

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

Luke 9:28-36

Key Verse: 9:29

“As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”

In the last passage Peter confessed that Jesus is “the Christ of God.” It was correct. The Christ of God means God’s anointed King. He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. But his reign is not political or military. It is spiritual. He suffered and died on the cross, shedding his holy blood, to pay the ransom price for our sins. Then God raised him from the dead, giving him eternal victory over the power of sin and death. King Jesus is willing to enter the hearts of all who confess him as the Christ of God. King Jesus delivers us from the power of sin and death and gives us eternal life and the kingdom of God as our everlasting home. But he also requires that anyone who would come after him must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow him. May God help each of us to accept Jesus as our King and to live a life of holy mission following him.

In today’s passage Jesus is transfigured on a mountain and has a very important fellowship meeting with Moses and Elijah. It is a most glorious revelation of Jesus’ divine nature. Jesus took Peter, John and James with him to see this. We want to understand the spiritual meaning of this event so that we may know Jesus better. We also want to learn the significance of this event in the lives of his disciples and to us as well. May God help us through the Holy Spirit.

First, Jesus’ prayer on the mountain (28).

Look at verse 28. “About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.” It had been eight days since Jesus taught his disciples for the first time that as the Christ of God he must suffer many things and be rejected, that he must be killed and finally rise again. In this way, he would become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It was the only way for him to fulfill God’s holy mission and to save men from their sins. We hear these words again and again as we study the Bible. But we must deeply realize that it was the only way for Jesus to save us from our sins. Sin demands lifeblood. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Only the holy blood of the Son of God can purchase forgiveness for all mankind. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for me and for you. Thank you, Jesus! Everlasting thank you, Jesus!

The work of the Christ was quite different than what the disciples had expected. When they saw his supernatural power to heal the sick, calm the storm and feed the five thousand, they were ecstatic. They expected Jesus to use this power to establish a messianic kingdom on earth like the kingdom of David. They were willing to go through hardships with Jesus to fulfill their expectation. They had sacrificed their families and their careers; they had endured hunger and sleeplessness. But when Jesus talked about suffering, death and resurrection, they were shocked. They were like one young man who committed himself to UBF in order to marry a holy woman of God. But instead of marrying, he was asked to feed Jesus’ sheep as a one-to-one Bible teacher. It took time and struggle for him to give up his own expectation and to do what God wanted him to do. Jesus gave his disciples eight days to digest his teaching that he must suffer, die and rise again. But it was not easy for them at all. They would rather face the storm at sea than give up their dreams of worldly glory by means of Jesus’ messianic power. Probably, after eight days, they were sitting around looking at each other with sour expressions on their faces. Maybe no one said anything. What did Jesus do?

Look at verse 28. Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. Jesus went to God in prayer, putting aside everything. Jesus went to God in prayer, climbing up a high mountain. Often we pray simply out of habit or as part of our daily routine. We pray two by two after meetings. We pray before meals. We pray before going to bed at night. This is good. But here, Jesus put aside everything and went up onto a mountain to pray. It was not just part of his routine. Jesus was seeking God as a matter of first and utmost importance, putting aside everything else. We learn from Jesus that in addition to routine prayer, we must also learn “mountain prayer.”

One shepherd was very kind and gracious to his sheep and loved them very much. He always fished many sheep and had many one-to-one Bible studies. But when the time came to solve their marriage problems, he became helpless. After many disappointing events, he decided to bring this problem to God in prayer. He stayed at the center all night, crying out about his sheep’s marriage problem. The next morning he had the peace of God and spiritual joy in his heart. He did not know what would happen, but he knew that God had heard his prayer. Several months later, his girl

sheep married a most pure and generous man of God and has lived happily in Jesus ever since then. On the other hand, there is one shepherd who is very intelligent. He always provides his sheep with his superior ideas to help them out. But his sheep often look at him with a question mark on their faces. Then he laments that his sheep are so dull and adopts the philosophy of “que sara, sara,” “whatever will be will be.” So he has remained fruitless in spite of much effort. We learn from Jesus the importance of “mountain prayer.”

What did Jesus pray for? Luke does not say in this passage. But if we examine Jesus’ prayer in Luke 11:2-4 and Luke 22:42, we can understand that Jesus prayed first for God’s will to be done and God’s kingdom to come through his death and resurrection. Jesus knew that there was one thing that he had to do. It was to die on the cross for the sin of the world and rise again after three days. It was God’s will to crush him and to cause him to suffer. It was God’s will to make his life a guilt offering. Jesus would not avoid this will of God. But in his humanity, he did not want to suffer and die. Through prayer, he decided to obey God’s will. No doubt, Jesus also prayed for his disciples. They must carry on his work after his ascension into heaven. But they had no idea what Jesus really wanted them to do. It was a very urgent matter to Jesus that they open their spiritual eyes and see the spiritual world. So Jesus went up on the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John and James. Second, Jesus’ transfiguration (29).

Look at verse 29. “As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.” As Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed. Humanly, there was nothing special about Jesus’ appearance. Isaiah 53:2b says, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Though Jesus is the Son of God, he looked like any ordinary man. Moreover, as the shepherd of his people, he took upon himself the sufferings and sorrows of God’s children. Therefore, traces of anguish must have marked his countenance. He was drained from the constant hard work of preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick. He was pain-stricken and grieved by the sin of the world. He was constantly harassed by the malicious religious leaders. But when Jesus prayed, the appearance of his face changed. Gone were the traces of sorrow and weariness. Matthew 17:2b says, “His face shone like the sun...” The Apostle John described glorious Jesus in Revelation 1:14. It says, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.” And Revelation 1:16b says, “His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” The shining glory of God transformed the appearance of Jesus’ face.

In addition, Jesus’ clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. As the radiant glory of God blazed forth from within Jesus, even his clothes were transformed to be like a flash of lightning. They say that a flash of lightning carries about one million volts of electricity and reaches temperatures of 60,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The tremendous consumption of oxygen by the lightning produces a vacuum that causes thunder. Lightning is one of the most powerful and brilliant natural phenomenon which we human beings can relate to. But in fact, the shining glory of God in Jesus surpasses any natural display that we are familiar with. The very essence of the Holy God Almighty blazed forth in Jesus. This essence was not electrical power, it was the holiness of God. Jesus is truly glorious. Jesus is in very nature God. Jesus is the holy God Almighty. Through his transfiguration on the mountain, Jesus revealed to his top three disciples his glorious image as God.

It was important for Jesus’ disciples to see his transfigured image as the holy God Almighty before going to Jerusalem. There Jesus would suffer many things, be rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, and be crucified. To human eyes, Jesus looked like a victim and a loser. But Jesus’ disciples must know that Jesus willingly laid down his life to save men from their sins. If Jesus wanted, he could have burned his executioners with fire in an instant. He is the holy God Almighty. But he veiled his true glory in human flesh and obeyed the will of God humbly. Jesus wanted his disciples to know in their hearts that he is the holy God Almighty so that they might stand firm in faith during the time of his suffering and death.

Likewise, it is most important for each of us to see Jesus as the holy God Almighty while living in this fallen world. Otherwise, we suffer from disfigured and evil images. There was a very talented and promising young man who was drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. There, he saw so many evil things and their images were burned into his heart and soul. When he came back to America after the war, he was not the same person. He lost all his desire to do something good and spent his time welding pieces of metal into meaningless forms.

However, when we see the glorious image of transfigured Jesus, we can overcome the fallen world and do the work of God and do beautiful things. The famous composer Handel was a court-appointed musician. As he watched the political manipulation in court on a daily basis, he sometimes got sick to his stomach and did not want to serve in

court anymore. But through his constant struggle to put the word of God to music, he could see Jesus as the Messiah in all his glory and splendor. Jesus was so beautiful and majestic. When Handel looked at Jesus, he could compose the greatest music, "The Messiah."

To see Jesus in his glory gives us clear life direction and also hope to be transformed into his glorious image. As we know well, Peter was once a man of big mouth and selfish ambition. But through the transfiguration, the glorious image of Jesus as the holy God Almighty enlightened his soul. It remained in his heart like a bright morning star that guided his life and gave him hope. By holding this image, Peter was gradually changed in his inner man to be a shepherd for God's people in the image of Jesus. It is remarkable that at the time of his imminent death he wrote the book of 2 Peter. His heart was not dark at all. He saw Jesus in his glory and was looking for the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pe 3:13). He was most concerned about helping the people of God to keep their faith in the word of God.

Then how can we see the glorious image of transfigured Jesus? We must pray. We must study the Bible diligently as the very word of God (2 Pe 1:19-21). The word of God reveals Jesus in his glory. The word of God cleanses all disfigured images and restores the image of God in us. One shepherdess went to Germany to participate in the European Summer Bible Conference. She studied the Bible and prayed day and night. She could glimpse Jesus in glorious splendor. Then all of the weariness of working as a teacher, raising her children, and studying for a master's degree melted away from her heart. She found true peace and new joy and new strength and vision. Now she is ready to take up her crosses for the new fall semester. May God help each of us to see the glorious transfigured Jesus through prayer and diligent Bible study.

Third, Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah (30-31).

Look at verses 30-31. "Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." We may wonder why Moses and Elijah appear here and not some of the other great servants of God. Only God knows fully why. But from the study of God's history, we can find several common factors. In the first place, Moses, Elijah and Jesus were all deliverers of their people. Moses delivered his people from bondage in Egypt. Elijah delivered his people from Baal worship. Jesus came to this world to deliver men from their sins through his death and resurrection.

In the second place, they were all servants of God's word. Moses received God's Law at Mount Sinai, and he delivered it to his people (Ex 19:20). Elijah represents all of the prophets of Israel who delivered God's message of repentance, judgment and salvation. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets through his death and resurrection.

In the third place, they were all suffering servants. In fulfilling God's will, suffering is unavoidable. Moses received 40 years of humbleness training in the wilderness and then spent another 40 years leading his people, enduring all their grumbling and complaints. Elijah suffered so much that one time he prayed to God, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life" (1 Ki 19:4). Jesus told his disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (9:22).

As we have studied, Moses and Elijah suffered much to fulfill God's mission during their generation. But here they appear with Jesus in glorious splendor and eternal life. Their sufferings because of their mission did not devastate them at all. Rather, they were refined, ennobled and glorified. Here we learn that those who suffer much for God's mission gain everlasting glory and eternal life.

Look at verse 31b. "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." At this time, Jesus had to make a final decision to go to Jerusalem to fulfill God's will for world salvation through his death on the cross. How painful it must have been for him to make the decision! But Moses and Elijah encouraged Jesus to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross as God had planned.

Fourth, listen to him (32-36).

By the way, what were Peter, John and James doing? Verse 32a says, "Peter and his companions were very sleepy...." Climbing up a mountain is strenuous, as David Choi Jr. testified. The disciples were tired. But the main

problem was that they were still more physical than spiritual. As soon as Jesus began to pray, they began to sleep. They slept so soundly that they almost missed the glorious transfiguration of Jesus. But they woke up at the last moment, just as the meeting was ending. Then they glimpsed Jesus' transfiguration glory and Moses and Elijah in glorious splendor. Look at verse 33a. "As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'" Peter was so amazed by the glorious image of transfigured Jesus that he just burst out with what he had in his heart. He wanted to stay there in glory. He totally ignored God's world salvation purpose. He totally ignored the fact that only those who have suffered much can receive this glory from God. Luke comments in parentheses, "(He did not know what he was saying.)" (33b) Peter reveals the sinful nature that wants great glory from God with no suffering.

Look at verses 34-35. "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.'" Here the cloud represents the presence of the holy God Almighty. God himself testified to Peter and the other two disciples that Jesus is the Son of God and the promised Messiah. God told them to "listen to him" – in other words, to accept Jesus' teaching concerning his crucifixion and resurrection. Here we learn the point of the transfiguration to the disciples: They must see the glory of Jesus and decide to take up their crosses and follow him.

Look at verse 36a. "When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone." Moses and Elijah suddenly disappeared. Jesus remained alone. Jesus remains alone in the end. Verse 36b says, "The disciples kept this to themselves...." The transfiguration of Jesus was planted in their hearts as a spiritual reality. Although they did not understand its meaning at the time, it became a source of inspiration and power for them to participate in the suffering of Christ.

Today we learned that Jesus is the holy God Almighty. Jesus planted his glorious image as God in his disciples to help them take up their cross of mission with hope to share his glory in the kingdom of God. May God plant Jesus' glorious image in our hearts through Bible study and prayer until we can take up our own cross of mission daily.