

“The Transfiguration”

February 23, 2020

Luke 9:27-36

I. Introduction

We saw last week that Jesus had taken His disciples to Caesarea Philippi so that He could prepare them for what was going to happen in less than 6 months. Last week we read in [Luke 9:22](#) that He had told the disciples, “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**” [Matthew 16:21-23](#) and [Mark 8:32-33](#) record that Peter had something to say about this—[turn to Matthew 16:21-23](#). There was no place in the disciples’ thinking for a dying and rising Messiah. What they believed was what the scribes had taught all the people. They believed that the Messiah would come to conquer and judge His enemies; He would bring salvation to the Jewish people; and He would raise Israel to world supremacy. After destroying all the enemies of Israel, the Messiah would establish His earthly kingdom of righteousness, peace, and knowledge. What Jesus said about His coming arrest, being mistreated, killed, and rising again was unheard of—it was unacceptable.

For 8 days they had been trying to come to grips with this totally incomprehensible idea. (On a side note, [Matthew 17:1](#) and [Mark 9:2](#) place the transfiguration 6 days after Jesus taught about His death and resurrection. There is really no contradiction between their accounts and Luke’s account. Luke’s count includes the day Jesus spoke those words and the day of the transfiguration; Matthew and Mark counted only the days between these two events.) If the disciples were going to be the foundation of Christianity, their faith needed to be strengthened so that when Jesus was gone, they would continue to stand. Jesus needed to show them that He was more than just a man; He needed to show them that, as [Philippians 2:6](#) says, He is “**in very nature God.**” With this in mind, He had said, “**Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.**” So eight days later, Peter, James, and John

were going to experience more than just signs of the power of the Son of God, they were going to briefly enter His kingdom itself at His Transfiguration.

II. The Events of the Transfiguration

A. Jesus' Transfiguration In preparation for His transfiguration, Jesus “took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.” These 3 frequently went alone with Jesus when He went to pray (Luke 8:51; Mark 14:33). As part of the inner circle, each of them would have a special place in the fledgling church. James would be the first leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem and would be the first disciple to die (Acts 12:2). John would be the last disciple to die but he would go through severe persecution ending on the Isle of Patmos. Peter would also go through much suffering and in the end would give his life for Christ—being crucified as was his Master—but at his request, he was crucified upside down.

Back in verse 32 seems to indicate that as Jesus “was praying;” the apostles were asleep. And while they slept, “the appearance of his face changed.” Matthew 17:2 says, “he was transfigured.” The word *transfigured* comes from the Greek word *metamorpho,w*, (*metamorphoō*). It describes a change on the outside that comes from the inside—like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar in a cocoon into a butterfly. It’s the same word used in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed, i.e. metamorphosed or changed from the inside out, by the renewing of your mind.”

For a short time, He who had “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7). allowed the shekinah glory of God—His divine glory to be seen. The glory of Christ’s divine shining nature radiated through His whole being so that even “his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.” Unlike Moses, after he had seen God, Jesus’ glory was not just reflected on the outside, it was radiated from within. Jesus had possessed this glory from all eternity but, while on earth, had veiled it until this moment. This is the glory that the entire world will see

when Jesus returns—[Matthew 24:30](#) says, “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” Jesus’ transfiguration confirmed His deity.

B. The Visitors’ Confirmation When the Apostles woke up, they not only saw Jesus’ divine glory, they also saw “two men, Moses and Elijah, in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.” The testimony of these two Old Testament saints was a second confirmation of Jesus’ deity. Their arrival represented the Law and the Prophets as witnesses to Jesus—the Messiah—who fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies. Their presence said that *“This is the One of whom we testified, the One in whose power we ministered, and the One in whom everything we said and did has meaning. Everything is fulfilled in Him.”*

They weren’t just standing there talking about the weather or worshiping Him, the topic of their conversation was Jesus’ “departure—the Greek word is the word “exodus,” which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” Jesus’ coming arrest, death, and resurrection were predicted and would fulfill the Law and the Prophets—just read [Isaiah 53:1-12](#). Moses had led Israel out of bondage to Egypt; Elijah had delivered them from bondage to false gods; but Jesus would die to set a sinful world free from bondage to sin and death—[turn to Hebrews 2:14-15](#). Nothing could have brought the Apostles more assurance and confidence that Jesus’ death would fulfill God’s purpose and plan than hearing it from Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah not only gave confirmation to the disciples of Jesus’ divine nature but also of His divine plan.

C. Peter’s Contribution While all this was happening, i.e., Jesus’ transfiguration and His conversation with Moses and Elijah, “Peter and his companions were very sleepy”—actually, they were overcome with sleep. The wording seems to imply that their falling asleep was involuntary. They must have fallen asleep before Jesus’ glory was revealed. Still tired from their evangelistic trips as well as being deeply saddened and emotionally spent by Jesus’ prediction of His rejection and death, the 3 Apostles were sound asleep—just as they would be later in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Luke 22:45](#)).

Something or someone woke them up. They were awakened, groggy at first, perhaps rubbing their eyes and trying to make sense of what they saw. “But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.” Obviously, they would not have recognized Moses and Elijah. Somehow they must have been introduced to one another.

How long the scene lasted isn’t known, but eventually Moses and Elijah had to leave. As the two men were leaving, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (Matthew 17:4 and Mark 9:5 note that Peter also called Him “Lord” and “Rabbi.”) Perhaps Peter wanted to bypass the cross and make the current situation permanent. Peter wanted Jesus to hold on to the glory *apart from the suffering*.

Peter, in his excitement and, as always, throwing caution to the wind—“not knowing what he was saying,” asked Jesus if three shelters or booths should be built. We can only guess at Peter’s motive for making this suggestion. Perhaps he wanted to remain with the Lord on the mountain top. This way Jesus would stay and not leave and return to Judea. He especially did not want Him to leave by way of death. Peter may have still been caught up with his plans rather than God’s. Peter probably assumed Jesus would approve and things would be different. Maybe Peter recalled the Feast of Tabernacles that celebrated Israel’s exodus from Egypt, and what better time could there be for Jesus’ exodus to save Israel and establish His kingdom? Peter may have also remembered that according to Zechariah 14:16-19 the Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated in the millennial kingdom. He also knew, like any good Jew, that according to Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 that Elijah was associated with the coming of the kingdom.

Probably, the best that can be made of Peter’s suggestion is that, in trying to make sense of this overwhelming transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of these two great figures of Jewish history, he wished to make some sort of memorial fitting to their stature. However, as God’s declaration in the next verse indicates, Jesus is not just another Old Testament figure on equal footing with Moses or Elijah. Jesus is superior in every way and His transfiguration is just one more proof of God’s plan.

D. The Father's Correction Interrupting Peter's interruption of the conversation between Jesus and the 2 witnesses, "a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud." A "cloud"—a "bright cloud" (Matthew 17:5)—was how God appeared at different times in the Old Testament. Throughout the wilderness wanderings of Israel, God appeared to them through "a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way" (Exodus 13:21). The cloud of God's glory appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 34:5-7; God's glory filled the tabernacle as a cloud in Exodus 40:34-35; it was as the cloud of glory that the Lord filled Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 8:10-13. So when God's "voice came from the cloud," understandably, Peter, James and John "were afraid." Matthew 17:6 adds that "When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified."

Using almost the same words as at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22), God said, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen." In calling Jesus His Son, the Father declared Jesus to be identical in nature with Himself—Jesus is divine. Jesus was not to be put on the same level as Moses or Elijah, He was God. By calling Jesus His chosen Son, the Father was declaring a relationship of divine love as well as having a divine nature. Then, addressing the three disciples, perhaps Peter especially, God said, "Listen to Him." God was saying, "If my Son tells you He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, believe Him. If He tells you He will be raised up on the third day, believe Him. If He tells you to take up your own cross and follow Him, that is what you are to do."

When the Father had finished, Matthew 17:7 says that "Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'" After His mighty display of splendor, Jesus' first actions and words were those of gentle, loving care. Knowing the great fear of His three disciples, Jesus tenderly touched them and reassured them. As they hesitantly lifted up their eyes, it must have been a great relief—"they found that Jesus was alone."

Matthew 17:9 says that “As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’” So “The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.”

III. Conclusion

As would be expected, the transfiguration made a tremendous impact on these men. Over 30 years later John and Peter both wrote about this experience. Turn to John 1:14. Now turn to 2 Peter 1:16-18. After this experience, there was no doubt in their minds. They were able to stand firm when things got difficult. Even in the face of persecution and death, they continued to do what Jesus told them to do.

The transfiguration shows all of us what was hidden in Jesus’ incarnation—turn to Philippians 2:5-8. How about you? Do you believe in your heart that Jesus is the Son of God—that He is every way divine and not just divinely empowered like Moses or Elijah had been? If you do, then as God the Father said, “Listen to Him.” Jesus’ way is the only way—not just the way of salvation but in the way to live. Our philosophies of life—our worldview—need to be based on Jesus’ Words. As Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, 39: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.” Because they believed and obeyed, the disciples underwent a metamorphosis. They were willing to deny self, take up their crosses and follow Jesus in everything they did.

Similarly, every Christian must undergo a metamorphosis—2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed—metamorphosed—into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Everything we do, including our daily priorities and values, must also be evaluated with Jesus’ teachings in mind. We must listen to His guidance on the way we live our lives—not just how we are to relate to one another and God, but even to the point of how much television and what kind of movies we watch, the way we budget our income, the respect we display toward our spouses and children, the kind of car we drive, the style of

clothes we wear, the language that proceeds from our mouths. Everything we do and say should be done as a disciple of Jesus. With what we know from His Book and the Holy Spirit within us, as one of His followers, we need to continually ask ourselves, “What does Jesus want me to do”—“What would Jesus do?” Peter put it this way in **1 Peter 2:21**, “**To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**” Are you following in Jesus’ steps?