

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS (Mk. 9:1-8)

Mk. 9:1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. ² And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. ³ And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. ⁴ And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. ⁶ For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. ⁷ And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. ⁸ And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

This chapter begins with encouragement for the disciples. Jesus has had to deal with them fairly severely because, - on their behalf, - Peter had remonstrated with the Lord, **Mk. 8:31** And he [*Jesus*] began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

Understandably, this was a serious blow to their Messianic aspirations, - to learn of such impending horrific atrocities, - so Jesus begins chapter nine with this note of encouragement, **Mk. 9:1** And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you [*... addressing the disciples*], That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. ... What does that mean?! ... He is not saying this prophecy is intended to be fulfilled in them all, but only 'some', that is *some* of them standing there, - belonging to the band of disciples, - will see and experience the kingdom of God come with power. ... What would have been going through their minds at this point?

From *our* perspective, what was Jesus referring to? Some suggest He is referring to post-resurrection or to the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, or some other event away in the future. Actually, keeping things simple ought always to be our first approach ... and what Jesus was referring to was the account in the following verses, **Mk. 9:2** And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. ³ And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. ...

That is the same glory as Daniel witnessed, **Dan. 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days ... And it is the same as Ezekiel saw, **Ezek. 1:26** And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. ²⁷ And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. ²⁸ As the appearance of the bow

that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. ... And it is also the same as John saw in the vision while he was on the island of Patmos, **Rev. 1:13** And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man ... and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Here on the Mountain of Transfiguration, - as He had promised six days earlier, - He gave the three disciples, - Peter, James, and John, - a view of His Kingdom glory. ... Back in Mk. 8 Peter had confessed, **Thou art the Christ (v.29)**, and now he, along with James and John, were about to experience a taste of the Heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus.

No doubt, the teaching of Jesus about having to take up a cross had very much worried them (8:34). It would have been a shock to be told they might have to lose their life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel (v.35). So, six days later He had three of His leading disciples ascend the mountain with Him for an experience they would never forget. They would witness, - beyond any shadow of a doubt, - that Jesus *is* the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

Having been brought up in the synagogue, the disciples would have been taught about the manifestations of God in the Old Testament. Jehovah had often appeared in His *shekinah* glory. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* describes *Shekinah* as “The majestic presence or manifestation of God which has descended to ‘dwell’ among men.”

The Shekinah was first evident when the Israelites set out from Succoth in their escape from Egypt. There the Lord appeared in a cloudy pillar in the day and a fiery pillar by night (Ex. 13:20-22). One of the many beautiful accounts regarding the *Shekinah* glory is recorded in Ex. 34, **28** And he [*Moses*] was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. **29** And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

The apostle John also recorded, **Jn. 1:14** we [*specifically Peter, James, and me*] beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father ... James also wrote about the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17) ... And Peter referred to it specifically, **II Peter 1:16** For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹⁸ And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. ... And the writer to the Hebrews also testified, **Heb. 1:1** God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, ² Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; ³ Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high

It is a foretaste of how God promised the children of Israel concerning the future Kingdom, as far back as Num 14:21, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. It is also *exactly* what He promised to the prophet Habakkuk, **Hab. 2:14** For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. But never before had God revealed Himself as He did in Jesus Christ for in the Old Testament they dare not look upon His face and live (Ex. 33:20). ... This was how Peter, James and John had been taught about the glory of the Lord, and now they were going to be privileged to see it for themselves.

Perhaps you might notice a possible discrepancy in the Gospel accounts for Matthew and Mark both say, **Mt. 17:1** And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart ... **Mk. 9:2** And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves ... Whereas Luke records, **Lk. 9:28** And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. ... However, there is no problem because Luke included the day the Lord gave the promise in Lk. 9:1 and the actual day it was fulfilled ... whereas Matthew and Mark counted the days in between. Both were very common ways of doing it in those times.

So Jesus took the three disciples up the mountain ... Why three? ... because Judaism taught that two or three witnesses were required to verify an event (e.g. Dt. 17:6; 19:15). ... Mt. 18:16 (But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established) confirms this remained the practice during the times of the disciples, as does II Cor. 13:1 (In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established) and I Tim. 5:19 (Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses). ... In keeping with the custom and tradition Jesus

brought the three disciples up the mountain. Incidentally, tradition, - whether it is reliable or not, - identifies the mountain as Mount Tabor which is at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, and eighteen miles due west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

Luke says Jesus brings them with Him up the mountain *to pray* (Lk. 9:28). What are they doing though? ... Let's read from v.28, **Lk. 9:28** And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.¹ **29** And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. **30** And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: **31** Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. **32** But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep ... While this was going on, they were soundly asleep!!! ... Indeed, how *human* the disciples really were! ... He didn't choose perfect people. He didn't choose people to be placed on a pedestal ... He chose people who were real ... And while they were asleep, Jesus prayed alone ... just as He again would do in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He would be praying, and they would be sleeping.

Why were they sleeping? Maybe they weren't overly interested? ... No, I don't believe that for these were very special times ... Perhaps they were still struggling with the concept of having to bear a cross, - that sounds more plausible ... or it might have been something as simple as being tired climbing a mountain to pray, - that sounds very probable! ... Surely Jesus could have found an easier place to pray?! Yes, He could have ... but so could Jehovah in the Old Testament have taken old Moses a much handier place than all the way up Mount Sinai ... or Elijah, a better place than out in the wilderness beside the brook. ... God proves His people to test their willingness to follow Him. ... He could have made it so much easier for many of His servants in the Scriptures, but what makes them great is the faithfulness they displayed in their service for Him. The chorus says, "Where He leads me I will follow, Where He leads me I will follow, Where He leads me I will follow, I'll go with Him, with Him all the way." ... Aye, Lord, but don't make it too strenuous ... that is often what we quietly say to Him. ... Here are these three disciples who had walked up the mountain with Jesus, but they had not managed to stay awake.

Luke seems to indicate they missed out on those first moments when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus ... They missed out on the opening greetings

between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. They missed the experience of how Moses and Elijah appeared ...

And Jesus was transfigured, - it is a Greek word (μεταμορφόω; an example of *metamorphosis* is a maggot turning into an adult fly, caterpillar into a butterfly, tadpole into a frog) which means His appearance was wonderfully and gloriously changed. Normally, Isaiah's description of Him was accurate, **Is. 53:2** *he hath no form nor comeliness ... there is no beauty that we should desire him* - ... but His 'form' was changed when He was transfigured on the Mountain of Transfiguration. His glory shone in magnificent splendour. He did not change on the inside, for He is God and He is forever the same ... but His form changed on the outside, that is His appearance ... the blazing glory of His divine nature enveloped His humanity ... In a manner, the veil of His humanity was drawn back ... **3** *And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.* His clothes were gleaming white! For a short time on that mountain He exhibited something again of His glorious body before He came to this earth as a little baby!

... And notice how *his raiment became shining*. They were absolutely shining-clean! It is another beautiful indication of the humanity of the Saviour that He would condescend to wear the same garments as ordinary men ... garments that regularly became dusty with His travels. They would often need cleaning, as like what a 'fuller' (γναφεύς) would do to bleach them ... but when Jesus was transfigured, everything about Him, - even His raiment, - *exuded*, - radiated, displayed, oozed, - glory. ... That is the glory He shared with His Father from eternity (Jn. 17:5), and it is the glory that one day will be revealed in all its fulness when He comes again (Mt. 24:30).

... And along with the glorified Jesus there was standing beside Him Moses and Elijah, and Luke says they *also* appeared in glory (Lk. 9:31). Obviously, this was a special manifestation for them ... just as the appearance of Samuel was a special manifestation in the cave of the witch of Endor. This was for the occasion ... and they were talking with Jesus (Mk. 9:4) ...and Luke tells us what they were talking about, **Lk. 9:30** *And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: 31 Who appeared in glory [i.e. a glorified form], and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.* ... They were talking about His death, and the glory which would follow it ... and by this time, the disciples were awake, listening, and taking it all in.

And then Peter, - in his own inimitable style, - spoke up, [Mk. 9:5](#) And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

And you could imagine the other two disciples nodding in silent agreement, not a bad idea, Peter! ... Surely you haven't got it wrong *again ... this time?!* He is usually the first to say something, whether he has thought about it or not! ... It sounded good, but what lay behind the suggestion he made to Jesus? ... Well, for sure, he did not know what to say for he was terrified. In that case, he would have been better saying nothing ... he had not learned from previously. ... It is a basic principle of common sense that if you don't know what to say, you are better saying nothing! ... Peter did not always abide by that principle though!

In his favour, there are two 'improvements'. Firstly, Matthew tells us, [Mt. 17:4](#) Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: *if thou wilt*, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. ... so he is leaving it to the Lord, *if thou wilt*. Secondly, he did not ask a tent for himself, but for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. ... That was good of him too!

The idea of the tent is connected to the time of the year when this took place. Peter knows Elijah is to return at the conclusion of the age ([Mal. 4:5](#) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD) ... According to Peter's calculations, he presumes the conclusion of the age is fast approaching, and that is when Jesus will establish his Kingdom, and that is why Elijah is here... This is how Peter was thinking ... and at this time, - six months before Passover, - was the month of Tishri in which the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths was commemorated and celebrated ... And Peter had a fantastic idea ... What perfect timing! ... We've got Moses the lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet ... and Lord, You are here too ... so let's have the 'Exodus' all over again, and get ourselves out of this present state of invasion under the Roman Gentiles and into the glorious Kingdom. ... Let's do it now, Lord ... just right now ... and let's 'skip' any suffering and hardship ... and let's bring the Kingdom in *now!*

Peter would have been so ready for it! ... And so would the other disciples, as is evidenced by what they were later to say to Jesus, [Acts 1:6](#) Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ... They were impatient for the Kingdom to be established! ... And what a good idea of Peter's to establish it *now* for it would solve so many problems!

By the way, concerning the appearance of Moses and Elijah ... will we know each other in Heaven? It is a question relevant to this passage ... Yes, I believe we will for neither James, John, or Peter had to be told these two men were Moses and Elijah ... They knew them straightaway, so I believe it indicates we shall know each other in Heaven, and besides, there are no strangers there!

Anyhow, Peter seems to have it all worked out. Forget the cross, forget the self-denial, forget the suffering and being rejected and killed ... forget all that and let's skip ahead to the part where You said, "and follow Me" ... We will follow You into the Kingdom, and we'll follow you in the Kingdom, and everything will be great! ... Maybe Peter was wanting to prove a point, - as a man ☺ he never liked being wrong, - for remember how he rebuked Jesus about being so pessimistic, concerning how He would suffer, and be rejected, and killed ... Well, Peter reckoned, here is a way I can be proved right ... **Mk. 9:5** And Peter answered and said to Jesus, ... let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. ... *Jesus, we are here to stay!* Let's set aside all the hardship and heartache and get to 'the gain' without any of the pain. ... Let's herald in the Kingdom right-away, without any further hesitation. That is what Peter was saying!

It was as if he had not listened to a word Jesus had said. Peter preferred to 'rub out' the dying on a cross ... but if the dying on the cross had been erased from God's plan, there would have been no salvation. ... Peter, *wrong again!* ... And Scripture records how his inappropriate interruption was passed off, **Mk. 9:6** For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid ... he didn't know what he was saying! ...

So, on this mountain there was Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus ... and then, **Mk. 9:7** there was a cloud that overshadowed [*ἐπισκιάζω, enveloped*] them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. ... Matthew explains it was a bright cloud which covered Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Mt. 17:5). This is the Lord's *Shekinah* presence, and Luke tells us *they [James, John, and Peter] feared as they entered into the cloud.*

All this was for Peter, James, and John, - Jesus could have met Moses and Elijah *any* time, but all this was for the three disciples. ... They saw *Moses* witnessing to the Lord Jesus, and *Elijah* as another witness ... and then there was a *third* Witness, as the Father declared, *This is my beloved Son.* That's it, -

confirmed, settled, and sorted! ... Moses witnessed to Christ's Messiahship, so did Elijah, and most importantly, so did God the Father! ... So, at this point there is no longer any doubt in the minds of these three influential disciples. And something additional was added, as if they were being corrected: *hear him*. ... **Mt. 17:5** This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; *hear ye him*. ... **Lk. 9:35** This is my beloved Son: *hear him*. ... Quit your talking and make sure you are listening, for this is My Son! Listen to what He has to say about His death, and believe everything He tells you for **This is my beloved Son: *hear him***.

The transfiguration was a glimpse of glory that put everything into perspective for the cross had to come before the crown. ... So, what was the response of the disciples? Well, Peter stopped talking, and Matthew tells us, **Mt. 17:6** **And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid**. ... And here is another lovely picture, **7** **And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid**. ... They were on their knees, with their faces to the ground ... *Jesus knelt down* to touch them, and He told them, there's no need to be afraid because He had it all under His control. ... And Mark concludes, **Mk. 9:8** **And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves**. ... Just them and Jesus ... and then they went back down the mountain ... and for Jesus it would mean the road to the cross, and they would follow.

It took a while, but they eventually got the message. They had a hard time understanding and believing the Gospel because it required suffering and self-denial, and they had difficulty being confident in all of God's Word, - ... but they eventually did. The lesson that comes across very forthrightly is that God has it all worked out. As Elijah and Moses were used on that occasion, all things in Heaven and in earth are being used today to accomplish His plan. Some would argue, - like Peter, - that God's straightforward planning needs revision, and He doesn't necessarily mean what He says ... Well, this passage reminds us to take God at His Word, for as the Psalmist says, **Ps. 119:89** **For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven** ... and as Paul wrote to Timothy, **II Tim. 2:19** **the foundation of God standeth sure** ... and as Jesus had previously said to His disciples, **Mt. 5:17** **Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18** **For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.** ... *That is the God we worship and in Whom we place our confidence! Amen.*