

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

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**Scripture:** Luke 9:28-36 (NKJV)

### **Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup> Now 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. <sup>29</sup> As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became white and* glistening. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> But 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. <sup>33</sup> Then 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.

<sup>34</sup> While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” <sup>36</sup> 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.”

I had been looking at the life of Peter with the Sunday school children, and we started discussing what were the moments of transformation that happened with Peter. And the first thing of course was the fact that he, who was a fisherman, got called by the Master. He answered the call and he, along with his brother, came to be disciples of Jesus. He moves on in terms of his two and a half years/three years and the major part of his transformation happened in the last few weeks of Jesus’ life on the earth and beyond. And we see that the first part was happening here, which we are reading about here in terms of the transfiguration of Jesus that he witnesses along with James and John. And after that, we also see the denial and the restoration of Peter. And thereafter we see him being filled with the Holy Spirit along with all the others to the point in Acts ch.2. There we see that Peter is so bold as to tell the Sanhedrin: Listen guys, I can’t do what you asked me to do. I can only do what the Lord wants me to do.

This particular passage also has its parallel in Matthew 17:1-9 and Mark 9:2-10. So there will be some parts which you might know, some words that you might pick up which are not there in this particular passage that we read in Luke, but which I might use, which will be there in Matthew or Mark in the equivalent passages.

John also talks about this in his life. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became 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.” he’s talking about beholding the grace of Jesus, an event that occurred years before he wrote this epistle. Similarly Peter also talks about it pretty much about 30 years later when he writes in 2 Peter 1:16-18 “<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup> For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” <sup>18</sup> And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

This is Peter describing what happened, not in depth the way the synoptic gospels captured this, but 30 years later. The memory must be still fresh in his mind.

So here is what is happening. Jesus is taking Peter, James and John up the mountain with the express intention of praying. This same group of people, Peter, James and John, are the ones who go with Him when Jairus' daughter was raised up. These are the same who are also going to be with Him when it comes to Gethsemane. You might wonder why Jesus, after seeing them fall asleep, He still calls them. But that's who Jesus is! He calls people like that. Where did this happen? Matthew and Mark talk about a high mountain, and there's a possibility of 2 names – one is Mount Tabor and the other is Mount Hermon. I would go with Mount Hermon, and I'll give you my reasons in a short while.

Matthew 16:13 onwards talks about Jesus' visit along with His disciples to Caesarea Philippi. Now Caesarea Philippi was the northern extreme of the province of Galilee, at the base of Mount Hermon. (For the rest of this discussion, I'm taking Mount Hermon as the place where this happened because of certain things that they did there).

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

Let's take a slight detour and see what's happening there to help us to understand it better. First, Jesus is asking them who people say that He is. And the answers were quick and ready. The disciples said: Oh, I heard people saying that you are John the Baptist come back. I heard people saying that you are Elijah. I heard people saying that you are Jeremiah or some other prophet. But Jesus asks them again: Who do you think I am? I can imagine the silence following that question. And as usual, it's Peter who steps up and says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God." And Jesus says, "My Father has revealed this to you." He commends Peter. Now it doesn't stop there because Jesus says, "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail."

A quick reference back to Caesarea Philippi and the 'gates of hell'. Caesarea Philippi was the red-light district of those days for that region. It was a part of Israel but there were people of all kinds of persuasions there. In fact, the reigning religion at that point in time was the worship of the fertility gods. It was their belief that in the winter, the fertility gods went underground through the caves at the edge of the town. From the caves down to Hades or the underground or the Underworld, the netherworld. They thought that the gods were coming back in spring when the plants would start blooming and the desert takes a new shape. Those caves were called the gates of hell.

Let's come back to our story. The first thing we see is that Jesus begins to pray. And that's the cue for the disciples to sleep. You might sympathize with them: it's been a long trek up, a long day; they've been walking all along. And Jesus is praying. They had not yet learned to pray. They had not yet gotten into that point of needing prayer the way Jesus had been teaching them. So they go to sleep. Suddenly they're woken up. It's not a sound that wakes them up; it's a light. It's like being cozy in your bedroom and suddenly somebody switches on the brightest light. You'll wake up! That's what happened to them; this light was brighter than any bedroom light that you might have. They wake up and what do they see? The disciples describe this light as the light of Jesus' clothes. We know from a number of descriptions of Jesus' glory being visible, that this was not reflected light, the kind of light that might show up on a white garment. This was a refracted light, light from inside.

That light wakes up Peter, James and John. There is no comparison to this glow in their vocabulary. The best they can come up with is: No washerman can have washed any clothes that bright. That's the best they can come up with. It's not as if they're not used to seeing miracles. They have been with Jesus for almost three years now. They have received bread from Him and they have handed out one piece of bread to a thousand people sitting there. They have seen the sick healed; they have

seen withered shrunken hands being stretched out in full power. They've seen lame legs being restored in front of their eyes. But what they're seeing now is nothing compared to that. What they are seeing now just can't hold a candle to that.

So, coming back to what they are seeing, this particular aspect of what they're seeing in terms of the light. And then, along with Jesus, they see two other people. They see Moses and Elijah. Now if you're like me, you wonder how did they know that this was Moses and this was Elijah? They didn't have name tags, there was no introduction. But they instinctively knew. And that leads me to what is so wonderful about this incident. When we get to heaven, we don't have to be introduced to the people there. My maternal grandfather passed away when I was six years old. But when I get to heaven, I know that he's going to be able to recognize me just as I am, in whatever state I'm going to be in. And each of us can have that confidence because our God is a God of the living. These saints and all the other saints are living. So Moses and Elijah were immediately recognized by Peter, James and John. They knew who it was, and so will we.

Why was it just Elijah? Why was it just Moses? Why wasn't it Abraham for that matter, or David, or any of the pantheon of names whom we have in the Word, whom we read about. Why wasn't it any of them? Well, one possible explanation is that these are the two who have seen God. And another possible explanation is that Moses represents the law. He's the one through whom the Ten Commandments were passed to the people of Israel. And Elijah represents the prophets. And Jesus summarizes all that. The law and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus.

The narrative tells us that Jesus is talking to Moses and Elijah about His exit, decease, death. You will have different words in your translations. And incidentally, the word which is there in the Greek translation here is 'exodus'. Exodus? What better person to talk to than to Moses about the exodus! He's talking to them about that exodus that is going to happen, something that He's told the disciples but the disciples were not able to believe. And here He's talking to these people and they are the people who are part of the plan, who are in on that plan.

So this is a meeting of heaven and earth, a portal where there is a conversation between people on earth and people in heaven. It looks like Moses and Elijah are about to leave. And Peter has to say something. And he comes up with the most ingenious statement that he could think of. He says: "Hey, don't leave. It's good that you three are here. Let's build three booths or tabernacles for you to come and reside." Now, tabernacle is not a word that we use very often. But for the Jews, it is very familiar. Every year they celebrate the 'Feast of the Booths' or 'The Feast of the Tabernacles'. They were used to spending a few days every year in booths which are constructed to remind them that they were not always in pucca houses. We watched a video of Jewish families in New York celebrating this feast by putting up these booths on the road even though they have these beautiful houses. Some created the booths within their homes.

What is he trying to do here? The booth or the tabernacle represents God's presence staying here. Jesus was that presence. He is that Tabernacle, resident in that place. It is at this point that God has had enough of this, and a cloud overshadows them. This incidentally is the very same word which is used to describe how the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary. So here we can see that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in the same place. And a voice out of the cloud speaks. God the Father says, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him." And this, except for the "Hear Him" is pretty much the same thing that was said when Jesus was baptized. At that time the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and God declares "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Jesus commanded them saying, "Tell the vision to no one."

### **How does the Transfiguration apply to us now?**

1. A week prior, Peter had exalted Jesus. He had recognized Him for who He was, as the Christ. Then a week later he actually sees the glory of Jesus. When it comes to us, are we waiting to see the glory of Jesus in our life before we exalt Jesus as the Christ, as our Savior? Are we waiting for something to happen – like maybe get a job, when my son becomes whole again, when healing takes place? Is this our attitude to exalting Jesus? Or are we ready like Peter to exalt Jesus first, and then see His glory?
2. When it comes to prayer, do I go with eagerness? Do I go with the recognition that every time there is prayer, whether you are by yourself, whether you are in a community setting, a small group, as a family, that there is the same opening up of the portals where heaven and earth meet? So is that a recognition available with me or am I just taking this as something mundane? Jesus taught me to pray, so yes, I've got to pray. Or am I coming with an expectation that God is going to meet me there in that time of prayer? Am I coming with the expectation that earth and heaven is going to meet, and some change is going to happen? What is my attitude to prayer?
3. What about the way Peter equates Jesus with Moses and Elijah by saying: I'd like to build three tabernacles? Am I bringing Jesus down and equating Him with other things in my life? My family, my job, my career, my sports, my other achievements, my studies, my social connections. Am I bringing Jesus to the level of that set of items? Because He is in a different category and cannot fit into these categories. So what is my attitude? In what way are we bringing Jesus down? In what way are we trying to slot Him? I've got ten minutes in the morning that I'm going to look to Jesus. And then we pretty much ignore Him through the day, till a little time at night prayer. Or we look at the daily devotional that we committed to doing at the beginning of the year, and so I do it every day. Is He part of my day? Is he part of my life in every point of the day? Is He preeminent among all the other things that I am setting out to do? How is He preeminent?
4. God's command to the disciples, to Peter specifically, is the same to us. It hasn't changed. He says, "Listen to My Son." Am I listening to Jesus? Do I have His Word firm in my heart? do I know His word? Am I spending time with His word?

John 15:7 "Abide in Me and My words abide in you." Am I allowing His words to abide in me? John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commands." That's something that continuously gets repeated by Jesus, when He repeats many times "If you love me, keep My commands." Getting to know His commands, living according to them is something that is extremely critical for us.

John 14:26 The Holy Spirit will remind you of everything I have told you. This is not just a one-time thing, but that one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is essentially to remind us about the words of Jesus at every situation, tailoring them. Reminding can only happen if they are there in the first place if we have heard them in the first place. How do I make sure that I have heard the Word? How do I ensure that I obey God's command to Peter and also to me saying, "Listen to Him"? There is a strong motive for us to want to do that.

John 10:10 says "I have come that they may have life and they may have it more abundantly." Jesus tells us that there is no better motive. That's His promise to each and every one of us saying that if we are found in Him and His Word is found in us, there is in us that ability to go through abundant life. I know for sure that my life is not a life of abundance the way Jesus would want me to live. But it is something that He has invited me to and He continues to remind me that it is something that He is interested in giving me.

I Corinthians 2:9 says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." Strong reasons to hear what the Son has for us to see, to listen to and obey and live according to.

**Summary for our consideration and meditation:**

1. Like Peter, will I exalt Him first and then be ready to see His glory?
2. When I'm invited to pray, will I be eager? Will I pray expecting heaven and earth to meet at that point for miracles to happen?
3. Am I in any way, bringing down the pre-eminence of Jesus in my life by putting other things up there along with Him? Is that something that I'm guilty of? What do I do about that? How do I make Jesus pre-eminent in my life?
4. What is my attitude to God's Word? How do I seek to fill myself with His word?

Amen.

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