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The Transfiguration of Christ (with Patrick Schreiner)

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Patrick Schreiner joins me to discuss his wonderful new book, 'The Transfiguration of Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Reading': <https://amzn.to/3Tq2UPd>. Patrick and I also consider how the light of the Transfiguration can illumine Holy Week and Easter.

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Transcript

Hello and welcome. I am joined today again by Patrick Schreiner. He's already been on for a discussion of his commentary on the book of Acts and also for his book on the Ascension.

And this time he's joining me to discuss his newest book, which is The Transfiguration of Christ, an exegetical and theological reading. Patrick is the Associate Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The book in question is absolutely superb.

I highly recommend it. And thank you very much for joining me. Hey, so good to be with you Alastair.

I always really enjoy talking about the Bible with you and the scriptures. I learn so much from you in terms of your own work. So it's just a privilege to be with you.

And I feel like we could do this for hours and maybe we'll do it for one hour now, but we should do it for multiple hours at some point. We should do and in person at some point. That's right.

That's right. Well, this is a rather unseasonal discussion. We're nearing Palm Sunday and Holy Week and we're talking about the Transfiguration.

Now, reading your book, it would actually seem to be a justified discussion because the Transfiguration, the mountain of the Transfiguration, gives us a vantage point to see all these other events in a different way. Can you speak to the significance of the Transfiguration as a vantage point upon these other key events of the life of Christ and maybe discuss a bit on why it gets neglected and doesn't get discussed among them for the most part? Yeah. You mentioned I'd been on before to talk about the Ascension.

So one of my own projects is to kind of hit more neglected aspects of Christ's life. And it's kind of become a little series of mine. So I'm planning on doing some other books on other aspects of Christ's life that maybe aren't spoken about as much.

Will we get a book on the circumcision of Christ? There's something to say about that. There is something to say. I'm not sure I will be the one to do that.

I do plan on doing, I keep saying, one on the descent of Christ would be next. And then I'm thinking about Temptation in Gethsemane or other topics I've been thinking about doing. I think those would be fun.

But, you know, that reality became very visceral to me when I went to our library and there was only three books on the shelves on the Transfiguration when the shelf was weighed down by the books on the resurrection and the death, which, of course, I'm very thankful for. We need to have those books on the shelves. And then the other thing I'd say in terms of why it's neglected, you know, it is a mystical, mysterious, symbolic event.

So we're speaking of when Christ went up on the mountain and his face shone and his clothes turned white. And maybe if I can pick on Protestants for a minute, Protestants aren't so good with symbolism sometimes and we struggle with it. We like straightforward narratives.

And this one just, there's mysteries surrounding it. And the Eastern Orthodox tradition has done a lot with the Transfiguration. And so maybe Western Protestant people have shied away from it for those reasons.

And another thing I mentioned, even in the book, is we probably focus more on the means to salvation rather than the goal of salvation. So there's various reasons why we might not think about the Transfiguration. I also like to think of if I were to summarize the life of Christ, I think most people wouldn't mention the Transfiguration, a short summary of Christ's life.

Even if I gave you 10 minutes, I don't know if most people would. So it seems like one of those events that doesn't have maybe impact upon the gospel or, you know, he didn't have to be transfigured to go to the cross. He could have kind of skipped that event.

So we almost feel comfortable cutting it out of our mind because it doesn't flow in terms of salvation history. But having said all that, the more I studied it, the more I thought about the reason I wrote this book is that it just seems to really contain the whole Bible in this one picture. And it is this mountaintop, literal and symbolic mountaintop experience where everything seems to come together.

I'd love to talk about other events, but you began by saying, you know, it's untimely because we're entering Holy Week and Good Friday and Easter. But there was one scholar who said, what did he say? There's a line, something to the effect, between Tabor and Calvary, there's no great distance of the two mountains. I love that line.

I think it's so true because if you read the Transfiguration in its context, this is post-Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus predicting that he will go to his death. And really, it's the moment before Jesus either goes on his journey to Jerusalem or enters Jerusalem. And so it's starting his Jerusalem ministry, ending his Galilee ministry.

And so it's so linked to the cross, and it's so linked to the cross in that he's giving them hope that the cross is not the end of the story, that on the other side of the cross, on the other side of suffering, there will be glory. And so it's pitching forward to the resurrection and the ascension and the vindication of Christ. And so I love that line, though, just to go back to it, between these two mountains, between these two hills, there is no great distance in that the New Testament brings glory, suffering, cross, crown, light, and darkness, and they bring them together.

And that Christ is really teaching his three disciples who go up on the mountain with him there will not be glory without the suffering Son of Man. And so in that sense, it's timely, because it is the introduction to the suffering, the passion of Christ, that you do have this glorious moment. In German, it's actually called the glorification.

It's not called the transfiguration. I think that's a good term for it. That's the term Peter uses.

He uses the term Gloria, and Luke uses the term Godoxa as well. And so it is this mountaintop experience that you get the vantage point of actually ultimately where the cross is going. But it also gives you a vantage point of Christology, who Christ is, this rich text in terms of what I argue is that Christ is the messianic and the eternal Son.

You also get a link, obviously, to the baptism. It's so similar to the baptism of Jesus. And so it's kind of like the entry point to his ministry and then the doorway to his suffering.

It's also a pitch back to creation. You get anthropology in here, the ultimate goal of

humanity, incarnation. I think there's a lot of links also to Gethsemane.

The same figures are there. They're asleep. There's not darkness.

There's light. And so there's just so much in here. New creation, resurrection.

We already talked about cross. In Revelation, the city is described as full of jewels and bright and shining, and it speaks of there being no need for the sun because the Lamb Christ himself is the sun. So I could go on for again and again, but it just feels like so much of the Bible, like typical, is just packed into this brief narrative with these symbols and these sayings, and it's reaching back to Moses and Elijah and so forth and so on.

So I would just agree, yeah, it's this amazing neglected text that if you just double-click on it and pause, the riches—I could have written a 500-page book on this, right? The riches are just untold. People need—there's not many books on it, and I would just say, let's write more. There's so much more to say.

I was just scratching the surface. I felt like I could have done a whole theology through the Transfiguration, and so I'm just gesturing towards here's some of the things we can see. I wrote a brief booklet on the Transfiguration a few years back, and one of the things that hit me about the Transfiguration, more than any other event in the Gospels, is it's an event that impacted my hermeneutics.

It changed the way that I read other events, and so you mentioned the way that it's connected with the baptism, and the baptism begins the Galilee mission, and then you have the movement towards Jerusalem, and particularly within Luke's Gospel, there's a very neat sort of divide. It begins with the witness of John and then ends with the death of John and the question of whether Jesus is John raised from the dead, and then you have this new sequence beginning with Peter's witness and then it ending with Christ being raised, but the two events clearly stand in significant parallel to each other, and you can map things on to each other in terms of the divine voice, the spirit descending in the form of a dove, the spirit descending in the form of a cloud, etc., but also on the other hand you have this connection with the cross which you discuss in one of your chapters in detail. The cross has the transfiguration as a sort of obverse icon that to understand the cross you need to see the transfiguration almost as the other side of the coin, and the contrast between the two is the truth of a single reality.

That's right. And it seemed to me that from the point of the Mount of Transfiguration there's a clarity upon all these other events. I mean, Peter, this is one you didn't even mention in your discussion just now, but Peter when he talks about the transfiguration in his second epistle refers to it in reference to the second coming.

That's right. That there's a sort of, it's the trailer of the second coming. You've already anticipated it by seeing the glory of the king.

It's just a matter of when that glory is going to be revealed and made more manifest. And so it really is an event that even if we're not going to class it in the sequence of the usual events that we would have, it is the event, perhaps more than any other, that is the hermeneutical key to everything. Certainly.

For that reason it can transform the way that we read every part of the gospel. And I'll be interested to hear more about your thoughts on the relationship with the cross in particular, because we're moving towards Holy Week. We're coming towards the end of that journey that begins on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Mount of Transfiguration almost provides a way of understanding that movement towards Jerusalem, what is and what is not taking place there. So as we near Palm Sunday and as we near the events of Good Friday, what are some of the ways that the Transfiguration helps us to see what's taking place? Yeah, I think you're exactly right. There's a pairing of Calvary and what's traditionally called Mount Tabor, although I argue we don't know exactly where it took place.

But for purposes of everyone speaking about it, I think we can stick with Tabor for now. And you know, I don't remember all the details, but there's a lot of really interesting literary links between the two events, which I won't be able to remember all of them right now, and you can probably help me with some of them. But number one, you have them on a high place.

It's a very high mountain in Matthew 17. And then it's Golgotha. You also have two figures flanking Jesus in both of them.

You have the robbers, first Moses and Elijah. In the Transfiguration, you have it in a scene of light. And then at the cross, darkness covers the whole land.

And in both cases, miraculous darkness, miraculous light. That's right. That's right.

In the Transfiguration, you have his clothes shine, and in the cross, his clothes are stripped from him. And I think there's a sense in which both of them, there's kind of a declaration either from Christ himself or the Father speaking to him. I'm thinking of the declaration, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then the Father saying, this is my beloved son, which these all seem antithetical.

But I think actually by joining them and by their antithesis, they actually come together in this union, which is what the scriptures often do. They're showing us this is the reverse image of the cross, which ultimately means the cross, the darkness and the light go together. The Moses and Elijah figure and the robber go together.

It's so beautiful. I didn't even say this in the book, but the righteous robber who confesses Christ is going to be in the same place Moses and Elijah are. The two covenantal head figures of the Jewish nation, man, just the amazing reality that this

man, the thief on the cross, that he's going to share in the same glory that Moses and Elijah get to share in.

And that's like the basis of our gospel understanding that Christ redeems all people, even at the very end of his life, and that he will be in the same place that Moses and Elijah is in. So, yeah, there's just so much there. And I think it's such an encouragement to us as we enter this week to think we are entering this time of meditating on darkness and sadness and suffering, but that ultimately the Christian story is that's not the end, that this light and momentary affliction is not worth comparing to the eternal weight of glory that's going to be revealed to us.

And that is what I think is happening in the Transfiguration. There's an eternal weight of glory that's communicated through light. And light is confusing to us why they'd use that imagery, but light is often tied to glory in the Scriptures.

And so this is a moment of hope, ultimately, and of don't give up. Because really, Jesus is telling his disciples, you must pick up your cross and follow me. And many of those disciples will die for their faith that are on the mountain with him.

And so they have to be forward-looking as well. And you mentioned 2 Peter, it ties it to Christ's return. That's when we will enter into his glory, right? That's when we will fully enter into his glory at the new creation when he returns.

And so it is a beautiful picture of Christ's return and such a hope for us in the midst of recognizing the cross. The cross was a time of darkness, but that darkness is turned into light. And now you're thinking of John, right? Jesus came as light and the world into the darkness.

John doesn't narrate the Transfiguration, but he transfigures it or transfixes it through his whole narrative. I think that's one of the interesting things about John, that if you imagine, I mean, John is one of the witnesses of the Transfiguration. But you imagine if John were to include the Transfiguration within his Gospel account, it would actually detract from his understanding of the cross in the light of the Transfiguration.

Because for John, the cross is the lifting up. It's Christ's glory. It's already the upward ascent.

It's not just the descent towards death. That's right. Yeah.

One author said John transposes, and I think that's a good, not transfigured, transposes all of the themes of the Synoptics just into a slightly different frame, but it's all there. Even in the very beginning, in the beginning was the Word. And then you go back to the Transfiguration, what's the one imperative there? Listen to him.

He is my Word. And so there's just so much there. And you spoke about hermeneutics,

and we can even speak of Christology.

I think the Transfiguration, I probably can't prove this, but was the source, likely the source for thinking of Christ's ontology, his two natures, existing one person. And think of, we are very averse to Trinitarian metaphors, but you know what the fathers were not averse to, of speaking of light from light. And that's actually in our confessions.

And where does that come from? Well, I think that comes ultimately beginning of creation, but that stretching forward towards the Transfiguration, and then Hebrews talking about Jesus as the radiance of the glory of God, all this imagery, I just, it started to pop for me in the Bible. And then walking in the light and Ephesians, and putting on the deeds of the virtues, and not walking in the flesh and in darkness. It's just, man, it's such an amazing event in that sense that the rest of the Bible, there's certain events that certainly start to click into place.

So Kevin Van Hoosier is working on a book on hermeneutics, and he's calling it transfigural interpretation or something to that effect. So he actually uses, when he said hermeneutics, I just read it to endorse it. And he uses the Transfiguration as this hermeneutical key, maybe in a slightly different way than you're saying, but it's so good because he's kind of saying there's a literal sense, which is the body of Christ, but that body, the literal sense, is always transfigured into a Christological sentence.

So he's kind of playing with the language of figure, figural interpretation, transfigural, but I think it really works. So he really used hermeneutics through that. We need to stay grounded in the body of Jesus, in the literal sense, but ultimately that's taken up into the heavens.

And so it's a really excellent work. One thing on the subject of Holy Week and Good Friday that the Transfiguration did for me is challenge me to see the cross, not just as an instrument of Jesus's death, but as an icon, as something that was there to be meditated upon, as almost an image in itself. And so when we're thinking about, for instance, the cross, we tend to think about the cross and we conflate it with Christ's death, which is, of course, by the instrument of the cross.

But we miss the way in which the cross is also a coronation. It's a parodic coronation. Christ is lifted up.

He's dressed in a purple robe. He's given the reed. He's given the crown of thorns.

He has the statement above his head. And in all of these ways, he's given a sort of mock coronation. And then the event of the Transfiguration is a coronation-like event.

You have the witnesses, you have the people on either side, the sort of two thrones that James and John want to occupy, you might think of them as. And then Christ declared to be the Son by the Father in the way that we might think about in Psalm 2 and elsewhere.

And all of this is mirrored in the exact reverse, as it seems, of the other side of the diptych, which is the event of the crucifixion.

And that idea of Christ's coronation having these two facets to it was one that really hit me over the last year or so as I was thinking about it. That's super helpful. And I think you can even think of what you're saying here, the Transfiguration as kind of an icon of the coronation of Christ.

And I became more convinced as I wrote it, and I'm still kind of playing with the idea in my head, but that there is a link. I guess maybe my own mind goes where I've studied, but there is a link between we certainly there's some connections between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, but there may be even closer links to the Ascension where there is that coronation image, where Christ receives that glory from the Father because of his faithfulness upon the earth. And that you're getting in the Scriptures, we always want to see things so linearly, but often you're getting pictures.

And maybe this is why the Transfiguration is confusing to us, is because you're getting a picture of the coronation before the coronation. And that's why I think we often skip the narrative because we're kind of like, one author or maybe someone told me, or maybe I said this, I don't remember exactly how it came to my mind, but they were like, it's almost like an actor has missed his cues, like the light shines on him, he's like, oh, I'm here. And then he steps off scene.

I stepped away from the mic, not a good idea on a podcast. But it does almost feel like he shines and then he goes back to human, normal life, goes down the mountain, continues his ministry, goes to the cross. And we're like, what was that? What just happened there? And so because it sits, I kept on trying to meditate, like it seems to almost sit out of place in terms of a linear story that it does confuse us.

But Second Peter is so helpful there because it's a picture of the parousia, the return of Christ. And think about Revelation, when Christ returns, it's this glorious white horse. And when John even sees, before Christ returns, when John sees him, he describes him in transfiguration images that he's bright and shining and like the sun and his eyes are flames of fire.

And so it's, yeah, it's pointing forward to that return of Christ. And I think that because it's out of place, it sometimes confuses us, but it is an icon of that. It seems one of the things that your book really gets at well is the relationship between the transfiguration as an anticipation of the ascension and the glorification of Christ and his second coming, but also as something that testifies to the pre-existing glory of Christ.

And you get that anticipation, but also this sense of testimony to who Christ is in his eternal sonship. And we get something of that, I imagine, in John, where John talks about the ascension in terms of a manifestation of where Christ was beforehand. That

movement between past and future and the way that the transfiguration gives us a way of understanding the connection between those two things, but also the reality of that past and that future as that which help us to understand the present of that moment in the narrative.

I think it's very important. Yeah. And, you know, one, it's so hard because this is the difficulty of Christology and studying the two natures in one person.

We tend to either speak of one or the other at the expense of the other. And in the transfiguration narrative, my guess is in the church, a normal Bible reader would say, okay, this is showing that he's God. And then in the academy, I noticed that all the scholars are like, this is not showing he's God.

This is showing that he's going to be glorified in the future as man. And I thought, well, I think the church has dealt with this issue. And so really, my book was saying, I think the classical Christology and Trinitarian toolkit is actually a really helpful lens to view this event.

And not every event needs to be viewed through that exact same lens, but it is a unique event where I think the two natures of Christ, there's something that's revealed about both of them at the same time. Because sometimes you do have, this is more focused on Christ's humanity, like when he suffers, than on his divinity, right? And so if you have those categories, I think it's really important to see that it isn't just, as you mentioned, a forward-pointed event, but that ultimately it can be a forward-pointed event, because he's always possessed this glory before the world began. So John, I mean, it seems silly, but there's one verse in John that I think summarizes my whole argument, John 17, I think it's five, where Jesus says, glorify me with the glory that I possessed before the world began.

And I think this is the paradox for us. We're like, wait, why does he need glory if he already has it? And that's what all the students always ask me, they're like, wait, why is he appointed? He's the son of God. Like, this doesn't make any sense.

Why would he be appointed to anything? And this is where the two natures in one person that cannot be, they need to be distinguished, but not divided, right? That there's one subject and there's two natures, and as he takes on flesh, then he has to, as Hebrew says, learn obedience to be glorified. But he also possesses that glory from the beginning of time, and that we can affirm both things at once. So what that means is that in the transfiguration, we can affirm his humanity is transfigured and his deity is revealed.

And that if you don't say both, I actually think you're kind of missing the point of the whole narrative. That both are happening at the same time, and that our tendency is, again, to go to one or the other, but the reality is they must meet in the one subject, and

that's what happens here. They meet in the one subject.

So I used the idea of sonship and say, really, this is pointing at Jesus' messianic sonship and eternal sonship. And I think that is confirmed through the rest of the scriptures, and I could be wrong about this. I'd love to hear what you think about this, but I tend to think when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, that he doesn't have his Trinitarian ducks in a row, and he doesn't have it all figured out, but that the transfiguration is this event where he's saying, yes, I'm the Messiah, and yes, I will die, and yes, I will be glorified.

But more than that, I am the one Moses and Elijah long to see. I am the face of Yahweh himself. I am the pillar and the cloud.

I am, I am, I am. This is Yahweh himself come in the flesh. And still, Peter and the disciples didn't quite understand that until later reflection.

After the resurrection, they understood more who he was. But in that sense, it's distinguished from Peter's confession in that it is saying more than what Peter said. It is saying, yes, he is the Messiah, but he's the Messiah by being the eternal Son of God, which I think, not everyone argues this, but I think it's supported in Psalm 27.

For me, I'm not trained in systematic theology, but I think it's a toolkit that we, if you don't use it in the transfiguration narrative, you just kind of out of sorts. You just don't know what question to ask. Studying the transfiguration, it was the one gospel narrative more than any other, even more than the cross or the resurrection, that forced me to get really theological in my thinking.

I was always theological in my thinking, but you really have to use those categories. The story itself, if you're going to read it well, pushes you in that direction. And there's an important aspect of your book, it seems to me, is working on that hermeneutical dimension, the way in which we have the literal reading and then we have the spiritual reading and we have the topological and we have the anagogical readings.

And there is a very natural way in which the text is gesturing us on that journey. There's a path that we're following, but that path is a path of ascent. And when we reach the top, we will see that path of ascent as a unity in a way that we would not previously.

Yeah, the quadriga or the four senses were used actually as a way to ascend in our interpretation. And so it fits very well here because they go up the mountain, they ascend to see Jesus. And I think in the same way, yeah, we have to define our terms well, obviously, but there's a sense in which a literal reading of this will not do it justice.

You have to use those Christological categories and analogical or anagogical and topological, the moral idea. And so ultimately, you see in the rest of the New Testament, it seems like that's what the New Testament authors are doing. They're taking this

image, this picture, and just pressing it through the sieve of you can really think through everything through this event.

And that's obviously true for many events in the Bible. I'm not saying it's more important in that sense, but it is a moment of revelation. It is uniquely a moment of theophany, Christophany, that it deserves a mountaintop kind of placement, if that makes sense, because it does something in terms of bringing—and this is where we started the conversation—bringing things to cohesion for us.

So I even use Trinitarian categories, I think, that are important for us to use in understanding this, because as you said earlier, I think the Spirit is there as well, and it matches what we've confessed historically as Christians. That's the Father who sends the Son and the Spirit, and they have missions, so therefore they would appear in creaturely form, and that would match that you—I'm talking in circles, I know, but I struggled in the Bible because it says we cannot see God. If we see him, we will not live, and he dwells in unapproachable light.

And I'm like, well, wait, this is unapproachable and approachable. It's both and. I don't know what to do with this.

And I think those Trinitarian categories were super helpful for me, because there's a sense in which it's appropriate for the Father's voice only to appear here, and it's appropriate for the Son to be in human form, and it's appropriate for the Spirit to be in the cloud and for the voice to come out of the cloud. And having those categories just made all of those seemingly contradictory texts click for me, and like, oh, right, this is how God has revealed himself, that he revealed himself in the sending of the second and third person of the Trinity, but that there is an inseparable operation to all of them, too, and they're all present here. And so, like, so many things came together for me in terms of my own kind of working through the classical categories that I just think are so beneficial to use when you read this event.

And so that's why we can say Jesus is really the face of Yahweh, because he's one with Yahweh, and he has a face now, because we are made in the image of God, and the image of God is tied to who God is, and so it's appropriate that he would take on flesh, and it's appropriate that the Spirit would actually not take on a permanent creaturely form, but take on creaturely forms as breath and wind and cloud and dove and fire, and that is, yeah, it matches the mission of the Spirit. So this is where so many books could be written and need to be written on the Transfiguration. I'm putting you up to that task, you're next.

And that relationship between the event of the Transfiguration and our reading of Scripture more generally, it really brings me in mind of 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, the way that Paul treats the example of Moses, the one who turns to the Lord, the veil being removed, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the one who called light from

darkness, etc., and the way in which the themes of redemption, the story of the Old Testament and the story of Moses, his shining face, and Exodus 34, the story of the original creation, all of those are marshaled by Paul as a context for understanding, again, you mentioned the importance of light as this master metaphor for the New Testament. When it's thinking about Christ, Christ is the one who has dawned. He is the morning star.

He is the one who has come with the dazzling light of the sun. He's the son of righteousness. He's the one also who has people who are children of the day, people who walk in the light, people who are children marked by this dawn.

Now, another thing that really I mentioned already was the way that the Transfiguration encourages us to read the Bible almost as iconic. There's a sense of our hearing being accompanied by a sort of seeing, and as a committed Protestant on these issues, I don't really go in for icons, but the text has a sort of iconic character to it, and so I would not have seen the disfiguration of Christ at the cross for what it is were it not for the Transfiguration of Christ, and it's holding those two things together that you're able to see each. In Protestants, Protestants tend to speak of hearing.

We don't like the sight imagery because we are anti-image often, but the Transfiguration challenges at least certain aspects of that, and even Hans Boersma's beatific vision kind of work has challenged me on this, but that hearing is not the ultimate end sense that we are longing for. In the new heavens and new earth, it is sight, which seems to be the fullest, most complete sense that we long for, and as a Protestant who feels probably the same way about icon veneration as you, I struggled with that a little bit because I had to kind of reconcile, not because I don't believe in the beatific vision, but more that uniquely this is pointing forward to when we see him as he is, we shall be made like him, 1 John 3, I think 2, and so it's a sight that transforms us, and there's a sense in which we see already in the Scriptures, but that sight is also, we long for the completion of that sight in the new heavens, new earth, but as you said, I found myself going so strong for sight, for image, but at the same time, there's commands and there's voice, and it seems to bring the senses somewhat together here, and I found it interesting. And the one who we are seeing is the word.

Yes, yes, yes, yes. I found it interesting that sometimes people would say, oh, the words are more important, or the vision is more important, but I thought, well, that's very imprecise. They come together.

They support one another. They lift one another up, and there's both here. There's a declaration, and there's this image of Christ, which again, we talked about why we neglected.

I think Protestants maybe tend to neglect it because of that sight imagery and the deification associations that sometimes come with the transfiguration, but if you read

through the church tradition and you define deification in a way that I think is biblical or theosis, it actually seems to be all over. Partakers of the divine nature, I just quoted that we shall become like him. So, however you want to define that, that's a form of theosis.

That's becoming like him. We are transformed into the same image that he is. So, ultimately, all the church tradition has said the picture of Christ that we see in the transfiguration is our future.

That is, we will be glorified with him, and we will look like him. And the difference, I think, is we have to affirm there's a difference between the creator still and the creature, and that we are receiving that light, and he emanates that light eternally, right? And it's the difference that we have between the sun and what we see in the light of the sun, or that's also the way in which there's a, we don't tend, we are used to the contrast between faith and sight, the way in which sight is seen according to natural sight as a faculty that is limited that faith can exceed, faith can see things beyond. And faith is primarily by hearing in Romans 10 and elsewhere, but there's also this sense of sight, seeing Christ as a far more transformative thing in some respects.

And even when faith is coming by hearing, the hearing entails a sort of seeing that we see Christ in a way that as we see him, that sight is a means by which we start to reflect what we're seeing. And of course, the image of Moses and his dazzling face after seeing the vision of God on the mountain, the theophanic presentation of God, is one that is taken up by Paul and elsewhere. And there it seems the contrast matters a lot, that Christ is not seeing some other vision and his face shining, and rather his face is shining almost from the light within, rather than a light that is coming from without, that he's receiving.

That's right, yeah. I press into that in the book because often people will read the transfiguration narrative and say Jesus is the new Moses, which is true, very true, because he goes up on the mountain like Moses goes up on Mount Sinai. He has three people with him.

It's after seven days. You know, there's so many links, and then his face shines, and he comes down the mountain, and there's corruption down the mountain. So that's all there, and I've written about that in other books and totally affirm that, but as you said, Moses ascends the mountain, and he sees God, and therefore the glory of God is reflected off his face.

Jesus ascends the mountain, and there's nothing. He is the light. There's nothing that he's reflecting at that point, unless you want to say he's reflecting the Father's light, which you can say, but ultimately he's one with the Father, and so therefore he is the light.

So Moses's light is derivative. Jesus is essential. And certainly when we get to the

beginning of John's gospel, Christ is the light.

He is the light. That's right. And even this idea of seeing that light, as you were talking, even the imagery, I use a lot of ascend imagery, ascend the mountain.

We are listening to the voice of him who calls us up the mountain, but ultimately it's on the top of the mountain that we see him, and so I use that as our own even spiritual formation that throughout the Christian tradition and throughout the scriptures, our ascent to God, that is our spiritual formation. That's how it's been described, and this is exactly what the disciples do. They ascend the mountain with Christ, and it's just that's the tropological sense that we can get from this.

I press into how we need to purge the sin from us to ascend the mountain, and then we are illumined, and then we are ultimately united with him. And so often we can look at these events and just think, what did it mean for Christ? And forget that tropological moral sense that it has implications for us as well, which makes it even more rich as we meditate upon it. It seems to me that one of the things that is striking about John's gospel, which doesn't mention, as we've noted, the transfiguration, but transfiguration is shedding its light upon everything, is the references to Old Testament saints who witnessed something of God's glory.

In the very opening section you have the reference to Moses and the glory of God in that context, and then you have the reference to Abraham rejoicing to see Christ's day. You have things like the reference to Isaiah in chapter 12. This Isaiah said when he saw his glory and wrote concerning him, which in the context is, it seems, Isaiah chapter 6, and I saw the Lord high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple.

We have also these great theophanic visions in the Old Testament, places like Ezekiel chapter 1, and we have the throne chariot in that context, or we have the burning bush. We have all these different theophanic visions, and it seems to me that the transfiguration in part is the one who could be read as being present in all of those events incognito, his face coming into the light, and that face being that of Jesus Christ. Yes, I totally agree.

You know, there's debate in the church tradition how precise you can get with the persons of the Trinity in the Old Testament. Augustine was maybe famously said, we need to be very careful here. He was working against some heresies, but the people before Augustine, especially the Gregories, they were very strong on what, and I think it's John 12, affirms this, what he was seeing was Christ, and then you have that what seemed more confirmed even to me.

In Ezekiel, he sees a human-like figure, and often they see a throne, but what's also very clear is that it's not clear. It's like in shadows. There's a form, there's a substance, but they don't know what they're seeing, and ultimately, I think, Christ hadn't been fully

revealed at that point, so they see it, to use 1 Peter, even maybe imagery in shadows, right? But the substance is now revealed, and so ultimately, yes, the theophanies of the Old Testament lead to the Christophany of the transfiguration, which then causes us, I would argue, to read back the theophanies and say those are Christophanies.

This is where Christ was, at least in part, revealed, and so I'm more and more comfortable with that sort of reading. I recognize people, some disagree with that sort of reading, but that we, and this is where Augustine was helpful for me. He said, if there's a good argument for a person of the Trinity being there, then you can make that argument.

A lot of people just quote him and say, you can't do that. It just needs to be the triune God. That's who it is, but he says, no, no, no, if there's a good argument, and again, you go back even to the Exodus, and you have the fire and the cloud being associated with the Spirit, and you see that in Isaiah, that he's picking up the Spirit of the Lord was in their midst.

It stood amongst them, and that language is then used in the Exodus of the pillar and of cloud and fire being amongst them, and then I think, I mean, we don't have time to get into this, but I think this has implications for the angel of the Lord imagery. Meredith Klein's images of the Spirit is worth reading on these sorts of questions. Yes, certainly, and so it does feel like the transfiguration is the Theophany Christophany par excellence, right? That then frames and colors the rest of how we read those, and what's strange, again, I brought this up before, what's strange is that it happens in the middle of Jesus's ministry, but it is a proleptic vision of what is to come, and it ultimately points to, as I mentioned earlier, that Christ will be the light of all of creation, that his light will be so overwhelming that we'll have no need of the sun.

This is ultimately what we see in the new creation, and so it's like the end of the Bible in the middle of the Bible. That's what it is, and you just get this little glimpse, and maybe, I didn't even say this in the book, I'm just reflecting right now, maybe part of our life here on this earth is we get little glimpses, and that that is a picture of the little glimpses that we get of, there's this incursion of heaven at times, where we see, okay, that's what the new heavens is going to be like in some sense, and I do think that's what the disciples see, okay, this is what it's going to be like. This is what's going to help us press forward, and as you mentioned earlier, this is what Peter uses in second Peter to say, you deny Christ is returning? I was on the mountain with him.

I was there. I was there when he shone like the sun. That's not just a past event.

That's right. Ultimately, it is a guarantee of everything that's promised in the future. Yeah, and ultimately, it seems like the scriptures don't just say he shone like the sun, but that, as one author put it, the sun is actually more compared to him.

Not in the Transfiguration narrative, but in the rest of the scripture, the sun's brightness is just a pale picture of Christ's brightness, and so they have to use images like the purity of his garments. Mark says that his garments couldn't have been any cleaner if you brought them to a laundromat. You can't oxy-clean your garments more white than they were, and the point is, it's a heavenly being, right? It's from another world, and so he's certainly like the angels that he was sent, but he's more than the angelic beings.

Yeah. Do you have any thoughts, or I know you have plenty of thoughts on the question, but why is it Elijah and Moses who are seen with him in the Transfiguration? It seems that these characters are noteworthy in various ways. Do they have something in common, that they would be the figures? Would we be surprised if we had two different figures instead? Yeah.

I think those are important questions to ask, because you could ask, why not Adam and Eve at this point? Why not David and someone else? Why not David and Esther? Why not anyone? There's many covenantal kind of heads, even figures. Elijah's not so much a covenantal head, but Moses is, and so why do these two figures come? And through the church tradition, there's been many, many, many interpretations of why this happens. I give in my book eight reasons, possibly why it could happen, using, again, others that I've read.

I'll run through a few of them, and I think there's probably truth to some of these more than others, and then we probably don't have to pick one reason. It's probably multi-form, pluriform here. Most would argue that they represent the law and the prophets, and I think that's a good starting place.

I think most commentators begin there, but it is a little unspecified in terms of, well, what does that mean? Ultimately, I think you have to press down a little further into that and say, the law and the prophets ultimately point and are fulfilled in him. So, in other words, they are the servants, he is the master, because the voice says, listen to him in the singular, not listen to them, which it's interesting, because think about who's on now. It's Peter, the rock of the church, it's Moses and Elijah, the prophets, the law and the prophets, and he says, listen to him.

Now, I argue in the book that's not exclusive, because Jesus says, also listen to them, right? But there is a superiority, think of Hebrews 1, and a primacy to his voice, that all of the law and the prophets come to completion in him. I also think we could argue that they are heavenly witnesses who are confirming who this figure is. So, you have earthly witnesses on the mountain, three witnesses, then you have three, at least, beings, and you could even say the father is a witness.

So, maybe Moses, Elijah and the father. And if we didn't have the baptism and the transfiguration, the relationship between father and son would be considerably less drawn in the synoptics. That's right.

And then you also have predictions in the Old Testament that there's going to be a new Moses figure, Deuteronomy 18, and then a new Elijah figure, Malachi 4. There's also some interesting things to think about in terms of their deaths. Elijah and Moses have unique or remarkable deaths. More Elijah, I mean, Elijah doesn't have a death, actually, he's transported to heaven, right? So, he doesn't have a death, that's what's remarkable about it.

And then Moses, there's all this tradition about his body and who's going to bury it. And so, some church fathers spoke of how, what ultimately, the symbolism here is that Christ pulled Moses up from the dead and brought Elijah down from the heavens, and therefore he's showing his authority over life and death, which fits with the context of the transfiguration, I'm about to die, and ultimately it's going to lead to life, so I have authority over life and death. Both these figures, we've talked about Moses' own kind of transfiguration on Mount Sinai.

In Jewish tradition, I think it was assumed that the chariots of fire were a sort of transfiguration into the heavens, that the fire imagery is his body is changing as he goes into the heavens. But the most important one, and we've mentioned this, I do think is they both requested or saw God on the same mountain. So, in Exodus 33, Moses requests to see the face of God, the glory of God, the goodness of God.

And the answer is yes, in part, you can see, but I'm going to hide a lot of it. And then you have this same sort of scene in 1 Kings, is it 17:19? I can't remember the exact chapter right now, where Elijah goes to Mount Horeb, the same mountain, he goes into a cave, just like Moses, and the Lord says he's going to pass by Elijah. It's actually, I think it's avod.

It's the same Hebrew verb that's used where the Lord is going to pass by Moses. And then he doesn't show up in the whirlwind, he doesn't show up in the storm, in the fire, but he shows up in a soft whisper, which seems to be kind of an anti-Sinai to me, in terms of the imagery. We could press more into those details, but the point of it is both of these figures saw something of God, but longed to see more.

And so on the Mount of Transfiguration, they finally do have that request granted. Moses asked to see the face of God, he sees it in the face of Jesus Christ. And this is the first time that Moses steps into the promised land, and he not only sees Emmanuel's land, but he sees Emmanuel himself, which is, it points to Christ's divinity.

So I think there's a lot of reasons these two figures appear, and I don't think these things have to be opposed to one another. I think you can look at them from multiple angles of why these two figures appear. The other thing to say is they both appear in glory, Doxa, according to Luke, and they're speaking of Christ's departure, his exodus.

Luke is the only one to give us the minutes of the meeting. So they're having a

conversation, and Luke's like, let me tell you what they're talking about. They're talking about the exodus, and I like to think, we don't know exactly how that conversation went, but that Moses, it's clicking for him.

He's like, oh, the Passover lamb, the redemption, it's all pointing to your death on the cross, because that's exactly the context. And Elijah, all of the suffering of God's people, and how it's pointing forward to the suffering of ultimately the new Israel, it's all clicking for them, but they realize it'll end in glory. So I think ultimately what Jesus is doing is he's kind of giving an Emmaus road lesson on the Mount of Transfiguration to Moses and Elijah, and it's all clicking for them, how the plan of God is going to come to completion.

And so Moses is thinking, oh, I led them through the exodus, you're now leading them through the new exodus. This is how it's all coming together. One thing I wondered about in that connection is why the speculation about the identity of the Elijah to come on the way down the mountain, and the connection with John the Baptist has stood out to me.

The fact that John the Baptist's death is told shortly before this event, and then the speculation in the context of Peter's confession, that Jesus is John the Baptist, come back. And each of these figures, in their own way, represent the first phase of a two-phase mission, and there's very clear parallels between them. They all have interchanges on the far side of the Jordan.

You have Moses, and then Joshua, and then you have Elijah, and then Elisha, and then you have John the Baptist and Jesus. And John the Baptist's ministry has just completed, he's died, and people are speculating whether he's come back in Jesus' ministry. But now you have the other great Aramite prophets, the great wilderness prophets that led to these prophets that would complete their mission, and they're testifying to him too.

So I wonder whether that's a further aspect. I've not heard anyone write about that. No, I didn't even draw all those connections, but I do think in terms of coming down the mountain, I've always thought they see Elijah there, and they're like, okay, this is the Elijah that you said was going to come in Malachi.

This is what we've been longing for. So when Peter says, let's build tents, I think he's saying, what you see in the Scriptures is their timing is so often off. It's incorrect.

And so I think Peter's timing is off again, and he thinks, okay, there's Jesus glorified, there's Elijah. It's kind of like the Acts 1-6, it's go time. Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this point? And so then when they're coming down from the mountain, they're like, wait, Elijah was just there, and now he's gone.

I thought you said Elijah was coming first. What's going on here? And ultimately, actually, I think this is a good text of Jesus looking at them and saying, you're too literalistic. Elijah is a figure, and John the Baptist is that figure, and I fulfill both of them

as the new prophet.

And so he looks at them and he says, you're doing too much literal interpretation. Elijah has come. This is John the Baptist.

And I'm actually not opposed to even literal Elijah coming back again. Maybe Revelation is pointing towards some of those themes, but maybe it's a more symbolic figure. And so I think Jesus corrects them on their timing, and that's what he's always doing.

Their timing in terms of the arrival and the nature of the kingdom and how it comes, his whole ministry is a clarification of that. So we began this by thinking about the untimely character of this particular conversation, the fact we're nearing Palm Sunday and Holy Week, and we're talking about an event that doesn't seem to be connected with them in most people's minds. But yet, as you noted in Luke's account, it's about the exodus or the departure that's going to happen in Jerusalem.

That's the subject of conversation in that context. And so Holy Week is a very natural thing to connect with the Transfiguration. That's what they were talking about at the Transfiguration.

And now, as we near Holy Week, we can talk about the Transfiguration. What are, in conclusion, a few thoughts that you would want to give people to meditate upon as they enter Holy Week from the Transfiguration? What is some of the light that the Transfiguration can shed on the next few days as people think about the suffering and death and the resurrection of Christ? Yeah. The first thing that came to my mind is that the Gospel of John, I think because John is on the mountain with Jesus, he actually describes the crucifixion as a lifting up and a glorification.

And so not only do the darkness and light sound antithetical to us, but John ultimately argues that the light overcomes the darkness. And so it's not only that we put these two things side by side, but if we can use a pun of a word, they're transfigured, aren't they? The darkness is transfigured. Which, in that way, John can speak of the cross as a good thing.

And I know that seems so obvious to us, but it shouldn't be obvious to us, because the cross is a tragedy at its most basic level. It's the death of the one who's come to rescue us. But as Christians, we confess the cross is the best news, and we confess it's the best news because it has been transfigured.

The icon has been transfigured. And the cross is now a sign of life. What was death is now life.

And so as we step into Holy Week, I think that's where we recognize the principle from Scripture that what man means for evil, God means for good, and that he transfigures all things, and that there's nothing outside of his sovereignty and his providence that he

cannot touch with his hand as he does to the disciples at the end of this narrative, and he lifts them up, and he says, come and follow me, because it'll all be transfigured. And so I guess my encouragement to people as we step into this week is, I know people at our who are suffering death and families, loss of jobs, and as a Christian, we believe all these things will be transfigured. They will be turned to good somehow.

We can't see it right now, and the disciples couldn't see it, but the transfiguration, this moment where we can see, it is the ascending of the mountain, the peeling back of the layers, the cloud comes, and it conceals, but in that concealment, there's also revelation. That's what's so beautiful about the the cloud is you're in the Shekinah glory of the Lord, and you can't see everything because it's too much, but you can see something. And so I would just encourage people to have hope, because death is now defeated, and it becomes life.

It's like David taking the sword of Goliath and using it against him, right? Christ takes death, and he uses death against death, and it's such an amazing, the message that we proclaim is this kind of upside-down reality, that we wear crosses because we know the cross is the means to life now, and it only feels like in the Christian message that you get that, that you get that amazing reversal, and it comes through light of the transfiguration. My guest has been Patrick Schreiner, the author of *The Transfiguration of Christ*, an exegetical and theological reading. I highly recommend that you get this book.

We've merely scratched the surface of the topics that he discusses within it. You'll find it very edifying and encouraging reading, and it's also very accessible, so buy some for your friends and share the blessing with others. If you're interested in hearing more, Patrick has also joined me for discussions of his commentary on Acts, which is amazing.

The episode is called *Reading Acts of Scripture*, and then also his book on the Ascension of Christ, which the episode is called *The Ascension of Christ*. So if you look for those, you'll be able to hear more of his work, and I highly recommend those books as well. What do you have coming up? Any new projects? Yeah, I have a Gospels textbook which is coming out in June, *Theology of Matthew*, which the publisher won't let me know when it's coming out, but I'm basically done with the manuscript with Zondervan.

I'd say the thing I'd like to emphasize right now is you've got to, if you read the book, I give a hermeneutical grammar, and I do speak of the quadrigara, the fourfold sense, and basically I'm expanding that project to a whole book project, and so I'm writing a book for Baker right now. Tentatively, it's titled *The Four Sentences, Recovering an Ancient Way of Reading for Today*, and so I'm looking at the way the early church read the scriptures, which I think includes the Reformers in some respect, and I'm arguing that we should recover that today because we've modernized our reading of the scripture, we've lost the symbolic nature of scripture, and we've desacramentalized or disenchanting our reading of scripture. So, while the Reformers—I know you don't want me to give you the

whole book right now, but I'll say a few things—while the Reformers, I think, rightly responded to an abundance of allegory within the medieval tradition, which was getting out of hand, I don't think we exist in that same spot as the Reformers, and so their solution to a problem back then, I think our solution actually needs to be slightly different today.

Our time is different, and we need a different response, and so I'm looking to the early church and saying, this is the most natural Christian way of interpreting the Bible, and we should recover that. Sounds extremely exciting, and I look forward to having you on to discuss that book when it comes out. Thank you so much for joining me.

Thanks so much, Alistair. Fun to talk to you again.