

## A FURTHER LOOK AT THE TRANSFIGURATION

Recently we were studying the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, when Moses and Elijah also appeared. This was on the occasion when the three disciples, - Peter, James, and John, - had accompanied Jesus up the mountain, drawing aside with Him from the busyness of daily life to come before God in prayer (Lk. 9:28). What a prayer meeting that would have been! ... On a mountain with Jesus ... no interruptions ... no other agenda but listening to and learning from and participating with Him as He led His three disciples to the throne of God in prayer.

A problem developed though, because Peter, James, and John fell asleep. ... It is one thing to fall asleep in a prayer meeting, but it is something else to fall asleep in a prayer meeting led by Jesus! On another occasion they asked, **Lk. 11:1** Lord, teach us to pray ... but on this occasion, they should have stayed awake, **Lk. 9:32** But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep. ... And they missed out on hearing Jesus pray, and no doubt, He would have been praying for them and the other disciples. He would have been praying for His nation of Israel. They would have heard Him pray about His impending suffering, rejection, and death. They would have heard the tender way He spoke with His Heavenly Father ... They might even have heard Him praying for the father and his young demon-possessed son He was to meet at the bottom of the mountain ... but they missed so much because they were asleep!

And during the time they were asleep Moses and Elijah came. ... What would that have been like? How did they arrive? Did they come down out of the sky, from Heaven? Or did they simply appear? ... We don't know because the only three men who could tell us were sleeping!

There is another reason though, and that is ... this story is not about Moses and Elijah, or about how they came to be on the scene for it is about the Lord Jesus. The appearance of Moses and Elijah was significant ... but it was secondary to Jesus for the transfiguration was about Him.

Now, obviously, - as far as the three disciples were concerned, - this manifestation was totally unexpected for Jesus had not told them it was going to happen. ... Why should He? They should have been awake, - there was no excuse for them to be asleep! Tired or not, they should have been awake ... and they missed so much because Jesus did not have their attention!

These disciples should have been expecting something special to happen, for, after all, they had come up that mountain in the presence of the Lord Jesus to pray ... and to pray *together*! He had brought them, - not any of the others, but them, - and they should have been ready for something spectacular. Besides, as their Teacher and Master, Jesus would have been looking forward to hearing them pray ... not snoring, but praying! What a disappointment they must have been to Him!

I wonder what wakened them ... and I wonder when they wakened, would they have thought they were still sleeping, and this was a dream? Whatever the circumstances, they very quickly realised this was no dream, - this was reality! Let's look at the little information we *do* have about what they saw,

- **Mt. 17:2** And [*He - Jesus*] was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.
- **Mk. 9:2** ... he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.
- **Lk. 9:29** And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.

Both Matthew and Mark indicate the close proximity of the disciples to Jesus, - he was transfigured *before them*. They weren't lying a few yards away, or around the corner where they could peacefully fall asleep ... Instead, the word ἐμπροσθεν means immediately in front of, in the very presence of ... up close to Jesus ... *beside* Him. ... All four of them had had began their time of prayer together, but one by one Peter, James, and John 'dozed off' and fell asleep. ... There is a warning here that even when we are 'up close' to the Saviour, it is not always a guarantee He has our full attention. We could be coming to all the meetings and be active ... and yet, spiritually, we could be dormant. The disciples had walked up/climbed the mountain with Jesus but when they arrived at the top, - when they reached their objective, - that was the dangerous time for that is when they went to sleep!

Nonetheless, they were not there to sleep for they were there to witness the transfiguration of Jesus.

*How* was He 'transfigured'? How was He 'changed'? How did Jesus in human form express the Heavenly glory of God? ... Let's turn over to II Peter. In his own simple straightforward way, Peter explained, **II Peter 1:17** he [*Jesus*] *received from God*, - that is an interesting phrase, λαμβάνω. It means that Jesus reached out and accepted from His Father. That which He had set aside, - His Godhood

and all the privileges which accompanied it in Heaven, in order to humble Himself and become obedient to death on the cross, - He reached out on the Mount of Transfiguration and received from the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. ...

*That* excellent glory which He shared with His Father from before the world was created (Jn. 17:5) and the same glory to which He returned when He ascended from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9), and to where **Phil. 2:9** God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. ... It is the glory with which one day we shall also be clothed (I Cor. 15:51), **I Cor. 15:52** for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed ... **Rom. 8:30** Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. ... This was the glory into which the earthly body of the Lord Jesus was transfigured, during this time on the mountain with Peter, James, and John.

Why was He 'transfigured'? He was transfigured, - gloriously changed, - so that Peter, James and John would be eyewitnesses of His majesty (II Peter 1:16) ... so that, - before others, - they would personally and powerfully testify to His honour and glory (II Peter 1:17) ... and to confirm Him as truly the Son of God. Indeed, it reaffirmed Peter's confession of faith, **Mt. 16:16** *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

... And notice how the Lord Jesus outshone both Moses and Elijah, for He took centre-stage. Even if Abraham, Samuel, and David had all been there He would have outshone them too. If every saint from the Old Testament had been there, Christ would have surpassed them all. No matter who would have appeared, it was the Saviour *only* Who held the attention of His disciples. ... And again, that is how it will be in glory for all eyes are fixed on Him!

And notice also how both Matthew and Luke draw attention to His face. *All* of Christ would have been glowing, but they were especially transfixed by His face, **Mt. 17:2** and his face did shine as the sun ... **Lk. 9:29** the fashion [*εἶδος, the form, the appearance*] of his countenance [*face*] was altered [*changed, different*]. There was none of the dust of the mountain ingrained into His face. There was none of the dryness of the searing heat for *His face shone!* ... None of the earthly elements interfered with His Heavenly glory!

In the Old Testament, none could look at the face of God and live, and yet John wrote how that had changed with Jesus on the Mountain of

Transfiguration, **Jn. 1:14** we beheld his glory ... we looked into the face of God in Christ Jesus ... and John also later described how it is what every child of God will do some day, **Rev. 22:4** they shall see his face.

Mind you, there will be many who will try and hide from His face ... for it will be frightening, **Rev. 6:15** And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; **16** And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb ... There will be nowhere to go!

There is coming a day when *everyone* shall see Him (Rev. 1:7) ... even those who pierced His precious body, and even those who don't believe He *is*. On that day there will be no atheists and no agnostics, - such a condition is only temporary for they *all* will have to stand before Him ... and they will *see* Him. We shall either be full of joy looking into His face, or full of fear. For the Christian, it will be "Face to face with Christ my Saviour ... Face to face in all His glory".

And something else ... When Moses and Elijah left Him to return to Heaven, Jesus remained. He did not leave when He had the opportunity, - Moses and Elijah did ... but He didn't, and that is because there was nothing such great giants of the faith as Moses and Elijah could do for the people ... The reason Jesus did not leave was because God had sent Him to this world to die for the sins of His people, and to be raised again from the dead.

It would have been so easy for Jesus to have returned with them. It was an option. ... In the Garden of Gethesemane He cried, **Lk. 22:42** Father, if thou be willing, remove [*release*] this cup from me: [*take Me out of this!*] nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. He knew the Father would not remove the cup because in eternity the Father and the Holy Spirit had agreed along with Him that He must die as a Ransom for many, to be their Saviour. ... In the Garden of Gethesemane, there was no transfiguration ... there was no Moses and Elijah appeared either. There was not any glory that shone from Him, - the only thing that came were the tears flowing down His cheeks. On that occasion too, the disciples were sleeping again ... and the most God the Father was prepared to do for His beloved Son was to send an angel to strengthen Him (v.43) ...

[Moses and Elijah could not have died to atone for our sins. ... Neither did Moses and Elijah suggest to Jesus one of them take His place and suffer, be

rejected, and die. They did not suggest it for they knew nothing but the blood of Christ, God's Son, would wash away the sins of the Redeemed.

Neither was the Saviour transfigured on another even more important mountain, - Mount Calvary. None of His glory shone there as His enemies mocked and reviled Him. There, He was **Is. 53:3** *despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.* ... The light causes you to turn towards it, - it attracts your attention, - but the Light of the world had been dimmed on the cross during the three long hours of darkness.

On the Mount of Transfiguration it was daytime ... In the middle of the day the three disciples experienced the overwhelming glory of the Lord Jesus. The sun was shining, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky ... for the cloud did not appear until it came in Lk. 9:34. ... So there was nothing blocking the strong light of the sun *until* the glory of the Son of God shone. ... There was only one Son shining ... and that was the Son of God. ... Malachi (4:2) describes Him as the Sun of righteousness ... and in Rev. 22:16 He is *the bright and morning star.*

And when Peter, James, and John looked upon Moses and Elijah, - *they* were shining in glory too. However, the splendid glory in which they appeared was surpassed by the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Whose face caused the sun to fade into the background. ... In the Book of Revelation we are told that is how it will be in the new heaven and the new earth ... in the new Jerusalem, **Rev. 21:23** *And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.* ... The three disciples were enjoying a glimpse of rare Heavenly glory on earth, as Peter later described ... **II Peter 1:17** *the excellent glory ... when we were with him in the holy mount.*

That could also take us back to such passages in the Old Testament as the occasion when Moses saw God's glory on Mount Sinai ... and when Solomon and the Israelites saw the glory of God filling the Temple in Jerusalem ... and to the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel and Isaiah and Jeremiah. God's glory is indescribable ... John could not find the words to portray it when He was lifted up into Heaven (Rev. 4). ... He heard the choir sing, **Rev 5:13** *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.* ... And even Satan and his devils in Hell have to acknowledge His glory, as Job recorded, **Job 2:1** *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also*

among them to present himself before the LORD. ... Satan hates the light ... and God is light. The light blinds the devil, and he has never been able to overcome it, and he never will (Jn. 1:5). It makes him powerless ... and he cannot stand ... and He has to *fall* before the majesty of Almighty God!

And on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus Christ took pre-eminence, and Matthew tells us, **Mt. 17:2** his raiment was white as the light ... Mark describes it, **Mk. 9:3** his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. ... And Luke remembers, **Lk. 9:29** his raiment was white and glistening. ... All three Gospel writers were struck with the 'whiteness' of His garments, - 'white as the light', 'white as snow so as no cleaner on earth could ever whiten them', 'white and glistening'. ... That is the same as Daniel saw, **Dan. 7:9** I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool ... That is the standard required for Heaven. ... Not righteousness like filthy rags, but righteousness as 'washed in the blood of the Lamb'! ... When the Son communed with His Father, the earthly, - for those moments, - was covered by the Heavenly.

There was no purer a sight than Jesus that day for He was adorned in Divine glory. And that is why it is important to revisit this event in preparation for what we shall see with our own eyes, as Job said, **Job 19:26** And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ... And where will Job see Him? ... **Job 19:25** he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ... And how will Jesus come to be standing in all His glory on this earth? ... Here's how, **1 Thess. 4:16** For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, - He is coming in all His glory ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **17** Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

And we shall come back with Him, - not to Heaven, - but He will return to Jerusalem, for He has promised, **Zech. 8:2** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. **3** Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. **4** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. **5** And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. **6** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith

the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; <sup>8</sup> And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness. ... <sup>20</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: <sup>21</sup> And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. <sup>22</sup> Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you. ... And that is when, - like it was for that brief time on the Mountain of Transfiguration, - as Habukkuk prophesied, **Hab. 2:14** the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

The reason Jesus brought those three men up the mountain was for them to be assured of His glory ...and they were ... And I trust as we have looked again at this passage we see His glory, and also of His *coming* glory. On that day it will not be just three men who will see it, but every redeemed believer from out of every nation, and every age who have acknowledged Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Amen.