



Week 3: Matthew 17-28

Study Guide for the week of Jan. 12-18

Personal reflection / journaling exercise

This week, spend time in Matt 17:1-7, the transfiguration of Jesus.

The transfiguration of Jesus stands, as NT Wright has written, as a reminder, a rebuke, and an invitation. A reminder that there are depths of spirituality open to all of us, but that so many of us hide from; this is often because we fear what the transforming presence of God might do if he were truly given free rein in our hearts and lives. A rebuke that we are too often content with a discipleship that stays on the surface and where we're happy just to go through the motions instead of taking the time and care to seek God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And an invitation into the presence of God that teaches, strengthens, encourages and nourishes us for the journey back down the mountain into the flat plains of our ordinary, everyday lives.

In what ways is the transfiguration of Jesus a reminder to you? Where are you afraid to give God free rein in your life? Where do you need God's burning love to show up unexpectedly?

In what ways is the transfiguration of Jesus a rebuke to you? Where are you skimming along the surface or just going through the motions of following Jesus? Where do you need to take the time to seek God's grace and silence so the Holy Spirit can continue to transform you?

In what ways is the transfiguration of Jesus an invitation to you? Are you spending time in God's presence just for the "experience," or to be taught and encouraged so you can bring God's presence into the lives of the people you encounter every day? How are you responding to the hurt and brokenness that you meet at the base of the mountain?

Discussion starters

1. Reread Matt 18:15-17. What are the three steps to conflict resolution Jesus teaches his followers? Why do you think it's important to approach a person who wronged you in private and by only yourself? What is your usual first step in conflict resolution? How is Jesus' way better than yours (if they differ)?
2. Can you name some people you don't expect to see in heaven? Reread Matt 20:1-16. How do you feel about "deathbed conversions"? Does anyone "deserve" eternal life? Read Rom 3:23. Does your answer change? Now read Rom 3:24-28. Would you rather receive God's grace (being treated better than you deserve) or his justice (being treated exactly as you deserve)? How do you think others would rather be treated?
3. How do you view or experience God's law, as a positive or a negative force in your life? Why? Reread Matt 22:34-40. How would your life change if you viewed God's law as the best way to show love?
4. In Matt 25, Jesus teaches how we're to live as we wait for his second coming. What are the three ways we're to live? (Hint: each parable focuses on one characteristic a Christian should cultivate as we wait.) Answer: we're to live expectantly, believing Jesus will return at any moment, always prepared to meet him; responsibly, using our gifts to invest in God's kingdom; compassionately, being personally involved

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with simple acts of service to each other. Which of these characteristics seem most prevalent in our world? In the lives of the average Christian? The least prevalent?

5. When we think of Peter's blustering confidence (Matt 26:33) we also remember the cock crowing (Matt 26:69-75). How do you allow your great expectations of Jesus to look like your own ambitions and image of God? Are there cocks crowing in your life, asking those difficult questions you'd rather not entertain? Is your enthusiasm for Jesus backed by a growing faith and deepening understanding of what it means to follow him?
6. How seriously did the religious leaders take Jesus' claims of resurrection (Matt 27:62-65)? How seriously did the disciples take Jesus' claims (Matt 26:56b)? Are you more like the religious leaders or the disciples? Why?

Bible verse to memorize: Matthew 28:19-20