

His Kingdom Will Come

Luke 9:27-36

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Let's look together at what has been called by many "one of the most amazing and astounding of all the Lord's experiences on earth," and you probably know it as the transfiguration. The transfiguration is also referred to in Matthew 17:1-8 and in Mark 9:2-3. That means that all three of the synoptic Gospels felt it was important to recount the episode of Jesus on the mountain being transfigured before three of His apostles, Peter, James and John.

Luke doesn't use the word "transfigured." He describes it, but he doesn't use the word. Matthew and Mark use it. And before we unpack the text, let me give you three reasons—although the list could be quite lengthy—for the transfiguration. But I've reduced them to three, so when we go through the story, you will keep these reasons in your mind.

Number one, the transfiguration was God the Father's seal of approval to Peter's confession of Christ in verse 20, where Peter called Jesus, "The Christ of God" and in Matthew 16:16, where Peter said that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." In verse 17, "Jesus answered and said, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" So now the Father is confirming, by speaking from heaven, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him! (Luke 9:35).

Number two, the reason for the transfiguration was to teach and encourage us that the Cross, both of Christ's and of ours, leads to glory. So it was an encouragement for the disciples, for Christ and for us that the Cross would not hinder the glory but would actually lead to glory. Even in our suffering, we are sure of victory.

Number three, the transfiguration was a preview of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This excites me. Have you ever been privileged to preview a movie? You feel so honored that they would want you to come to see a movie and preview it. Well, we will get a preview of the Second Coming in our text. Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain and gave them a sneak preview of the coming attraction, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

As far as the story goes, there are three dramatic occurrences. First, is the heavenly vision or the actual transfiguration, in verses 27-29. "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God. Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James..." Usually the order is "Peter, James and John." Here He reverses the order of the two "sons of thunder." "...and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening." This is the vision of the transformation of Jesus on the mountain.

I want to put this in context, in verses 27-28. Jesus said, "There are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." There are some who have come up with a false teaching based on this statement. They believe that Jesus came before the apostles

died and saw the kingdom come. It's called "preterism." They take the book of Revelation, which has a future aspect for the church even today, and put it all in the past. They believe Jesus had already come, we're already in the kingdom and it's not going to happen in the future.

If Jesus had already come, and we see how the world today is, we're in big trouble. So I believe we still look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So don't hold a preterist position based on this text.

You say, "Well, what does it mean then?" The text says that "about eight days after" He "went up on the mountain to pray" and He was transfigured. So the context would tell us to conclude that the transfiguration was the fulfillment of this prediction that "they see the kingdom of God."

Some disagree with that. They say the fulfillment was the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in His fullness. That's a possibility, but I don't think it's highly probable. I'm not here to debate all the pros and cons of different views, but I do reject the preterist view that Christ had already come, and everything in the book of Revelation is past tense. I believe that Jesus is still to come. Not only are we looking for the Second Coming, but as the church, we're looking for the rapture, when we will be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Verse 28 says, "about eight days after these sayings." The other Gospels say, "after six days." And that's why Luke's Gospel says, "about eight days." He probably was thinking about the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles and what they did on the eight days. It's all tied in with the imagery of the Old Testament. But it's a roundabout statement. So Jesus took the three apostles up on a high mountain.

the men, the mountain and the Master. In verse 28, we see the men. "He took Peter..." we know who he is "...John..." the apostle of love "...and James..." who was his brother. They were called "the sons of thunder." "...and went up on the mountain to pray."

Peter, James and John were known as "the inner circle." These three were clearly separated from the others three times in the Bible. Jesus revealed things to these men that He didn't reveal to the others. The first time was at the raising of Jairus' daughter. It's interesting that we see Jesus' victory over death. The second time was at Gethsemane, where we see Jesus surrender to death, when He took them deeper into the garden. And the third time is at the transfiguration, where Jesus was glorified in death. So all three episodes, where He separated these three men, dealt with death.

So what a privilege it was to be part of this group of men; to be with Him on the mountain, to be with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter and to be with Him when He went deeper into the garden of Gethsemane.

But now we move to the mountain, verse 28. And it's funny that when you read commentaries on this story, they'll spend pages trying to decide which mountain it was. Some think it was Mount Horeb, some think it was Mount Tabor. Mount Horeb sits over 9,000 feet above sea

level. A lot of times of the year it has snow. And in the context, the disciples were in that area. They were in Caesarea-Philippi, where Peter had just made his great confession of Christ. So it would seem natural that they would have been on Mount Horeb, rather than the traditional site of Mount Tabor. But which mountain doesn't really matter. They went from Caesarea-Philippi to a high mountain, perhaps to Mount Horeb.

But we do know that He went up on the mountain to pray, verse 28. And I like the fact that Luke, in his Gospel, emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus Christ. So make note that Jesus prayed, in verses 28 and 29. As a man, Jesus was spending time in prayer.

Jesus' prayer on the mountain led to His transfiguration. And when we spend time in prayer, it leads to our "transfiguration." The more time we spend in prayer, the more we are changed into the image of Him, the Son of God.

Now look at the Master, who is the focus of verse 29. So we have the men, the mountain and now the Master. "As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening." This glory that came from the face of Jesus Christ was not shining from the outside upon Him. This is very important to catch. It wasn't an exterior glory coming upon Him that He was reflecting; it was interior glory coming through the veil of His flesh.

They didn't have washing machines or laundromats or dry cleaners. In those days, robes got very soiled and very dirty, because they walked on dirty, dusty roads, and they slept in their clothes. So this is amazing that Jesus' clothes became "white and glistening."

The same text in Matthew 17:2 says, "He was transfigured before them," speaking of Peter, James and John. "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." And in Mark 9:2-3, "He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them." And if they were on Mount Horeb, where there is snow, they may have been in snow when Jesus was transfigured before them. And it probably was nighttime when He was transfigured.

What does it mean by "He was transfigured"? We get our word "metamorphosis" from the word "transfiguration." We all know that when a caterpillar spins its cocoon, it comes out not as a caterpillar but a butterfly. We call this a "metamorphosis."

What you are on the inside, your intrinsic nature, then is manifested on the outside. So whenever you get discouraged and you're weary for glory, look at a caterpillar and be encouraged. It's on its way to becoming a butterfly. Then go look in the mirror and say, "I will be metamorphosed; I'm not right now." You will receive a transformation. And right now the Spirit of God is changing us into the image of the Son of God, and one day we'll be with Him and be transformed perfectly into His likeness and share His glory.

Jesus pulled back the veil of His humanity to reveal His divine glory and majesty. It is one of the simplest and an important way to describe the transfiguration. Jesus Christ was God, veiled in human flesh. He was true, authentic, genuine, sinless humanity. He was conceived by the

Spirit of God in the womb of a virgin, so He was sinless humanity; He didn't inherit a sin nature, and He never sinned.

But His human nature veiled His true deity. But He did not glow in the dark. If that were the case, when they went to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, they wouldn't need Judas to kiss Him to identify Him; they'd just look for the guy who was lit up like a light bulb. "Just grab the guy you can see in the dark." And Jesus didn't have a halo. His voice didn't have reverb in it. He didn't look any different than any peasant from Galilee. So to look at Him, there was nothing you would desire.

So His deity was veiled. We sing at Christmas,

"Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;

Hail the incarnate Deity."

Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,

Jesus our Emmanuel."

Jesus was God with us.

What Jesus was doing was giving a unique preview to His apostles, who had just been told that "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny yourself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). He wanted to show them where the cross will lead; it will lead to glory. So He then pulled back the veil of His humanity.

In the Old Testament, God would appear in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. In the Holy of Holies and in the tabernacle, in the temple, there would be dwelling the shekinah glory of God. What a blessing that would be to see. Jesus is God in human flesh.

In John 17:5-6 and 22, when Jesus prayed in His great, high-priestly prayer, He said, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world....And the glory which You gave Me I have given them." So He prayed to His Father that He would be restored to His preincarnate glory and that those He was given would also share in that glory.

And Revelation 1:14-16,19 describes the post-Resurrection appearances of Christ with His "hair...white like wool...and His eyes like a flame of fire...; His feet were like fine brass...and His voice as the sound of many waters....Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength." He's not coming back as meek and mild, little Jesus; He's coming back as the glorified, reigning King of kings and Lord of lords.

So the Cross is future. He had just disclosed for the first time in Luke that He would go to Jerusalem to be arrested, He would suffer and die, be buried, but He would rise from the dead

the third day. But that did not compute in their Jewish minds. “How could You be the Messiah and be crucified?!” It didn’t fit. But He wanted them to know that the Cross would lead to a crown.

And it was a confirmation to us that our sorrow and suffering would be transformed into glory. When you read this story, it is a guarantee that your sorrow, your suffering, your pain, your weaknesses would be metamorphosized, transformed into glory. In Romans 8:18, Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall...” future tense “...be revealed in us.” There are so many sufferings, so many heartaches, so much hardship, so much pain in this present world. But when you put on the scales the sufferings of this present world and compare them “with the glory which shall be revealed,” they don’t even come close. This is to motivate us to keep going. We are on our way to heaven, on our way to glory.

And in 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul says, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” He calls our sufferings “light affliction.”

So what it means to us as believers is that we must live by faith. Not by sight. Not by feeling. When you don’t understand, when you can’t see the reason—someone said, “Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light.” I like that. Stand on the promises of God. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” And David ends this psalm by saying, “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:4,6). That’s because he knew the Lord was his Shepherd. What a picture!

And Abraham lived by faith. He “waited for the city...whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). When you have a lot in this world, it makes dying hard. When you have a lot of money and possessions, it makes dying hard. But when you don’t have anything, you’re looking for your reward in heaven. That doesn’t mean you have to live in poverty. But Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

What holds your heart? Is it heaven? Does that motivate you? Do you like to sing about heaven, think about heaven, long for heaven, yearning for your home in heaven? Jesus said, “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). Do you want Him to come and take you to heaven? We should all long to be at home with Jesus in heaven. So this is a picture of the glory that is ours in the future.

Now we move from the heavenly vision, in verses 27-29, to the second section of our text, the heavenly visitors, verses 30-33. “And behold, two men talked with Him.” So Jesus is on the mountain and was being transfigured before the others. And we’ll see that before this all started on the mountain, Peter, James and John were sleeping. Can you imagine sleeping through the transfiguration?! “Dudes, what’s your problem?!” Jesus was being transfigured,

they wake up, rub their eyes and say, “Wow! This is radical!”

“And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease...” or “death”; literally “exodus” “...which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep.” There it is. They also were asleep in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus told them to stay awake and pray.

Verse 32, “And when they were fully awake, they saw His glory.” I put alongside that John 1:14, which 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.” “...and the two men...” Moses and Elijah “...who stood with Him. Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here.’” It’s like he’s saying, “This is awesome!” “...and let us make three tabernacles...” little lean-to shacks made out of wood “...one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.” Some feel that Peter was trying to put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. But that’s not what would happen.

Notice here we have Moses and Elijah. Why them? Why not Jeremiah, Isaiah, Abraham or King David? Let me give you some reasons why it was Moses and Elijah. First, both these men had met with God before on mountaintops. Some feel that their mountaintop experiences were on the same mountain where Jesus was transfigured, Moses on Mount Sinai and Elijah on Mount Horeb, which is also called Mount Carmel. These are the same mountain. Moses said, “Please show me Your glory” (Exodus 33:18-23), and he was allowed to hide in the cleft of the rock, God covered him with His hand and passed by. Moses saw the afterglow of the presence of the Lord. Elijah also saw the glory of God on the mountain.

Second, these two guys prove that there is life after death. When someone you love dies, they don’t cease to exist; it’s not the cessation of their existence. They just go to another place. The word “death” here means “exodus.” It means you’re going out. So when you die, you leave your body. Where do you go? If you’re a Christian, you go into the presence of the Lord.

The Bible is very clear. I’m always asked about this. “Where do we go when we die?” The Bible says, “To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). You are immediately in the presence of the Lord. Even though your body is still in the grave and maybe decomposed, you are in the presence of the Lord.

So it is the picture here of Moses and Elijah. And Moses had been dead for 1,400 years, and Elijah had been dead for 900 years. But they are still Moses and Elijah. Quite often I’m also asked, “When we get to heaven, will we know our loved ones?” The answer is, “Yes.” Charles Spurgeon said, “Do you think we’re going to be dumber in heaven than we are here?” Imagine this: “Who are you?”

“I’m your husband.”

We will instantly, perfectly, completely know one another in heaven. It’s going to be you but new and improved. Praise God for that! What a blessing that will be.

From Moses and Elijah, we also learn that they picture two ways for believers to go to heaven. Moses represents the believer dying and going to heaven; Elijah represents the believer being raptured or “caught up,” from life to life going to heaven.

So you can die and go to heaven. The Bible teaches that death for the Christian is a friend and not a foe. Jesus had defeated death. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). They may die physically, but they haven’t died spiritually; they’re in the presence of the Lord.

So death is nothing to be afraid of. Someone said, “I don’t mind dying; I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” The Bible says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15). But it’s painful for those left behind. We say “Goodbye” now but we’ll say “Hello” then. And we sorrow not “as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). So He has taken the sting out of death, but we may have to go through death to get to heaven.

And then there also is that blessed hope that we can be raptured and “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Elijah went to heaven on a chariot that had swooped down out of heaven, picked him up and transported him right to heaven. That’s called “goin’ in style.” Whoa!

That’s a picture of what can happen to us. In 1 Corinthians 15:51, Paul talks about the rapture, and he said, “Behold, I tell you a mystery.” That means it was not taught in the Old Testament; it’s a New Testament revelation. “We shall not all sleep...” which is death “...but we shall all be changed.” “Changed” means “metamorphosized.” It’s the same word used as “transfigured.”

Paul continues in verse 52, “...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet....So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’” That’s why Paul says, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” Jesus Christ has taken the sting of death and brings us victory.

It’s very possible and highly probable that we’re living in the last days. As I look at the world around me today, I think that it can’t be long until Jesus will come for His church. He will catch us up to meet Him in the air in the rapture.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul says, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

When the rapture takes place, those who have died in Christ before the rapture are coming back in the clouds with Jesus. The bodies of the dead in Christ will rise first; they’ll be

resurrected. And their soul and spirit will be reunited with their bodies. Those of us who are alive when the rapture happens will be “caught up,” Paul says. It’s the Greek word “harpodzo,” which means “to snatch up” or “take up by force.” Then we will meet them in the air, and together with them, “we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” So whether we die or we’re raptured, we’re going to “meet the Lord in the air.”

The last point is that Moses and Elijah represent the two, main divisions of the Old Testament. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. And both divisions point to Jesus. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law...” which would be Moses “...or the Prophets...” represented by Elijah. “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

We see this in verse 31 of our text. Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about “His decease...” or His death or exodus “...which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.” The main theme of the whole Bible is the Cross of Christ, especially the Old Testament and the prophets. Everything points to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Cut the Bible anywhere and it bleeds red with redemptive truth. If you miss the Cross, you miss the whole meaning and emphasis of the Bible.

The Law spoke of the Cross in typical, predictive prophecies. The prophets spoke of the Cross in verbal, predictive prophecies in Isaiah 53. It’s very clear. Jesus came with the Old Testament pointed to His death.

So what were they talking about? His death. What a mountaintop, Bible conference this must have been! Can you imagine? Jesus, Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah—that’s what you call “a party on the mountain”! I would have loved to have been there. And they were talking about His Cross.

The death of Christ was not an accident; it was an “accomplishment,” verse 31. “...his decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem.” When Jesus died on the Cross, He was accomplishing the work He came to do, planned out, charted out, preordained before the foundation of the world. It was not an accident in the mind of God. Jesus came to accomplish a purpose; that was, to die on the Cross for the sins of the world. A body that was prepared to become the sacrifice for our sins. So the Cross of Christ is the central theme of the Bible.

The Cross would not prevent the kingdom from coming but would rather make it possible. That’s the purpose and plan of God, to redeem by way of the blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Then you have in verses 32-33, the classic story of Peter waking up and seeing what was going on. Then it says, “...as they were parting from Him.” That indicates that the vision or shekinah glory cloud of Moses and Elijah and of the transfiguration was fading. As that was happening, Peter said, “‘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.”

A good rule of thumb is that when you don't know what to say, say nothing. "I don't know what to say, so I'll say something really stupid."

"Go ahead."

But you can't really blame Peter. "This is amazing. Let's stay here."

Have you ever gone on a retreat over the weekend up on a mountain? It's just awesome and God's moving in your heart and the worship, the fellowship and the teaching are great? Then the conference is over and you get in your car, go back down the mountain to the kids, to the husband/wife, to the problems, to the job. Do you feel like making a U-turn and going back up the mountain?

As a matter of fact, when the apostles get down off the mountain, what's waiting for them is a demon-possessed boy. "Okay, let's just go back up the mountain and make some booths and hang out there. We were 'under the spout where the glory came out.'" No; we have to take the blessing back down to the valley.

Now we move from the vision and the visitors to lastly, the heavenly voice, verses 34-36. "While he was saying this..." that is Peter speaking about the three tabernacles "...a cloud came and overshadowed them." I believe this cloud is the shekinah glory of God. It's the same cloud that was in the tabernacle, in the temple and in the wilderness. It was the presence of God.

"And they were fearful as they entered the cloud." The other Gospel said that "They fell on their faces." Verse 35, "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying..." this is God the Father speaking from heaven "... 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!' When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone." That is significant. "But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen." So they kept quiet about this experience until Peter wrote about it in his second epistle in 2 Peter 1:16-18, speaking of the transfiguration.

That same voice of God the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism. He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The same audible voice came from heaven on the mountain. So the Law and the prophets point to Jesus.

In Hebrews 1:1-2, it says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." Jesus is God's last word to man. That's why it says, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), or "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus is the revealer, the Logos, of God, because He is God. He speaks to us. "Hear Him!"

Are you lost? Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). Are you thirsty? Jesus said, "Come to Me and drink" (John 7:37), or "Listen to Him." Are you hungry spiritually? Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (John 6:35). Are you living in darkness? Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in

darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Now notice, in verse 36, that "Jesus was found alone." Matthew 17:8 says, "When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." I like that. So both Moses and Elijah were gone. But Jesus was still there. "Hear Him!"

This was kept quiet until in 2 Peter 1:16, Peter said, "We made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." They were on that mountain, they saw Him and they heard the voice from heaven. Peter affirmed that. But he said, "We have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed" (2 Peter 1:19). "The prophetic word confirmed" is greater than what you see, you hear or you experience. It is the Word of the living God.

There are three closing points I want to make. We learned, number one, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Chosen One. The Father spoke from heaven, "This is My beloved Son." Number two, we learned that the Cross leads to glory. And number three, we learned that we will see and share in His glory.