

# OpenTheo

## December 1st: Isaiah 44 & Luke 9:18-50

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Demystifying the idols. The Transfiguration.

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## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 44. But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen. Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb, and will help you.

Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jashoran whom I have chosen, for I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.

This one will say, I am the Lord's. Another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, the Lord's, and name himself by the name of Israel. Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts.

I am the first, and I am the last. Besides me there is no God. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid.

Have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? There is no rock. I know not any.

All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. Who fashions a God or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human.

Let them all assemble. Let them stand forth. They shall be terrified.

They shall be put to shame together. The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm.

He becomes hungry, and his strength fails. He drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line.

He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house.

He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar, and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man.

He takes a part of it and warms himself. He kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a God and worships it.

He makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat, he roasts it and is satisfied.

Also he warms himself and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes into a God, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, Deliver me, for you are my God.

They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes so that they cannot see, and their hearts so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, Half of it I burned in the fire, I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and have eaten, and shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes. A deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant.

I have formed you, you are my servant, O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it. Shout, O depths of the earth, break forth into

singing, O mountains, O forest and every tree in it. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb. I am the Lord who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited, and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins, who says to the deep, Be dry, I will dry up your rivers, who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose, saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built, and of the temple, Your foundation shall be laid. In Isaiah chapter 41 the Lord began a trial and debate with the idolatrous nations and their false gods.

In chapter 44 this trial of the gods continues to provide the backdrop for the prophecy. The Lord is demonstrating that he alone of all of the gods is the true one. He is the creator of all, the master of history and over all of the nations.

Just as in the preceding chapter, this chapter opens with a but now. In both instances the sorry state into which the nation has fallen through its sins is contrasted with the loving commitment of the Lord to them and his coming redeeming action for them. Chapter 43 ended with the terrible sentence that fell upon Israel on account of its sins.

Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and deliver Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling. Chapter 44 opens by addressing Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen, accentuating the contrast that is being drawn by the repetition of the double name from the prior verse. Verse 2 recalls the great song of Moses from Deuteronomy chapter 32 and his blessing of the tribes in the passage that follows in chapter 33, the only other places in which the term Jashoran is found.

Jashoran is an unusual term for Israel and perhaps the intention is to evoke the larger context of those passages in Deuteronomy, passages which certainly invite intertextual comparisons with this passage in Isaiah. For instance in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verses 15 to 18. But Jashoran grew fat and kicked, you grew fat, stout and sleek.

Then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation. They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded.

You were unmindful of the rock that bore you and you forgot the God who gave you birth. As in Isaiah chapter 44, this passage in Deuteronomy speaks of the birth of the nation and in verse 8 of our passage in Isaiah the Lord will speak of himself as the true rock over against the false gods of the nations, an important theme in Deuteronomy

chapter 32. The song of Moses foretells the way that the Lord will prove his supremacy over the false gods of the nations and how he will redeem his people.

This great prophetic statement of divine intent given through Moses is being fulfilled in the events declared here in Isaiah, so perhaps we should recognize some allusions here. The spirit will be poured out upon their descendants like rain upon the heights of a parched land descending in streams through the wilderness with the new life of a restored people springing up on its banks. The motif of the pouring out of the spirit, most particularly seen in connection with the Pentecost, occurs in several places in the Old Testament prophets, perhaps most notably in the book of Joel.

Imagery of the Lord's watering of the land has already been used by the prophet Isaiah at many points in his book. Here the watering is explicitly connected with the Lord's gift of his life-giving spirit. When the nation was so blessed with the vivifying presence of the Lord's spirit, people, whether Israelites or Gentile proselytes, would be eager to identify themselves with a nation that so displayed the glory of its maker.

In the debate with the nations and their false gods, the Lord had presented Israel as his witnesses even in their sinful rebellion. In its history, Israel had witnessed the faithfulness, the might and the holiness of the Lord and could bear witness to it and to him. The Lord is unique and supreme and there are no gods that can threaten him nor any other like him.

Besides substantiating the Lord's case against the idols and their worshippers, the demonstration of the Lord's uniqueness and sovereignty is a source of assurance to his people who are once again told not to fear. The Lord is the first and he is the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He, as the creator of all things, is before all other powers and as the judge of all he will stand unrivalled when they have all returned to the dust.

He has formed his people Israel as his witnesses who can testify to the fact that the Lord has spoken concerning his future actions which he has brought to pass. Can any other god produce such witnesses? In this is demonstrated the fact that no other god exists, no other rock, using the terminology of the Song of Moses, looking for other peoples to bear witness to the faithfulness and goodness and greatness of their gods in comparison to the witness that Israel can bear concerning the Lord. None are to be found.

In one of the most powerful polemics against idolatry in the whole of the scripture, the Lord skewers the futility and stupidity of idol making. Idolaters clearly had sophisticated accounts of what idols meant and how when they were worshipping them, they were really worshipping the god behind them. All of this however is mystification of what is actually taking place.

To demystify the process, the Lord goes back to the construction of the idols in the first

place. Robert Paul Wolfe tells the old Jewish joke of Mrs. Feinschmeck and her son Reuben with his irrational fear of blintzes. For some reason her son had a deep fear of this delicacy and so she was advised by a child psychologist to go through the process of making the blintzes in front of him so that he could see what they were made of.

Wolfe writes, Mrs. Feinschmeck dutifully gathered up the ingredients, set Reuben on a kitchen chair in full view of the work table and stove, and began to make blintzes. At each stage she turned to Reuben to see whether he was becoming frightened. She mixed up the filling.

Is it alright Reuben? It's alright mama. She made the batter. Is it alright Reuben? It's alright mama.

She made the first paper thin pancake, laid it on the table and placed a big spoonful of filling in the middle of the pancake. Is it alright Reuben? It's alright mama. She folded over the first corner.

I'm alright mama. She folded the second corner. I'm alright mama.

She folded the third corner. I'm still alright mama. Finally she folded over the last corner.

And there it is Reuben. Help! Blintzes! In Isaiah chapter 44 the Lord is making the blintzes for Israel, helping his son to get over an irrational view of idols. Whatever sophisticated mystification pagan theologians might give for the idols, when it all comes down to it, they are constructed by human beings out of inanimate pieces of wood and stone and metal.

There's no great virtue conferred by those that make them, there's no power inherent in the materials that are used, and the process of their construction is mundane. By breaking down the process of forming an idol, step by step, the Lord shows his people just how irrational idol worship is. People are prostrating themselves before pieces of wood taken from trees, parts of which were used as fuel for fire, fashioned by human craftsmen who are but flesh.

He becomes hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water and is faint. The image that they bear upon them is nothing but the image of a man. What renders such an object fitting to receive the worship belonging to God? If they truly knew what they were doing, they would realise the abomination that the idol is.

An idol is such an abomination because of what it claims for itself. It claims the worship of the Lord whence is but a piece of wood. The more hollow and vain the mockery of the true, the more grievous the offence.

In contrast to the idols formed by men, the Lord formed Israel. Israel has been established by the Lord as a witness to his deity, and as John Oswalt observes, they can

take comfort in the fact that their task has not yet been finished. The Lord has not forgotten them, and has not finished with them.

Indeed he had dealt with the great obstacle, their sins and their transgressions which had been removed from his sight. They are called to respond accordingly, returning to him as he has restored them. Heavens and earth are called to join together in song to praise the Lord for what he has done.

The Lord's glory would be seen in his redemption of Israel. Jacob himself would be a demonstration of the Lord's deity. The Lord Israel's Redeemer who first formed them from the womb, perhaps in the redemption from Egypt, is also the creator of all things.

As the creator of all things, he is sovereign over all things. He is the one who rules at the first as the one who created, and he is the one who will rule at the last as the judge, and his purposes will be effective over all others in between. He brings to nothing the words of counsellors, wise men and diviners of the nations, but the words of his prophetic witnesses, the words of Israel his servant, will be fulfilled, more particularly in the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah.

In the drying up of the deep, we probably have an allusion back to the crossing of the Red Sea as the Lord led his people out of Egypt. In redeeming his people from Babylon, the Lord would be accomplishing a new exodus. The final verse of this chapter is the most startling and is one of several reasons why many commentators argue that the book of Isaiah should be split into different parts, chapters after chapter 40 being attributed to some prophet from the middle of the 6th century at the very earliest.

The last prophecies that we can clearly date within the book of Isaiah come from 701 BC at the time of the attack of the Assyrians upon Jerusalem. Yet the man who is being spoken of here did not perform the prophesied actions until 539 BC, over 160 years later. The nearest analogy that we have to such a prophecy of a person's name many years before their birth is in 1 Kings 13.2 Part of the strangeness of verse 28 here is that the name Cyrus is not presented as a prediction, it's just used as if the readers already knew what the name Koresh or Cyrus meant.

It is important to recognize that many of the people who do not believe that this was written by the prophet Isaiah do not on that account automatically deny that this is a predictive prophecy. Many see this as something that is given in the years running up to 539 BC, speaking of a known figure but declaring something remarkable that he is about to perform. Some commentators have suggested that the name might have been added in later in recognition of the fulfillment of Isaiah the son of Amoz's prophecy 160 years earlier.

Verses 3 and 4 of the following chapter might give a bit more weight to those who see the name Koresh as part of an original prophecy from Isaiah the son of Amoz. Those

verses read Cyrus has already been predicted within this part of Isaiah, most notably in chapter 41 verse 25 Remarkably, Cyrus is here spoken of as the Lord's appointed shepherd for his people. The shepherd is the king-like figure and this shepherd Cyrus is going to be the one through whom the Lord will achieve his purpose.

That purpose being the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah. In 539 BC Cyrus took Babylon and shortly after he made a decree by which many of the Jewish exiles started to return to Jerusalem. We read of all of this in Ezra chapter 1 verses 1 to 4 May his God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel.

He is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. When we consider the place of this prophecy concerning Cyrus here, it is also important that we keep in mind the larger context.

The Lord is disputing with the idols and gods of the nations, showing that they cannot foretell the future. This prophecy is part of the Lord's proof that he is sovereign in history. And perhaps the remarkable character of a prophecy delivered 160 years beforehand was to serve more fully to underline that fact.

Wherever we fall on the particular question of when this is to be dated, it is important that we do not thereby evacuate the argument that surrounds it of its proper force. A question to consider. In the remarkable satirical section of this chapter, where the Lord demystifies the idols and reveals them for what they are, the Lord helps to free his people's imagination from something that might have kept them captive.

The images of the nations are no gods at all. What comparable processes of demystification might be applied to certain of the idols of our own time, such as money for example? Luke chapter 9 verses 18 to 50. Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him.

And he asked them, Who did the crowd say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others that one of the prophets of old has risen. Then he said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, The Christ of God.

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

And as he was praying the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

And as the men were parting from him Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him. And when the voice had spoken Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

On the next day when they had come down from the mountain a great crowd met him. And behold a man from the crowd cried out, Teacher, I beg you to look at my son. For he is my only child.

And behold a spirit seizes him and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.

Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here. While he was coming the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.

But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.

But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who



is great. John answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us.

But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you. After the feeding of the five thousand in Luke chapter 9 Jesus asks his disciples who people say that he is. The crowd seem to identify him with John the Baptist, with Elijah or one of the prophets.

Jesus' ministry very naturally follows from that of John the Baptist, and it's not surprising that there will be seen to be some resemblances. Herod the Tetrarch was already speculating about that connection. Like Elijah and John, Jesus spends much of his time at the moment in the wilderness.

Peter however confesses that Jesus is the Christ, he's the anointed one, he's the awaited Messiah. The disciples are strictly charged not to tell this to anyone. The time will come when they will do so, but that time is not yet.

And here we reach a turning point in the narrative. The first phase of Jesus' ministry began with the testimony of John the Baptist, and then his baptism in which the Father testified to him and the Spirit descended upon him. That phase ended with a cluster of events.

It ended with the death of John the Baptist, and speculation about Jesus being John the Baptist raised from the dead, also with a commissioning of the disciples. Now the second phase of Jesus' ministry as he moves towards Jerusalem begins with the testimony of Peter, that he is the Christ of God. Then the testimony of the Father in the transfiguration which corresponds to the baptism.

And then that leads up to his own death and resurrection, and a second sending out of the Twelve. And here Jesus announces the fact of his forthcoming death. A great shadow is coming over the story at this point.

There have been veiled foreshadowings of Christ's death before this, but now it is being made more explicit. Jesus teaches his disciples about his forthcoming death in considerable detail. Not only will he be raised, he will be raised on the third day.

Jesus doesn't explicitly seem to mention the manner of his death here, but immediately afterwards it is followed by a statement concerning those who would follow, that they must take up their crosses and follow him. It can be very easy for us to forget the force of the symbol of the cross. The cross was not just a generic form of execution.

It was a gruesome instrument of torture and public humiliation, and to take up your cross was to mark yourself out as a condemned man or woman, an outcast of society to be scorned and humiliated. Willingly to take up such a thing would be to deny and resist every screaming instinct of self-preservation. Not merely our desire to avoid pain, but

our desire to avoid being ashamed.

The humiliation of being made a public display in your agony and nakedness. We all want to save our lives, but Christ says that those who want to save their lives must lose them. Taking up the cross is not an optional thing to do.

Our very lives must be held with an open hand, as we live like those condemned to death. There is a stark underlying choice. Who are we ashamed of? Are we ashamed of the person that we are called to follow? The one who calls us to follow after him in bearing the shame? The one who calls us to take up our cross as he has taken up his cross? Or are we ashamed of the world that rejects him? Ashamed of our sin? Ashamed of the things that tether us to this order? This order of shameful rebellion? Shame stands opposed to the concept of glory.

And there is going to be a revelation of glory. The glory of Christ as he comes with the holy angels. And Jesus teaches his disciples that those who are ashamed of him in that day will find themselves put to shame when his glory appears.

Jesus says to them that some of them will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. And the various forms of this statement in the Gospels are each followed by the event of the Transfiguration. There seems to be some connection between that statement and the event of the Transfiguration.

However, I don't believe that the Transfiguration is the fulfilment of this statement. For one, it might seem rather strange to talk about some people not dying before an event that takes place only eight days later. Rather, I believe that it refers to the events of AD 70 and the revelation of Christ's kingdom and power at that point.

Part of the background here could be seen in passages such as Daniel chapter 7. However, the Transfiguration is an anticipation of the later coming of Christ. It's a trailer, as it were, for a later feature presentation. The Transfiguration is a privileged preview of the reality of the resurrected Christ, the ascended Christ, and also the glory of the later coming of Christ.

In 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 16 to 18, the Apostle Peter speaks about this. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the majestic glory, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

In the event of the Transfiguration, we're seeing a number of different themes coming together. Christ is the glorious last Adam and the second man. There are themes of Sinai, the theophany of Sinai as God's glory appeared on the mountain to Moses and his

face shone.

Here Moses again appears on the mountain, as does Elijah, two people who witnessed glorious theophanic appearances of God in the Old Testament. Here Christ's face, unlike that of Moses, shines with a light of its own, not merely a reflected light. Sinai was also the place where they built the tabernacle, and Peter here wants to build three tabernacles for Elijah, for Jesus and for Moses, not realising that Jesus himself is God tabernacled among his people.

Finally, the law was given at Sinai, and here, instead of giving the law, God declares that his Son is the one to listen to. As Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1-2 puts it, In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Beyond these connections and the presence of Moses, we might also think about what they're talking about.

Jesus is talking about the departure, or very literally, the exodus that he's about to accomplish at Jerusalem. In using the word exodus here, Luke makes clear to his reader that the events that are about to take place fulfil the meaning of the Passover and all the other events of the exodus. Christ is accomplishing a new deliverance for his people.

I don't believe we should think of this exodus purely in terms of Christ's death either. The exodus is achieved in his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and in the gift of his spirit at Pentecost. Indeed, these are events that can be mapped onto the Old Testament story of the exodus, the story of the Passover, the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, the story of the arrival at Sinai, and the gift of the law.

All of these things are fulfilled in Christ's work. Moses and Elijah appear alongside Christ, representing perhaps the law and the prophets, or the great witnesses, the wilderness forerunners. Jesus only takes three of his disciples, the three core disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him up the mountain.

They will witness things here that the others will not witness. However, what they witness will help them to understand what comes next. The Transfiguration will help them better to understand the cross.

When they see the power and the glory of the heavenly high priest and his glorious robes, they will know that the events of the cross do not befall him unwillingly. Rather, he has taken up his cross. He has willingly walked towards this fate.

He has purposefully determined this as his path. From the vantage point of the Mount of Transfiguration, we see a glimpse of the future, of the glorious king who will one day display his glory in the coming of the kingdom. There is also an unveiling of the past.

Moses and Elijah appear with him as two witnesses. They are people whose ministry pointed forward to his, and in their appearance we learn something more about the way

that Christ relates to the Old Testament and the events within it. In the glorious transfiguration of his face, we see something about the character of the appearances of God to his people in the Old Testament.

In the Gospel of John, for instance, on a number of occasions, the glory of Christ is connected with Old Testament appearances of God's glory to his people. Isaiah chapter 12 verse 41 connects the vision of Isaiah in the temple with a vision of Christ's glory. John chapter 1 verse 51 speaks of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, connecting Christ with the vision of Jacob in Jacob's ladder.

In verses 14 to 18 of chapter 1 of John, we're seeing a contrast and comparison between the glory of Christ and the glory witnessed by Moses on Mount Sinai and the glory of the law. What we see on the Mount of Transfiguration then is an unveiling of the identity of the one who had appeared to Israel throughout its history. Moses saw his back on Mount Sinai.

Isaiah saw the train of his robe filling the temple. Ezekiel in chapter 1 of his prophecy described in the most elliptical way the lower parts of his appearance in bodily form. But now, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see the face, and the face is that of Jesus Christ.

The glory of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration then is a revelation that opens up history and its meaning, both the meaning of Israel's past and its anticipation of Christ's work, and in Christ's work in veiled form in the Old Testament, and the meaning of the future of Israel and the world, as the glorious King is seen in all of his splendour. Following the majesty of the mountain appearance, there is a return to earth with a bump. Jesus had left the nine other disciples at the foot of the mountain, giving them the duty of looking after the people, and they have failed miserably in his absence.

We might think here of the example of Moses. Moses descends from Mount Sinai where he has received the law, and he goes down to the people who he had left in the charge of Aaron, and he sees that they've gone wild, and they've built a golden calf and they're worshipping it. He casts the tablets of stone to the ground and shatters them, and the people are judged on that occasion.

Here I think we're seeing much of the same thing. Jesus has left his disciples behind, as Aaron was left behind. The disciples, just like Aaron, have failed miserably.

And I wonder whether we're supposed to hear some allusion to the story of Exodus chapter 32, as the demon casts the child to the ground and shatters him. In calling the people a faithless and twisted generation, Jesus is taking up the language of Moses. Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 5, They have dealt corruptly with him.

They are no longer his children, because they are blemished. They are a crooked and

twisted generation. And in verse 20 of that same chapter, And he said, I will hide my face from them.

I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom there is no faithfulness. Jesus then demonstrates his power over the demon by casting it out. And at this point, as everyone's marvelling about his power, and Peter, James and John are in wonder at what they saw on the top of the mountain, Jesus tells them, and says that the words must stick in their ears.

He is about to be delivered into the hands of man. And they still do not understand what he's saying. At this point, of all the things to be preoccupied with, the disciples start to get into an argument about who is the greatest.

This is the typical human desire for exaltation over others. And Jesus' response to it is to show them a child. The kingdom of God does not work in the same way as earthly kingdoms.

The example of the child challenges us to humble ourselves, not to be people who vaunt ourselves over others, with a sense of superiority. We are not players of the competitive game of honour that utterly consumes other people's attention and concern. We must recognise our dependence, our unworthiness, and to resist the pursuit to exalt ourselves over others.

Greatness, true greatness, comes through loving service of others. Greatness also requires welcoming and receiving the weak, receiving them as we would receive Christ. In this respect, children are representative of a wider group of weak and dependent people, but important in their own right.

Receiving children means paying attention to and honouring the people who cannot give you anything in return, the people who might threaten your status rather than raising it up. In receiving such persons, we follow Jesus' own example. Jesus surrenders his rights for the sake of people who have nothing to offer him, nothing to commend themselves to his attention.

This incident is followed by another failure of recognition on the part of the disciples. There is a man casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples seek to rebuke him because he is not one of their band. This is reminiscent of Numbers 11, verses 26-29.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant to Moses from his youth, said, My lord Moses, stop them. But Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's

people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them. Jesus here challenges any sort of sectarianism.

His disciples are called to build his kingdom, not to build their own kingdoms. And learning to rejoice when they see other people doing the work of God, even though they are not of their camp, is one of the ways that they will grow into this calling. A question to consider.

Why is there a cloud and a voice on the Mount of Transfiguration?