

21. The Transfiguration of Christ

Luke 9:28-36

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

The Gospel writer, Luke, has been slowly recounting to us who Jesus actually is—God manifested in the flesh. In our previous passage, verses 18-27, Luke writes that Jesus had given His apostles a test, asking them, “Who do you say I am?” (Luke 9:20). When their reply indicated that they believed that He was the Messiah or Christ of God, He then began to reveal to them that His mission while He was with them was not to lead them into some earthly battle to overcome the Romans but to die in Jerusalem as a Passover sacrifice for our sins. Not only was He to die, but also He began to tell them that they, too, if they were to follow Him, were to die to themselves and their wants and to deny themselves daily for Him. Right at the end of the passage was this verse:

I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).

There are two interpretations of what Jesus was saying to the twelve. The first is that He was talking about the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, i.e. bringing the reality of the Kingdom of God. Judas would not be with them; hence, the use of the word, “some.” In the other interpretation, the *some* were three of them who would ascend one of the mountains in Galilee and see the transfiguration of Jesus. He wasn’t saying that the Kingdom of God would be set up in their day. In the Transfiguration, they would see heaven on earth for a brief time. Three individuals, viz. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, would be seen in Kingdom glory. It will have its full manifestation later at the end of the age when Jesus returns, but the Kingdom of God had already come with the presence of the King and the new life that He brought and gives us as a gift.

Where could the Mount of Transfiguration be? Luke tells us that it was *about* eight days later. The question as to His identity, “Who do you say that I am?” was posed at Caesarea Philippi, twenty-five miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee. The Mount of Transfiguration was more than likely in that same area. Tradition tells us that it was Mount Tabor, twenty-five miles south-west of the Sea of Galilee, near Nazareth where He grew up. Mount Tabor was about as far in the opposite direction as they had already come, a fifty-mile walk from Caesarea Philippi, easily accomplished in eight days. It could also have been Mount Hermon, which was close to Caesarea Philippi. The location was not important enough for any of the disciples to mention. It is not the site that was holy, but rather, what took place there.

Hungering and Thirsting for God

²⁸About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray (Luke 9:28).

Question 1) Why would Jesus take just three disciples?

Peter, James, and John were selected as an inner core of leaders to witness a manifestation of Jesus as heaven sees Him. It seems that the cloak of the physical universe was put to one side for

a short time, and the three disciples saw into the true reality of the spiritual world. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see what they saw?

Peter, James, and John were brought in on things that were not revealed to the others. They were His inner core group. Jesus brought these three closer to Himself when He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33), and when He healed Jairus' daughter, He took these three with Him into the room where He healed the girl (Luke 8:51). It is possible that the three were closer to Jesus than the others. Some people desire to walk closer to Christ than others. To those that hunger and thirst after God, He reveals more of His heart and purpose. We have as much of God as we want to have. God spoke to His people about this through Jeremiah the prophet:

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

When we thirst for Him, He will come near. He will give us as much of Himself as we are thirsty for: **“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?”** (Psalm 42:1-2). The things of God are rarely given to those who are indifferent and have no spiritual hunger or thirst. The Lord said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness would be filled (Matthew 5:6). This should drive us to prayer to ask God that He would give us a thirst and revive us and awaken us to our spiritual need. The times in which we live have a way of making us lukewarm in our relationship toward God. This was the strategy of Pharaoh when the children of Israel grew tired of their burdens and wanted time out to worship the Lord, he made them make bricks without giving them straw, thus making them work harder (Exodus 5:5-9). When we are too busy for God, we are too busy. Our souls need regular times when we can take a break from our labors and ascend the mountain of the Lord, in a spiritual sense, to be with Him.

As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning (Luke 9:29).

Question 2) What do you think took place when the Scripture says that the appearance of His face changed. What was happening?

The Metamorphosis

The Gospel writer Mark records what happened with these words, **“There He was transfigured before them”** (Mark 9:2). Mark uses the Greek word, *Metamorphoo*, translated into the English word *transfigured*. We get our word, *metamorphosis*, from this Greek word to describe the change that takes place when a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly. The word literally means to change form, to alter fundamentally, a change of place or condition. This was the revealing of His inner supernatural glory being seen on the outside by the three disciples that were witnesses of His glory.

Let's look at a passage that will help us explain what was happening. Paul the Apostle, writing to the church at Philippi, tells us about Christ in this way:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but **made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:6-7).

The Greek word that is translated *made nothing* is the word *Kenoo*. The word means to empty, to void, to make empty, to be without content, to be made ineffectual. It means to empty something of its power, to render insignificant, to cause to be irrelevant. The mystery of the Gospel is that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). When Jesus left heaven and the glory He had with the Father, He became fully man and voluntarily accepted the restrictions upon Him as a man without laying aside His nature as God. At the same time as becoming man, He was fully God. The Lord was allowing the three disciples to see beyond the veil of the flesh to Who He is in essence. Not only that but also at the same time, they were seeing two others in the glorious state that they now had in the realm beyond the flesh. This metamorphosis will also take place in the believer in Christ. The Lord was encouraging the disciples that, in their denying of themselves, inner glory would be the result, and this glory from God would be manifest in the future, just as Elijah and Moses' were. What God is doing on the inside of us, i.e. our spirit man, will come to the outside.

Jesus said the kingdom of God is within you:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: ²¹Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, **the kingdom of God is within you** (Luke 17:20-21).

In saying the kingdom of God is within you, there is a possibility that Christ was saying that wherever the King is, the kingdom of God is present. However, it also could be that He was saying that all believers are being transformed on the inside by the presence of the King in their lives. When we enter eternity, we will discover what God has been doing in our hearts, the core of our being. Jesus told the disciples (and us) that, if we will follow Him, He would **make** us into fishers of men (Matthew 4:10). During our life of walking with Christ, there is a recreation that is going on within a disciple's life, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus is shaping us day by day to be like Him. Paul wrote:

For we are **God's workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

It should be a great comfort that God has undertaken to make us into the kind of person He wants us to be. There is a need for cooperation on our part, but we are like clay in His hands, and He is molding and working in our lives to shape us into someone who will reflect His glory (Jeremiah 18:6). At the end of our lives or when He comes, we will see the result of His workmanship:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

It is a truth that we become like on what we fix our eyes. When our lives are fixed on Christ, His purposes, His plans, and His kingdom, then we are fashioned and shaped after His image on the inside. For a brief time, the three disciples saw Jesus as He really is. What was on the inside, the character of Christ, who He was and is, was manifest to the three.

³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³²Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him (Luke 9:30-32).

Notice that the Scripture not only tells us of the glorious Son of God, but also goes on to tell us that two men who had given their lives to the purposes of God, Moses and Elijah, representatives of the Law and the Prophets, were also appearing in glorious splendor as they talked with Jesus. If there was a cross ahead for the disciples, they needed to know that there was something beyond. It is important to know what they talked about here. Jesus was about to fulfill his mission on earth, and this is what Moses and Elijah were talking about with Jesus! This shows us that Jesus knew what was about to happen. What happened at the cross was a success and not a failure! The Lord was showing the disciples that the plan of Christ to die in Jerusalem was set in motion before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20). Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His departure [literally, the word is His exodus] that was about to be accomplished or fulfilled in Jerusalem. The crucifixion was not an unexpected blip but planned in Heaven before the foundation of the World. Just as Eve was brought into being from the side of Adam, so the Church, the bride of Christ, had to born from the side of the Savior.

Question 3) What kind of body will ordinary disciples like you and I have in the resurrection? If our resurrection body will look like Jesus' body, about which body are we talking? The body that He had after the resurrection, or the body He has in heaven?

The Glory of God in Man

When Jesus walked alongside the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He was talking to them, and they did not even know that it was Jesus.

¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Luke 24:15-18).

There was nothing that looked different to them whatsoever about this Man Who, at that point, had a different body; the resurrection had already happened. This is similar to the appearance of Jesus after the resurrection and His appearance to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee:

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they

answered. ⁶He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. ⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water (John 21:4-7).

In some way, Jesus was hiding His real essence while He was visiting the disciples and revealing Himself for the forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). I do not believe that the body we will receive will be like the body that Jesus had just after the resurrection. What does Jesus look like now?

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:12-18).

For every difficulty that we go through for Christ, there is a crown. Paul wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Let this encourage each of us in whatever suffering we are enduring or called of God to suffer. There will be a time at the coming of the Lord Jesus when the Bride of Christ, i.e. all born-again believers, will put on a different body:

³⁵But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” ³⁶How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 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. ⁴¹The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. ⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it 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. ⁴⁵So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 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. ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 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.” ⁵⁵“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:35-55).

Let’s return to our passage in Luke. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw His glory and Moses and Elijah standing with Him. We are told that, when they had overcome their sleepiness, “**They saw His glory**” (verse 32). Luke tells us that: “**His face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning**” (v. 29). The Greek word translated as *bright* is the color that is used three times in the Book of Revelation to describe pure white—untainted by any darkness, a brightness that the only word to describe it is as a flash of lightning, and that is just His clothes. Mark is a little more descriptive:

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them (Mark 9:3).

Matthew discusses His face shining as the sun in its brilliance:

There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light (Matthew 17:2).

Again, I would encourage us that, just as the moon reflects the glory of the sun to earth, so we that are born-again believers in Christ will one day reflect the glory of the Son of God. Jesus described the experience of the saints in this way, “**Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear**” (Matthew 13:43). We will be changed into His likeness at His coming. For this perishable body must put on an imperishable and immortal body. ²**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** ³**Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:2-3).** Our resurrection bodies will be like Jesus’ glorified body that He now has with the Father. For all who will live for Christ and deny self in this life, the reward is to be like Christ in His glory. Don’t misunderstand me. There is only one begotten Son of God, the Lord of Life Himself, and we will never come close to shining like Him, but He did say that we are to reflect His glory in eternity.

The three disciples saw the Shekinah glory emanating from the Son of God, the same glory that lit Mount Sinai with its “consuming fire” (Exodus 24:17). His face shone like the sun in all of its strength. This is the same brightness that blinded Saul who became the Apostle Paul after he saw the risen Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3). If anyone near the Mount of Transfiguration would have looked up, I am sure the mountain was lit with the Shekinah glory of the Son of God

emanating from it. It was the same glory that appeared in the pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day when the children of Israel were wandering through the wilderness. The cloud and the pillar of fire was the pre-incarnate Son of God.

¹For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and *that rock was Christ* (1 Corinthians 10:1-3).

This same glory had appeared at the Tent of Meeting:

³⁴Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35).

³⁶In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out-until the day it lifted. ³⁸So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels (Exodus 40:36-38).

The transfiguration of Christ was so powerful to the disciples that Peter spoke before thinking:

³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “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.” (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen (Luke 9:30-36).

Question 4) Why did Peter want to put up three shelters or tabernacles?

There are two possible interpretations:

1) Peter often thought and acted impetuously. Some would say that he had the urge to package the experience that he had, i.e. that the three shelters were to mark the location so that he could bring others to the spot where heaven showed up. Why do people do such things? There are those that go to this religious site and that religious site, and it becomes something that man tries to market. I once went to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the church built on the site some believe to be where Christ was buried, and as I bent low to get in, there was a man hassling me to buy a candle! I was so disappointed. I think this was what Jesus was so upset about when he threw the moneychangers out of the Temple.

2) In the second interpretation, Peter wanted to be able to make the experience last, i.e. to build shelters so that Elijah, Moses, and Jesus would stay longer. He was so enthralled with the glory

of God emanating from Jesus that He wanted to stay there longer and prolong the experience. Peter wrote later about what he saw:

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice from the Majestic Glory said to Him, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” ¹⁸And we ourselves heard this voice from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16).

All of a sudden, the Father showed up telling them, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” (v. 35). This must have reminded them of Moses’ own words about the Messiah written down many years before:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him (Deuteronomy 18:15).

We cannot go wrong in life if we will listen to the Son of God. It is interesting that the only instruction or command that Mary, the mother of Jesus, ever gave was to, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). The lesson we are to learn after hearing about denying ourselves and taking up our cross is that the more a person listens to Christ and denies himself for the kingdom of God’s sake, the more glory will rest upon that person in eternity. Speak Lord for your servants are listening.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the hope that we have in You. Thank You, also, that we will one day be like Your Son and see Him in all His glory. Amen!

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