

## The Transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36

## I. THREE TRANSFIXED MEN

When in college I was required to take a class in Fine Arts. We studied music and listened classical composers like Beethoven, Bach and Mozart. We learned basic song leading and sang through the Hallelujah chorus.

We studied art periods viewing paintings, sculpture and architecture. One assignment was to visit local architecture in Grand Rapids patterning their design from particular periods in the art movement. We studied the Baroque, Renaissance, Romanticism and modern art movements. For exams the professor would show a slide with a painting, sculpture or building and we had to know the artist, the name of the art being shown and the era.

To help us remember we made up games. For example, to help us remember the style of building in the Baroque period we came up with the idea that “if it isn’t Baroque, don’t fix it.” Now you know my humor goes way back.

One specific painting we had to know came from today’s passage. It’s titled *The Transfiguration* by Giovanni Bellini. The shape of the figures in the painting was like that of a bell so we could associate the painting with the artist.

It all helped and I got an A in the class.

Please turn to that passage in Luke’s account of the life of Christ – Luke 9:28-36.

Stand in honor of God’s Word as I read the passage. Consider the following with me this morning:

Three transfixed men

Two transformed men

One transfigured man

One transcendent voice

His transfiguration, our triumph, our transformation

Notice that it is only Peter, James, and John who are with the Lord on this occasion. Of the 12 disciples they were His closest companions. Remember that according to the Old Testament law there had to be two or three witnesses for anything to be substantiated. Having three witnesses would validate the event. “On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.” Deuteronomy 17:6 (19:15)

While the passage refers to the death penalty, they carried that over to validate anything.

We can only speculate why they were with Jesus for this event. Perhaps they were selected because they would have significant roles in the church after Christ ascended to heaven. Peter would be the primary spokesman for the Apostles in the early days of the church and witnessing this incredible event would give him boldness to preach.

James would be the first Apostle martyred and perhaps he was chosen to give him a glimpse into the heavenly kingdom and transformation that awaited him. This too would give him courage.

John would be imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. It is there that he is given a vision of things to come, things which would include a vision of gathered saints and angels in heaven and of God’s glory.

Whatever the reason they were chosen is uncertain except to say that Jesus wanted the witness of three men that could be trusted with what they were about to experience.

There are two events where these three disciples accompanied Jesus apart from the others. We considered one already. A desperate father came to Jesus asking for His help. His only daughter lay sick, near death and Jairus clung to the hope that

Jesus could heal her. Before they reached home, news came that she had died, but that did not deter Jesus. He went and miraculously (it is a miracle to us, but not to the one who created all things) she was raised to life again.

The other time we will see them alone with Jesus is on the night of His betrayal when all the disciples accompany Him into the Garden of Gethsemane. Once there He took Peter, James, and John a little further where He left them to watch and pray. As we will see in this passage they fell asleep.

Jesus and these three men climb an undisclosed mountain where He will again pray, for what we do not know. While He was praying we read that He became transfigured. We'll talk more about that in a moment. Joining Jesus and the three disciples are two other prominent figures in Old Testament history. We'll talk about them in a moment as well.

Perhaps because of the bright light that now shone around them, the disciples woke up. How long they had been asleep, we don't know.

Verse 34 indicates that when a cloud came and enveloped them all they became afraid. I'd like to suggest two reasons for their fear.

The first is that in the several years of their being together they had never seen Jesus in this way. His teaching was amazing. He performed phenomenal miracles. But they had never seen Him like this before. A week earlier they had proclaimed that He was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, but this put things in a whole new perspective for them.

The other reason I think they were afraid is that with Moses and Elijah there, the three disciples may have thought the two men were there to escort Jesus back to heaven. If that is truly what they were thinking, what had they forgotten? Jesus told them He would suffer, die, and be raised again.

There is something else that is interesting in their encounter. Peter decided that being there was a good thing. It was such a great experience that he thought they should build some temporary shelters as a way to prolong the experience. Peter was suggesting that Jesus start His kingdom right then and there. What was he proposing? He was proposing that Jesus bypass the cross and set up His kingdom right then. Mark adds an interesting side note. He states that Peter said this because he didn't know what else to say because he was afraid.

This is the second time Peter suggested Jesus bypass the cross. Earlier when Jesus spoke of His impending death, Peter told Jesus it would never happen. He would fight to his last breath to keep Jesus alive. Jesus rebuked him and told him he didn't have in mind the things of God.

I think sometimes we want to bypass the suffering that God is allowing. We forget that the suffering is what helps us grow in faith and develop godly character. Peter forgot that entrance into the kingdom of God is only possible through the cross.

As the cloud lifted and Jesus was alone with the three disciples they were instructed not to say anything about their experience until after Jesus was raised from dead. That's in Matthew's account. If people heard about this event, they would come and force Jesus to be king, or worse yet Rome, who was always suspicious of conspiracies against the Empire, might come and put Jesus and the disciples to death for plotting an insurrection. Remember that Jesus had to die, but it was to be at a specific time to coincide with the Passover so that He would be our sacrificial lamb for sin.

That's another reason for the silence. They couldn't preach about a glorified Christ without His death resurrection. Besides, the event was so otherworldly that most people would not understand or believe.

Years later John would write about his experience in the opening chapter of the gospel that bears his name. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 14)

Peter records his experience in his second Epistle. “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.” (II Peter 1:16-18)

At the time they were three transfixed men.  
There were two transformed men.

## II. TWO TRANSFORMED MEN

While Jesus was praying and His appearance being transfigured Moses and Elijah appear. Why them? Why not Abraham, the Father of their nation? Why not Daniel, who saw amazing visions and lived a life of great integrity? Why not David, a man after God’s own heart?

Scholars agree that they were chosen to visit with Jesus because they represent what Jesus would do. Moses is the one who delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and was the great law giver. Elijah was perhaps the greatest prophet and represents them as one who sought to deliver Israel from slavery to sin through idol worship by defending the law. Both had a significant role in the history of Israel.

As Moses led Israel to the Promised Land, so Jesus will lead His people into the Promised Land.

As Elijah led people from bondage to sin, so Jesus will lead His people from bondage to sin.

Galatians 1:3-4

Colossians 1:13

Hebrews 2:14-15

Moses and Elijah are present as representatives of the Old Testament speaking to the very One who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

Something else to consider is that both Moses and Elijah had unique departures from earth. They are reminiscent of how believers depart from earth. Though Moses’ body was never found, Moses died here on earth. I Thessalonians 4:16 speaks of the dead in Christ, those who had faith in Christ at the time of their death. Elijah on the other hand, did not die, but was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. He represents those also spoken of by Paul in I Thessalonians 4:17 who are still alive when Christ returns at His second coming.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17

What is interesting in this passage is that these two had bodies. It wasn’t a spirit the disciples saw. I doubt they had name tags identifying them, but somehow the disciples knew who they were. Maybe there were formal introductions. That they had bodies tells us something. Either they had been given their temporary glorified bodies for this specific occasion or they were given their permanent glorified bodies. We believe that at death the soul leaves the body and is present with the Lord and when Christ returns the dead in Christ will be raised from the grave to be joined again with their soul in a glorified body that has been fit for heaven.

I John 3:2 “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.”

I Corinthians 15:51-53

Their appearance settles several age long issues. Their appearance in bodily form shows us that there is life after death. They were very much alive and talking with Jesus.

Their appearance dispels the opinion of those who believe in reincarnation, that somehow when we die we come back in some other life form.

Their appearance indicates that people will be recognizable. We'll know one another.

Their appearance dispels the idea of soul sleep because they were both in bodily form and alive consciously and talking with Jesus.

Their appearance proves that we will receive glorified bodies. They suddenly appeared and just as suddenly disappeared. This is a glimpse of our future resurrected bodies.

Their appearance indicates that we will have fellowship with one another in heaven. Prior to His incarnation, they enjoyed fellowship with Jesus in heaven and did so on this occasion as they talked about an upcoming event.

Their appearance and discussion with Jesus indicate that they had knowledge of earthly events. They may not have known the when, but they knew the what and the why and His departure – a reference to His deaths.

They were two transformed men.  
Let's next consider one transfigured man.

### III. ONE TRANSFIGURED MAN

Our text in verse 29 tells us that as Jesus was praying the appearance of His face changed and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Mark describes it as being whiter than a bleached garment. Matthew says He shone like the sun, and His clothes were as white as light. It literally means

that His face became different. In the original Greek there is no conjunction between white and radiant so it reads “and His garments white radiant.”

The word used to describe His appearance means to flash out, like lightning. It was commonly used to describe that natural phenomenon. Scholars believe this event is taking place at night which would enhance the effects of Jesus' appearance. Matthew and Mark both use the word transfigure while Luke avoids it. Remember that Luke is writing to Gentiles who had come out of a pagan culture. Transfiguration had a negative connotation to those coming out of a pagan culture so Luke avoids the word's association.

Jesus was transfigured. We get our word metamorphosis to describe what happened to Jesus. It was a momentary display of His glory. This was not like the experience of Moses while on Mt. Sinai sitting in God's presence and reflecting the glory of God when he came off the mountain shining so brightly that he had to veil his face when in the presence of others. It was not like the night when the angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus where Luke 2 says “the angel of the Lord shone with the glory of the Lord.” It was not the angel's glory, the angel reflected the glory of God having been in His presence.

This was Jesus' own nature being unveiled. While on earth His glory was hidden by the event of His incarnation when He became a man. Philippians 2 describes that event as He veiled Himself in flesh and on the mountain He let His glory shine through for a brief time, not for His benefit or for the benefit of Moses and Elijah. They already knew what His glory looked like. This event was for the disciples. It was to help embolden them for the task that lay ahead of them. It was an affirmation of His deity and His identity.

Daniel had a glimpse of this glory.  
Daniel 7:9-14

We often see Jesus depicted in paintings with a light shining down on Him. But that is far from what is happening here. His glory is shining through Him. As a kid did you ever take a flashlight and press it against your hand so that the light would illuminate through your skin? Jesus shone with the glory that is His.

There is coming a day when the full glory of the Lord will be revealed to all mankind. Isaiah 40:5 “And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Jesus spoke of coming in His glory. Matthew 24:30 “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.”

Matthew 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory.”

They are getting a glimpse as witnesses of Jesus’ glory and one day He is going to return and appear in all His glory and His glory will never be veiled again.

As Peter, James, and John woke and Jesus in His glorified body and saw Moses and Elijah talking with Christ, they overheard them discuss Jesus’ departure. They were speaking about His approaching death. The time was nearing and they may not only have been talking about the physical aspect of His death but also about what His death would accomplish, what the Law and the Prophets spoke of, a death that would deliver people from bondage to sin, accomplished only through faith in His shed blood. This would bring to fulfillment the work of Moses and Elijah. Just as Moses was given Joshua to finish his work of bringing the people into the Promised Land and as Elijah was given Elisha to finish his work of bringing people back to God,

so Jesus would finish His own work of breaking people free from their bondage to sin and subsequent spiritual death.

Of this event John MacArthur writes “The event that most powerfully and dramatically proved Jesus Christ to be the true glory of God, though veiled while He walked on earth, is the one recorded in this passage. The transfiguration is a preview of Christ’s unveiled second coming, when He returns in full visible glory.”

Except for the disciples who saw Jesus ascend into heaven, the last view of Jesus the world had was of Him hanging on the cross. The very next view of Him will be when He returns in His glory.

Three men are transfixed.  
Two men are transformed.  
One man is transfigured.  
One voice is transcendent.

#### IV. ONE TRANSCENDENT VOICE – v. 34-35

It is at this moment God speaks. On numerous occasions in the Old Testament we see God speaking in a cloud. It was a representation of His presence. The glory of the Lord was seen on numerous occasions revealed in a visible light-like manifestation. The glory of the Lord was seen.

Exodus 16:7, 10 – in the wilderness

Leviticus 9:23 – at the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests

Exodus 24:15-18 – when the law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai

Exodus 40:34-35 – when the Tabernacle was completed

Numbers 14:10 – when Israel rebelled in the wilderness

Numbers 20:6 – when Israel complained about their lack of water

I Kings 8:10-11 – at the completion of the Temple

In that cloud there on the mountain God's glory was seen and He gave an affirmation and command. And notice that He interrupted Peter. "This is My Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him." Matthew adds that God was well pleased with His Son.

A week earlier Jesus had asked them who they thought He was. Now God responds with an affirmation that Jesus is His Son. Lest any of us should question it, or be confused, it confirms His deity and it commands our obedience. The disciples were commanded to listen to Jesus about His death. His death was a necessary part of God's plan of redemption. Jesus was God's choice to liberate mankind from the slave market of sin and bring us back into a loving, favorable relationship with God.

What God says not only affirms who Jesus is, it gives a seal of approval to Peter's statement about Jesus' identity from the preceding week along with confirming that the way to the Kingdom must be through the cross. God's words also encourage the Son on the final leg of His journey to Jerusalem where He will suffer and die for the man's sin. So what does this all have to do with us?

## V. HIS TRANSFIGURATION, OUR TRIUMPH, OUR TRANSFORMATION

We've already touched on some of these but let's review. What does the transfiguration of Jesus do for us today since we weren't there to see it? It is a reminder that this life is temporary and that there is something better coming that is eternal. Until then His transfiguration helps us to be triumphant in the present.

### A. There is Triumph for the Present

Romans 6:1-14

Romans 8:1-9, 15-17

Sin is no longer my master, Christ is. I can have victory today because Jesus is who He claims to be revealed in His glory on the mountain that also revealed His deity.

That Moses and Elijah were present with Jesus on the mountain in their glorified bodies should be an incentive and motivation for us to be strong in our faith until Christ returns or calls us home. Hebrews 12 reminds us that there have been a lot of people who lived by faith who have gone before us and endured some horrific things for their faith. They encourage us to remain faithful to the end when the real victory will occur. There is triumph for the present.

### B. There is Triumph for the Future

"When 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.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'" (I Corinthians 15:54-55)

We are reminded in Scripture that death has been conquered by Jesus and because He lives, we too shall live. The grave no longer has the power to hold those who are in Christ, so that at His command the dead believers will rise from the grave no longer held by its icy grip. We triumph in the present and in the future.

### C. There is Transformation for the Present

The same Greek word that is used to describe the transfiguration is the same word that is used to describe the change that takes place in us. It's the word metamorphosis.

We are changed, transformed spiritually. This change is something that occurs internally and instantly the moment we are saved.

II Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.”

NLT “What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!”

But it doesn't end with just an internal transformation from one kingdom to another. The transformation that's taken place inside is to show outside. We reflect a different character to those around us. There should be a noticeable difference and spiritual maturity each day. We might call it by another name – sanctification. Romans 12:2 uses the same Greek word to speak about our minds being renewed as it does of Christ's transfiguration. In order for us to live in an evil world, a radical change must take place within as we allow the power of Christ to transform us.

I John 3:2 says that because we have the hope of seeing Jesus and of being changed into His likeness when we see Him, we should begin now to purify ourselves. This means that we are to turn from sin as we endeavor to become more like Christ.

II Corinthians 3:18 “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed (metamorphosis) into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

What change is taking place in you that is evident to those around?

#### D. There is Transformation for the Future

One day there is going to be the completion of this transformation. It's called glorification.

Romans 8:29-30 “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.”

This is stated in such a way that it's as if it were already done.

I Corinthians 15:51 reminds us that when Christ returns this metamorphosis, this transformation will be complete. It will happen instantaneously and we will be fit for heaven.

I John 3:2 states that we don't know what that will look like, but we do know that we will be like Christ because we will see Him as He is – in His glory.

If we are convinced that Jesus is who He claims to be, then as God commands, we need to listen to Him. His kingdom is real and someday He is returning for those who will be part of it forever.

The transfiguration provides help for the present and hope for the future. As it confirmed Jesus' identity to the disciples and encouraged them to be bold, let that same truth change us and embolden us. What difference are you letting the transfiguration make in your life?