



Matthew 17:1-8

The Transfiguration of Jesus

God the Father spoke directly about His Son, Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration. There Moses and Elijah were discussing the coming death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the visible glorification of Jesus we see the Shekinah in the face of Jesus. The incarnate God made Himself visible. It is the full glory of deity dwelling in Christ made manifest. The apostle John remembered it and wrote, We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father (John 1:14b).

During His prayer, with Peter, James, and John present, Jesus is transfigured into a glorious figure with brilliance like lightening. The glory of Jesus reminds us of Exodus 34:29-34. The Shekinah presence of God and the declaration of the Father stress the glory of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God in His uniqueness.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament messianic hope. Moses and Elijah were present to illustrate Jesus fulfilment of God's eternal purpose in the Old Testament Scriptures.

If a man die shall he live again? The Transfiguration of Jesus answers that age-old question. Elijah and Moses are, though unseen, still with us today.

THE CONTEXT OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

In the quietness of Caesarea Philippi and the shadow of snow-crested Mt. Hermon, Jesus asked His disciples, Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:15) The disciple Peter responded for the group, You art the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 16). This was a clear understanding that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the anointed of the LORD, the Son of God.

Jesus began to spell out the details and Show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day (v. 21).

The thought was unbearable to Peter, who grabbed hold of Jesus as if to hold Him back as if He were going to commit suicide. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You (v. 22).

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Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's' (v. 23).

It is essential for us to keep this context in mind as we examine the next event that occurs a week later when Jesus takes Peter, James and John with Him to a spur of Mount Hermon to pray (Luke 9:28). The context of the prayer was probably this critical issue for the disciples to understand. Luke writes, "And when He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. The Transfiguration seems to be the answer of the Father to the prayer of the Son. The disciples will come to a full realization after the resurrection of the glory of the Kingdom of God.

There have been various suggestions, but the Transfiguration probably occurred in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi on one of the spurs of Mt. Hermon.

THE CENTRAL PERSON AT THE TRANSFIGURATION

Jesus went up into the mountain to pray, and as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered. Jesus was transfigured as He was praying. Matthew informs us that His face shone as the sun. Mark tells us His garments also glowed. Luke says the fashion of His countenance was altered, so that He became the type and figure of the transfigured men whom God will one day similarly glorify.

Jesus became a blaze of celestial glory.

The testimony of the Scripture and eyewitnesses makes it clear the glory seen on the mount came from within Him. It was not as if a strong spot light shone upon Him. Jesus irradiated the glory of God. He became a blaze of divine glory.

The time of the Transfiguration could have been at night because the disciples were heavy with sleep, and it was the next day when they came down from the mountain. If it was during the day, the glory seen by Paul on the road to Damascus was brighter than the brightness of noonday sun. The same would be true here if the transfiguration occurred during daylight.

The manifest radiance of the glory of God is a major theme in the Old Testament. The first reference is found in Exodus 16:10. "It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud." It was the Shekinah glory of the LORD.

This glory was like a burning fire. The prophet Ezekiel saw it as a bright radiant rainbow (1:27, 28). This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. Yahweh spoke to the prophet out of His glory cloud.

The parallel with Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration is apparent. The presence of the LORD was within the pillar and cloud in the Old Testament (Ex. 33:18). His voice was heard and He went before His people as they journeyed through the wilderness. The Jewish Targums declared, "The glory of the Shekinah went

they journeyed through the wilderness. The Jewish Targums declared, The glory of the Shekinah went before them. The LORD dwelt among His people in the Shekinah which was the strange light dwelling between the cherubim over the blood sprinkled mercy seat on the ark.

The Shekinah reappeared and was seen by men at the birth of Jesus. Luke says, the glory of the Lord shone around them (2:9).

In Matthew 17:5 the cloud appeared suddenly and overshadowed Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Scholars are divided on whether the disciples were included in the cloud. Most prefer only Jesus and His two visitors from heaven.

John 1:14 tells us the Word dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. This glory was unique because it was deity. It was the glory of the only begotten of God.

A bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud saying, This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear Him! ”

This cloud is the cloud of glory we encounter in Exodus 13:21. And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ”

The cloud symbolized the presence of Yahweh with His people; the Shekinah reappeared with Christ on the Mountain of Transfiguration.

The glory cloud describes Yahweh's self-manifestation, His transcendence, His apprehensible presence (Ex. 33:18-20). It is a type of His dwelling in heaven.

When Moses went before the Lord on Mt. Sinai, he did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him (Ex. 34:29). The word shone has the idea of a general irradiation and illumination. Moses' whole face was irradiated in a strange and wonderful way. It was an unusual manner in which those familiar with him had never seen irradiated before. The word is used also for sunrise. His face was transfigured to a degree but not in the full manner of Jesus.

Matthew says, Jesus was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. A unique change came over Jesus. The disciples saw Him undergo a unique transformation before their very eyes. It was an unusual radiance with even His clothes becoming marvelous in appearance. The human appearance of Jesus was for a moment changed into that of a heavenly being.

The word *metamorphoo* meaning to change into another form, implying to change form, from the outward expression one gives to his in most nature and a change of activity. The word refers to an inward spiritual change. The transformation touched the inner man, the form, and the nature.

Christ changed from humiliation to the glory of His Deity. Jesus took on the form of His heavenly glory and was transformed. It was a change in appearance and does not denote the change of the substance of a thing.

The essential form, proceeding from within, is transformed. The deity was made visible to the disciples. It shone like the sun or like the brightness of the sun. It was luminous, radiant, bright, shining, and gleaming.

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The apostle Paul writes of Jesus "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7).

Jesus did not empty Himself of His divine nature or His divine attributes. It was a self-limitation of His outward visible glory. He limited His manifestation of His glory. He was still fully God. He existed in the form of God. The essential attributes are unchangeable and unchanging essential nature of a thing. The same essential nature of His deity never changed. The essential nature of Jesus is the same as the essential nature of God. The nature of Jesus is the nature of God. The essential form never alters and never changes. Jesus is fully human —fully God. He is the God-man. He is God incarnate. He is God with us. ”

What was this change that took place with Jesus?

The apostle Paul said, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). The self-limiting, or self-emptying, was the Taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men (v. 7). Jesus laid aside His privileges of deity even though He was God-man. He was at all times fully God and fully man.

The preexistent glory of the preincarnate Son temporarily broke through the limitations of His humanity as we have already noted in Philippians 2:6-9 and John 1:14. No doubt, it is a picture of His return to glory (John 17:1, 5). Moreover, Jesus will return in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels ” (Lk. 9:26) at the time of His Parousia.

His face did shine as the sun (Matt. 17:2) reflecting the outward expression of the inward change. The glory of the transformation of the inner man has its counterpart in the shining face.

Luke 9:29 says, And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. Elijah and Moses also appeared in glory (vv. 31-32).

Literally, the appearance of His face became different. Matthew 17:2 reads, His face did shine as the sun. ” Luke says, His clothing was radiant white. The participle *exastrapton* is from the compound verb meaning to flash out or flash forth. The simple verb is used for lightening flashes and bolts. Mark says, His garments became radiant and exceedingly white. We would say it was so, so white. ”His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light (Matt. 17:2).

The apostle Paul makes a brilliant application in 2 Corinthians 4:6. The Shekinah is now seen in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For God, who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

When we see Jesus one day in glory, we shall be like Him, and shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

The transfiguration reveals Jesus as He is in His present glory.

We will be like Him. We shall be glorified, irradiated, transfigured. Jesus Christ will be glorified in us. We shall show forth something of His beauty. Paul writes, "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed —for our testimony to you was believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

THE CONVERSATION WITH MOESES AND ELIJAH

Moses and Elijah became visible to the disciples. They appeared in a supernatural manner as representatives of the law and the prophets.

It speaks of heaven and how we get there and what it will be like. What will happen after we leave this earthly existence? Moses and Elijah, gone from this earthly life thousands of years, have shining bodies conversing about the greatest event in history, and God's eternal purposes. Men recognized them who never saw their faces before. They are not soul sleeping. They are conscious and are in the presence of their Lord in glory, in serious conversation with Him.

What are my mother, father and son doing in heaven? Why they are doing the same as your loved ones who have gone on before you. They are in the presence of Moses, Elijah, David, Abraham, Isaiah, Peter, James and John and millions more. What glory that will be when Jesus comes back for you and me!

Matthew says in 17:3, "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Luke says, "And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30-31).

Jesus is encouraged and comforted by the presence of Moses and Elijah. Their presence and speech were the acknowledgement that this was He whom they had seen from afar.

Here is the testimony that the Hebrew Scriptures were fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah (Luke 24:25-27, 44). The glory of the Old Testament lies in the fact that it is contained in and transcended by the New Testament.

The central idea at the Transfiguration becomes very focused with the conversation of the visitors with Jesus. Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus about His death, the very same subject in our context that so upset Peter. Peter was unsympathetic; however, these Old Testament saints fully realized they owed everything to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the Suffering Servant of God.

The theme that occupied the wonder and interest of heaven was the forthcoming crucifixion of Jesus. That is the central event of time and eternity.

Moses and Elijah knew that they depended on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for their salvation and their glory. Their conversation was consumed with His death.

After the scolding by Peter, how confronting and encouraging must have been the conversation of the occupants of heaven who could at this point in time fully understand and appreciate what Peter could not comprehend. They were in heaven on credit anticipating the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

How interesting and compelling that these men were not talking about His miracles, His raising men from the dead, His beautiful teachings about the Kingdom, or His powerful preaching on the mountain. They did not speak of His sinless life or even their own glory in heaven. They were consumed with the greatest event in history.

Luke captures the idea when he says, they were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. They were talking (imperfect) were talking with Him, i.e., a conversation going on between them regarding His exodus.

The word translated exodus or departure means Jesus' departure from earth to heaven. Jesus is going

The word translated *exodus* or *departure* means Jesus' departure from earth to heaven. Jesus is going away. Now this is the very subject Peter dared to rebuke Jesus about earlier (Matt. 16:21-23). Peter uses the same word in 1 Peter 1:15 referring to his own death as a *departure* and then speaks of the transfiguration of Jesus in vv. 16-17.

A. T. Robertson comments, "Moses had led the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus will accomplish the exodus of God's people into the Promised Land on high."

Robertson adds, "The purpose of the Transfiguration was to strengthen the heart of Jesus as He was praying long about His approaching death and to give these chosen three disciples a glimpse of His glory for the hour of darkness coming. No one on earth understood the heart of Jesus and so Moses and Elijah came. The poor disciples utterly failed to grasp the significance of it all."

Moreover, Luke says "And it came about when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). Literally, Luke says "of His taking up," or as the NASB reads, "His ascension." The word *analempseos* is found here alone in the New Testament. It is derived from the word *analaambano*, the verb used of the Ascension (Acts 1:2, 11, 22; 1 Tim. 3:16). Robertson says it refers here to the Ascension of Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus revealed a yearning to return to the Father (John 17:5) and it is in His mind at the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:31; 12:49f).

Luke is emphatic in his reference to the steadfast purpose of the look on Jesus' face in reference to the cross (9:31; 13:22; 17:11).

THE CLOUD AND THE VOICE

You would think that by now Peter would get the idea. But for some reason he gets all beside himself and reveals his stupidity. The counsel of Peter was senseless and sinful. If Jesus followed Peter's counsel, they would have turned Jesus from God's eternal purpose of redemption. There can be no eternal salvation without the vicarious substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Here is how Luke describes what happened: "Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud" (Luke 9:32-34).

Jesus did not respond to Peter. Suddenly the glory cloud surrounds Jesus, Moses and Elijah and begins speaking.

The heavenly Father interrupted Peter's nonsense. There can be no greater authoritative testimony to Jesus' Sonship and Messiahship than the words of His Father (v. 5). At the baptism of Jesus, these words were directed to Jesus confirming Him in His understanding of His messianic office. Here at the Transfiguration they are directed primarily to the disciples confirming the conviction expressed by Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The Transfiguration is the confirmation of the Messiah to the disciples and that He is the Suffering Servant of God.

The important truth from the Transfiguration is the authentication of the Son as the Messiah by means of the voice that spoke to the disciples out of the Shekinah cloud. Jesus may be rejected by men, but He is accepted by His Father.

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him! " (Matthew 17:5).

In the vernacular you could say, Shut up Peter! Listen to Jesus. ”

What did the transfiguration of the King mean to the three disciples who witnessed it? The disciples needed urgent help in comprehending that their Messiah was also the Suffering Servant who must die. Probably the meaning of the moment was hidden to them because Jesus told them not to speak about what they had seen until the Son of Man has risen from the dead (Matt. 17:9). In subsequent years after His resurrection, Peter looked back upon it through the resurrection, and the mystery of the cross and then wrote his epistles around the coming, the presence and power of Jesus Christ.

"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased ”—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Alexander Maclaren writes: Jesus alone among men could pass into the flesh into that brightness, and be hid in its fiery heart, unshrinking and unconsumed. Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? That bright cloud was His own calm home, His habitation from eternity, He enters as the Son into the bosom of the Father. ”

God the Father's voice bids us hear and obey His Son's voice. Since He is the beloved Son, listening to Him is listening to God.

COMPELLING CLIMAX TO THE TRANSFIGURATION

The disciples of Jesus did not remain on the mountain top experience. They came down to the reality of the lost world all about them.

Peter's suggestion for three shrines was completely ignored. Thank God! The last thing the lost world needed then, as today, is another religious shrine.

We need our mountain top experiences. They give us encouragement and renew our spiritual strength. But don't sit there and glory in some religious experience of the past. Don't build a monument to the past.

In verses following, a demon-possessed child met Jesus. It was a picture of human need and God's infinite power to meet it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Theological importance of the Transfiguration

1. The transfiguration anticipates the Kingdom of God to come upon the earth. Jesus Christ and God's eternal purpose will be vindicated before the eyes of a watching world who rebelled at His call to obedience. The transfiguration is a kind of prelude, pledge, foretaste and foreshadowing of the coming messianic kingdom on the earth (Matt. 16:28; 2 Pet. 1:16-18).
2. The transfiguration is also a picture of the personal resurrection of the Christian believer. When Jesus

2. The transfiguration is also a picture of the personal resurrection of the Christian believer. When Jesus comes He shall fashion a new the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 John 3:2). His appearance in glory anticipates our appearance in glory. We shall never reach our transfiguration but through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He uses the experience to teach us to wait in anticipation of His second coming. What Jesus experienced, we too, shall experience (1 John 3:2).
3. The transfiguration confirms the Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messianic kingdom. We have the word of prophecy made more sure (2 Peter 1:19).
4. The transfiguration affirms the authority of Jesus teachings and redeeming grace. This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased; hear Him! (Matt. 17:5). Our response should be the same as Peter and his friends. They fell on their faces and were much afraid. That is the beginning of authentic worship of the holy One. And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone (v. 8). May we by God s' grace do likewise.
5. G. Campbell Morgan emphasized, The glory they saw was the glory of perfected humanity. The Transfiguration was not the proof of Deity; it was the proof of absolute, essential, and victorious humanity. Here was the evidence of the only man who never sinned! The absolutely sinless nature of the Son of Man manifested itself that day. He never experienced personal sin, even though He was tempted in all points like we are.
6. The disciples saw Jesus in glory of His perfected humanity, and they heard His conversation concerning His coming death and resurrection. The emphasis of that conversation was the cross and that should be our emphasis, also. The perfect Son of Man could only bring the Kingdom of God with power by the way of the cross.
7. When the vision passed, they saw no men save Jesus only. Everything was refocused upon the extreme humiliation of the Son of Man —His coming death, the resurrection, ascension and coronation. The Son of Man is coming in His kingdom with power and glory. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. Jesus needed to pray. That prayer experience brought the glory of God to the disciples as they had never before experienced. The Transfiguration immediately followed the prayer of Jesus. We, too, can experience awesome changes in our lives if we would pray as Jesus prayed.
2. The voice of the Father was reassuring and refreshing to Jesus and the disciples. Hearing the Word of God is the secret of spiritual life and its blessings. It brings prosperity to the soul. Is there something He wants to say to you today? Perhaps He has said it before, and now He is saying it again. Hear the still small, quiet voice of the Spirit speaking to you, reverently, and implicitly calling you to Himself. Come and follow. ”
3. Jesus sends us out to live transformed lives before a watching world. The same word for ttransfigured is translated ttransformed in Romans 12:2. Men who live in darkness see a reflection of the glory of God dwelling in every transformed Christian (2 Corinthians 3: 18; 4:6). Even now as we behold Him in His Word, we are being transformed from glory to glory.
4. Thank God Peter was not allowed to build another hut. Jesus is not on par with anyone in the Old Testament or in world religions. There is no need for three booths. The world need only listen to the one voice —Jesus Christ, the Son of God. World culture wants to treat Jesus along side all others. When you minimize the glory of Jesus you misrepresent who He is. Acts 4:12 is even clearer. Jesus Christ alone is the

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minimize the glory of Jesus you misrepresent who He is. Acts 4:12 is even clearer. Jesus Christ alone is the ground of saving faith. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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