

Wk 3 | God is present within his polluted Kingdom

SLIDE 1 | Intro | A life-changing experience cannot be restrained

Have you ever had an experience which so challenged and changed you – that its effect was going to be life changing?

Perhaps when you got married? **CLICK** OR the birth of a child? **CLICK** Or perhaps a profound and undeniable encounter with God?

We often call these types of experiences “mountain top” experiences:

- experiences in which we see things more clearly, from a higher vantage point.
- experiences where we hear God speak to us, and it is exactly what we need to hear at a particular point in our life.
- or an experience where we realise we have done something disastrous or made a foolish decision, and we know, its consequences will have a lasting effect on our life from that moment into the future.

Most of us can easily recall our ‘mountain top’ experiences – they are memorable and defining - defining our thought-life, defining our behaviour, defining our perception of the future.

In all of today’s readings we are reminded about people who had ‘mountain top’ experiences – and in each case the experience changed not only their life, it also changed the lives of those around them.

Before we launch into the Gospel passage which describes the ‘mountain-top’ experience Peter, James and John experienced with our Lord and Saviour – I’d like us to read the verse which introduces the passage. It occurs at the end of Chapter 16.

Jesus finishes his teaching to his disciples saying: *“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*
(Matthew 16:28)

I’d like us to explore the transfiguration of our Saviour as an event in which **The Kingdom** is revealed - how Jesus described it - *“some were about to see the coming of his kingdom.”*

If we just pause for a moment on Jesus’ words, we will notice one of the major themes Jesus uses throughout his earthly ministry - the theme of **The Kingdom**.

Jesus refers to **The Kingdom** about 162 times in the Gospels – he speaks of ‘The Kingdom of God coming’, ‘The Kingdom of heaven being near or at hand’ and ‘The Kingdom being like a hidden treasure, a pearl, or a found coin’, and Jesus emphasis the need for anyone who hears his teaching “to have eyes and ears to discern The Kingdom”. In fact, all of Jesus teaching was what was necessary to enter The Kingdom and how to live according to the culture and principles of The Kingdom.

The theme of the Kingdom of God runs right through the whole bible – it refers to God’s reign and rule. There are references to Jesus Kingdom right through our passage today.

Understanding this Kingdom theme helps us to see HOW and WHY Jesus called his three disciples up to the mountain with him – so that they may “see the coming of His Kingdom.”

Last week we learnt about the importance of knowing our origin story – the story of our beginning. The concepts and themes introduced in the first two chapters of Genesis run all the way through the overarching story of the Bible. No event in the Bible can ever be fully understood in isolation – everything that happens, every time God encounters his people, or God invites people to come and encounter him – is part of a much larger picture, story or plan.

That is why the Bible has been likened to a giant box of puzzle pieces – when we read a passage or verse, it can be like picking up a piece of puzzle, but we are not able to see how that specific piece fits into the overall picture, even though that one puzzle piece may be a crucial part to the whole picture.

So, today, I’d like us to understand how Peter, James and John’s experience fits into the overarching story of the Bible – God’s Eternal Love Story.

SLIDE 2 | In last week’s message we learnt that God created humanity and placed them in The Perfect Home - on a mountain top where God’s Perfect Kingdom, his glorified presence, dwelt.

Yet, we know that the early humans chose to disobey God’s command and reject God’s pattern. They decided to be autonomous beings, seizing the authority to determine good and evil for themselves. Although, a ‘mountain top experience’ – it was of a different kind. The first mountain-top experience in the Garden Temple of God was profoundly life-changing for the first humans – their hearts had become polluted by sin.

Therefore, first humans had to be sent down the mountain – sent into exile, into a wilderness of sorts – But our loving, gracious God did not send them down the mountain without a promise. He promised that one day, one of their descendants would be a ‘wounded saviour’ – the devil would bite his heel, but he would triumph over him.

Their life-changing experience, however, had a lasting consequence on the whole of humanity – God’s perfect, magnificent, glory filled kingdom had now been broken and humanity had lost the ability to discern right from wrong. God’s people were lost in slavery – not just slavery to harsh oppressors but bound in slavery to sin.

SLIDE 3 | And, this bring us to the next momentous mountain-top experience. God calls Moses up to the sacred mountain to give his rebellious people the law and commandments. We learn they were written “for their instruction.”

It was also a decision-making time, when God asked his people to decide whether or not they would keep their covenant with Him. The law was given – the principles of His Perfect Kingdom – to teach them how to live in holiness and reverence, obedience. In the New Testament the law’s role is – for training in righteousness. Righteousness is living the way of the Kingdom within God’s rule and reign.

God ensured his presence at Mt Sinai was so holy, so terrifying that the people could only stand at a distance to worship. The cloud of God’s glory – a symbol of his presence - overshadowed the mountain. God’s purpose in revealing his presence in such an awesome and terrifying fashion was to instil in his people a proper awe and reverence - to ensure they learned obedience. God was training them to be his holy people. We see God reminding and commanding his people to live within his Kingdom’s Sabbath day of worship.

Later when Moses ascended the mountain a second time, to spend time in God’s presence – the result of this mountain-top experience within God’s presence - was his face was radiant – it shone with God’s glory. Another way to put it is Moses’ face was like a light that shone in darkness – it was so terrifying the people asked Moses to veil his face.

SLIDE 4 | All these earlier mountain top encounters come to mind as we think about what it is happening for Peter, James and John on the mountain top. We now understand the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus.

By appearing with Moses, it shows Jesus was fulfilling all that the law commanded.

Isaiah’s presence signified that Jesus fulfilled all that the prophets had foretold.

What a sight it must have been, seeing the glorified Christ with Moses and Isaiah. It is easy to understand why Peter fumbled and suggested building dwelling places – who wouldn’t want to stay on the mountain top?

But even while he was speaking a bright cloud, and booming voice spoke, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

Of course, they were terrified. As Malachi says, “Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” (Malachi 3:2).

But the voice thunders “Listen to him!”

The thundering voice was too holy to bear. Peter, James and John cannot respond.

So Jesus touches them gently and says compassionately, “Do not be afraid.”

Although Peter wanted to build dwelling tents to stay on mountain top, Jesus’ knew his mission was not to dwell above the people, on a mountain-top.

So, on the way down the mountain Jesus tells them once again that the Son of Man must suffer, and he orders them to tell no one about the vision until after he has been raised from the dead. They discuss Elijah’s role in restoring all things.

Jesus, whose countenance is a light, descends into a dark, needy human world.

SLIDE 5 | He is immediately faced with a demon-possessed child. This fulfills what Malachi says, “For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2).

When the first humans descended the mountain, they descended alone into a wild, dark, harsh wilderness.

When Moses descended the mountain, he descended alone to a rebellious and stubborn people who desperately needed to be trained in righteousness.

But when Peter, James and John descended the mountain, they did not descend alone.

Jesus - God’s presence amongst us - walked with them, back into the suffering, hungry crowds. As soon as Jesus returned down the mountain he is confronted by needy people.

But the mountain-top vision of our glorified Christ, which Peter, James and John experienced - left them profoundly changed. The experience prompted Peter to write,

“For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:16-19)

SLIDE 6 | THE MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE GIVES US A PROPHETIC MESSAGE

Peter's letter challenges us to recall when we have encountered God, or rather when God has revealed himself to us – this is our mountaintop experience.

And Peter says “we also have a prophetic message ... “. Any encounter with God (when God reveals his presence to us) carries with it a prophetic message to proclaim.

The way God has worked in our lives, changing, transforming us from glory to glory is a prophetic message – a light in a dark world.

And Jesus sends us out – into the wilderness of the world – to the poor, the needy, the seekers, the sick to be the hands and feet of Jesus with a powerful message of the story of our lives on our lips.

Prayer ...