

The Transfiguration

In the scripture passage that we studied last week, we read in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 23 . . .

23 And Jesus said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses (or forfeits) his own soul? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. **27** But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:23-27)

These last words in this passage here in verse 27, seem somewhat out of place, but they are not. Listen again,

27 But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:27)

With those words, Jesus was beginning to make His disciples aware that something beyond their natural sense of understanding was taking place. He was beginning to reveal to them that while the full manifestation of His "Kingdom" will only come to fruition over the many years of the future, His "Kingdom" had already begun.

It had its beginning in those very first moments of His arrival into this life. You'll recall the words the angel spoke to Joseph, saying . . .

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel", which means, God with us. (Matthew 1:20-23)

Folks, those words, "Immanuel, God with us" meant that the "Kingdom of God" actually arrived on the earth in those first moments as Jesus was born there in that stable. And here, as Jesus taught and preached the gospel among the people, He was more and more manifesting the presence of His Kingdom.

And you might also recall those words in Luke 17, when Jesus was asked when the kingdom of God would come, He said,

“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”
(Luke 17:20-21)

And then also, recall all those many parables that were given by Jesus where He began them by saying, “The Kingdom of God is like unto”, and then He would describe situations like a small mustard seed growing into a large tree.

And here in this passage where Jesus is telling the disciples that they would not die until the “Kingdom of God” was revealed to them, Jesus wanted them to be able to fully understand the truth that the “Kingdom of God” was already here and beginning to grow just as God had planned for it to grow.

And then, to further manifest who He truly was, here in these next words given in our passage for today, the Lord Jesus gave a revelation of Himself and of the presence of the “Kingdom of God” like had never before been seen and never will again until He comes in His glory at the end of days.

Listen to these mysterious words given in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 28,
²⁸Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became* white *and* glistening. ³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. ³³Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, *that* Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.
³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. ³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” ³⁶ When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen. (Luke 9:28-36)

Sometimes, perhaps often, there are events presented in these scriptures that give us very little explanation. And they sometimes leave us wondering as to the full meaning and application we should take from them. And at first reading, the "Transfiguration" of Jesus seems to be one of those events.

But we must remind ourselves that there is an unwavering truth that applies throughout all of these scriptures, and that truth is that all of these words are expressly given to us for our edification and blessing. We are told that clearly in 2 Timothy 3, where we read,

¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

These words of 2nd Timothy are especially true regarding the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus. There is an important message for you and me in them and we should be drawn to understand it.

First in purpose is that as Jesus appears in the brilliance and brightness of His "glorified" body, we are given a clearer, more convincing revelation of exactly who He truly is. Yes, He is "Son of Man", flesh and blood, just as we are, but He is also "Son of God", the express image of God the Father.

We are told that in chapter one of the Book of Hebrews. Listen to those words!

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power. ((Hebrews 1:1-3)

Unfortunately, when left to only the comprehension of our natural mind, these words describing Jesus' "transfiguration" take us far beyond our ability to fully understand.

And here in this passage in Luke chapter 9, we can see that Peter, James and John also suffered from those same limitations. And although yes, leading up to this moment those men had been privileged to witness Jesus performing many powerful miracles, like turning water into wine, healing the sick, raising the dead,

feeding over 5000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fishes, still those men struggled to fathom that Jesus could actually be the God of Glory.

Thankfully, Jesus was fully aware of their limitations, and He was also aware that if in the years to come Peter, James and John, were going to be depended upon to carry forward His ministry of building the church, then they would need far more solid grounding than their simple human comprehension could provide. Jesus knew that they would even need some “visual” form of proof to shore up their faith that He was truly who He claimed to be, the God of Glory.

And yes, Jesus has clearly said to us that faith alone is far better than sight. He said that to Thomas in John 20, where He said,

²⁹. . .Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed. (John 20:29)

Faith rather than sight truly is the foundation of all that men are in Christ. But again, because Jesus knows the limitations within men’s souls, He knew that He would also need to provide at least some visual proof in order to help His disciples to progress on forward in their faith.

And Jesus actually did that regularly with His disciples as He went about His ministry. He used His miracles to confirm that He not only had supernatural power and ability, but that He was also truly the very God of Glory, the Messiah, the Chosen One, the one who had come to save them and us from our sins.

Jesus knew that they knew that it was God and God alone who could forgive sin. And so, in Mark chapter 2, while He was healing a paralytic, He made that point, He said,

⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, ¹¹“I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” (Mark 2:9-11)

And folks, let me assure you and me that Jesus often does much the same with each of us, personally. We might not recognize when He does it, but He gives you and me many different visual proofs of His presence and power. We simply need to be watchful to look for it. Jesus truly is,

³ . . . the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power. (Hebrews 1:3)

And may I also give us a strong caution here. These words must never be taken as being merely symbolic or figurative. They are not intended to present Jesus as simply being "like" or "similar to" God the Father.

To the contrary, these scriptures specifically say that Jesus actually is fully "one in essence and being with God the Father." And while that kind of concept can be difficult for our minds to grasp, these words are defining the deeper truths about the Trinity of God, that yes, there are three members of the Trinity, but they are all three One in essence and being.

I recall some of the first times that I realized that truth. One of those times was in my reading of Isaiah chapter 9. Listen to those words that prophesy about the coming birth of the Lord Jesus. There we read,

⁶ For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given.
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called,
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Folks, may I say again that the truths we read about Jesus are not just symbolic or figurative language. They are literal.

As these words of Isaiah tell us, Jesus, the Son, is also the "Mighty God" and the "Everlasting Father". Yes, God the Father is "God the Father". But it is also true that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, being three, are also One, one in essence and one in nature and one in being.

And again, I don't expect my meager human mind, or yours, to fully comprehend these concepts, but they are nonetheless absolutely true.

Everything that Jesus was and everything that He experienced, was equally shared and equally experienced by God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

And again yes, all of this is far beyond our normal human ability to comprehend. That is why the secular scholars and the academics remain so confused.

But thankfully, through simple faith and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, unlearned people like you and me can know that it is all true. Jesus is God!

. . . Another intended purpose of this Transfiguration experience was to give you and me encouragement to know and to believe that there will surely also be a transformed body awaiting each of us as we abandon our corrupt earthly frame and join the Lord Jesus in paradise. There, we also will have a new and glorious heavenly "incorruptible" body. Those words,

²⁹As Jesus prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became white and* glistening. ³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:29-31)

While the glorious bodies of Moses and Elijah were probably not nearly as brilliant and beautiful as the transfigured body of Jesus, still their bodies were also glorious. And those words, "Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory", assure us that there surely is life after death, and that a transformation will surely also take place with us, you and me.

We'll no longer have these earthly physical bodies that will grow old, deteriorate and die. But our heavenly bodies will still have some form of physical nature. We know that because here we see that Moses and Elijah were recognizable.

And in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, God explained this to us saying,

³⁵ . . . someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

. . . ⁴⁰There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.

⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

. . . ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. . . . ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:35-54)

Isn't this wonderful folks! In heaven, while you and I will still be recognizable as to who we are, our new bodies will then be glorious and incorruptible, able to live for an eternity and never grow old and feeble again. Isn't that a precious and delightful reward to look forward to? And praise be to God!

. . . Also, another reason for presenting this occasion of Moses and Elijah meeting with the Lord Jesus there on the mountain is said by many bible scholars to be for the purpose of confirming that the "Laws" of God, there represented by the presence of Moses, and also, the "Prophecies of God", represented by the presence of Elijah, were all being "fulfilled" in the person and the presence of Jesus and of His soon coming death, burial and resurrection . . . the Law, the Prophets, and the Messiah, all coming together as one.

And that understanding is confirmed by the conversation they were having, that being about His coming death in Jerusalem. Those words in verse 30,

³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease (His death) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

Again, in His life, death, burial and resurrection, the Lord Jesus would fully accomplish all that the law and the prophets intended for mankind.

. . . Also, another reason for presenting the transfiguration of Jesus to us was to restate the superiority of Jesus above the level and authority of common man, even those as revered as the prophets Moses and Elijah. In Hebrews 3 we read,

³For this One (Christ Jesus) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. (Hebrews 3:3-6)

These words here in Hebrews 3, tell us clearly that Jesus is superior to all men. He is God, the creator and “builder of the worlds”, and He is superior to even the most revered of prophets, even Moses and Elijah.

But here on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, being overwhelmed by all that He saw, attempted to put Jesus, Moses and Elijah on equal ground. But God immediately rebuked Peter for doing that. Listen!

Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. ³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:33-35)

Peter surely did not intend any disrespect by his words. It had been common for him to hold the prophets, Moses and Elijah in high regard. But God the Father would have none of that. He was immediate and demanding in His rebuke of Peter, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”.

Folks, “Jesus is above all others”. And you and I must always hold Him in that high honor. We might think that we always do and that we would never be guilty of putting anyone or anything on an equal footing with Jesus. But as we look around us at the popular preachers of our day and at their preaching, there is great need for concern.

In Matthew chapter 15, Jesus warned us about how the newly formed church can err in much the same way as did those Old Testament believers and can mistakenly develop church teachings that can get intermingled with and can substitute themselves for the real truths of God.

And that is especially so when “silver-tongued” preachers with tantalizing doctrines that seldom mention the Person and Name of Jesus Christ, speak their enticing words into our ears, telling us that we, instead of the Lord Jesus can be lifted up to higher heights. When that takes place folks, Jesus is not exalted and God is not being glorified. And the church is in trouble.

Those words of Jesus there in Matthew chapter 15. Listen!

⁸ 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.(Matthew 15:8-9)

Folks, we dare not get caught up in the fervor of those false teachers. We must do as God commanded Peter to do there on the Mount of Transfiguration when He said, "This is My beloved Son, Hear Him!"

One last thought and we'll close. Our part in this great mystery of the Lord Jesus and of His ever-present Kingdom here on earth is a very simple one. Our part is to simply read words such as these within our scriptures and to trust the truth they give to us. Jesus truly is the Lord our God, and we are to do as God the Father instructs us, and that is to "hear Him", to hear the Lord Jesus, and to hear Him alone!

Let's pray!