

The Return of God's Cloud – To the “Wrong” Mountain?

Exegesis of Matthew 17:1 – 8

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For Dr. Bruce Beck, *New Testament Exegesis: The Gospel of Matthew*, Spring 2019

Last modified: April 4, 2019

Introduction: The Cloud of Glory

In this paper, I examine the bright (φωτεινή) cloud (νεφέλη) (Mt.17:5) which enveloped and surrounded Jesus on the high mountain where he was transfigured. What is the meaning and significance of this cloud? How does it advance the narrative of Matthew's Gospel?

When Will God's Glory-Cloud Return to Mount Zion?

When would God's pillar of cloud of fire return so that God would dwell among His people once again? What was the status of the second temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion? These were the questions that the Jews who lived in the period of second temple Judaism were asking. These were the questions that the Jewish disciples of Jesus were asking. These were the questions Jesus would answer. But his answers would surprise his contemporaries.

Jesus' contemporaries naturally expected him, as a claimant to the title of “Israel's messianic king,” to repel the Romans from Jerusalem, cleanse the temple, and inaugurate the return of God's pillar of cloud and fire to Mount Zion. King David and his son Solomon established the historical precedent linking king and temple. Prior to that, Moses and the tabernacle sanctuary served as a template of sorts. But in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus clarified to his disciples what his messianic vocation meant (Mt.16:13 – 27). Contrary to their expectations, he would not be a military leader on the model of Judas Maccabeus. He would not take Jerusalem back from the Romans; he would not cleanse the temple building for worship. How, then, would God's pillar of cloud and fire ever return to be in the midst of Israel?

Because the disciples grow despondent and distressed at Jesus' prediction of his death in Jerusalem, Jesus shares a cryptic remark to help them interpret his death once it happens. He anticipates his resurrection and enthronement with mention of the “glory” of the Danielic “Son of Man” coming to his throne (Mt.16:28; Dan.7:13 – 14). To help them the disciples remember his mention of “glory,” Jesus verbally anticipates his transfiguration, which is correlated to his resurrection and enthronement in the sense that the transfiguration is a glimpse into the Danielic enthronement scene. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the “high mountain” (ὄρος ὑψηλόν) (Mt.17:1) to be witnesses to this event. “Glory” is not explicitly mentioned as a term in Matthew 17:1 – 8, but “cloud” is. And Jesus' transfiguration is framed by a concern for “glory,” and demonstrates the revelation of God's “glory” concentrated in and through Jesus.

The fact that the transfiguration and the cloud occur on a mountain is vitally important to a Jewish audience. But it happened on an unexpected mountain. Mount Tabor? What significance did Mount Tabor have? Jesus' Jewish contemporaries believed that Mount Zion would be where God's pillar of cloud and fire returned to dwell, for there on Mount Zion was the temple. This is because they understood Mount Zion to be a re-instantiation of Mount Eden.

Eden was the original mountain of God (Gen.2:10 “four rivers” diverging implies elevation; Ezk.28:13 – 14 explicitly names Eden as a “mountain”), from which God commissioned humanity to spread life. After the flood, the ark rested on a high mountain (Gen.8:4), from which God called forth life to repopulate the world. When God called Abram and Sarai to the new garden land, Abram built an altar on a mountain to worship God (Gen.12:8; 13:4). When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He led them to Mount Sinai (Ex.19). There, God commanded them to build a tabernacle to recall the covenant made at Mount Sinai.

The Cloud of God's Presence: Israel's Companion From Exodus to Exile

The vital Old Testament background to the phenomenon of the “cloud” of God's presence is the narrative of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The first time “cloud” (νεφέλης) appears as a designation of God's presence, as opposed to the atmospheric phenomenon of ordinary “clouds,” the word describes the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night by which God appeared in Egypt. LXX Exodus 13:21 – 22 reads:

21 ὁ δὲ Θεὸς ἠγεῖτο αὐτῶν, ἡμέρας μὲν ἐν στύλῳ **νεφέλης**, δεῖξαι αὐτοῖς τὴν ὁδόν, τὴν δὲ νύκτα ἐν στύλῳ πυρός· 22 οὐκ ἐξέλιπε δὲ ὁ στῦλος τῆς **νεφέλης** ἡμέρας καὶ ὁ στῦλος τοῦ πυρός νυκτὸς ἐναντίον τοῦ λαοῦ παντός

21 And God led them, in the day by a pillar of cloud, to show them the way, and in the night by a pillar of fire. 22 And the pillar of cloud failed not by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, before all the people.

In LXX Exodus 16:10, when Aaron spoke to the people, and they turned towards the wilderness to venture forth from the safe side of the Red Sea, “then the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud” (καὶ ἡ δόξα Κυρίου ὤφθη ἐν νεφέλῃ). Presumably, this means some kind of special divine light appeared in the cloud as the Israelites followed God into the wilderness.

At Mount Sinai, God appeared in the form of a cloud (νεφέλης) (Ex.19:9). He called Israel to come up the mountain to meet with Him. Significantly, when Moses and Joshua went up the mountain, “the cloud covered the mountain” (ἐκάλυψεν ἡ νεφέλη τὸ ὄρος) (Ex.24:15). This cloud either contained or was synonymous with “the glory of God” which came down on the mountain and appeared like “as burning fire” (πῦρ φλέγον) (Ex.24:17). Moses went into the cloud (Ex.24:18). Eventually, his face shone in a partial transfiguration experience. The light that shone from Moses’ face is rendered by the LXX as “the skin of his face was glorified.”

29 Μωϋσῆς οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι **δεδόξασται** ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ.

29 Moses knew not that the appearance of the skin of his face was **glorified**, when God spoke to him.

The pillar of cloud and fire signifying God’s presence met with Moses in the tabernacle (εἰς τὴν σκηνήν) (Ex.33:9). The “glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex.40:34 – 35), and hovered over the tabernacle to lead Israel through the wilderness (Ex.40:36 – 38)

When King Solomon built the more permanent version of the sanctuary, the temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, to replace the portable tabernacle, the “cloud” of “the glory of the Lord filled the house.” The presence of God’s glory was so powerful that the priests could not remain in the temple. LXX 1 Kings 8:10 – 11 reads:

10 καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἱερεῖς ἐκ τοῦ ἁγίου, καὶ ἡ **νεφέλη** ἔπλησε τὸν οἶκον· 11 καὶ οὐκ ἠδύναντο οἱ ἱερεῖς στήκειν λειτουργεῖν ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς **νεφέλης**, ὅτι ἔπλησε **δόξα** Κυρίου τὸν οἶκον.

10 And it came to pass when the priests departed out of the holy place, that the **cloud** filled the house. 11 And the priests could not stand to minister because of the **cloud**, because the **glory** of the Lord filled the house.

But because Israel rejected God, God withdrew His “cloud” of glory from the temple. LXX Ezekiel 10:4 reads:

4 καὶ ἀπῆρεν ἡ **δόξα** Κυρίου ἀπὸ τῶν Χερουβὶμ εἰς τὸ αἶθριον τοῦ οἴκου, καὶ ἔπλησε τὸν οἶκον ἡ **νεφέλη**, καὶ ἡ αὐλή ἐπλήσθη τοῦ φέγγους τῆς **δόξης** Κυρίου... 18 καὶ ἐξῆλθε **δόξα** Κυρίου ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου...

4 Then the **glory** of the Lord departed from the cherubs to the porch of the house; and the cloud filled the house, and the court was filled with the brightness of the **glory** of the Lord... 18 Then the **glory** of the Lord departed from the house...

Ezekiel saw the pillar of cloud containing the glory of God depart from the temple. The Babylonians invaded and destroyed the temple. Even though the returning Jewish exiles rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, the glory of God never returned. By the time of Jesus, the holy of holies stood empty. God had still not returned to His “house.” Hence, the prophets hoped for the return of God’s pillar of cloud and fire to a renewed Mount Zion (Isa.4:3 – 5). They foresaw a movement of people – both Israel and the Gentiles – into a renewed temple of some sort to meet

with God, but also a movement of people outwards to the coastlands from a renewed Mount Zion (Isa.2:1 – 4; 42:1 – 4; Mic.4:1 – 5).

Mountains, Cloud, and Temple in Matthew's Gospel

Mountains figure prominently in Matthew's Gospel because Jesus retells the story of Israel as the one true Israelite, who succeeds where all other Israelites failed. If, throughout the biblical story, God met with His people on a mountain and commissioned them to spread life from there, then Matthew takes a keen interest whenever Jesus did anything on mountains. This emphasis is unique to Matthew.

However, one cannot help but sense that Jesus had a mischievous type of intention when doing things on mountains. It is true that the "mountain" events serve a special role as inviting comparison to Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, and hold the narrative together. Yet Jesus situates himself on mountains in order to critique and compete with Mount Zion. On mountains, Jesus represents himself as the new temple presence of God, in whom God has resumed His original creation vision to dwell among, and within, His people.

Jesus' transfiguration story contains direct and indirect signs of being a retelling of both Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (because Sinai and Zion are already related to each other), but in a fresh way and in a fresh direction. The parallels to Moses and Mount Sinai are particularly strong. When Jesus ascends the mountain with his three disciples, a divine light transfigured his face, body, and clothing. "His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light" (Mt.17:2). This echoes the peculiar experience of Moses in Exodus 34:29 – 35. MT Exodus 34:29, 30, and 35 read, "the skin of his face shone." LXX Exodus uses the phrase, "the skin of his face was made glorious."

There are too many associations Matthew makes between Moses and Jesus to list here. This transfiguration of Jesus' face, however, is a particularly strong association because Moses and Jesus are the only two people to undergo this experience, and both occurred on mountains. Jesus is making Mount Tabor a re-enactment of sorts of Mount Sinai. He has already made another mountain the site of his re-enactment of God on Mount Sinai giving Israel the Ten Commandments, when Jesus ascended a mountain (Mt.5:1) and gave "the Sermon on the Mount" (Mt.5:1 – 7:29). Jesus also performed the two bread multiplication miracles on mountains as a re-enactment of Mount Zion, in some sense. Jesus retold an episode from King David's life: David was hunted by his enemies and took the five loaves of bread from the tabernacle (1 Sam.21:1 – 7; cf. five of twelve loaves per Lev.24:5), a story Jesus quotes very strategically (Mt.12:1 – 4) and probably pointedly, given that his enemies were hunting him. On the first occasion, Jesus took five loaves – as David took five loaves – but left behind twelve baskets filled with bread (Mt.14:13 – 21). Jesus was signifying that he was greater than the temple (Mt.12:6), which of course was on Mount Zion. Jesus' point, at minimum, it would seem, is that God's presence was with him, not on Mount Zion. Maximally, Jesus inverted David's impact on the sanctuary; for Jesus, the greater king than David, was building a greater temple than David, and did not deplete but overflowed the boundaries of the sanctuary paradigm as it stood, at the time, within the Sinai covenant. Then, on the second occasion, Jesus went "up on the mountain" (Mt.15:29), took seven loaves of bread (twelve minus five loaves, a reminder of the sanctuary again), and produced seven "large baskets" of bread (Mt.15:37), indicating once again a miraculous reversal of, and order of magnitude increase over, David's action in the tabernacle, but this time in "Galilee," which was both Jewish and Gentile. Jesus' "playfulness" with mountains must have been powerful but destabilizing to his disciples: Perhaps they were meant to interpret Jesus' actions as indicative of something he would do for Mount Zion, too? Or from it?

On Mount Tabor, the order in which the cloud and the light in Jesus' face occur are switched from the order in which Moses experienced them. At Mount Sinai, God descended in a cloud, Moses ascended, and then his face shone. At Mount Tabor, Jesus ascended the mountain, his face and body shone, and *then* the cloud descended. This probably reflects positively on Jesus' divine nature shining from within in his human nature when he reached the top of the mountain. In effect, Jesus' humanity might serve already as the equivalent to the "cloud" which hides, then reveals, the fiery glory of God, as Jesus had said before that he hides and reveals the Father (Mt.11:25 – 27), not coincidentally quite close to Jesus' "something greater than the temple" statement (Mt.12:6).

If so, then the bright "cloud" is meant to trigger a literary connection to Mount Sinai where the *humanity of Jesus* is drawn into a theological cluster of motifs and achieves more prominence by the association. This is an intimation

that Jesus himself is “greater than the temple” (Mt.12:6). He houses the presence of God. The *Menaion Forefeast of the Holy Transfiguration* affirms this, saying,

“To sight a mortal, but God in hiddenness, Christ ascends Thabor to lay bare the radiance of his Godhead by the splendours of his glory which shines more brightly than the sun.”¹

The *Menaion* refers to Jesus *cleansing* his human nature; the divine light transfiguring it was the result:

“Having *cleansed sullied mortal nature* by water and fire, in your own flesh, you show, O Saviour, its splendour by your face, as you shine more brightly than the sun, as a figure of the glory to come”²

“As we go beforehand to meet the all-holy, glorious Transfiguration, on this present day we glorify Christ who *refigured our nature* with the fire of the Godhead and made it blaze with incorruption as at first... [Jesus] has *made the human divine*.”³

By virtue of relationship with Jesus, the disciples would become part of that “new temple” community in which God dwells. One of the sections referring to a saint applies the transfiguration *to us*:

“In the divine Transfiguration, all mortal nature divinely shines forth today, as with gladness it cries: Christ is transfigured, saving all.”⁴

Correspondingly, in the Matthean text, the disciples, too, are enveloped into the cloud experience in such a way that *they* are placed into the role of Moses, somewhat, seeing the divine glory in the cloud, which is found in the face of Jesus, and hearing the divine voice.

Origen finds significance in the fact that the disciples were invited into Moses’ experience in the cloud: “the standing of their feet was akin to the standing of Moses...”⁵ Origen also interprets the cloud as a type of tabernacle, “a diviner tabernacle” which reflected God’s “wish to dissuade Peter from making three tabernacles.” But Origen rather abruptly shifts the emphasis of “cloud” to mean that God “overshadows the just... the genuine disciples of Jesus.” Origen wonders whether the cloud-shelter is “the power of the Father,” “the Holy Spirit,” or “our Savior.” He suggests that God leads us via “the cloud” as He led the Israelites of old. But he does not consider the Sinai-Zion mountain-temple significance of the image.

John Chrysostom makes a distinction between the dark cloud of Mount Sinai, as compared with the bright cloud of Mount Tabor, attributing different intentions to God.⁶ In Chrysostom’s view, God wanted to “threaten” with the dark cloud at Sinai and to “teach” with the bright at Tabor. He does not seem to regard Mount Tabor as Jesus’ more direct and focused commentary *on* Mount Sinai. While I am not sure that Chrysostom’s distinction between “dark” and “bright” is the most accurate or relevant one, he does helpfully point out that the cloud of God’s glory enveloped not Christ alone, but also Moses, Elijah, and the three disciples. Correspondingly, the disciples were able to learn something. Chrysostom says that God wanted to make sure the disciples saw and knew that it was not Jesus’ voice, but the Father’s, so therefore the cloud did not obscure their sight of Jesus. I take it that Chrysostom would agree that in this “temple on the mountain” experience, Jesus reveals knowledge of the Father, as he had said he would (Mt.11:25 – 27).

Augustine of Hippo connects the “cloud” to tabernacle imagery: “As the cloud then overshadowed them, and in a way made one tabernacle for them.”⁷ But he does not develop the meaning of this image further. Nor, it appears, does he perceive the significance of mountains in Matthew.

¹ *Menaion Forefeast of the Holy Transfiguration, Ode 1, Tone 4*

² *Ibid. Ode 7. The Godlike Youths*

³ *Ibid. At the Aposticha, Prosomia of the Forefeast. Tone 1. Joy of the heavenly hosts*

⁴ *Ibid. Of the Saint, Kontakion of the Forefeast, Tone 4*

⁵ Origen of Alexandria, *Homily 12 on Matthew’s Gospel* 32

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homily 56 on Matthew’s Gospel*

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *Homily on the Transfiguration, Matthew 17:1 – 9*

R.T. France, Donald A. Hagner, and Daniel J. Harrington all note of the “cloud” that it “is often in the Old Testament a sign of God’s presence (e.g. Exod.24:15 – 18; 40:34 – 38), and by adding *bright* Matthew emphasizes that this is no ordinary cloud, but the *Shekinah* of the visible glory of God.”⁸ But France, Hagner, and Harrington alike miss the significance of Matthew’s combined mountain and temple imagery *thematically*. Ulrich Luz, meanwhile, believes the transfiguration to be too “polyvalent” in associations and meaning to coordinate the pericope with Matthew’s larger thematic concerns.⁹ Consequently, these modern interpreters do not detect the significance of Jesus’ sustained critique of both Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, and also Peter’s desire to set up tabernacles.

Seeing the “cloud” on the mountaintop as Jesus’ engagement with the Sinai-Zion traditions of Israel explains at least two other features of the story. First, one likely reason why Peter suggested making three tabernacles is not because he wanted to stay on the mountaintop (so Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo of Rome,¹⁰ R.T. France¹¹). Rather, Peter correctly identified the experience of Jesus’ face shining as a retelling of Moses on Mount Sinai, and correctly assumed that the glory of God would be especially manifest. He probably believed that Jesus and the disciples were going to bring the presence of God down the mountain to the “resting place” of God on Mount Zion in Jerusalem’s temple. The three tabernacles might have been for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah to experience this “cloud” in a manner reminiscent of Moses in the wilderness, but the tabernacles would probably have also signified the march of Israel through the wilderness into the promised land and eventually to the temple. When the cloud appeared after Jesus was transfigured, it would have confirmed Peter’s suspicions: they were going to lead the cloud of God’s glory to Mount Zion.

Second, the Sinai-Zion tradition of “cloud” and mountain also helps explain the presence of Moses and Elijah. These two figures may exemplify “the Law and the Prophets” (*Menaion*), they were both eschatological figures (Moses foresaw a “prophet like me” in Dt.18:15; Elijah was to come in Mal.4:15), and they both anointed a successor (Joshua and Elisha respectively) who completed their missions and led Israel to a type of victory. But not coincidentally, Moses and Elijah also experienced God on Mount Sinai/Horeb through incredible phenomena (Ex.19 – 34; 1 Ki.19:8 – 13), where God appointed them to their respective missions. They are almost certainly on Mount Tabor to anoint Jesus as the true and final “conqueror and successor.”

Matthew’s Narrative and Practical Significance

As I suggested above, the disciples may have interpreted the appearance of the cloud on the mountain as Jesus’ retelling of Mount Sinai. As such, they seem to have thought this was the beginning of a journey where they would lead a frontal assault of sorts on Mount Zion in order to fulfill the prophetic hopes for God’s return to the temple, in His cloud of glory. Jesus, however, had different plans. The Father repeated the statement from Jesus’ baptism about His pleasure in His Son, also an anointing formula from Psalm 2:7. The Father added “Listen to him!” to help the disciples commit fully to Jesus despite their confusion about his prediction of his death. The cloud vanished. What was going to happen next?

After the transfiguration, Jesus made an oblique reference to it intended for the three disciples: “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you” (Mt.17:20). In our modern day culture, “mountains” usually connote “obstacles,” as in the popular Motown song by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, “Ain’t no mountain high enough...” However, to a Jewish audience, “mountain” meant “a place to meet with God.” Furthermore, Jesus did not say “a” mountain. He said “this” mountain. He was referring to the experience on Mount Tabor, when God’s cloud of glory descended and highlighted Jesus himself as a new temple presence of God, connected to the authority of Daniel’s vision of the

⁸ R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p.267; cf. R.T. France, edited by Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), p.649 – 650; Donald Hagner, edited by Ralph P. Martin, Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 33B Matthew 14 – 28* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), p.494; Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Sacra Pagina Series Volume 1: The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p.254 – 255. Harrington’s neglect of Jesus’ use of mountains to engage the Sinai-Zion tradition is especially disappointing given his interest in highlighting the Jewish background.

⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Hermeneia: Matthew 8 – 20* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), p.397

¹⁰ Manlio Simonetti, editor, Thomas Oden, general editor, *Ancient Christian Commentary Series on Scripture: New Testament 1b Matthew 14 – 28* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p.55 cites Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, and Leo of Rome

¹¹ R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p.267

Son of Man coming on the “clouds.” The disciples will be able to move the presence of God from here to... anywhere.

When Jesus approached Mount Zion, he gave another cryptic remark about moving mountains (Mt.21:21). This time, he referred pointedly to Mount Zion and the Jerusalem temple. Jesus diagnosed the temple apparatus as dead as the fruitless fig tree. Jesus’ disciples would be the ones to repeat Jesus’ pronouncement on the temple itself as fruitless and dead. They will “say to this mountain,” that is, Mount Zion, “Be taken up and cast into the sea.” Jesus probably meant “the sea” to be “the sea of the Gentiles” as Daniel saw the chaotic Gentile world from which the beastly Gentile empires arose (Dan.7:2).

We see Jesus return to the mountain, temple, and glory cluster of motifs at the end of Matthew’s narrative. Matthew brings his narrative to a literary “high point” (pun intended) with Jesus on a mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee region with his disciples (Mt.28:16 – 20). Jesus said that he has “authority,” which reflects the “glory” given to the Son of Man in Daniel’s vision. Galilee was significant because it was populated by both Jews and Gentiles (Mt.4:15), and represented the world in a microcosm. The Sea of Galilee probably served as a concrete example of the “sea” of Daniel’s vision (Dan.7:2). While on this mountain, Jesus commissions his disciples in “the Great Commission” and promises them, “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.” That is a temple motif. Jesus’ assurance of his personal presence with the disciples as they went out to the world not only fulfills Jesus’ birth title Immanuel (God with us) but fulfills Jesus’ promise to be “something greater than the temple” (Mt.12:6).

In fact, Jesus’ playfulness with “mountains” can now be seen in retrospect as his genius as a Jewish theologian. Jesus looked back at Israel’s story and saw that God always wanted the whole world to be His temple, which is why God placed His image-bearers there (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). God wanted to dwell with humanity, from Mount Eden onwards (Gen.2:4 – 25). But when God brought Israel out of Egypt and led them to Mount Sinai, the story took an interesting twist. God called Israel up Mount Sinai to meet with him (Ex.19:13), but they refused and sent Moses in their place. Moses underwent some kind of purification and transfiguration process (Ex.34:29 – 35) which God apparently intended for all Israel. Israel’s failure to come up the mountain (articulated as such in Dt.5:5), and later idolatry (Ex.32) led to an institutionalized pattern where, every year, the vertical movement of Moses up the mountain had to be repeated in the horizontal movement of the high priest into the holy of holies of the tabernacle (Lev.16). In the sanctuary, this annual movement of sacrifices culminating in the Day of Atonement repeated the approach of Israel and Moses to God, and renewed the Sinai covenant.¹² It was a purification of sorts, but it was also a repetition and reminder of Israel’s failure. The tabernacle, and later, the temple on Mount Zion, was therefore a temporary accommodation to Israel’s failure to “come up the mountain” and into the cloud of God’s glory. God wanted to renew His original creational vision to dwell among, and within, His people.

Jesus was never planning to militarily retake Mount Zion and lead God’s cloud of glory back there. Instead, he was planning to make God’s temple presence dwell once again in human beings – first, his own human nature, and then, that of his followers. Therefore, Jesus made any mountain serve his purpose while he was in a Jewish symbolic world. The mountain where he gave the Sermon on the Mount could replace Mount Sinai. The mountain where he fed the four thousand could replace Mount Zion. Mount Tabor could replace both completely. And the mountain where Jesus gave the Great Commission was the mountain “cast into the sea” of the Gentiles. In fact, “this mountain” – the very presence of God in Jesus Christ – could be anywhere the disciples go in his mission, anywhere in the world. “Any mountain” becomes “any place” with Christ. Jesus’ teachings, his nourishment, his glory, his power, and his revealing of his Father can now be experienced anywhere.

My wife Ming and I have experienced the presence of Jesus Christ in our neighborhood, which is a low-income, high-crime area of Boston. We were married in 1999 and bought a three-story house in Dorchester in 2000 in order to start a Christian intentional community to our neighborhood and community. For one year, we had 19 people living in a community-oriented way in our 11 bedroom, 4 bathroom, 3 kitchen house! That in itself is a minor miracle attesting to the power of Jesus! We have had the privilege of raising our two biological children and now (for 2 years) our foster daughter in the friendship and partnership of high quality Christian adult friends. Our

¹² Mako A. Nagasawa, “God as Dialysis Machine: The Sacrificial Calendar as the Renewal of the Covenant and the Retelling of Moses’ Mediation on Mount Sinai” (*New Humanity Institute blog*, October 18, 2018), <https://newhumanityinstitute.wordpress.com/2018/10/18/god-as-dialysis-machine-the-sacrificial-calendar-as-the-renewal-of-the-covenant-and-the-retelling-of-moses-mediation-on-mount-sinai/>

children have known the love of Jesus. And so have the former drug dealer across the street whose arthritic pain was miraculously healed by Jesus when we prayed for him; the woman a few doors away who felt Jesus empower her to give up drugs and toxic relationships and bitterness against her adult children; the neighbors who saw a vacant lot become a beautiful community garden because of our calling people together. The presence of Jesus among his people has been shown. Because Jesus makes the love and power of God available to His people, anywhere we are.