of the LORD," they spoke of God's approach "in clouds and thick darkness" (Joel 2:2, Zeph. 1:5).

These traditions clearly associated God's fearful, awe-inspiring presence in association with clouds. It's no wonder the three disciples "were terrified." I suspect we would have been no less afraid.