

**Matthew 17:1-9**

*The Transfiguration (Mk 9.2—13; Lk 9.28—36; 2 Pet 1.16—18)*

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.<sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.<sup>3</sup> Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.<sup>4</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.<sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”<sup>8</sup> And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”<sup>1</sup>

Our scripture drops us in the middle of a thought, so we must back up a little to know what Matthew expects us to understand. In Matthew 16 Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. At that time Jesus had foretold of his death and resurrection, and had said if anyone wanted to be his follower they must “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow” him. He also said the only way to save our lives were to give them up. Then Jesus prophesied that the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of God and repay everyone for what they have done. However the most astonishing statement was “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Then Matthew continues by saying “six days later.” During that week, the disciples must have pondered and discussed what Jesus meant by His death and resurrection. If Jesus were going to build a church, what would happen to the promised Jewish kingdom?

Jesus then took his three closest friends up Mount Hermon, which is about 14 miles from Caesarea Philippi, the site of the earlier conversation. Jesus went to pray and ask God for guidance and assurance that His path to Jerusalem was God’s plan. In answer to Jesus’ prayer He is transfigured, visited by two of the greatest Jewish leaders of all times, and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 17:1-13

was given confirmation by God's voice. The Transfiguration revealed some aspects of the glory of Jesus.

First we see the glory of His person. As far as the record is concerned, this is the only time Jesus revealed His glory in this way while He was on the earth. The word translated transfigured is our English word "metamorphosis," a change on the outside that comes from the inside. When a caterpillar builds a cocoon and later emerges as a butterfly, it is due to the process of metamorphosis. Jesus' glory was not reflected but radiated from within.

Jesus Christ laid aside His glory when He came to earth (John 17:5). Now his three disciples were witnessing a glimpse of his glory on the side of the mountain. We, like them, don't have to wait for heaven to share in this "transfiguration glory." When we surrender ourselves to God, God will "transfigure" our minds (Rom. 12:1-2). As we yield to the Spirit of God, God changes (transfigures) us "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). As we look into the Word of God, we see the Son of God and are transfigured by the Spirit of God into the glory of God.

Second we see the glory of His kingdom. At the close of His sermon about cross-bearing, Jesus promised that some of the disciples would see "the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). He selected Peter, James, and John as witnesses to this event. These three friends and partners in his work (Luke 5:10) had already been with Jesus in the home of Jairus (Luke 8:51), where they had learned that he was the Lord of life and death as Jesus brought Jairus' daughter back to life. The Transfiguration was preparing them for the fact that he would be glorified in death.

On the mountainside they experienced the presence of Moses and Elijah. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the prophets. Other scholars believe that these two men and the disciples suggest all the categories of people who will be in Jesus' coming kingdom. The disciples represent individuals who will be present in physical bodies. Moses represents saved individuals who have died or will die. Elijah represents saved individuals who will not experience death, but will be caught up to heaven alive (1 Thes.

4:17). Both Moses and Elijah knew something of being servants of God, being misunderstood, and suffering at the hand of those who should have supported them. Moses and Elijah explained that all of the Law and Prophets pointed to Jesus and would be fulfilled in His sacrifice (Luke 24:27; Heb. 1:1).

The experience of the disciples on the mount fortified their faith in the Old Testament prophecies. But unlike them, the important thing for us is not seeing wonderful sights, but hearing God's Word. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5). All who are born again belong to the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). This is a spiritual kingdom that is separate from the material things of this world (Rom. 14:17). But one day, when Jesus returns to this earth, there will be a glorious kingdom with Jesus Christ reigning as King. Those who have trusted Him shall reign with Him (Rev. 5:10).

Third we see the glory of His cross. The disciples had to learn that suffering and glory go together. Peter had opposed His going to Jerusalem to die, so Jesus had to teach him that, apart from His suffering and death, there could be no glory. Peter certainly learned the lesson, because in his first epistle he repeatedly emphasized "suffering and glory" (1 Peter 1:6-8, 11; 4:12-5:11).

According to Luke Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about His suffering and death that He would accomplish at Jerusalem. His sacrifice would not be an accident, but an accomplishment. For the Christian, death is not a one-way street into oblivion. It is a release from the bondage of this life into the glorious liberty of the life in heaven. Because Jesus died and paid the price, we have been redeemed, purchased and set free. Our redemption in Christ is final and permanent.

Fourth we see the glory of His submission. Peter could not understand why the Son of God would submit to evil men and willingly suffer. The Transfiguration was God's way of teaching Peter that Jesus is glorified when we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. The world's philosophy is "Save yourself!" but the Christian's philosophy is "Yield yourself to God!" As He stood there in glory, Jesus proved to the three disciples

that surrender always leads to glory. First the suffering; then the glory; first the cross, then the crown.

Each of the three disciples had a need for this important truth. James would be the first of the disciples to die (Acts 12:1–2). John would be the last of the disciples to die, but he would go through severe persecution (Rev. 1:9). Peter would experience much suffering and would, in the end, give his life for Christ (John 21:15–19; 2 Peter 1:12).

We are like Peter, we like the great moments in our life to last, but he also understood the importance of the event. He was experiencing the kingdom of God, but his timing was wrong. So on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter tried to tell Jesus what to do. He wanted to build three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so that all of them could remain there and enjoy the glory! But the God the Father interrupted Peter and gave other directions: “Hear Him!” God allowed his *shechinah*, the glory of God resting upon his people, to appear in the cloud. And God’s voice was the authentication that Jesus is the Son of God. God set God’s seal of approval on Jesus his Son. And in that moment Jesus’ prayer was answered; he knew beyond a doubt that he was right to go on to Jerusalem, and to the cross.

As Jesus and His three disciples came down from the mountaintop, He cautioned them not to reveal what they had seen, not even to the other nine disciples,<sup>2</sup> until after He had risen from the dead (cf. 16:20). Some people had already tried to make Jesus King by force, and if news of this event had become commonly known, maybe others would have attempted to make Jesus King.<sup>3 4</sup>

The scripture teaches us there is often a major difference between us and Jesus. Jesus always asked: “What does God want me to do?”; we usually ask: “What do I want?” Jesus

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 17:1

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:59

<sup>4</sup>Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 619

had no will but the will of God. We must work at being like Jesus. Our hymn of the Christian must always be:

“Your way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be!  
Lead me by Your own hand; Choose out the path for me.  
I dare not choose my lot, I would not if I might:  
You choose for me, my God, So shall I walk aright.  
Not mine, not mine the choice In things great or small;  
You be my Guide, my Strength, My Wisdom and my all.”

When Jesus had a problem, he did not seek to solve it only by the power of his own thought; he did not take it to others for human advice; he took it to the lonely place and to God. And his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration enabled Jesus to walk the way to the Cross.

We also learn that the Transfiguration not only blessed Jesus, but also his disciples.

(i) Like the disciples, we must learn that hardship can bring glory when we work for God. The cross brought shame to men, but glory to God.

(ii) Peter was always the man for action; always the man who must be doing something. But there is a time for stillness; there is a time for contemplation, for wonder, for adoration, for awed reverence in the presence of the supreme glory. The Psalmist said “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Sometimes we are too busy trying to do something when we would be better to be silent, to be listening, to be wondering, to be adoring in the presence of God. Before a person conquers the world they must wonder and pray.

(iii) But there is a converse of that. It is clear that Peter wanted to stay on the mountain side. He wanted that great moment to be last. He didn't want to go down to the everyday and common things again but to remain for ever in the sheen of glory.

That is a feeling we all know. There are moments of intimacy, of serenity, of peace, of nearness to God, which everyone has known and wished to prolong. A.H. McNeile said: “The Mountain of Transfiguration is always more enjoyable than the daily ministry or the way of the Cross.”

But the Mountain of Transfiguration is given to us only to provide strength for the daily ministry and to enable us to walk the way of the Cross. Susanna Wesley had a prayer: “Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in thy presence.” The moments of glory exists to help us know that God is with us and we are God’s beloved children in all that we do.<sup>5</sup> Let it be so in our lives!

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<sup>5</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 156