

## **MATTHEW 17:1-9**

I have often driven through Glencoe on my way north from Glasgow over the years. And as many of you will know, it's a spectacular drive; the mountains tower above the road on both sides and the waterfalls cascade right down to the road's edge. And I always enjoy driving that Glencoe stretch a wee bit slower than the rest of the journey, so that I can soak it all in. But I remember one journey through Glencoe that was better than all the rest. I was by myself in the car and the weather

was bad. The rain was belting down and despite the fact it was about lunch time the glen was grey and dark with the heavy clouds. Then suddenly through a gap in the clouds, sunlight hit the side of a mountain and it was like a shaft of light; as if someone was shining a massive torch on the mountainside. The wet rock shone and glistened in the light and the whole scene was so amazing that I pulled my car over to the side of the road and just stared at it. I was reminded of William Henry Davies great poem; “What is this life if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare.” It was one of those moments. Now the transfiguration of Jesus Christ must have been something like that for the disciples, but even better. The momentous events of the transfiguration occur immediately after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus had warned the disciples that it was going to get extremely tough from now on and they had to be prepared for that. And so to give them some encouragement for the days ahead Jesus took them up the mountain for some spiritual refreshment. And what an experience they had! The

mountain was probably Hermon, vast and splendid and often snow capped. It was almost other worldly for people who were used to living in the dry, dusty heat of sea level. And that fitted the experience they witnessed very well indeed. It was truly other worldly as Jesus' clothes shone white and there was Elijah and Moses to meet with him....

At times we have all probably spoken when the best thing would have been to keep quiet. We know the feeling of wanting the ground to swallow us up – anything to protect us from the

embarrassment of that ill-chosen word at the wrong moment. Imagine, then how Peter must have felt here. His offer to build shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah may have struck him as being totally out of place as soon as he had made it, but we can also probably understand where it came from. This was the mountain-top experience to end them all – Jesus appearing in radiant glory, joined by two ancient Israelite characters with the Father’s voice thundering from the cloud. Who wouldn’t want to make the moment last? But the moment wasn’t meant to last

– rather it was meant to be a time when more of the truth about who Jesus was could be revealed to Peter, James and John. The intensity of the experience was not an end in itself, it was meant to be an opportunity to learn. I've never had an experience of God remotely like the transfiguration, but there have been times when the Lord's presence has changed things for me; when I've been dry and tired and feeling unable to offer anything, God has come alongside and blessed. And I'm sure that's true for you as well. I know that some people have seen visions

of Christ that have powerfully moved them and I think that it's proper that we don't right these experiences off. Instead folks should be encouraged to seek to understand what God is saying through them. Peter clearly appreciated this moment of revelation, and wished that he could prolong it. He expresses this in a bumbling way, trying to contain what was uncontainable. He delights in being in the presence of Jesus, even when he doesn't fully understand. Cloud often symbolises the presence of God in Scripture, and the voice is an echo of Jesus' baptism.

Remember God's words then: "This is my beloved Son, on whom my favour rests." Here in a similar way is a voice of loving affirmation not just for Jesus' benefit, but also for those looking on. It is a summons to pay attention, to listen to the word of God through his Son. Jesus needs this affirmation, as he sets his face towards Jerusalem, and all that that means. We need to continually hear the affirming words of God also. That's why times of gathering together are crucial when we hear the prophetic voice of God through worship. The transfiguration experience



can only be understood as a worshiping experience. There is nothing to be gained by trying to rationally explain it. Instead we are to believe in its reality by faith and to worship as the disciples would later do as they reflected on it.

Jesus' instruction to them to keep quiet really puzzled them. It would have been very natural to want to tell everyone about what they had just witnessed. Why keep something so splendid secret? They had to wait until after the resurrection, which to the Jews meant the end of time when all believers would be resurrected together;

they wouldn't have understood that Jesus would rise first. Jesus understood that his cousin John was the second Elijah, but they didn't. Nor at this point could they understand about a suffering Messiah. It just wasn't within their expectations. Sometimes we too are slow to understand and we need the Spirit's enlightenment. Despite all his revelation, God's ways remain a mystery to human minds. This calls for humility and trusting obedience. The Lord had gifted Peter with a vision: a vision of the glory of Jesus and that vision would remain with Peter for the rest of his

life. Whenever Peter encountered difficult times; maybe persecution or trouble with the Jews or ill health or eventually the prospect of a terrible death, he would have been able to remember back to the vision of the glorified Christ and say to himself “I was there; I was part of that so that I would be strengthened to never give up.” Peter lived with Jesus every day. He lived with him through the transfiguration and the miracles and all the great moments. But he also lived with him through the ordinary events as well: the shared meals; the long journeys and all the rest. We live

with Jesus every day as well. We may not have too many transfiguration experiences, if any, but we do have the same Jesus with us every day. One of the pitfalls that we can fall into is to build our lives around the transfiguration experiences or the wait for the transfiguration experiences and miss the point of a daily relationship. You see, Peter was not called to worship the transfiguration. He was not called to build a shrine on the mountain and pay homage at it. There was no annual pilgrimage to be set up in memory. No, his relationship

with Jesus was to strengthen; that was the point. And it has got to be the same with us. To return to the example that I began with this morning. The journey is not full of Glencoe moments, even though the scenery is always splendid. If I was to pull the car into the side of the road and wait for the special moment then I may never complete the journey. Let's be grateful for the highs of faith, but let's be realistic and understand them only as an encouragement in the greater journey.