

**Old Testament Lesson—Exodus 24:12-18**

*The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them." Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.*

**New Testament Lesson—Matthew 17:1-9**

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

Question: How good are you at keeping secrets? Hm?

Are you a vault? A stone-cold, impenetrable fortress of trust and reliability? A "take-it-to-the-grave" kind of person?

Or are you, instead, the type that just can't hold it in, despite your best intentions? You know, the type who's just gonna burst if you don't dish, if you don't spill a mixture of tea and beans all over the place?

Or, perhaps, maybe you fall somewhere in the middle—depending on the secret, why you're keeping it, and who you're keeping the secret for.

Who knows? Maybe you're even one of those who justifies blabbing what someone swore *you* to secrecy to protect by swearing another person to secrecy! And, you know, the pattern just continues on and on from there...Don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about!

So: Think about the biggest secret you've ever held. Think about the juiciest bit of private info you've ever received, for whatever reason.

You know how consequential it would be if this got out. You know how potentially damaging it could be if what you know somehow found its way into the ether where rumors and gossip spread like wildfire.

Now: Imagine the person you're keeping the secret for is Jesus of Nazareth. Imagine it's *Jesus* who has entrusted you—*you*, of all people—with something so big—so incredible—that it would change everything as we know it.

What you now know could reshape the world. Actually, even that's putting it too lightly. What you now know could completely revolutionize how everyone you've ever met understands reality and their purpose in life!

There is no bigger secret than this. There is no juicier information than what you have. So, what are you going to do with it? How will you move forward? Because today, and every day after this one, is different now. Nothing can be the same anymore.

Well: This was the case; this was the situation for three of Jesus' close friends. For Peter, James, and John, their perception of not only Jesus, but their entire worldview was changed forever by the time they came down that mountain.

Except this secret wasn't *verbalized* to them. It wasn't whispered in their ears like many private conversations. Actions always speak louder than words, of course. No, this was something that had to be *experienced*—something that warranted not just one witness, but three.

Peter, James, and John are given a vision more spectacular than anything else in the history of their people. It's beyond imagination, really.

If I'm in the disciples' sandals, I'm thinking, "Dude, a little heads-up would've been nice, buddy. Maybe just a quick word of warning next time before you plan on dazzling us to death!"

Lord, have mercy, Jesus!

Matthew doesn't tell us why Jesus brings these three of his followers. I mean, surely Peter, the fast-tongued blabbermouth of a disciple, would've been a questionable choice where sensitive information is involved.

But, alas, it's Peter, James, and John that are given this privilege and responsibility. Jesus takes them up atop a hill and, for a few brief moments, gives them a glimpse of eternal glory. For just a few brief moments, Jesus shows them who he really is.

Imagine being shown such a vision! Imagine bearing witness to earth and heaven coming together—seeing what the human eye just isn't built for!

The three disciples look up and their friend has been changed—transformed. Peter and the others are transfixed and, at the same time, overcome with awe. It's as if the sun had been transported and was now pouring forth its power just yards away from them.

It's as if Creation had started anew before their eyes—as if God had reissued the command "Let there be light" and those first days began again in the very heart of Christ!

No wonder Jesus' friends wanted to build three memorials—just hoping to stay in the moment a little bit longer. Witnessing the light of Creation alone would've been enough to bring anyone to their knees. But, as we know, the vision didn't stop there. Did it? No, there was more to the story—more to the secret.

With Jesus lit up like a Christmas tree, the disciples witness something even less believable. Two of the most consequential figures in Jewish history appear alongside the brilliant, glowing figure.

Moses—the giver of the Law...Elijah—the prophet of power—both of them suddenly at Jesus' side—almost as if they're there to pay him homage—as if to lend him their support—a revelation, a miracle, and an anointing all wrapped up together.

What a blessing to behold—no kind of filter to make it easier for human beings like us to perceive—just an unmitigated, pure, window into heaven that could've made an angel blush.

Of course, it isn't just about what they *saw*. No, this movie has a soundtrack too.

As if it weren't enough to get the seal of approval from Moses and Elijah! As if it weren't enough to take in the light of Creation! Of course those *are* enough to get the point across. But, just for good measure, the disciples hear the voice of Creation, too. They hear the seal of approval from the Creator, too...

... *suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"*

Finally, the disciples' suspicions and hopes were confirmed. With Moses, Elijah, and the God of Israel all present and pointing at their best friend—well, that's enough to obliterate anyone's doubts. Yes, their leader—their teacher—*was* the Son of God!

This person from Nazareth in Galilee is the Messiah! This is the One we've been expecting. This is the One our people have been praying for! The wait is finally over!

Oh, how ecstatic our friends and family will be when they hear the news! This will be the most joy our people have felt since returning from exile! The glory days of David's kingdom are coming back to Israel, baby! Oh my gosh, I can't wait to see the look on Thomas' face when he gets wind of this!

Except, this wasn't their news to tell—not yet. For a time, what Peter, James, and John just experienced together had to remain between them and Jesus. For God's sake, they had just witnessed heaven and earth overlapping and glimpsed Eternity! And yet, the time was not right to share it with anyone else.

As Christ had made a habit of doing by this point, he calms the fears of his three friends—immobilized and shaking after hearing the voice of God—the same voice Moses once heard out of a fiery bush.

Matthew says *they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."*

After catching their breath and slowly returning to a normal cardiac rhythm, the four of them begin walking down the hill. And then, seemingly out of nowhere, Jesus hits them with the most unfair command ever!

*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision."* What? Are you flipping kidding me, dude? You expect us to keep what we just witnessed to *ourselves*? I mean, come on Jesus! Philip's gonna know something's up. You know how intuitive that guy is!

It figures, right, that Jesus' first command after this mountaintop moment would be to keep their mouths shut. Easier said than done!

I like to think that after Jesus demanded their silence, the disciples recalled the voice of God they'd heard moments earlier: *"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"* Listen to him. Do what he says—yes, even keeping this to yourselves.

They had to try, at least. But, as it turns out, they didn't have to keep this secret forever: *As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."* (Repeat)

At this point in the story, Jesus' friends don't know what that means. But we do. They don't yet realize that Jesus is the One—that Jesus is the Messiah not because he's come to overthrow Rome or restore the glory days of David. But we do.

No, he's the One—Jesus is the Messiah specifically because he's come to die and be resurrected to new life.

Jesus isn't the Son of God because he's BFF's with Moses and Elijah or because he shines with the light of Creation. No, he's the One—he's the Messiah because he knows that true power is rooted in self-sacrificial love.

Friends: Being transformed by God's power and grace happens when we humble ourselves—when we repent of our hubris that uses our power and privilege as a means to make the world in our image—strongarming those we disagree with into submission.

Being truly transformed happens when heed the voice of God: “Listen to him!”—when we seek to follow in Christ's footsteps.

And yes, those footsteps will lead us to mountaintop experiences. But they'll also lead us to places that makes us uncomfortable—that challenge us—that frustrate us and frighten us.

That glowing figure, shining like the sun, we might've expected to demand the disciples' exaltation and to be hailed as the embodiment of earthly power and force. But Jesus doesn't do that! Instead, he gives us an example that confounds us.

He comes down that mountain after revealing his glory. And rather than demand to be waited on hand and foot like an emperor, he serves others. He serves not only those he's called, but serves those society has discarded, ignored, and given up on.

That, siblings in Christ, is Transfiguration. That is how we build God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. That is how we are transformed and made new.

We do the work. We serve. We follow. We shine.

It isn't rocket science. And it's certainly not a secret.

Amen.