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## **MOUNT TABOR'S PARABOLIC VISION**

**- MATTHEW 17:1-8;14-20. - JULY 24. -**

**Golden Text: – "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."**

CONCLUDING our last study, our Lord, six days afterward, took Peter, James and John, three of his favorites among the disciples, into a high mountain. There he was transfigured before them; that is to say, his appearance changed, his face shone like the sun, his garments were white like the light. Then the vision grew and Moses and Elijah appeared to be holding conversation with the transfigured Jesus. The impulsive St. Peter, anxious to serve, inquired whether or not it was the Master's will that they build three tabernacles, one for him, one for Moses and one for Elijah, on the top of the mountain. One of the evangelists says, "He knew not what he said." Another account shows that the three disciples were for a time overwhelmed by something like drowsiness but later became fully awake.

It was on this occasion that they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." It required our Lord's kind words and touch to relieve the Apostles of their fright, and looking up they saw no one but Jesus. His transfiguration had vanished, and it was the Master, just as before. If, momentarily, they thought that Jesus had entered into glory, they now perceived that they were mistaken. Another account tells us that as they were coming down the mountain side Jesus charged them that they should not tell the vision to any one until after his resurrection from the dead. He thus explained to them that the whole matter was a *vision*, an apparition. This was a fulfillment of what he had told them in his last words of our lesson of a week ago, "There be some standing

here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom." These three disciples had been standing in his presence at the time those words were uttered, and now they had seen the Son of man in his Kingdom glory – *in vision*. The reality of that vision has not yet come to pass, although it is surely nigh, even at the door.

St. Peter himself declares that they accepted the vision as a corroboration of our Lord's assurance of his coming Kingdom. In his Epistle he says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, but were eye witnesses of his majesty (his Kingdom), when we were with him in the holy mount. (2 Peter 1:16,18.) Yet the Apostle proceeds to tell us that this vision, helpful as it was at the time, became secondary as he came to a better understanding of the prophecy which more particularly describes our Lord's second coming and Kingdom. He says, "We have a more sure word of prophecy [a more sure evidence than the vision] to which we do well to take heed as unto a lamp that shines in a dark place until the day dawn" – until the Millennial morning dawn. – 2 Peter 1:19.

Before leaving the story of the transfiguration, which symbolized our Lord's Kingdom glory, we note his gracious words to the affrighted disciples, "Arise, and be not afraid." On several occasions he thus addressed them. It would appear that by nature many of us have a consciousness of our own imperfections and a realization of our unworthiness of Divine favor, and fears are likely **[R4650 : page 233]** to grasp us and torture us. This is because we do not know our heavenly Father. The more we learn of him the more does the love of God cast out fear from our hearts, and assure us that he who created us is sympathetic towards all who are striving for righteousness. He is a *great* God, not a little one. True, he will not give his greatest blessings to any except those who come into harmony with him, but, on the other

hand, he is not a demon that he should be feared as such. He takes no pleasure in the suffering of his creatures and will not permit that any should suffer eternally, therefore his provision that all shall have, through Christ, an opportunity for regaining perfection and eternal life, and that whosoever will not avail himself of this great privilege must die the second death – must be annihilated.

While Jesus and the three favored Apostles were in the mount of transfiguration, supposed to have been Mount Tabor, at the foot of the mountain was a man whose son was a lunatic, whom he had brought that the Lord might expel the demon. The Apostles had already been out, as the Lord's representatives, in various parts of the country of Palestine, curing the sick and expelling demons in his name, so they assayed to cast out this demon, but could not. The Revised Version speaks of the sufferer as an epileptic. Indeed, all higher criticism disputes that there is such a thing as obsession by evil spirits. It is a common saying today among the Higher Critics that what our Lord and the Apostles mistook for demon possession was merely insanity, epilepsy, etc. Of course, the word *disease* is broad enough to cover any kind of ailment, whether it be a direct affection from the Adversary, or an indirect one through heredity. In either case there is loss of ease, dis-ease, discomfort. We, however, have more confidence in the wisdom of the Lord and his chosen Apostles and mouthpieces than we have in all the doctors of theology and doctors of medicine in the whole earth. We therefore accept this narrative just as it reads, that Jesus rebuked the "devil" and cast him out of the boy, who was cured from that very hour.

The disciples who had been unsuccessful in casting out this demon, called the Master away from the hearing of the multitude and asked him why *they* had failed when they attempted to cast out the demon. He replied, Because of your little faith. Another

account says that he stated, "This kind cometh not out except by fasting and prayer." In other words, the lesson to the Apostles was that their greatest power would result from their living very near to God, living lives of self-denial and prayer. Of course, fasting to be seen of men is not here inculcated, nor do we suggest that the works of penance on the part of disciples would make them more efficient in the understanding of the Lord's mystery; rather the thought is, the nearer one lives to God the more of the Divine power may be exercised by and through him.

It is perhaps difficult for us to understand our Lord's reference to their having little faith, for they surely exercised considerable faith in making an attempt to cast out the demon. Faith, to be successful, must be backed by spiritual power, and our Lord assures us that even with a small amount of faith we would be able to remove a mountain and nothing would be impossible. We are not to suppose that our Lord meant that his followers should try to remove mountains as a diversion, nor as a proof of their faith, for by so doing they would be seriously interfering with the interests of others who would be more inconvenienced by having the mountain remain. This they would have no right to do. We assume, therefore, that the thought must be that if in the fulfillment of the Divine command it should be necessary to have a mountain removed, and if the commission had been given to one of the Lord's followers to remove the mountain, and if he could exercise the faith to obey the command, the result would correspond to the faith exercised. All that the majority of us could do would be to exercise as much faith as possible and ask the Lord for more, and also seek to cultivate a greater degree of faith.

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