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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.” (Matthew 28: 16-17)

“After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:6)

This article brings us to the eighth of Christ’s post-resurrection manifestations. It is an event of paramount importance, yet of all the appearances it has the shortest written record. It is only by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and bringing isolated statements together that light is shed on the subject; the three main verses being those in Matthew and the Corinthian epistle, presented above. The majority of Bible commentators are agreed that this was one and the same interview, one saying: “nothing can account for such a number as five hundred assembling at one spot but the expectation of some promised manifestation of their Risen Lord: The promise before His resurrection and twice repeated after it, best explains this immense gathering.” (Jamieson, Fawcett and Brown).

The Scriptures in question are these: *“But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee”* (Matthew 26:32); *“go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you”* (Matthew 28:7); *“Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me”* (Matthew 28:10). These give the context of the verse before us: *“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee; into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them”*.

From this it is evident that the disciples received instruction, both before and after Christ's resurrection, that as soon as He had arisen, they must make their way back to Galilee. Furthermore they were appointed to assemble at a certain mountain, which was a pre-arranged rendezvous. Whilst only the eleven disciples are mentioned here, the five hundred others may also be connected to this same incident by a careful study of the Scriptures.

Consider the place: It was a mountain in Galilee. The question then arises, 'why Galilee, rather than any other region?' Remember what the gospels record about this unique location; it was there that the Lord spent the first 30 years of His earthly existence. In the obscurity of the village of Nazareth, He had toiled as a carpenter. In Cana of Galilee, He performed the first of His miraculous signs. In this same province, He delivered the amazing discourse of 'The Sermon on the Mount'. It was from Galilee that most of His disciples were drawn, such that the term 'Galilean' became synonymous with a follower of Christ (cf Mark 14:70).

More importantly still – and in this there is great significance – it was in Galilee that the Lord was Transfigured. At that most memorable event only Peter, James and John were present; but there they received a solemn instruction: "*And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead.*" (Matthew 17:9). In these words a clue is given as to the place, the facts and the meaning of this meeting of the five hundred. The Lord most definitely connects the Transfiguration scene with something subsequent to His resurrection. There is no incident during that period which answers to the former Transfiguration promise, other than this meeting with the five hundred. It seems very likely then, that the mountain appointed for this eighth appearance of Christ was the selfsame place in which He was Transfigured.

The Lord's words to Peter, James and John on that occasion were a command that all the things which took place on the Mount of Transfiguration **must** be told at a future date; but not until He had risen from the dead. Then, there had to be a public declaration of the manifested glory of the Incarnate Son of God. The obvious destination for such a proclamation was Galilee – the same place in which the incident first happened, and where He was best known.

The names of those who met in Jerusalem numbered about one hundred and twenty (cf Acts 1:15), whereas five hundred assembled in Galilee. In the capital at that time the Lord's followers were driven to meet in secrecy and behind locked doors for fear of the enemies of Christ; hence He did not appoint a large gathering in the province of Judea. Instead, following His resurrection the disciples were to make their way back to Galilee, their home territory, and to the particular mountain named as the point of assembly. "*Tell My brethren...*" says Christ, "*and there shall they see Me*", a wonderful term of endearment which embraced all those who truly believed on Him. This eighth appearance was to be in the sanctity of an isolated elevation, where undisturbed, He could reveal Himself to them with infallible proof, and they could see Him clearly, and hear Him speak and give commandments pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

Assuming (with many commentators) that the location was the same as the Mount of Transfiguration, the wondrous vision previously given to three of the disciples could now be plainly told. Journeying thence through the province of Galilee, they could inform other brethren of the appointed meeting place where they would see the risen Christ; thus a great number of persons were drawn together. The way in which the Lord specifically appointed this gathering, and the conspicuous nature of His manifestation there, are important. This general assembly had been announced before His death (cf Matthew 26:32), and again afterwards (cf Matthew 28:10), and confirmed by angelic messengers (cf Matthew

28:7). In total, over five hundred people attended this Divinely-summoned concourse, which represented the great majority of all the believers then upon earth. So this became the last public gathering of the Body of Christ, with the Lord visibly and bodily present with them – until He should come the second time, to receive them unto Himself. One of the chief purposes of this convention was that the clearest possible evidence be given to the largest possible number – so that the whole Church could testify to the fundamental fact that **Christ was alive**.

There is still more to be learned. On this mountain in Galilee, Matthew records that “*some worshipped*” but “*some doubted*”. On their previous visit to that mountain, Peter, James and John had seen Jesus of Nazareth transformed in their sight, and something of the glory of Deity radiated through His body of clay. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him, and “*spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:31). They saw His intrinsic majesty, and heard the voice of the Father from Heaven, saying “*This is My beloved Son*”. Their lips had been sealed from that time, but now they were to declare it all. His decease had now been accomplished; Christ had gone to death, being made sin, and had come forth triumphant over sin, death and Hell, in eternal resurrection life. He was still in a recognisable bodily form, but would shortly ascend to the Father, to be fully glorified. The three disciples who had received a preview of all these things could now tell them out, and make it all known. Thus Christ’s own bodily presence, and the apostles’ testimony combined upon the mountainside in infallible witness to the gathered throng. Many were lost in wonder, love and praise, and worshipped Him there. But some doubted.

What prompted this latter, unworthy reaction? Perhaps they could not believe that this awesome figure was the same man whom the scribes and elders condemned, and the Romans had crucified. These

doubts were indicative of a feeble faith – they could not grasp the magnitude of it all. Yet before them was the very thing to inspire faith and courage in the face of a difficult future: a glimpse of the glory of Christ, and an assurance of the victory which He vouchsafed to them! For as the five hundred brethren gazed upon the radiant form of the risen Christ, they had a picture of the glories that awaited them – His very presence was a proof that after a season of toil and suffering, their vile bodies would be made like unto His (cf Philippians 3:21). We need not wonder that as the realisation dawned upon some, they bent the knee in adoration and began to exult in worship. Nor should we be surprised that others were bewildered and amazed, thinking it all too good to be true, and too much for perishing men to hope for.

In His merciful love and understanding, the Great Head assembled on that day a representation of all His people: those who are weak in faith, as well as those who are strong. He is the blessed Saviour of the spiritual babe, as well as the spiritual warrior.

On the surface it might seem strange that this remarkable meeting in Galilee, which was three times predicted, should receive so little Biblical record, whilst others never previously hinted at are given much greater coverage. The answer to this is perhaps that having taken place before so many, a full record was less necessary, the facts being conveyed by the mouths of many witnesses. What is more, the tongues of the three apostles were now loosed to tell of Christ's Transfiguration – which Peter did at length, speaking in his first epistle of "*the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*" (1 Peter 1:11), and telling in the second letter how they: "*were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For He received from God the Father honour 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*" (2Peter 1:16-18). He goes on

to say: “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” (v.19) – a sure word indeed, a faith in one once crucified and buried, but now the resurrected and glorified Saviour. He is the Daystar of the heart, the light which illuminates life’s darkest passages, and will remain with His people ‘until the day dawn’.

The Lord makes an infallible promise to His people to meet with them again – not on the hills of Palestine, or even on the Mount of Transfiguration; not in the company of merely five hundred, where worship is mixed with doubts and fears – but on those eternal hills which border heavenly Canaan, the realm which needs no sun by day or moon by night to lighten it (cf Revelation 21:23), where there will be gathered “*ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*” (Revelation 5:11), all surrounding the Lamb upon His throne. There where all tears are wiped away, and sorrow for ever banished, and pain unknown, all shall join in harmonious chorus to sing the new song of eternal victory, “*to Him that loved us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood*” (Revelation 1:5).

So Christ’s appearance on this earthly mountain portends a far greater truth pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Let all His true disciples prepare themselves for the Day which He has appointed, and the glorious reunion that awaits. He has gone on ahead – not into Galilee – but into Heaven itself (cf Hebrews 9:24) – and there His people shall see Him, for He has said: “*I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*” (John 14:3).

W. H. Molland
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

DECEASE ACCOMPLISHED

Every word of Scripture is significant. Every sentence is inspired, profitable, Divinely authored and God-given (cf 2 Timothy 3:16) down to the last ‘jot and tittle’ – the dotted i’s and crossed t’s of the originals (cf Matthew 5:18). Certain words are so laden with meaning, and convey such depths of truth, that they become sermons in themselves. Among this list of the Bible’s most profound vocabulary come two words in Luke 9:31, “*Who appeared in glory, and spake of His **decease** which He should **accomplish** at Jerusalem.*”

This verse is all the more remarkable because of its context, namely **the Transfiguration**. Here is a well-known event, documented in all three synoptic gospels – but what does it mean? What is a Transfiguration, and wherein lies its spiritual significance? To use a more common term, it could rightly be called a ‘transformation’. The original Greek word here used, has passed into English as ‘metamorphosis’. Put simply, it is a change from one form or likeness to another. In this Biblical incident it describes the dramatic though temporary alteration which happened in the Lord’s appearance. His substance and proportions remained the same, even the clothes He was wearing, but: “*the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering*” (Luke 9:29), He “*was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light*” (Matthew 17:2).

What was the cause of this awe-inspiring transformation in the Saviour’s physical form? The Man Christ Jesus was God Incarnate (cf 1 Timothy 3:16). During the years of His earthly life, His inherent and undiminished Godhood was ‘veiled in flesh’ (cf Hebrews 10:20). But in those few moments upon the mountainside,

the veil of His flesh was allowed to become ‘more transparent’, or was fractionally withdrawn, that the disciples might see His Deity with their mortal eyes. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (cf 1 John 1:5), He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto (cf 1 Timothy 6:16) – it was that light which three apostles were privileged to observe upon the holy mount, shining in the person of Christ. They “*were eyewitnesses of His majesty*” (2 Peter 1:16).

Two Prior Events

Why were they favoured with such a spectacular demonstration of the Saviour’s true nature – and at this particular time? All three gospel recorders emphasise the context of the Transfiguration, and two events which preceded it – both involving Simon Peter. The first occurred eight days before (cf Luke 9:28), and was a **Statement of Faith**. “*Jesus...asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 16:13-17). God-given faith was developing in the disciples’ hearts, and they began to recognise the real identity of Jesus of Nazareth. He was not merely a successor to John the Baptist, or a new Elijah, or Jeremiah or Moses – but greater than all these: He was very Christ. That faith was to be rewarded, strengthened and confirmed at the Transfiguration, eight days later.

However, Matthew and Mark both relate an intervening incident that happened after two more days had passed: this time, a **Statement of Incredulity**. “*From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and*

suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:21-23). Peter’s perplexity is easy enough to understand: he had come to the point of believing that ‘this same Jesus was both Lord and Christ’, Son of the eternal, immortal God. Now here was his Master talking of the impending violence of the Jews against Himself, ultimately resulting in death. How could such an end possibly be reconciled with His Divine nature? How could the immortal die? “Be it far from Thee, Lord!” was Peter’s logical retort – He was God, He surely could not, or should not die! To the natural mind, these things were unnecessary and inconceivable. The apostles needed to learn that there was no contradiction between Christ’s Deity, and the death He was to suffer – rather was His approaching end in perfect harmony with His Divine nature and glory. This was the lesson contained in the Transfiguration scene: the Lord appearing in radiant and God-like splendour, whilst simultaneously speaking of the decease He would accomplish.

Two Notable Men

*“And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were **Moses** and **Elias**: Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish”*. No sooner had the Lord’s appearance undergone its radical transformation than two other figures also stood forth, illuminated by His glorious effulgence – Moses and Elijah – whom the disciples immediately recognised. It might be asked why these two, of all the patriarchs, were privileged to attend. There are several reasons. Moses was the man used by God in the transmission and publication of the Law, whilst Elijah is the figurehead and epitome of the Prophets. These two characters thus

represent **The Law and the Prophets**, the component parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, whose continual theme and subject was Jesus Christ: *“We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth”* (John 1:45).

Their presence at that time also answered the question concerning the person of Christ: He was evidently greater than the greatest of the patriarchs. He appeared before them on the mount, just as He predates and precedes them in eternity. When they were dismissed and departed, He remained, such that the disciples ultimately *“saw no man, save Jesus only”* (Matthew 17:8). And of Jesus only the voice of the Father testified: *“This is My beloved Son: hear **Him**”* (Luke 9:35). For Christ is the one to whom all the Law and Prophets owe their origin; He is the one to whom they all point; and He is the one who fulfils, completes, and perfects all that they ever said. *“For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house...And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son”* (Hebrews 3:3, 5-6).

Now consider this event from the perspective of Moses and Elijah. At some point in their enjoyment of the delights of heaven, they were summoned to make a brief visitation to earth again, there to behold God the Son in His bodily, human shape, and hold conversation with Him. There was so much that they might have spoken of in those precious moments. Moses had never before reached Canaan; but he had no thought for his earthly surroundings now. These two men of a past generation did not discuss their shared experiences, or reflect upon their natural lives once lived in that region. They were entirely occupied with Christ – their conversation was wholly devoted to Him. And to one detail in particular: not His glory and Godhood, not His physical form or the

mystery of the incarnation, but to **the decease which He should accomplish**. This was their all-consuming theme.

It was an event which they had both prefigured and typified in different ways during their lives below. Moses, in the providential circumstances of his birth, and in forsaking a great kingdom for the purpose of redeeming God's people, set forth the Saviour's work and in particular "*the reproach of Christ*" (Hebrews 11:26). Throughout the wilderness wanderings, he ever acted as the people's Intercessor and Advocate (cf Exodus 32:30-34). Yet God at length commanded him: "*Get thee up into this mountain... and die in the mount wither thou goest up*" (Deuteronomy 32:49, 50), whilst the people inherited the promises. Christ was the substance of all that Moses foreshadowed, and fulfilled his prophesy: "*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken*" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Elijah also acted as a type of Christ in other respects. The first recorded miracle of resurrection was performed by him (cf 1 Kings 17:17-24), portending the coming of One who is The Resurrection and The Life (cf John 11:25). Elijah's departure from this world, and immediate reception to glory was also remarkable and unique: "*Behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, ...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven*" (2 Kings 2:11). In the process of which his mantle was cast back to the earth, and received by his disciple, Elisha – symbolising 'a double portion of his spirit' (cf 2 Kings 2:9-10), all of which is highly suggestive of the Lord's Ascension, and final return to the Father.

Thus in life, in death, and in this unprecedented Transfiguration appearance, Moses and Elijah both spoke eloquently of the decease which Christ should accomplish.

Two Profound Words

The word translated as ‘**decease**’ in the English Bible, does indeed imply death, as in the normal usage – but it also carries the sense of ‘departure’, and ‘exit’. In precisely this way, the Saviour’s ‘decease’ was not just an end of His natural life, but also involved a glorious resurrection, and magnificent departure from this terrestrial scene to the Father’s right hand on high. This wonderful end that Christ made of His work was not merely ‘endured’ or ‘undertaken’, but **accomplished** – the original meaning being to fulfil, complete, or satisfy. Let the reader rightly understand these two Holy Spirit-inspired terms, and the death of Christ will be seen in its true light.

His was a decease accomplished, because it was **previously ordained**. To ‘accomplish’ something in a practical sense implies that a requirement or instruction existed beforehand. If a person acts spontaneously, they might simply be said to ‘do’ a thing; but if they rise to a challenge, or meet a standard, then it is truly an ‘accomplishment’. Even so, Christ’s decease was by prior arrangement – a Divine imperative existed long before the events themselves transpired. This is proved at the Transfiguration, where the Lord and His ancient companions spoke in detail of the future as a thing well known to them all. Later, upon reflection, the apostle Peter concluded: *“For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever Thy hand **and Thy counsel determined before to be done**”* (Acts 4:27-28).

How far back can this counsel of God be traced? Back beyond the days of Elijah or Moses, or those of Abraham (who also saw Christ’s day); back to the Genesis record and the first Messianic promise (cf Genesis 3:15). Ever since the Fall of Man, there has been a requirement for a Saviour; ever since the first Adam’s sin, a need existed for the second Adam’s sacrifice (cf Romans 5:17-19).

Yet even before this, the will and purposes of God were in existence – the plan that He should descend in the likeness of His own creatures, and suffer on their account, and procure their salvation – stretches back before the dawn of time itself. In fact God has “*saved us, and called us with an holy calling... according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **before the world began***” (2 Timothy 1:9). The Divine scheme of Redemption is as eternal and timeless as God Himself, and has no historical beginning, so that Christ can rightly be called “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8). From that ‘pre-eternity’ Christ’s decease was appointed. That work was, in the fullness of time, accomplished.

The language of the text also shows His decease was **personally undertaken**. They “*spake of His decease which He should accomplish.*” The great object was not achieved in a general or collective way, but was wrought particularly and personally. This death could be died by only one individual – one who had all the infirmities of man, and all the perfections of God; one with the mortality of man, and the eternity of God; one who was tempted in all points like man, and yet as sinless as God. The only person meeting these stringent criteria is Jesus Christ – the God-Man – and He personally undertook the work of Salvation.

There is an amazing verse to this effect, which, as it were draws back the veil of Heaven, and reveals Christ’s acceptance and readiness to engage upon this mission: “*Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart*” (Psalm 40:6-8). The Saviour well knew the impotence of all the Levitical animal sacrifices, and so committed Himself to be the ultimate and final offering for sin. It was done wittingly and willingly. He read in the

book of Divine foreknowledge all that was involved – the extremes of condescension, the depths of humiliation, the magnitude of suffering – and concluded ‘Lo I come! I delight to do Thy will, O My God’ *“Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; And ... became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:8-9).

His decease was an accomplishment, because it was a great task – long, involved and arduous – which He **patiently endured**. Whilst it ultimately concluded in Jerusalem, it was a work that occupied Him from His first Advent onwards. His entire thirty-three years of mortal existence were all part of the ‘end’ He was accomplishing; the culmination of an eternity of preparation. As He endured all that was required of Him, He said: *“I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up”* (Psalm 88:15). From the beginning He was appointed like a sheep to the slaughter, and ‘killed all the day long’. Who can rightly reckon up all that Christ had to suffer in His life, before ever Jerusalem was reached? However, as that final destination drew closer, Luke records, *“it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:51). These words follow a few verses on from the Transfiguration account. Although that capital city was to be the site of His worst sufferings, as known to Himself, and confirmed by the conversation of the patriarchs, He set His face to go there, immovable in resolution, inexorable in obedience. He endured the cross, despising the shame; He endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, and resisted unto blood, in His strife against sin (cf Hebrews 12:2-4). He accomplished His decease.

The word ‘accomplished’ specifically teaches that His decease was **powerfully completed**. Calvary’s hill, and the empty tomb are the pinnacle of all time and history; the great end to which Christ was working. There and then, all that God demanded was supplied; all

that man needed was provided; atonement was made once and forever.

The Scriptures were fully answered: every last detail shown in the Old Testament types was fulfilled, every prophesy outworked and every promise assured, from first to last. *“For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me ... for the things concerning Me have an end”* (Luke 22:37). Righteousness was fully wrought: all that was owed to God by man, in obedience, worship and duty, was offered by Christ. The penalty was fully expended: all God’s wrath and judgment upon His people’s sin was poured out on the Son until not one drop remained. The debt was fully paid: the ransom price which justice demanded to redeem us from sin’s bondage was transacted. This is what Christ’s decease achieved. To use the words of Isaiah’s prophecy: *“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied”* (Isaiah 53:11). God looks upon His Son’s offering for sin, and He is satisfied. Christ knows His work for His people to be complete, and He is satisfied. The saints view this decease, and see there all things that pertain to life and godliness, and they are satisfied. God’s eternal mission is **accomplished**.

There is nothing remaining undone; there is nothing left to question or debate. This was not an ‘open’ decease upon which some will believe, whilst others reject. It is not a decease completed, but waiting for man’s choice or decision to be saved. **No** – it is a decease accomplished for all God’s elect. To that number it is efficacious and powerful, and will be applied to them all. Neither is there anything outstanding for those who believe: no additional punishment to endure, or atonement to make, or security to ensure – the Lord’s decease has accomplished everything necessary. So the saints’ eternal safety and victory is guaranteed! Christ has fought, and won the fight, that His people might share the conquest. He has faced the King of Terrors, that they need no longer fear; He has

fought the Last Great Enemy, that they should never have to; He has endured Death and Hell, that they might be eternally beyond the reach of either; He has accomplished His decease in order that they may joyfully accomplish theirs, and be more than conquerors through Him who loved them. Little wonder if Moses and Elijah, briefly disturbed from the delights of Heaven, should speak of His decease. To that cause they owed their life and eternity, and the everlasting enjoyment of Glory from which they had momentarily descended.

Two Contrasting Views

The crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ is generally accepted to be historically factual by a wide range of people: practitioners of various religions, persons from across the spectrum of belief, even the average worldly man will give some credence to these details. The vital question is **why?** Why did that death happen – what was its cause, and what were its consequences?

To some it is just a demonstration of fortitude in suffering, to others a model of determination in the face of opposition, or a striking illustration of self-sacrifice. It is quoted as an example of Roman brutality, or Jewish spite, or the blindness of the masses. The majority conclude it to be the inevitable end of an unusual man in an oppressive society. The subject of ‘Christ Crucified’ is to the Jews a stumbling block; to Greeks, foolishness; to philosophers, a metaphor of good behaviour; to historians, a social commentary; to casual readers, an unfortunate demise. But to those who believe the Truth, it is something else altogether: a manifestation of “*Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:24). Not a tragic accident, but a death powerful and efficacious; not a sad end, but a **decease accomplished**; the most glorious theme which thought will ever conceive, or language express. It is a privilege to study it while on earth – but how much greater to contemplate it in the world to come, where it is the saints continual occupation, and

source of all their pleasure! The patriarchs at the Transfiguration were but continuing the conversation of Heaven, where ten thousand times ten thousand say with one accord: “*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*” (Revelation 5:12).

“The shadow of Thy cross beneath,
We dwell on Thy decease,
While blood-bought peace Thou dost bequeath –
Peace, perfect peace.”

We celebrate Thy dying love –
Thy coming draweth nigh!
Thy praise we’ll sing when called above –
Eternally!”

R. J. Steward

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The Transfiguration is one of those passages in the Saviour’s earthly history which an expositor would rather pass over in reverent silence. For such silence, the same apology might be offered which is so kindly made in the Gospel narrative for Peter’s foolish speech concerning the three tabernacles: “*He wist not what to say*”. Who does know what to say any more than he? Who is able fully to speak of that wondrous night-scene among the mountains, during which heaven was for a few brief moments let down to earth, and the mortal body of the Lord Jesus being transfigured shone with celestial brightness, and the spirits of just men made perfect appeared and held converse with Him respecting His approaching passion, and a voice came forth from the excellent glory, pronouncing Him to be God’s well-beloved Son? It is too high for us, this august spectacle, we cannot attain unto it; its grandeur surpasses our comprehension; its glory is ineffable...

The talk of the great lawgiver and of the great prophet of Israel on the subject of His death was doubtless a real solace to the spirit of the Lord Jesus... Surely we may believe that when He looked forward to His own decease – the crowning evidence of His love to sinners – it was a comfort to His heart to think: ‘Up yonder they know that I am to suffer, and comprehend the reason why, and watch with eager interest to see how I move on with unfaltering step, with My face stedfastly set to go to Jerusalem.’ And would it not be specially comforting to have sensible evidence of this, in an actual visit from two denizens of the upper world, deputed as it were and commissioned to express the general mind of the whole community of glorified saints, who understood that their presence in heaven was due to the merits of that sacrifice which He was about to offer up in His own person on the hill of Calvary?

A. B. Bruce (1871)

“Jesus Only”

1. It is the summing up of revelation. All others vanish; He abides.
2. It is the summing up of the world’s history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap the past, and all its mighty names get forgotten; but His figure stands out, solitary against the background of the past, as some great mountain, which is seen long after that lower summits are sunk below the horizon.
3. Let us make this the summing up of our lives. We can venture to take Him as our sole Helper, Pattern, Love and Aim, because He, in His singleness, is enough for our hearts. There are many fragmentary precious things, but one pearl of great price.
4. This then may be a prophecy of our deaths. – A brief darkness, a passing dread, and then His touch and His voice saying, *“Arise, be not afraid”*. So shall we lift up our eyes and find earth faded and its voices fallen dim, and see *“no man any more, save Jesus only”*.

A. Maclaren

Editorial

In the foregoing articles, the wonderful occasion of Transfiguration has been considered from various perspectives. However, the most apposite and pertinent of all commentaries upon that scene is found within Scripture itself – namely, the inspired remarks made by Peter in his second epistle.

As his natural life drew to its close, the aged Apostle concerned himself with the rising generation of Christians, desirous that they should have the same certainty and assurance of faith that he had, as an eyewitness of the Lord. Their conviction and belief in the things of Christ needed to be of the same calibre as those who had observed the Saviour at first-hand. To this end, Peter wrote: “*I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty*” (2 Peter 1:15-16), and goes on to describe that most memorable of evenings on the ‘holy mount’ – the definitive demonstration of Christ’s true nature and Deity, culminating in the audible approbation of God, spoken directly from Heaven.

What could the saints in following ages possibly have to compare with this? What could rival so miraculous a display, to impart and confirm faith? The Apostle supplies a bold answer: “***We have also a more sure word of prophecy***” (v. 19); by which he means, “*the prophecy of Scripture*” (v. 20). The import and magnitude of this statement cannot be denied. Peter is saying, by inspiration, that the words of Holy Writ are of greater worth and efficacy than the sensible experience of Transfiguration. His assessment must be true. For what reasons is the Word of God, the Bible, to be preferred above a miraculous sign, such as the Transfiguration event?

1.) Its effect is greater. The Scriptures are “*a light that shineth in a dark place*” (v. 19). The radiance of the Transfiguration appeared only upon an isolated mountain-top, witnessed by just three dazed disciples; but the effulgence of God’s Word has beamed into every place, illuminating a sinful world (cf John 1:5), the hearts of men (cf Psalm 119:130), and the path of the just (cf Psalm 119:105).

2.) Its duration is longer. The Transfiguration light lasted for a few moments, and then ceased; but the rays which shine in Scripture will continue “*until the day dawn*” (v. 19). Throughout this gloomy period between the Lord’s Ascension and His ultimate Return, the light of God’s Word provides unvarying and undiminished brightness. The passage of two millennia have not served to quench it. The Word will endure – until that time when the Daystar Himself shall arise; Christ, the bright and Morning Star (cf Revelation 22:16).

In the present day, the Bible is not given the priority and prominence which it demands. Many Christians, it seems, would much rather live in the age of signs and wonders. There is an infatuation with ‘feelings’, ‘leadings’, ‘calls’, and ‘inner voices’. Great store is placed by coincidences, circumstances and events in everyday life. Amongst this plethora of extra-Biblical revelation, the written Word of God is relegated to a poor second place. It is a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks after signs; and they can expect to receive no more than what is already plainly written in the Scriptures (cf Matthew 12:39).

To be in possession of the lively oracles of God, uncorrupted and entire, is a privilege and blessing above any that the patriarchs or Apostles enjoyed. To hold a transcript of that which is ‘forever settled in Heaven (cf Psalm 119:89) – the complete canon of Holy Scripture – is an unspeakable benefit, peculiar to these Last Times. As John makes clear, those who read the written record are in no way inferior to those who first communicated it: “*That which we*

have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:3).

Indeed, within these sacred pages, there is an ongoing Transfiguration of Christ. Not simply the record of that single event, but a lively demonstration of His inherent Divinity and Godhood. His humanity as the Son of Man, described in the Gospels, is irradiated by language which shows Him to be God. His earthly history is rendered ‘white and glistening’ by a multitude of other verses. His eternity and immortality is testified: *“I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth was...”* (Proverbs 8:23), *“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8). More distinct than any vision, or enveloping cloud are the words of Hebrews describing the Son *“whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Hebrews 1:2-3). What greater testimony could there be from Heaven, than the verse which records that, *“unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever”* (Hebrews 1:8)?

The Christian who thus makes recourse to the Scriptures is taken into a high mountain apart, and reading there, becomes in their turn an eyewitness of the Lord’s majesty. These Scriptures exalt, glorify and transfigure the man Christ Jesus; these Scriptures testify of Him; these Scriptures are a more sure word of prophecy, ***“whereunto ye do well that ye take heed”***.

His former visits we recount,
On Mizar’s hill and Hermon’s mount;
Yet still our souls desire anew
His sweetest, loveliest face to view.