

© Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study, www.intothyword.org

Transfiguration

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Matthew 17:5

Key verses: Matthew 17:1-13; 2 Peter 1: 12-21

Key personalities: Jesus, and the Disciples.

Timeline: The God of Eternity; He enters as a Man, being fully God and fully Man, walks this earth as our Lead, 28-29 A.D.

Jesus, for the most part, has led a life of humility and humiliation. He, being fully God, rarely showed His Divinity, yet was steadfast to His mission. Then, all of the humiliation and misunderstanding collapsed. Jesus gives them a glimpse of real Holiness. You can imagine the reaction! This was not just a revelation of God's holiness, it was also a glimpse of Hope they could use to carry them through the troubled times ahead. For us, it means the working of the Holy Spirit in our inner life that transforms us (Rom. 8:11; 12:2; Col. 3:18).

Key Happenings: God revealed His Kingdom and Glory!

God revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, in this manner, Jesus transformed powerfully. There was nothing like this before and will not quite be again. (This might something that the special effects wizards in Hollywood wish they could do.) Jesus spectacularly used Peter's testimony in the previous passages to give an incredible light show of hope for what was in store for them. A small glimpse of the coming Kingdom was given to the inner circle of Disciples. They came face to face with the law (Moses), the Prophets (Elijah), the Father's pronouncement of blessing, and the Son's coming work on the cross, all converging to fulfill it. If the Disciples had any doubts about who Jesus was, these doubts had ceased as real, tangible proof was given. Jesus' apologetic miracle was showing them the Living God! No longer was it a just intangible teaching that they would not fully understand until later; here, they were face to face with God and His unfolding plan of redemption (Matt. 16:13-17).

- *He was transfigured* literally means to change in form. This was the revelation of Jesus' divinity, as He prayed. Here Jesus is showing Who He is and what He is doing. Jesus represented the 'Law,' which He lived out in perfection in our place. Jesus represented the 'Prophets,' for He was the One to whom they were pointing, and He continued the prophetic ministry in His teachings (Luke 9:29).
- *Fear* is how we are to come before God, and with humbleness (1 Pet. 5:6). It is a term of endearment and respect that is supercharged with more meaning and power because it infers intense reverence and awe of God and His holiness (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 3:5; 8:13; 9:10; 16:6; 31:30; Psalm 2:11; 34:11; 111:10; Isa. 12:6; Eccl. 12: 13; Mal. 1:14; Matt. 10: 27-33; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1). It does not mean being afraid of God, rather fearful of His wrath and trustful of His provision (Romans 3).
- This took place so the disciples could begin to fully comprehend who Jesus was and what was ahead for them. They had to confirm their faith by being able to recognize Jesus for who He was. This was necessary so as to remove any presumptions or false ideas they may have held. The Disciples had to come face to face with Jesus as God in a real way to prepare them for Jerusalem, and as preparation for a crisis (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-4).

- Mount Hermon is the traditional site for this event. This happens just before He departs to Jerusalem, and four months before His crucifixion, according to Luke, who gives a chronological account. Luke 9:31 ALSO records that they talked about Jesus' coming death.
- This is also what is called, in theological language, a "Theophany," which is a divine show of God to a person or people, which usually invokes total fear. *His face shone* refers to transformed glory, as in God's glory. It is also as with Moses, whose face also shone when he met with God (Ex. 34:29).
- Elijah was the greatest of the Prophets, and Moses was the lawgiver; they tie the old covenant with the new covenant of grace. There are no characters in antiquity who would be better to point to the work of our Lord and the plan of redemption. Both communicated to God on the mountain top of Mount Sinai also called Mount Horeb (Ex. 24:15; 1 Kings 19:8).

The transfiguration for us is a call to get our minds lined up with God--His Way, His precepts, and His plan. We still have the old sinful nature residing within us. God declares us clean, but we do not become *completely* clean. Perhaps the reason for this is that if we were "scrubbed clean," we would not face the struggles in life that produce depth and holiness. We would never struggle with thoughts, desires, sin, and life; therefore, we would not learn, grow, and respond to God within the realities of life. We would be robots, preprogrammed to respond--such mechanisms do not produce real fruit or love.

Tabernacle refers to recognizing God's presence. It also means a tent that the people lived in while they wandered the desert for 40 years. The main tabernacle was a holy tent set apart for God's use only, where the Ark was kept and the priests made offerings to God prior to the building of the Temple, and where God made His presence known. Peter's suggestion to build a tent was irrational as he meant he was seeking to make the mountain top a permanent place to be; he did not realize that you have to go back down to the valley to make the mountain top known and to put the experience into practice (Ex. 35-37).

- *Bright cloud* was just as God revealed Himself to the Hebrews in the desert while they were under the leadership of Moses. This passage is also from the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15, where God tells the people to listen, and to direct their attention to the work of the Prophets who will point toward the redemption to come (Ex. 24: 15; 40:34-35).
- *This is my Son* is the designation given at Jesus' baptism and, in John, as His *only begotten Son* (John 3:16); again, God personally reveals who Jesus is as loud and as powerfully as Moses saw Him. *Hear Him* is a rebuke to Peter as well as referring that the work of the Law and Prophets point to Jesus' final work of reconciling us to God. This is also an announcement to listen to God, not to be distracted from what is false and misleading, what seems to look good but will ensnare us. The Hebrews were distracted many times. God warns them not to be, yet they were, and, as a result, became lost, wandering for 40 years.
- *Fell on their faces*. This was extreme fear. We have this notion of a "teddy bear"-like God who is just love and comes to us as a dad. This is true; however, He is also most Holy, and, in the Bible, every encounter a person had with God or an Angel was met with that person experiencing utter terror. We are only able to come to God by what Christ has done. Jesus Christ removes the terror so we can experience His love as *Abba*, Father, daddy.
- Peter never forgot this foretaste of the eternal Kingdom. This was the event that helped galvanize him, the main thing he held on to, his security when he was suffering. Suffering precedes glory. Peter's impulsiveness eventually subdued into passion for the cross. He realized there is a cost for glory, and that cost is in suffering (1 Pet. 1:6-8, 11; 4:12-16; 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 1:12-18)!

From a mount of jubilation to a valley of humiliation is "where we live." After seeing God's glory, the Disciples had to learn trust and reliance. Jesus brought the Disciples from their incredible emotional

mountain top experience directly into the valley of daily life where they were met with opposition and failure. The valley was filled with unbelief, Jesus' coming suffering, and taxes. The Disciples put into practice what they saw and learned, and quickly hit a wall of opposition. They saw that taking both what they had learned and their experiences, then applying all of it takes more than merely an attitude of, "Just do it" (Matt. 17:14-26).

God's revelation was given through the Son, for His glory. But, the cost for that glory was the cross to come! The three Disciples, having seen the Transfiguration, were able to move ahead in their faith and understanding. Even after Peter's setback of denying Christ (something he could never fathom doing at this point), he was restored and this Transfiguration became his banner of faith. All the remaining Disciples, except Judas, were able to know Him and make Him known for countless generations. God reveals His Kingdom and Glory to you in many ways--through His Word, through your prayer and devotional life, and through your faith and obedience. Has He revealed it to you? If not, are you really looking? What do you need to do to receive it (Gal. 6:14)?

Our Response to God. The Gospel of Christ is also the transformation of our life, thinking and social relationships.

This is how we must live. Why? The Gospel is the transforming and the convicting power of God. It transforms fallen social relationships by virtue of the dynamics of love, which is the fulfillment of the law! What Christ has done must affect our lives and attitudes and the people around us. Christianity is an offering to others in gratitude, by what Christ has done. Pleasing ourselves is not the goal of the Christian life as so many pursue. We are to follow Christ and be imitators of His character, so it transforms our character. We are doing this through love and acceptance of others as Christ did with us even though we deserve nothing.

We may think that God plays favorites, as some people just seem blessed while others are under constant struggle. However, we can take comfort that God does not play favorites; we *all* are His favorites! Blessings of the world are never a sign of God's favor; they will fade. The faith we exercise will only build, and we will come to see more bountiful blessings than we could ever have imagined. God is more concerned about what we do than with what we have than what we actually have! Always remember that Christ is our living Hope that will never fade away. Because He paid for us, we owe Him more than we could ever know!

No matter what we face and what we go through, we have a reason and a purpose. Tragedies and jubilations can mold and shape us, but that shape is only good when it is in His image and plan. No matter how powerful or ominous our foes seem or are, they will be judged; they will fall!

Key Takeaway: Peter wanted the glory without the suffering. We can have all the glory without the suffering, too. We can have the fruit without the planting or cultivating of the tree; we can have the vacation without the work; but, it is not from God (Matt. 4:8-10). In fact, in the world, it is considered theft to have something without working or paying for it, unless it is a gift. Fruit without work is what Satan offers us. But, the cost is too high; the cost is a meaningless existence with a damned future. So, all we would end up with would be suffering with no purpose and no glory! Take heed; God reveals His Kingdom and Glory to you. The cost may seem high, but it was only high for Him. For us, it is dirt cheap, no matter what we have to go through. When we remain obedient, faithful, and take seriously our call to be disciples and make disciples, He will show us. Just think of His blessings and the joy of being in Him. Most of the things that hold us back from growing in Christ are not just sin; rather, it is when we refuse to recognize His divine power. We are ignorant of what He can do, and we are afraid when we know we should follow (James 1:2-8).

The Call to the Church? As church leaders today, we must acknowledge Christ's Holiness, and get our direction from Him, molding ourselves after Christ rather than trends, the latest ideas, or what you think will work. Purely and simply, leadership is learned by first being a child and a servant of Christ. Neither

an intellectual awareness nor Christian activity means anything without Christ. We must be His to do as He wills; this takes our acceptance of Christ first, then our commitment and continual faith (example: Ezek. 34: 1-10; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18; 13:1-17; 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:3; love: Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 5:8-13; 1 John 4:7-11; humility: 1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Luke 22:27; Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5)!

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever had a "mountain top" experience, such as a powerful experience at a worship service or retreat, so you never wanted to leave and go back to the "valley" of your life?
2. What event in your life helped motivate you in the right direction in life with faith, obedience, or to know Christ and make Him known?
3. **Why do you think the Transfiguration was necessary?** How do you think the transfiguration affected the Disciples' faith and purpose?
4. Imagine if you were there seeing this marvelous event; how would you have felt? What would you have done and said?
5. Why do you suppose that in the Bible, virtually every encounter a person had with God or an Angel was met with that person experiencing utter terror? How does this affect your mindset of God's Holiness?
6. How and why are many Christians today not willing or able to see the real message of the Word over their presumptions?
7. Peter wanted the glory without the suffering; how and why do we do the same today?
8. Imagine God saying to you, "this is my child, and I am well pleased!" Obviously, through grace, He is well pleased with you; but, beyond grace, what is in the way of this happening in your life?
9. If you could do literally anything with your faith, what would you do? What stops you?
10. What do you do when you face unbelief and frustration? What can you do? What should you do?
11. What can you do to avoid becoming frustrated and giving up with your faith when faced with the realities of daily life and/or failure?
12. God reveals His Kingdom and Glory to you in many ways-through His Word, through your prayer and devotional life, and through your faith and obedience. Has He revealed it to you? If not, are you really looking? What do you need to do to receive it?