

# The Transfiguration

**Introduction.** Approximately eight days before the events of this lesson, Peter had confessed his faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Later that day and the following day, Jesus taught the apostles some significant lessons which related to His being the Messiah, His suffering, death and resurrection, and the costs and rewards of being His disciple.

Nothing indicates that Jesus left the region of Caesarea Philippi, so we assume that six days later, while still in the same area, the events of this lesson took place (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36).

## I. ***The Place And The Occasion (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28)***

- A. Jesus again separated Peter, James and John from the other apostles. They witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter. They would also be taken farther into the garden by Jesus on the night of His betrayal.
- B. Jesus took them to a high mountain, probably Mt. Hermon. Luke says that Jesus' purpose was to pray. Mountains were significant in Christ's life.
  - 1. During the temptations, Satan took Him to an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Matthew 4:1-11).
  - 2. The sermon in which Jesus set forth the greatest statements of moral and religious principles in the annals of history was spoken from a mountain (Matthew 5:1-7:29).
  - 3. On a mountain He spent an entire night in prayer before selecting twelve men from His disciples whom He named apostles (Luke 6:12-13).
  - 4. When the multitude would make Him king, He slipped away in the gathering gloom up into the mountain to pray (John 6:15).
- C. He was often on a mountain, lingering in its lonely access and finding amid its grandeur a comfort and solace to His spirit that He was unable to find in the familiar paths of men.

## II. ***The Glorious Scene Beheld (Matthew 17:2-3; Mark 9:2-4; Luke 9:29-32)***

- A. "And He was transfigured before them."
  - 1. The Greek word used by Matthew and Mark means "to change, alter, or transform." This transformation was visible and awe-inspiring.
  - 2. His countenance was altered, His face shone as the sun, and His clothing became as white as light (cf. John 1:14). Peter would later write that they saw His "majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). Paul used this same Greek word when describing the change that God's word

would produce in a Christian (Romans 12:2), and the change we will experience when we enter into Christ's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

B. Elijah and Moses appeared with Him.

1. "Elias" in the KJV is the Greek spelling of "Elijah." These two had been expired from this earth for centuries, yet they appeared with Jesus in a recognizable form. Luke adds that they appeared "in glory."
2. Earlier, Jesus said to the mourners in Jairus' house, "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth" (Luke 8:52). Later, He would tell the Jews that God said, "I am the God of Abraham ... God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:32).

C. "He spoke of His departure."

1. Only Luke tells us the subject matter under discussion. His "departure" was His death or exodus from this world (cf. Luke 22:22; 2 Timothy 4:6; Hebrews 11:22; 2 Peter 1:15).
2. Moses and Elijah were representatives of the "Law and the Prophets" under which Israel lived from Sinai to the death of Christ. These two departed saints were vitally interested in the death of Christ, for it is the basis for the salvation of all who are saved, both before the cross and since (Matthew 5:17-18; Hebrews 9:15).
3. The Messiah's death, instead of being a degrading, inglorious act as Peter and the apostles at first supposed, would in fact be the most honorable and glorious event that ever happened for the benefit of mankind.

D. His death would be accomplished at Jerusalem.

1. The Lord is captain of His own destiny. Although evil men would perjure themselves and deliver Him into the hands of the Romans to be crucified, it was only His holy will that permitted it (cf. Acts 2:23).
2. A little later He would tell His apostles that no man had the power to take His life, but He would lay His life down and take it back up again (John 10:17-18).

III. ***Peter's Rash Proposal (Matthew 17:4; Mark 9:5-6; Luke 9:33)***

- A. Although the three were heavy with sleep, the sight before them and the discussion they heard awakened them. They were very troubled and panic-stricken by what they had just witnessed.
- B. The occasion seemed to demand that something be said. We have all faced similar conditions when, after witnessing some great event or hearing some profound statement, we feel the need to make a verbal response. Usually, we say what first comes to mind, often to our regret.

- C. Peter, not knowing what to say, but supposing it was better to be on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah than to be on the mountain with Jesus only, blurted out that they should build three booths or tent dwellings, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

#### **IV. *The Heavenly Response And Effect (Matthew 17:5-9; Mark 9:7-10; Luke 9:34-36)***

- A. While Peter was speaking, they were overshadowed by a bright cloud, and the three men were afraid. This kind of cloud was significant to the Jewish mind. It indicated the presence of God (Exodus 24:12-18; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3). This was no ordinary cloud, and the three apostles knew it.
- B. The scene and voice were so indelibly etched on Peter's mind that he later wrote about hearing the voice of God (2 Peter 1:17-18). The words out of the cloud were the same ones spoken at Jesus' baptism, with the exception of an additional phrase (Mark 1:11).
- C. "Hear Ye Him!"
  - 1. A proposal had been made to honor Moses and Elijah equally with Jesus. The voice identified Jesus, then added a command that was exclusive and restrictive.
  - 2. Do not hear Moses or Elijah or anyone else. God through Moses had already said this in Deuteronomy 18:15 (cf. Acts 3:22-23).
- D. The message of the Transfiguration signifies the passing of the old and the advent of the new. The sudden disappearance of Moses and Elijah signifies that God, who in the past spoke to His people through the prophets, would from then on speak only through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).
- E. Christ's touch imparts power and strength. Touching the three panic-stricken apostles, Jesus further encouraged them with the words, "Do not be afraid," which were His words of encouragement to the apostles when He came to them on the storm-tossed waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50).
- F. "And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone."
  - 1. "Jesus only" is the only message that meets and satisfies all human needs (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Colossians 1:16-18).
  - 2. Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God, in whom the Father is well-pleased, is man's only hope, atonement, savior, mediator, authority, and judge.
- G. Jesus instructed the three to say nothing of the event until after His resurrection.

1. At best, the three understood very little of the real significance of the Transfiguration, so to tell what they understood to others would have only multiplied the misunderstanding and confusion.
2. Also, what Jesus intended to accomplish in Jerusalem had already been discussed. Regardless of how little the apostles may have understood its importance, nothing was to be said or done that would compromise its orderly and timely accomplishment.

V. ***A Question Raised And Answered (Matthew 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13)***

- A. The Jews expected Elijah to appear as a forerunner to the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 4:5-6). Peter, James, and John had just seen Elijah with Christ. If they could not tell others of Elijah's coming, what about the scribes' teaching? Did that mean that Elijah was yet to come?
- B. Jesus answered that Elijah had indeed already come, and that the Jews had rejected and killed him (Matthew 14:1-11; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9). The Son of Man would suffer the same treatment from them. The three understood that the Elijah of whom He spoke was John the Baptist.

**Conclusion.** There were three good lessons in the Transfiguration. First, Jesus is the Son of God who gave up His glory to be on earth (John 17:5; Philippians 2:5-11). Second, we are obligated to listen to Jesus (Romans 2:16; 1 Peter 3:22). Third, His glorification is a foreshadowing of our future glory (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21).

On Mt. Hermon, Jesus and His apostles reached the high point in Christ's ministry; the remainder of the way was down into a valley of humiliation and death. In just six short months, our Lord would be put to death on the cross. However, Peter, James and John would always have that grand spectacle embedded within their minds as they risked their lives preaching the gospel.