

Youth 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”

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Keeping Secrets

Matthew 17:1-19

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth 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.

Gathering

As the group begins to gather, take a few moments to reflect on last week's challenge. After everyone has shared, continue with today's lesson.

Opening Activity

Show "He-Man Transformation" from *Masters of the Universe*, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GMnEhcwgQc>.

Synopsis: Prince Adam is secretly Eternia's hero, He-Man. As Adam, he is a puny, sometimes clumsy young boy. However, when he holds his magic sword aloft and says the right words, he transforms into He-Man. Cringer, his trusty, cowardly cat, undergoes a change to become Battle-Cat. This is a secret Adam shares with only three others in Eternia.

- What does it mean to be transformed?
- In what ways are Prince Adam and his cat, Cringer, transformed?
- What do you think Adam's friends or family would have thought had they seen him undergo this transformation?

Listening to the Scripture

Read Matthew 17:1-19 aloud.

- Imagine you saw what Peter, James, and John saw. How would you have reacted? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus told Peter, James, and John to keep what they had witnessed a secret? What might have happened had they told?
- What do you think this story tells us about who Jesus is?
- What implications do you think the "transfiguration" or "transformation" of Jesus in this story, has for our own lives?
- In what ways have you personally experienced transformation in your life?
- God's presence may not come to us in a great cloud like the disciples experienced, but God is continually present. How do you experience God's presence in your life?

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- “*This is my son, the Beloved, listen to him,*” said the voice from the cloud. What might the Holy Spirit be speaking to you through those words?

If the group is up for a challenge, consider discussing what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*:

- Why were the disciples so terrified by the cloud?

Application

Before closing, introduce this week’s challenge:

We find hope in this story that we, like Jesus, can and will experience transformation in our own lives. Our world is full of stories where people (individuals and entire communities) have experienced transformation, if be but have eyes to see and ears to hear. This week, find one story where an individual or an entire community has experienced transformation. Share that story on your social media pages and come back next week ready to share it with the group.

Close with prayer.

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.