
THE BIBLE IN A NUTSHELL

Today is Transfiguration Sunday.

- You probably figured that out from the Gospel reading.
 - I suspect that the Transfiguration is a fairly confusing event for many.
- “Transfiguration” is a word hardly ever used apart from this narrative.
- After spending the past month in the first chapter of Mark, we’ve now jumped to the ninth chapter.
 - That’s because the Transfiguration stands as a bridge from Epiphany into Lent.

The Transfiguration serves that role well.

- “Epiphany” means “appearing” or “manifestation,” as in seeing or understanding something you didn’t know before.
 - The readings for Epiphany help us to see anew who JESUS is.
 - And on the mountaintop, we are reminded of this once again.
- Lent is the journey to the cross and it begins here when JESUS leaves the mountain to go to Jerusalem to die.
 - The Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of Easter as we see JESUS the way HE was meant to be: dazzling white clothes and shining in glory.

The Transfiguration is the Bible in a nutshell

- In this event, we see much of the story of GOD’s relationship with humankind,
 - especially as it is revealed in JESUS CHRIST.
 - And we can see this if we pay attention to the movement of the story,
 - for while JESUS takes HIS disciples up the mountain, the important mission of the story moves constantly downward.

The story really starts in the highest place, not the mountain, but 66in heaven above.

- JESUS, in his dazzling white clothes, shows us the glory HE gave up to become human.
- Philippians 2 says, *“though HE was in the form of GOD, HE did not regard equality with GOD as something to be exploited, but emptied HIMSELF, taking on the form of a servant, being born in human likeness.”*
- JESUS’ downward movement from HIS rightful place in glory to embrace our life out of love is the heart of the Bible message.

Here on the mountain is JESUS with Moses and Elijah attending HIM.

- These are perhaps the two greatest figures from the Old Testament conversing with the most important one from the New Testament.
 - Both portions of the Bible are combined at this moment.
 - Moses, the main figure of the Exodus.
 - Elijah, GOD’s prophet during the Exile.
 - These are the two greatest events in Israel’s history meeting here with the MESSIAH foretold in the Old Testament, now fulfilled in the New Testament.

Another way the Transfiguration encapsulates the Bible is concerning the covenant GOD made with humankind.

- GOD's Covenant with Abraham was this: I will be your GOD and you will be MY people.
- That Covenant is echoed in the voice from heaven:
 - *"This is my SON,"* which echoes *"I am your GOD,"* now come down.
 - *"Listen to HIM,"* which is GOD saying follow HIS words and be MY people.

The Old Testament promise of SAVIOR is kept.

The Covenant is renewed.

- And from heaven above, GOD has come down.
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So, now we have JESUS on the mountain and three of HIS closest friends with HIM.

- Yes, I said friends, because that's who Peter, James, and John were.
 - They reflect JESUS' humanity and GOD's desire to be in relationship with us.

Yet, there is also a contrast here between the divine and the human.

- JESUS in his glory and the disciples on the ground in fear.
 - The greatness of JESUS; the weakness of HIS followers.
- I suspect the greatness of JESUS may be too much for us, especially when we are told that we should become more like HIM.
- A popular expression from a few years ago is "What Would JESUS Do?" or "WWJD?"
 - It encouraged people to do as JESUS would.
 - But we're not JESUS, nor can we do some of what JESUS could.
 - I think a better phrase for us to consider is "WWJHME," "What Would JESUS Have Me Do?"
 - You see, no matter how we try to be like JESUS, we know we will fail.
 - All we can do is strive to make the choices JESUS would want us to make.
 - And even in that endeavor, we fall short.
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But the Transfiguration is not a story of our going up.

- It is the story of JESUS coming down.
 - Not just from heaven to the mountaintop.
 - But from the mountaintop down to the valley.

This is the message of the Bible, too, that though we are to be GOD's people, over and over we turn and go the other way.

- And that's why JESUS comes down.
 - JESUS doesn't stay on the mountain and say, "I'll wait for you up here. When you're good enough to make it up to me on your own, I'll be waiting."

Instead, JESUS comes down, all the way down, into our brokenness and fear and loss and disappointment.

- JESUS comes down to the common nature of everyday life.
- Down to the details of misunderstanding, disagreement, and disbelief.
- Down to the political and religious quarrels of the day.
- Down to the jealousies and rivalries that color human relationships.
- Down to the poverty and pain.
- Down into the valley and all the way to the cross.

This also is the message of the Bible, that GOD is not afraid of what is difficult or fearful in our lives.

- This is the message of the Bible, that GOD will not reject us because of our failings.

JESUS coming down the mountain reminds us that when we find ourselves in the darkest places, GOD is already there.

- We don't have to hide the hard parts of life from the GOD we know in JESUS.

- GOD comes to us as the WORD made flesh,
 - to be with us and for us,
 - through thick and thin,
 - through life and death, and into new life.

Trust the love of the ONE who comes down the mountain.

- Trust the mercy of the ONE who entered the dark places of the world and still meets us in the dark corners of our lives.

- Trust the ONE with whom we can be honest enough to name what is broken and hurting,

- and thereby, fear it less.

This is why JESUS came, lived and died, and was raised up again,

- that we might know GOD's love and mercy.

This is the Bible in a nutshell;

- that we have a GOD who comes down, all the way down, from heaven, to the high places, and on to the lowest.

- We have a GOD who continues to come to us,

- to tell us and show us the message of the Bible,
- that we are chosen, loved, forgiven, and claimed,
 - to live in GOD's transfigured glory forever.