Matthew - Commentaries by George Vicesimus Wigram

Memorials of the Ministry of G.V. Wigram 1: Volume 1, Transfiguration, The

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WE get different views of the transfiguration according to the position from which we look at it. Looking at it from outside, as it were, we have to notice that it took place in the time of Christ's humiliation, at the time man was in weakness. The drift and scope of it will not be understood if that is not seen. It points to the earth's great Sabbath, and comes in as the last thought of redemption. God puts things in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and where the vessel (Israel) is not in a state to hold or retain the glory, Christ can hold it in the millennium; so when Christ was a man on earth, though there were none to understand Him, and He had to trace out His path all alone, He fully showed forth the glory of God. It is true that a certain holiday has to be spent on the earth in the millennial time. There will be shown amongst Israel the divine glory in Christ, and the whole earth will be the witness of it. Israel may not be able to hold it, but there it will be displayed. The transfiguration just points out the character of that holiday, and it makes a direct appeal to the hearts of the children of God as to their feelings about it. The difference between a well-taught Christian and one little instructed about millennial truth will be, that the latter will be absorbed with the thought. " We shall be with Christ." That is quite true; but it is also true, and it will be perceived by one who has studied Scripture, that we are to reign over this earth with Him in its unchanged condition. The earth is to be reigned over by the Church. Christ will bring us into the Father's house as His bride. That is our blessed portion. But He not only says, "Come along with me," but " You shall reign with me." We shall have a resurrection body; but this same body changed. "This mortal shall put on immortality," and, as brought into connection with this present world, we shall reign over it.

Another thing connected with the bearing of the transfiguration on Christians in the present day is, that three of the disciples, Peter, James and John were selected to see what was the sustainment of the heart of Jesus in what He was to suffer. They were eye-witnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16.) Their being taken up into that glory, revealed to them the certainty that they would be there too. Do you know this? Has the Spirit revealed to your hearts, as it was revealed to their eyes, that a scene of brilliant glory will open over this six days' groaning earth-the glory of the Lord Jesus? It is revealed with quite as much certainty to you as it was to Peter, James and John It is revealed to us by the Spirit of promise, the earnest of the inheritance; but it was revealed to their Sight. Is it a sweet thing to you to think of seeing

Christ? that before to-morrow's sunrise you may be in that very glory into which He has entered? The Spirit of God tells us, that as surely as Christ is on the throne of God, so surely will He leave the throne, and take a throne of His own. Are the kings of the earth brooding over that thought, that Christ will hold the scepter over the earth? No; they are not. But it has broken into your souls because you are to be there. The Spirit brings you the earnest of it now.

Only three of the gospels give us the account of this scene-Matthew which is peculiarly connected with the gospel of the kingdom; Mark showing forth Christ as the servant; and Luke as the Son of man. In 2 Peter where it is cited, the subject is the light of a risen Christ connected with this earth.

Now let us look at the scene a little from within, in detail. Some things are very distinct-the glory and the grace; the grace in glory, if you please. When the Lord was here, there was glory in grace; but there will be grace in glory then. Divine glory broke out from Him in His position of grace down here; e.g. when He brake the barley loaves, &c.; and now we see the other, grace flowing out amidst the circumstances of glory. It seems to me exceedingly important, the truth I get here. There has been extreme long-suffering in God in keeping Himself away from this earth. If He had come in, it must have been instant destruction long ago; but in grace He has come in the person of His Son, picking up, one after another, poor sinners. But after the thousand years it will be all glory. From Adam downwards, the great thought was, grace to be shown forth in the person of Christ. Moral glory and physical glory there were in Him. It was all hidden, indeed, but there, and grace was to flow out, and in the place of service and subjection which He took.

After His resurrection there was another manifestation of His grace in His lingering on the earth. They knew Him as the Nazarene in a glorified body. A new expression of His grace we have in that He has sat down " until His enemies are made His footstool." All these two thousand years of His waiting, in which we have a new phase of His grace, will add to His Messiah glory; but by-and-by He will be ministering grace from the court of God, and that will be grace flowing out from glory.

Verse 1: He took them up to "an high mountain apart," &c. It was a mount connected with earth, not away from it. Rev. 21 shows the heavenly city coming down from God out of heaven, and connecting its glory with the earth; for it is over the earth. Thus the heavenly city, the earthly Jerusalem, and the Gentile world will be connected.

In verse 2, we have three distinct thoughts. What will the joy of the glory be? Christ being there. It will be no strange place for you and me when we get inside the glory; for He will be there. The chief Person in the scene will be that same Lord Jesus. The beauty of that Person is the second thing; " His face did shine as the sun." Third, " His raiment was white as the light." In Mark it says, "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them." White indeed! unspotted white, that robe! His blessed hand could touch the leper, without contracting defilement, as no one else could; so His righteousness can cover all our deformity, without taking a stain from it. Brightness and purity are the two thoughts descriptive of His raiment. In the first two verses, then, we have the place and the circumstances of the glory; first, the place over the earth; secondly, the person of the Lord in all His beauty and perfection. God can measure His purity, but man cannot. Another thing to be noticed is their communion. It was not meet for man to be alone-this was the divine mind; and you little know the heart of the Lord Jesus, if you think He can take the glory all alone. No, it would not be meet for Him. God could be alone, but not man, nor the Son of man; He must have us with Him. It is meet He should have us with Him.

Mark the persons who are to be with Him-those who hate slept, and those who are changed. Moses and Elias with Christ; and the three disciples hear their communications. What is their topic? In Luke 9 we have an account, where it says they spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. One is apt to think, How can subjects which occupy Christ be of interest to us? But it will be the Lamb slain! When you see the Lord Jesus, shall you have nothing to learn from Him of His death? It will be the one thing that is part of all subjects.

Verse 5: There came "a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." How little we really enter into what the Lord Jesus is doing now that He sits upon His Father's throne; but here He is in the place where He is really in communion with man. The bride will be sustained by the presence of Christ throughout the millennium.

What are these three foolish Jews, the disciples, doing there? What a hard thing for the flesh to be silent in the presence of God, and in the presence of the glory of God Peter speaks; but God says, “Silence! my Son is the only one who has a right to speak here." Then Christ comes with the words, "Be not afraid." He has the only right to speak in those one thousand years. Then, how does He use the liberty? When He was here before it was not so. Christ was dumb, and might speak. If He had spoken, it must have been destruction then. But now, in the scene before us of glory, how does He use this power? Not for destruction, but for the most beautiful display of grace such as never was yet; for it will be according to man's circumstances. According to GOD it was on the cross; but Christ was straitened in His circumstances then, and there was a hindrance to the flowing out of His heart in His journey to it; but in the glory He shows it all out.

Where will all the sorrow be then? Gone! It will be like the bright shining after rain. Where all the suffering? Gone! for glory will be sustained by grace, and all that cannot stand the grace and glory will be put down.

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Matt. 11:27. Christ had the perfect consciousness of His solitariness, in connection with Divine glory. " No one knows Me but the Father." " I know who I am." A certain solitude belongs to Him, and most blessed that it is so. There is only one Messiah, only one Son, and He knew it. He never forgets who He is, nor ever acts short of what He is, as the Only-begotten of the Father. Again He says, "Neither knoweth any one the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him." Who could reveal the Father save the Son? Part of the glory of Christ is seen in the use He would make of this power, and the blessedness of His knowledge which gives Him the exclusive power and right to reveal the Father. He would teach whom He would, to know Him; that is His prerogative.

" All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." What was Christ's thought in connection with this universal power? " I have got the secret of the Father, I have power to reveal Him, I will look out for some to whom the Father can be revealed." That is the thought of Christ's heart-and does not this tell out a whole volume of His character? What a contrast to ourselves: if we had all things in our power, what should we do with them all? Should we not want some fragment for self? With Christ, it is only " My Father:" all is in connection with Him.

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