

WEEK 1: SATURDAY

Imagine yourself as a fifth member of the party, going up the mountain with Jesus leading the way, Peter beside him, and James and John following too. The last days and weeks have been utterly bewildering. Nothing like this has happened to you before, or to any of the others. Within a short time, you've got to the point where you really do believe that Jesus is God's Messiah, his anointed one, the one who will make God's kingdom a reality on earth as in heaven. But how is this going to happen? What will it mean?

It's all so new . . . and one of the things some of your friends are saying, back home, is that Jesus can't really be the one God is sending to rescue Israel and transform the world. He seems so different from what they'd imagined. You know that in yourself. You'd had a vague idea of a warrior king on a white horse, or of a new, strict teacher of the ancient law, insisting on sterner obedience to God's commandments. And Jesus — well, Jesus did indeed make it clear that God's commands mattered deeply, but that was in the context of him healing people, celebrating God's kingdom with all kinds of unlikely people, so that somehow, when he was around, holiness seemed different: exciting, liberating, rather than constricting and gloomy. So it seems to you, along with Peter and the others, that though this isn't what you thought the Messiah would look like he can't really be anybody else.

It's long way up the mountain. Walking, walking, not much being said. Then suddenly a sense of something happening. Your eyes are deceiving you. It's a trick of the light. No, it's a new sort of light — and it's coming from Jesus himself! Jesus is shining, brighter and brighter! And then something else is happening. He's talking to two men, two timeless, ageless figures. You hear enough of what they're saying to know that these are Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet. This is overwhelming. Moses, in the old stories, went up the mountain to meet God. So did Elijah. Now we have come up with Jesus and we're meeting Moses and Elijah. All the stories are rushing together. But they're making something quite new, and we're part of it.

Then Peter is speaking. 'This is it! This is wonderful! Let's stay here for ever! We can make booths right here, for you, Jesus, for Moses and for Elijah!' Great idea, you think. This is heaven on earth — heaven and earth coming together at last. This is what we've always longed for. Jesus really is the Messiah. He isn't overthrowing the law and the prophets; he's fulfilling them.

And then it happens. The Voice. People said they heard a voice when Jesus was baptized by John, and now it comes again. 'This is my Son, my Beloved; I am delighted in him. You must listen to him.' Did you imagine it? No, you all heard it, and you all found your legs giving way underneath you with sheer terror. And then it was over. Just Jesus by himself. Don't tell anyone, he says, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

This was all as bewildering and confusing in the first century as it is for us, reading it today. But what it meant at the time, and what it means now, is clear. Jesus was and is God's Messiah, his chosen one, fulfilling the ancient scriptures, bringing the age-old hope into reality. He was and is the ultimate place where heaven and earth meet. And if you stick with Jesus, it'll happen again. Not necessarily people shining like lights — though that has sometimes happened. But people, and places, full of a sense of God's presence and purpose. Usually, when this happens, it's the result of people taking Jesus very seriously. And usually, when it happens, it is in the middle of

a time of great testing and trouble. So it was with Moses and Elijah. So it would be with Jesus. So it may well be with us.

TODAY

Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, show us your glory, and give us ears to listen to what you have to say to us.