

## The Transfiguration

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The Transfiguration of Jesus is a remarkable incident in many regards. The account of it is found in detail in the three synoptic Gospels, and most people believe that John's statement, "We have seen His glory," refers to the event that happened on top of an unnamed mountain and which has been the subject of much discussion for 2000 years. Some say that it is a remarkable miracle because it is the only miracle that happened to Jesus while He lived on earth before the Resurrection.

The event has enormous implication for the proof of the deity of Jesus. But one aspect of this momentous account is that it is a foundational place to begin to think about the true nature of reality. On that mountain, a fact became very clear: There are two worlds,

the eternal and the temporal, and they are both proximate and permeable.

Luke 9:28-36.

28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. 31 They spoke about his departure,[a] which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have

chosen; listen to him.” 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Representative of the seen or temporal world were Peter, James and John, here portrayed all their humanity – such that in a crucial moment, they fell asleep. Representative of the eternal world were two figures who came to encourage Jesus, Moses and Elijah. There must have been some urgency that would necessitate their appearance there on the mountain. From a temporal point of view, if Jesus did not go through with the plan to save mankind, they like all others would end up in hell. And of course the other representative of the unseen powers was God Himself, speaking. Jesus, both fully God and fully man, stood joining those two worlds.

Two worlds came together on that mountain, or more properly stated, became visible on that mountain. But it wasn't the first time that the two worlds were seen by human beings. For instance, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego make a decision

to honor the unseen realities of God when the king told them to bow down, they were joined by a heavenly Being inside the fiery furnace, and others saw it too. And it happened after Jesus ascended, too: When Stephen, the first Christian martyr died, he saw Jesus roused from His heavenly throne in alarm.

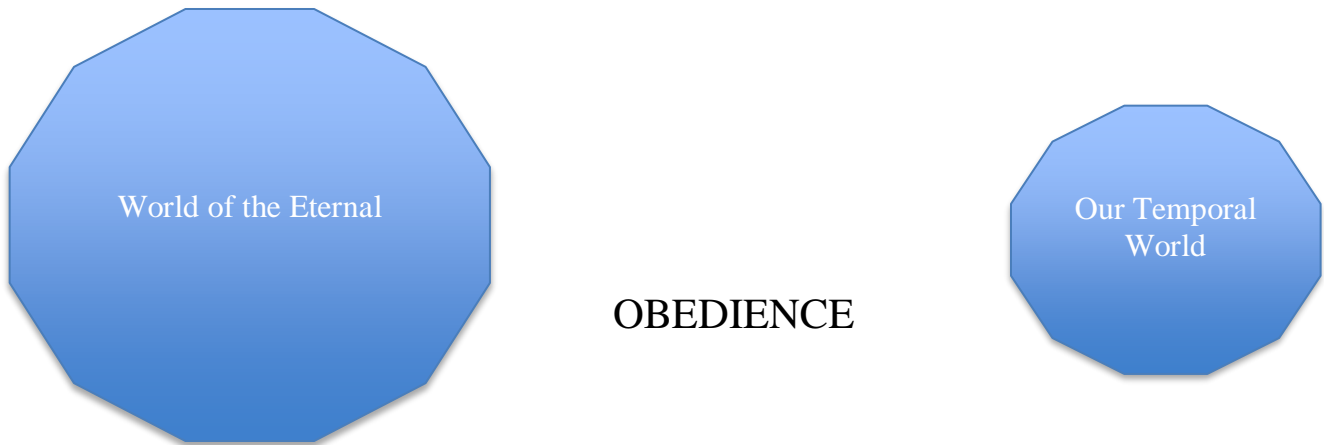
For each Christian, we must begin all our thinking about reality with the acknowledgment that there are two worlds, two aspects of reality. It is the decision the teenager has to make about whether to have sex with his girlfriend or show that he will act on the reality of two worlds and not just the sensation-filled one before him. It is the decision of the businesswoman who must turn down the opportunity to advance in her job if she knows it cannot be reconciled with what she knows about the God who reigns from another unseen world.

A Christian can only integrate the reality of those two worlds through one mechanism: The phenomenon of obedience.

In this phenomenon, Jesus Himself was the example. On the Mount, God's thunderous voice declared, "This is my Son, Whom

I have chosen. Listen to Him.” He could stand in the position of uniting two worlds because He Himself had been obedient to His Father. Peter, James and John entered the cloud there on the Mount and it was there, in the union of two worlds, that they could hear God speaking.

It can be demonstrated this way:



All religions claim to be able to join the two worlds of the eternal and the temporal. But the joining of the two is impossible without supernatural terms, conditions that created by God.

The heart of the Transfiguration is obedience. We call it a phenomenon, because like all phenomena, it 1) takes place in the real world 2) can be observed 3) can be measured and assessed, and 4) its consequences can be known.

Though we cannot see the things we are called to believe in, we can see obedience. Jesus served as a symbol of perfect obedience. We, too, can be symbols, not just because Jesus preceded us as the perfect example of obedience, but also because He is the chief Symbol of all symbols. Because of Him, we as human beings can bring the two worlds together on the basis of supernatural terms, that is, what God has supernaturally revealed; but we can ourselves serve as symbols of that.

Why do we refer to the commandments of God as supernatural terms? Because they were delivered to us by God. He pointed us to Jesus when He said, "Listen to Him." The

commandments of God, revealed throughout the Bible, are unique. You can't just reason your way to them. They are a means by which God fits two worlds together. The actual process of putting those two worlds together in a human life we could call "transaction."

Transaction is interaction between two or more things. In this case, the world we live in has to be transacted into the eternal one in such a way that our existence is subsumed by the eternal.



This is not something that can be accomplished just through human effort. It needs a mechanism, a transaction to take place, and it can only happen with supernatural terms.

When we talk about situations or conditions that we are in, we must always see them as situations or conditions that must be transacted into fitting into a greater reality, one superintended by God, His will, His Word.

In the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, these three young men transacted their situation without knowing what the outcome would be. We may die, they acknowledged. But they knew their situation must be transacted into a greater reality. They knew they must be obedient to supernatural terms – they knew the Ten Commandments, and they transacted the danger of what they faced until it became all one piece with eternal reality.

Later their friend Daniel faced the loss of his life in the lions' den. He transacted that hopeless situation into fitting into the larger circle, the larger and more powerful part of reality.



We, like Peter, James and John in the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration; we like the young men facing the furnace and their friend facing ravenous lions; we stand between two worlds. We acknowledge with them that survival is not the point, transaction is the point.

If you look at Scripture, you will see that every faithful person recorded in God's Word transacted his or her trouble into eternal reality.

This is a skill that children can be taught, which they must be taught. In most church situations, we tell young people stories of faithful people in the Bible and give them doctrinal teaching but we never come out and say what they simply must hear: Each of them must become a symbol of unity between the two worlds.

We have shied away from any sorts of rules or standards, thinking that they are impositions upon our children. But remember that obedience is a phenomenon and like all phenomena it has four characteristics: 1) takes place in the real world 2) can be

observed 3) can be measured and assessed, and 4) its consequences can be known.

We have bought into the world's lie that children have such inherent goodness in them that if we tell them stories of faith, they will rise to be faithful. But for most children the desire to be accepted by their peers is stronger than other things. Current teaching emphasizes relationships above almost everything. Most children don't naturally want to be symbols that go against the world. And even if they want to be symbols, they won't have the ability to do that and stay strong unless we teach them the truth about reality: It has two parts, the part you can see and the part you cannot see, and we must transact that seen side into the unseen.

Jesus was committed even in His own life to transacting His circumstances into eternal reality. He was committed to obedience, even obedient to the point of death on the cross. He showed people like Stephen, and his cousin John the Baptist, and all the early Christians, that this could be done, and that it was worth it.

In Acts, we read of the Herod arresting Peter and putting him into jail. How did the church react? They prayed. They knew that being obedient to God first put them in the position of being able to transact their circumstances into a greater reality. They knew they were symbols, that people were watching them. They knew they stood between two worlds. They waited and prayed.

Undoubtedly they were remembering a previous time when Peter and John were threatened by the Jewish leaders. How did they respond?

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

## The Believers Pray

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

““Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?  
26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together  
against the Lord and against his anointed one.[b]’[c]

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal

and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

What they were saying was, “Help us O Lord, we’re between two worlds. Help us to be able to transact our circumstances into the unseen world where Your power is.”

Here’s something else that was remarkable. The following verse says that all the believers were of one heart and one mind. That’s because transaction into the eternal world gives people around you courage. It builds community not by emphasizing how to form relationships, but by showing how to live in this world but not of it.

This is something you must approach deliberately. You must talk about it, identifying what elements of your circumstances don’t “want” to be subsumed by the unseen. These are the elements that must be deliberately tackled and downed.

Will such a teaching be popular? Will people from the world flock to a church that is populated by people committed to transacting their circumstances into eternal reality? It will look like lack of action. It will look like escapism. It will always look impractical.

It may drive away comfortable Christians, who have made their understanding of the eternal fit into their own circumstances. The eternal must take priority in the way we think, the way we speak and the way we behave. It will create smaller, harder churches instead of bloated, fat, useless ones. Like all phenomena, the phenomenon of obedience will have not only discernable characteristics, it will have discernible consequences.

This must start at the level of the home. A husband and a wife in a Christian home do not have a symmetrical relationship. The wife must submit to and obey her husband. She becomes a symbol of the phenomenon of obedience to her children and to the world which observes her as she transacts her “rights” into eternal

reality. Together, they are able with that strength to transact all the difficult circumstances they face, into eternal reality.

The Bible is full of examples of people who did or did not transact their circumstances and attitudes into eternal reality. In Exodus 32, Moses stayed a long time up on the mountain with God. Even though the people were right at the cusp of eternal reality (just as Peter James and John had been on another mountain) and could hear the thundering presence of God, they decided that they would assign their history and their fates to only the reality they saw around them. In fact, they even created symbols of that reality: a golden calf they said had led them out of Egypt. They refused to transact their feelings of fear and uncertainty into the eternal reality they were literally within sight of.

Paul on Mars Hill looked around at all the idols people had created there, and chose a symbol that he said could help people begin to transact into eternal reality. “You speak of an unknown

god,” he said, “But I’ll show you exactly the way that that god of mystery has actually been active in your lives.”

But he warned them: This true and living God was in a reality they couldn’t connect with through logic or history or through any device of their own minds. Transaction with this God could only be done on the basis of obedience to Him.

People in this world actually understand the idea of transaction if you explain it to them. An athlete will buffet and train – that is, transact-- his body not to conform to his present situation but because there’s unseen goal he is working toward. An employee transacts his or her time at work toward something unseen.

As Christians, we live out the terms of our transactions in our everyday lives. We must be conscious of the fact that we are showing ourselves to be symbols – of something – every day. Unfortunately many Christians have bought into the lie that it is our duty to be very good worldly people. We don’t become symbols of the eternal either to people close to us, or to people



who simply observe us, because we don't talk about what makes us different. Christianity isn't a guessing game for outsiders. We have to say that our obedience is to something with supernatural terms.

One reason people avoid being symbols of the eternal is that they realize there will be unwanted reactions and results. The phenomenon of obedience must create reactions from people who notice it. (If no one in the world notices your obedience, why is that? Could it be that it looks just like them? How can you be a symbol if you don't create some sort of impression on the mind of an observer?) Some will feel judged by it, as if you are saying by your obedience that you are making a comparison between them and yourself.

But there is a more obvious obstacle that people see to transacting toward eternal reality. There will be consequences. For the three young men in Babylon, the consequence of their transacting was a fiery furnace. For Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, there was most of a lifetime as a servant or a convict. For

Paul there was beatings and shipwrecks and trials and prison. For Jesus there was humiliation and lonely death.

In many cases in the Bible, people were rescued out of the fiery furnace or the lions' dens or the prisons. But for many more, there was no such rescue. In Hebrews chapter 11, the author was brutally honest about consequences:

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were

killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

We want a reality that we can control, and transacting with the eternal means we lose control of situations sometimes. But when you stand on the Mount of Transfiguration, when you enter the cloud of transacting with the eternal, things look different. Sometimes courage comes from the simple fact of knowing that you are at the juncture of two worlds.

No one of us has the inherent strength to become such symbols. Joshua and Caleb, on the verge of taking the Promised Land, knew this. Numbers 14:

6. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8“If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. 9“Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

They were telling the people that God was willing to transact with them, to enfold their desert experience into His reality of a rich and plentiful land. They warned the people that this transaction would be on the basis of supernatural terms: If God is pleased with us, don't rebel against Him. He was willing to transact every dream of theirs into reality, doing it Himself, by removing the protection of the enemy. God urged them to turn over

their fears to Him because He would transact every danger into a blessing.

But we have been speaking of the consequences of such transactions. What happened next to Joshua and Caleb?

10But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

The people wanted to try to fit God into their lives on their terms. And God was fed up with them, willing to kill them all if Moses hadn't interceded.

God calls us to take the bait of His promises. He wants us to make the pledge to become symbols, to stand between two worlds and fit ours into His.

The Lord will hear you when you place yourself into that position. You might die because of that position. You can live out the terms of the Transfiguration in your flesh every day.

Make the commitment to look at situations only as conditions to be transacted into eternal reality. Look at every situation from the vantage point of the Mount of Transfiguration.

Remember that Peter and James and John were human like us. They were asleep. They almost missed the whole thing! And the Luke account tells us that when Peter woke up, he was scurrying around, trying to do something, anything. But God put the focus on His Son, on listening to and obeying His Son.

Husbands should always be turning the attention of their wives to the eternal, finding ways to transact their situations into the eternal, to fit their lives into an eternal view. The memories of our children and grandchildren should be of parents and grandparents who were always talking about how to transact situation, how to fit them into the eternal view.

We will fail at this sometimes. The eleven disciples, who had been with Jesus daily, spent three days after His death unable to transact their experience into the eternal. When the women came and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead, they didn't

believe them. They were stuck firmly in their own small circle.

The men on the road to Emmaus were crushed and disappointed and told Jesus so, because they were now trying to cram all they'd hoped for about the eternal, into the small circle of their own reality of a dead man.

The world is committed to keeping our attention on what we can see, on their standards of measurement and success, to explain away the supernatural, to despise the supernatural. Perhaps in years past our government and our society were content to let Christians keep their transactions without comment, but now they stand ready to devour those who live on the basis of the unseen.

Transacting is what Christians do. It is our job description. It is our task in small things and large. For every Christian, every day is the Mount of Transfiguration, the intersection of the eternal and the temporal, a place where the Christian's life becomes transparent, and only the eternal purposes of God shine through.