



Jesus Only

by Desmond Ford

*The events surrounding the Transfiguration
reveal the truly important issues in Christianity:
Christ, church, cross, and coming*

May I talk to you today about the really big things of Christianity, the important things?

They are: Christ, the church, the cross, the coming. They are all explained in one section each of the first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Mt 16:13-17:9; Mk 8:27-9:10; Lk 9:18-36).

The Setting

Let me remind you of the setting: Jesus took his disciples on a three-month holiday. They left Palestine, and traveled north to the borders of Caesarea Philippi, a region far removed from the chosen people. Jesus wanted

to concentrate on training his disciples to be leaders in the great work of the gospel. For a time, he leaves the nation and focuses on a little company (who are the pioneers of the Christian church).

Jesus gives them instructions on the truly big issues of Christianity.

If a group forgets these, and majors in minors, it is in danger of becoming unChristian. The test of a professed Christian church is whether it makes big what God makes big. It is folly to make a world of an atom; and an atom of a world.

Who Is Jesus?

Matthew 16:13-20 is a dialogue

between Jesus and his disciples. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, let me quote a portion from the Contemporary English Version. "Then Jesus asked them, 'But who do you say I am?' Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'" (Mt 16:15-16 CEV).

The question is not, "Who do men say you are, Peter?" It is, "Who do men say I, the Son of Man, am?"

There are various answers, and Peter gives the correct answer: "You are the Messiah [Christ], the Son of the living God."

Jesus then proclaims that Peter is blessed for giving that answer. Peter did not work it out by his own

intelligence; God revealed it to him.

First Truth—Christ

The first truth in Christianity is that Christ is the spotless Son of God, the divine Savior.

In a dream Jacob saw a ladder extending from heaven to earth (Gen 28:10-22). Jesus is that ladder (Jn 1). By his divinity, he reaches the heavens. By his humanity, he touches us on earth. If we break the ladder on either end, we have no Savior, no connection with heaven. The heavens remain silent and empty, and earth is but a grave.

The very first truth about Christianity is that Christ is divine, the spotless Son of God. Unless we are clear on the nature of Christ, we will not be clear on anything else.

A true Christian church is clear on the nature of Christ. Christ is seen as a spotless sacrifice, the Creator of all things, and the Redeemer of the world.

Who Is Peter?

In response to Peter's answer, Jesus calls Peter a rock, and speaks of building the Christian church upon a rock (Mt 16:17-19). Much has been made of this passage.

Peter is a great man, whom God used to open the church to Jews and gentiles. In Acts 1 and 10 both Jews and gentiles are invited into the church by Peter.

Every time the apostles are listed, Peter is always first, and Judas last. Peter is very important; but some have claimed too much for him.

Second Truth—the Church

The issue in the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples is not, "Who is Peter?" but rather, "Who is Jesus?"

When Peter gives his correct answer, Jesus tells him God revealed the answer to him. Then Jesus said, "Peter, your name means a stone or a rock. This truth that you have uttered about me being the Christ, is a rock foundation into which you and the other disciples are built. You are built upon me, the Cornerstone. The temple of the Christian church will rear up on that Cornerstone."

The very foundation of the Christian church is the truth about Christ. If

Christ is merely human, then Christianity is only a philosophy. If Christ is only human, he was but a martyr on the cross, not a Savior. If he was a sinner, too, as you and I are, he cannot forgive our sins.

Something Strange

Here is something very strange. Peter confesses that Jesus is King of



Kings, Lord of Lords, and Son of the living God. You would expect Jesus to respond, "Yes, let's roll out the red carpet, blow the fanfare, strike up the band." Instead, "Jesus began to tell his disciples what would happen to him" (Mt 16:21). He must suffer and be killed. Three days later he will rise to life.

Third Truth—the Cross

The cross is vital. The church is built upon Christ, but it is the Christ of the cross. Any church that uses Christ just as an example or pattern for living, or as a philosopher or teacher, is not a Christian church. Central to the Christian church is the fact that Christ went to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed. Take away the atonement and there is nothing left.

The cross is the only lever that can lift the world to God. It is the magnetic attraction that draws men and women out of the maelstrom of sin. The cross has revealed the love of God in a way nothing else could.

Cross Not Welcome

We have seen three C's so far: Christ, church, cross. We have not written much about the church. But we are saying what the church must teach and believe about the nature of Christ and his death on the cross.

Peter's response to Christ's announcement of his sufferings and death is immediate. "Peter took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that. He said, 'Lord, surely God won't let this happen to you!'" (Mt 16:22).

The cross is never welcome. Humans do not like to be told that a Savior had to die for their sins. It takes a while for the thick crust to be broken, the consciousness to be stirred, and tears to fall.

If Peter had his way, there would be no cross. But then there would be no crown, no everlasting life. There has to be a cross before the crown. There has to be a torn body before the glorified body. There must be Good Friday before Easter Sunday.

Human nature is a poor thing. The church is composed of poor human beings like Peter. The church is not an art gallery for the exhibition of perfect saints. It is a hospital for sick people. Do not expect perfection in the church you attend. If you did find a perfect church, it would no longer be one once you joined it.

A church is a place where people acknowledge how far from perfect they are. By adoring One who is all-perfect, they show their desire to be better—and that by the grace of God, through the mercy of God.

Fourth Truth—Christ's Coming

"The Son of Man will soon come in the glory of his Father and with his angels to reward all people for what they have done. I promise you that some of those standing here will not die before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom" (Mt 16:27-28).

Jesus speaks of what could have been. If the early church had folded the gospel to its bosom and, in a wild contagion of joy and ecstasy, continued to spread it to the pagan world, Christ's coming would not have been delayed. Sadly, the fire died out and the coming of Christ delayed, because the gospel has not gone to all the world.

Jesus did fulfill his promise another way. Six days later he showed his disciples a miniature of his Second Coming. The true glory of Jesus was revealed in his Transfiguration on a high mountain (Mt 17:1-13).

Ten Parallels

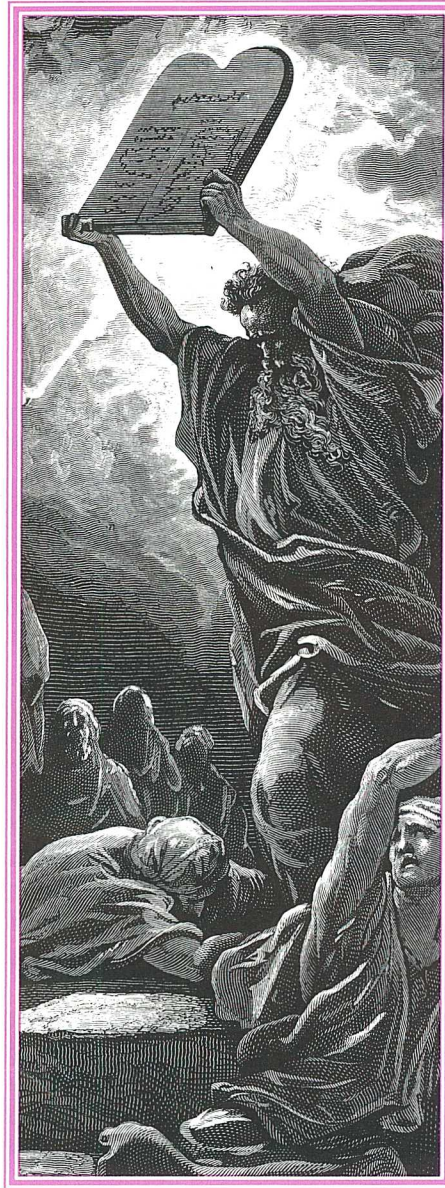
Peter, who was present at the Transfiguration, explains it as a miniature of the Second Coming (2 Pe 1:16-18).

Here are ten parallels between the Transfiguration and the Second Coming:

- One, Jesus went up into a very high mountain (Mt 17:1). When Jesus returns at his Second Coming, he comes from the heights, from the clouds.
- Two, Jesus was transformed, transfigured, and "shining like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Mt 17:2). Luke 21:27 says of the Second Coming, "The Son of Man will be seen, coming in a cloud with great power and glory."
- Three, at the Transfiguration, "the shadow of a bright cloud passed over them" (Mt 17:5). Matthew 24 says Christ returns in the clouds of heaven. Jesus returns in the glory of his Father. The clouds are a symbol of that glory.
- Four, "from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my own dear Son'" (Mt 17:5). In Revelation 16:17 we find a great voice from the heavenly temple associated with the Second Coming.
- Five, Luke 9:32 describes the per-

sonal glory of Christ. The Second Advent scene in Matthew 25:31 pictures Christ coming in his own glory.

- Six, Moses was present at the Transfiguration. Moses died, and was resurrected (Jude 8-9). Moses represents the dead in Christ who will rise at Christ's Second Coming (1 Th 4:16).
- Seven, Elijah was present at the Transfiguration. Elijah was translated



without seeing death (2 Ki 2:11). Elijah represents the living righteous, who will be translated at the Second Coming.

- Eight, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in glory (Lk 9: 30-31). Both dead and living saints will be glorified at the Second Advent.
- Nine, Moses and Elijah talked with

Jesus. We, too, will commune with our Lord Jesus when he returns. That is what heaven will be: talking and walking with Jesus.

- Ten, the last parallel between the Transfiguration and the Second Advent has to do with telling. Compare the following two verses:

"On their way down from the mountain, Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Son of Man had been raised from death" (Mt 17:9).

"When the good news about the kingdom has been preached all over the world and told to all nations, the end will come" (Mt 24:14).

Came and Touched and Spoke

When God said at the Transfiguration, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him" (Mt 17:5), the disciples fell on their faces in fear. Moses and Elijah were there, but God spoke of his Son. Moses and Elijah are servants, but Jesus is a Son.

"Jesus came over and touched them" (v. 7). God the Son "came over" to us, and drew near the human race. He was born as we are born; and died as surely as we must die. He "came over" by putting on humanity.

"And touched them." Our Lord Jesus has touched us by his life and death; and given us life.

"He said" (v. 7). As Jesus spoke to his disciples, so he speaks to us today. There are no words as self-authenticating as the words of Christ. We do not have to argue whether the words of Jesus are inspired. When our heart is surrendered, when we desire to know God's will, we will find the words of Christ self-authenticating. The words guarantee themselves.

Jesus Only

Jesus drew near, touched us, and spoke to us. "When they opened their eyes, they saw only Jesus" (v. 8).

Think of the possibilities. After God spoke, the disciples could have seen Jesus and Moses and Elijah, and walked down the mountain with all three.

How would you like to be in the company of Moses? He is a great man. But Moses represents the law, and if the law dominates your life, your life will not be comfortable at any time.



What about being in the company of Elijah? Another great man; yet Elijah represents the prophets, and the prophets tended to be fiery. When people came to arrest Elijah, fire came down from heaven and consumed them. I'm not sure I would be comfortable with a fiery prophet like Elijah.

I am glad that the disciples walked down the mountain with Jesus only.

Law in Jesus

We are only meant to see the law and the prophets **in Jesus**. We do wrong if we put either of them above our Lord Jesus.

Look at the law only in Jesus. The law tells us about Jesus. The law was placed in the sacred Ark; and that law was placed in the heart of Jesus. He was the living law—law and love combining. Never look at the law apart from Christ.

Never read the commandments of God in large type, and the promises in tiny type. Never read the law apart from Christ or you will be gloomy, discouraged, and depressed. Moses took the Israelites to the border of Canaan only; Joshua was the one who took them through into the promised land. ("Joshua" is the Hebrew form of the name "Jesus.")

Whenever Christians tell others their duty without also telling them about the love of God, they are representing Moses without Jesus. "The Law of Moses brought only the promise of death" (2 Cor 3:7). Whenever standards are upheld, and all the do's and don'ts spelled out, the mercy and grace of God, and the goodness of Christ must also be elevated—or there's no life.

What God has joined together, let no one put asunder. Law and gospel must be kept together. Distinct, but never separate. We are saved by the gospel only—that's why we keep law and gospel distinct. The fruitage of salvation is obedience to law—that is why we must never separate them.

Prophets in Jesus

Many people read the prophecies of the Bible and leave Jesus out. Many read the prophecies and predict the Jews will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and restart the sacrificial system, and the Antichrist will appear in what

was called Palestine. My friends, we need to be very careful, and inquire whether this is the correct way to read the prophecies—or should we read them in Jesus?

A true Israelite is someone who believes in Jesus. The true circumcision is that of the heart, not of the flesh. "If you belong to Christ, you are now part of Abraham's family, and **you** will be given what God has promised" (Gal 3:29).

There is not one word in the New Testament about a Jewish nation being established in the state of Israel. This is a church teaching that is not scriptural, and was inaugurated by reading the prophets without seeing Jesus.

All the Old Testament prophecies about the return of Israel are fulfilled in Christ. In Christ we are **all** (both believing Jews and gentiles) gathered together into the Promised Land. In Christ we **all** (both believing Jews and gentiles) inherit the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Your Eyes on Jesus Only

We are not to separate the law from Jesus, and we are not to separate the prophecies from Jesus.

As you walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following, resolve to keep your eyes on Jesus only.

Do not be downcast by those in the home, or those in the church, or those of your neighbors who are negative, unkind, and critical. Resolve to look at Jesus only—because you will become like whatever has your attention. Whatever gets your attention gets you.

Appeal

We have looked at the essentials in the Christian church's proclamation: Christ, the church, the cross, and the coming. All of these gain their value from the first: Christ. Christ is all in all. Christ is our salvation. Christ is our life. Christ is our righteousness. Will you not—with me—seek God's help to live by Jesus only? ❖

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