

The Mind of Christ

The Transfiguration of Jesus

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As the life of Jesus Christ moves toward the tragedy and the triumph of the cross, there are certain events that seem to follow in logical order.
 - A. It seems quite natural that the events of Caesarea Philippi, where the disciples of Jesus openly acknowledged Him as the Christ, should be followed by the events on the Mount of Transfiguration.
 1. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus put Himself to the test of human recognition.
 2. On the Mount of Transfiguration He will not only be declared to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, He will also be declared to be the **ONLY** source of divine authority for His disciples.
 - a. According to the gospel accounts, the events at Caesarea Philippi occurred perhaps no more than six to eight days earlier.
 - b. The confession Peter made at that time, saying that Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Son of the living God, was still fresh in the minds of the disciples – but it was only **THEIR** confession.

- c. The only way they had to confirm their faith in Jesus as being the Christ was the fact that they had personally witnessed the miracles and wonders He had been performing – miracles and wonders that clearly showed He had divine powers.
 - d. But, it was now time for their faith to be confirmed by irrefutable evidence – and that confirmation would take place on a high mountain, more commonly called today as the Mount of Transfiguration.
- B. As we take a close look at this most significant event in the life of Jesus, we're going to take special notice of two important details.
- 1 First, we're going to focus our attention on the actual events of that day, and then examine the significance of each of those events.
 - 2. Then, in three separate lessons, we're going to focus our attention on the things that were said that day – the comments made by Peter, and the importance of God's reply when He said, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"*
(Matthew 17:5)
 - 3. So, let's start by looking closer at the story of the transfiguration.

BODY:

- I. The story itself is recorded in the three synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. Years later, Peter would also make reference to the transfiguration in his second epistle (**2 Peter 1:16-21**) – a passage we'll look at in greater detail at the conclusion of this lesson.
 - A. To understand the events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration, we should read all three accounts. (**Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36**) However, for the sake of brevity, we'll read Luke's account – mainly because Luke's record of this event includes details that are not included in the accounts of Matthew and Mark.
 1. **Luke 9:28-36** – *Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James 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. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men 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; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

- B. The story of the transfiguration begins when Jesus takes Peter, James and John into a high mountain to pray.
 - 1. Most commentators agree that their ascent up the mountain occurred sometime earlier in the day, and that the transfiguration itself occurred at night. There are at least THREE REASONS for saying this:
 - a. The evening hours were the usual time of prayer for Jesus – He generally never had the opportunity during the day.
 - (1). **Luke 6:12** – (Before selecting the twelve) *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

- (2). **Luke 9:28** – (In our text of the transfiguration) *Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings [at Caesarea Philippi], that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.*
- b. The second reason why we say the transfiguration occurred in the evening hours is because once they arrived at the top of the mountain, the three disciples of Jesus soon fell asleep.
- (1). **Luke 9:32** – *Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him* (with Jesus).
- c. And the third reason for saying the transfiguration happened at night is simply because the text tells us that Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain the next day.
- (1). **Luke 9:37** – *Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him.*
2. Next, we notice that Both Matthew and Mark call it a “*high mountain.*” (**Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2**)
- a. More than likely, the transfiguration took place on MOUNT HERMON, and there are TWO REASONS for saying this.

(1). First, Hermon is 9,400 feet above sea level, and 11,000 feet above the floor of the Jordan Valley.

(a). Even though it's the HIGHEST mountain in Israel, it's also an easy climb.

(2). Second, Hermon is also about fourteen miles from Caesarea Philippi.

(a). Jesus and His disciples had come from there only days before.

C. While on the mountain, the body of Jesus was “*transfigured*.” (**Luke 9:29**)

1. This word means that His body literally changed in substance.

Exactly what all that entails is not revealed in the Scriptures, but one thing we know, He was changed in such a way that He actually glowed from within – illuminated from within.

a. We'll see the significance of the word “transfigured” a little later.

2. Next, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. (**Luke 9:30**)

a. How the disciples knew who these two men were is not revealed.

(1). Perhaps they overheard their names being spoken, or perhaps it was something they said during their

conversation with Jesus that identified them as Moses and Elijah.

- b. While all three accounts mention that Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus, only Luke tells us what they were talking about.

- (1). They were talking about His coming death in Jerusalem.

(Luke 9:31)

- 3. Next, notice Peter was completely overwhelmed by the whole event. As Moses and Elijah were departing, Peter proposed that all three persons (Jesus, Moses and Elijah) be honored by the building of three “*tabernacles*” – or “portable tent-like shrines.”

(Luke 9:33)

- a. Obviously, the three disciples were not only thrilled by what they were seeing, they were also terribly frightened.

- (1). **Mark 9:5-6** – *Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.*

(2). This is sort of typical of Peter – speak first and think later. He probably should have said nothing. Why?

Read on.

4. No sooner had Peter made that statement, than a cloud overshadowed and completely surrounded them. And out of the cloud came the voice of God, saying, "*This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!*" **(Luke 9:35)**
 - a. When the voice of God pierced the silence, Matthew tells us that the three disciples immediately fell to the ground face down, showing respect and great fear. **(Matthew 17:6)**
 - b. Then, Jesus came to them, touched them and told them to arise and not to be frightened by what they had seen and heard. **(Matthew 17:7)**
 - c. According to Luke's account, when they arose and looked around, the disciples noticed that Moses and Elijah were both gone, and Jesus was all alone once again. **(Luke 9:36)**

II. Every detail of this transfiguration scene has a very significant meaning, and either links Jesus with the greatness of the past, or gives His disciples the reassurance they needed to know for certain Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Son of the living God. There are five key things we want to notice here.

- A. First, in Jewish stories, mountain tops were always considered a place where one would go to be alone with God.
1. It was on Mount Sinai that Moses received the Law from God.
(Exodus 31:18) In fact, Mount Sinai was often called the *“mountain of God,”* or the *“mountain of the LORD.”*
 2. It was on Mount Horeb that Elijah received his revelation from God and was assured that the Lord still had *“seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal”* **(1 Kings 19:9-18)**
 3. Therefore, the very act of Jesus going up onto the mount was a deliberate act, according to Jewish tradition, of drawing near to God.
- B. Second, while on the mountain with His disciples, Jesus was “transfigured” until He became a figure glowing with light from within.
(Luke 9:29)
1. The word “transfigured” comes from the Greek word “metamorphosis” – meaning “to change into another form.”
 - a. It is used of the caterpillar who wraps itself into a cocoon, only to emerge in the Spring as a beautiful butterfly.
 - b. But the same word is also used in two other New Testament passages:

- (1). It's used in **Romans 12:2** in reference to a change in moral character.
 - (a). **Romans 12:2** – *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
 - (2). The other reference is in **2 Corinthians 3:18**, and pertains to the change we experience now by the Spirit of God, ending in the great change that will take place at the resurrection when we will have a body like the Lord's own glorious body.
 - (a). **2 Corinthians 3:18** – *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*
2. Concerning the transfiguration of Jesus, the text clearly implies that He underwent some kind of physical change as His garments radiated with a dazzling white light.
- a. **Luke 9:29** – *As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.*

- b. The text does not say His garments were REFLECTING some kind of light.
- c. Rather, it says the garments of Jesus “glistened” from a brilliant light that emanated from the transfigured body of Jesus.

(1). The word “*glistened*” (**v. 29**) means to “flash forth, or to flash outward like lightening.”

(2). In other words, light was coming through the garments of Jesus like flashes of lightening.

C. The third important thing we see in this event is that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus. (**v. 30**)

1. These men were the two most important figures in Jewish tradition.

a. Moses was the great lawgiver – the one in whom God had entrusted the teaching and the administration of the Law.

b. Elijah, on the other hand, was considered the greatest of all the prophets.

2. Here we see Jesus, Who is clearly heading toward the cross, and Who needs to assure His disciples that He is on the right course, being encouraged by Moses and Elijah.

- a. All three of these great figures were standing, talking about Jesus' *"decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."* **(Luke 9:31)**
- b. But the NIV and the NASB use a different word – for example, the NIV says, *"They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."*
 - (1). The Greek word here is "exodos," which is translated into English as "exodus."
 - (2). It's the same word that is used to describe the children of Israel as they ventured forth from the land of Egypt toward the promised land – a land described as "flowing with milk and honey."
- c. As Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus, they were discussing His great journey of faith.
 - (1). In essence, they were reaffirming the fact that Jesus was making His own journey through the wilderness of this world, but would soon be back home in the promised land of heaven itself.
 - (2). How reassuring, and yet how confusing this all must have sounded to His disciples – they were still having trouble understanding why Jesus must eventually die.

(3). And yet all three – Moses, Elijah and Jesus Himself –
were confident of the final outcome.

- D. Fourth, all of the gospel accounts speak of cloud that completely surrounded Jesus and the three disciples. **(v. 34)**
1. While Mark and Luke simply describe it as a cloud, Matthew calls it a “*bright cloud.*” **(Matthew 17:5)**
 2. Clouds were common on Mount Hermon. To this day, clouds can form very quickly on the top of the mountain, and then disperse just as quickly.
 - a. Clouds covering the mountain top would be seen as a normal occurrence to someone looking up at the mountain from the Jordan Valley.
 - b. But clearly, this cloud was different.
 3. All through the history of Israel, we read of the glory of God appearing to the people in the form of a cloud.
 - a. A pillar of cloud led the children of Israel through the wilderness. **(Exodus 13:21f)**
 - b. It had been in a cloud that God descended to give Moses the Law. **(Exodus 34:5)**

- c. When the tabernacle was finally built and dedicated to God, a cloud covered the tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. **(Exodus 40:34f)**
 - d. And, we find this same strange, mysterious, luminous cloud at the dedication of Solomon's Temple – a cloud that filled the entire Temple **(1 Kings 8:10f; 2 Chron. 5:13f; 7:2)**
4. To the Jewish mind, the cloud has always stood for the glory of God settling upon a certain place.
- a. Therefore, since mountain tops were supposed to be the place closest to God, and since the cloud that enveloped Jesus, Moses, Elijah and the three disciples was on the mount of transfiguration, it meant that the glory of God was there as well.
- E. However, the MOST important event during the transfiguration of Jesus was the confirmation He received from God the Father.
- 1. Everything Jesus had done during His earthly ministry up to this point had been just the OPPOSITE of what the people commonly thought the Messiah would do.
 - a. As we said before, Jesus was gathering no army to fight the enemies of Israel.

- b. He was laying no OPEN claim to the Messiahship – at least, not in terms that most could understand.
 - c. So, as far as most were concerned, Jesus was going in the wrong direction – and from all we know, even the disciples were confused about His mission and the way He was carrying it out.
 2. Therefore, the disciples needed to know that Jesus was on the right course.
 - a. They needed to have their faith in Him further validated.
 - b. And so, it was for this purpose that Jesus brought His disciples to the foot of Mount Hermon, and climbed the mountain to spend the night there with three of His most trusted disciples – Peter, James and John.
 3. Awakening to see Jesus radiating with a brilliant light, and talking with Moses and Elijah was very convincing.
 4. But it was the voice of Almighty God that gave the disciples the assurance and validation they needed.
 - a. For no sooner had Peter suggested that three tabernacles be built to honor Moses, Elijah and Jesus, than the voice of Jehovah pierced the silence of that cloud topped mountain and said, *"This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"* **(Luke 9:35)**

- b. There are three important things we need to understand about God's declaration:
- (1). First, in saying "*This is My beloved Son,*" the disciples now knew for certain that their confession at Caesarea Philippi was true – Jesus WAS "*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"
 - (2). Second, when God (according to Matthew's account) added, "*In Whom I am well pleased,*" the disciples were reassured that Jesus was doing the very things that met with the approval of God. Whatever lay ahead, even if it was to be the death of Jesus on a cross on Calvary, Jesus was doing what pleased God.
 - (3). And third, when God said, "*Hear Him,*" the disciples knew beyond any doubt that it was Jesus to whom they must turn for instruction. The commandments and teachings of Moses and the prophets would soon be replaced with the commandments and teaching of Jesus Christ – it was Jesus Whom they were to listen. I'll have A LOT more to say about all this in the next three lessons.

III. One last thing about the story of the transfiguration.

A. Peter wanted to remain on the mountain to build three shrines to the three great figures that appeared there. But Jesus came down from the mountain to enter the affairs of life once again.

1. Jesus had accomplished what He came for. His disciples received the assurance and confirmation they needed to know that Jesus was truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that He was on the right course.
2. Therefore, Jesus was able to leave the mount of transfiguration having given His disciples the assurance that THEY would need when Jesus eventually comes face to face with the cross and all the terror and agony associated with it.
3. Clearly, Jesus was able to firmly set His face toward Jerusalem, knowing that His little group of disciples would have their faith rocked to the very depths of their souls.
4. But that it would be the memory of their confession at Caesarea Philippi, and the validation from God Himself on the mount of transfiguration, that would carry these men through the darkest and most terrifying days of their entire lives.

5. I think it would be safe to say that the events on the mount of transfiguration must have also filled Jesus' heart with great hope and a solemn determination to go on.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Jesus was heading for an eventual head-on clash with His greatest enemies.
 - A. In the coming weeks, we will take a closer look at the groups of men who were so determined to put Him to death.
 1. But for now, the disciples had their faith in Jesus renewed – they were even more confident now that He was the Christ – the Anointed One, the Messiah.
 2. And yet, Mark's account tells us, *“as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*
(Mark 9:9)
 3. But the day would come when they would be able to break their silence and proclaim to the world that Jesus IS the Christ, the Son of the living God.
 - a. In fact, look at Peter's written recount of this event in his second epistle.

b. **2 Peter 1:16-19** -- *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so **we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed** as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...*

- (1). Peter is saying that the “*prophetic word*” (the prophecies about Jesus) have been confirmed.
- (2). But they were only like a small light shining in a dark place.
- (3). However, now the light of dawn has come to us through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the world that was once sitting in darkness is now illuminated with the TRUE “*Light of the World*” – the resurrected Jesus.
- (4). Jesus, the bright and morning star that has risen in your hearts.

- B. So, allow me to ask you this question. Has the light of Jesus Christ illuminated your world, or are you still sitting in darkness – unassured, fearful, perhaps even terrified of the darkness that envelops you?
1. Jesus came as the light of the world – the bright and morning star, and can rise in your heart as well.
 2. Why sit in darkness another moment? The free gift of eternal life and the assurance of heaven are yours for the taking.