

Resources:

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson. *The Transfiguration of Christ Sermon*. Believers Chapel
Pastor David Thompson. *Luke 9:27-36 Sermon*. Texas Corners Bible Church
Dr. Thomas Constable. *Mark 9:1-8 Sermon*. Plano Bible Chapel

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson made the argument that this topic of the transfiguration has been so neglected throughout the years in Bible teaching, but it shouldn't be, because it's just as significant as any other key event in Jesus' life. The transfiguration is on par with the birth of Jesus, the temptation of Jesus, and the baptism of Jesus.

JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION GAVE VISIBLE EVIDENCE TO HIS DISCIPLES THAT HIS WORD WAS TRUSTWORTHY.

I'd like us to study this topic by asking and answering 7 questions.

Question #1 - What does transfiguration mean?

Webster's defines the word transfigure as #1 To change the form or appearance of #2 EXALT, GLORIFY.

Transfigure means to change in appearance.

The Greek word that Matthew and Mark use to describe Jesus' transfiguration is *metamorphoo*. This word means to transform or change. This is where we get the word metamorphosis in English. Metamorphosis is the word we use to describe the drastic change in the life of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly.

But the word that the New Testament authors used to describe this event in the life of Jesus was like that. He transformed before their very eyes. They saw Him totally different. His physical features changed, and it was a glorious transformation.

Question #2 - Where in the Bible do we read about the transfiguration?

The three texts of the transfiguration are found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. **Matthew 17:1-8. Mark 9:1-8. Luke 9:28-36.**

Question #3 - What did Jesus' transfiguration look like?

Matthew gives us 5 descriptions of what this event looked like.

(Description #1) This took place in a secluded place on a high mountain.

This event was not open to the public eye. This was a private event. This experience was reserved for a select few. Jesus did not come the first time to display His physical glory before all men. He will do that one day in the future, but during His first earthly life and ministry, He came emptied of His visible glory. But during this unique and short amount of time, Jesus was seen by men in glory.

(Description #2) Jesus was changed before Peter, James, and John

Jesus did not hide himself in order to play some trick on them. There were no secrets involved in this. Jesus was before them in His humble form, then He transformed to His glorious form right before the disciples.

(Description #3) Jesus' face shone like the sun.

This would indicate that Jesus' face shined so bright that they could hardly look at him.

(Description #4) Jesus' clothes became white as light.

Matthew did not say white as wool or white as snow. He said white as light. There was an indescribable radiance to His clothing.

(Description #5) Jesus was accompanied by two men of God - Moses and Elijah.

Jesus had come up there with three men, but all of a sudden, two more were added to the party. The disciples saw two men appear in their midst talking to Jesus, and these two men would have come right out of heaven, or maybe as Jesus called it in Luke 16, Abraham's bosom.

There was apparently no doubt as to who these men were. It was none other than Moses and Elijah. How did the disciples know who these men were? I don't know, but they knew. This was Moses and Elijah standing right before them.

Moses was the great prophet of God who God used to give the Law to Israel. Elijah was a great prophet of God, raised up by God to do amazing works for God among the nation of Israel. Between the two of them, we could say they represented the Law and the prophets. And Jesus had declared that He came to fulfill all that was in the Law and the prophets.

In addition to what Matthew wrote, Mark noted another description.

(Description #6) Jesus' clothes were whiter than humanly possible.

Nothing could compare to the whiteness of Jesus' clothing. Mark noted that these disciples were looking at something that was truly impossible with man.

In addition to Matthew and Mark, Luke noted 2 other descriptions.

(Description #7) Jesus had taken them up on the mountain to pray.

This event happened during a prayer meeting. Jesus brought three of His closest disciples with Him to go pray. He got them out of the hustle and bustle of a town. He got them away from distractions. He took them out in God's creation. They hiked a mountain. I'm sure that gave them plenty of time to think as they looked out to see what God's handiwork had made.

(Description #8) Peter, James, and John had all fallen asleep and woke up to Jesus in a transfigured state.

Apparently, Jesus was the only one who kept his focus during the prayer meeting. The disciples had fallen into a deep sleep. Maybe they were exhausted from the hike. Maybe they were drained from the constant pressures of ministry life. Maybe they had been going for a good while with early mornings and late nights. I don't know the circumstances that made them so tired, but this wasn't the only time the disciples were sleeping when Jesus told them to pray.

Question #4 - Who were the people involved in the transfiguration?

There were 7 persons involved in this transfiguration event.

(Person #1) Jesus.

Jesus went about making some of the most outrageous claims of all time. He told people that He alone could provide people with eternal life, and He declared that anyone who did not submit themselves to His word would completely miss out on having life as it's intended to be. If Jesus was going to make such big claims, He needed to have some evidence to back up His claims. So, this transfiguration is another one of those evidences to prove that His claims were true.

(Person #2) Peter.

Peter appears to be the leader of the bunch when it comes to the 12 disciples. There must have been a confidence that Peter had that made him a natural leader. He wasn't afraid to speak up. Sometimes that got him in trouble, but other times, Peter would say profound statements, statements that only God could reveal to him.

(Person #3) James the son of Zebedee.

James was a pretty rough guy. He and his brother, John, were nicknamed by Jesus sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). James was a competitive kind of guy (Mark 10:37). He wanted to win. He wanted to achieve spiritual greatness. James actually ended up being the first apostle to be killed for his faith (Acts 12:2). That would tell me he went on to be a bold man of God.

(Person #4) John the son of Zebedee.

John, like Peter and his brother James, was a fisherman (Mark 1:19). He knew a thing or two about manual labor. He knew how to work hard. He could have been just a young teenager when he was called to follow Christ. He wanted to know spiritual truth. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist before becoming a disciple Jesus (John 1:35-42).

(Person #5) Moses

What we learn by the fact that Moses was there is that this indicates that physical death is not the end of life. We are talking about 1500 years after Moses' death, he shows up, is still alive, and is talking with Jesus.

We do know that Moses did go up on a mountain in the land of Moab and physically died in the presence of God. God apparently was the only witness of Moses' death, and God Himself buried Moses, but this event tells us that Moses' physical death was not the end of Moses. He continues to live on for eternity because He was right with God.

(Person #6) Elijah

Elijah was a significant prophet of the Old Testament. He was a prophet who helped the nation of Israel wake up to the things of God and helped turn the nation back to God.

Something very interesting about Moses and Elijah is that they both met with God on a mountain. In Exodus 19, Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, and in 1 Kings 19, Elijah met with God on the same mountain.

Elijah's death, like Moses' death, was pretty unique. He was raptured up in a whirlwind. He was caught up directly to heaven. He didn't really ever die physically. He was just taken up to heaven.

Between Moses and Elijah, not only do we have two guys that represent the Law and Prophets, but we have two guys that could represent the two avenues by which a person goes to heaven. We

studied this in message #13 of our Inheriting the Promises series. Believers will go home to be with the Lord in heaven either by death or by rapture. For Moses, it was death. For Elijah, it was rapture.

(Person #7) God the Father.

Just like God the Father made an appearance during Jesus' baptism, God the Father spoke from heaven again at Jesus' transfiguration.

Between these persons, we have three witnesses from earth seeing Jesus in radiant glory, we have two witness from heaven confirming that Jesus is the glory of God, and we have the ultimate witness, God the Father, confirming that Jesus' words are true. The Scriptures record six witnesses to the event of the transfiguration. Two men from heaven, three men from earth, and God the Father Himself.

Question #5 - Why did the transfiguration event happen?

I will suggest to us 8 reasons why this event took place. There could be more. There could be less, but this is what I see.

(Reason #1) To prove His statement that some standing there would see Him in glory in the kingdom before tasting death.

One week before the transfiguration, Jesus said, "*truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*" That is the exact wording of Matthew 16:28, but if you read Mark and Luke you will notice the same statement was made just before the transfiguration in both of those accounts as well.

Jesus declared that one day He would come in glory and establish a kingdom. History tells us that has not happened yet, and the Bible would tell us that is still a future event after the Tribulation. But Jesus said to that crowd of people that some standing there listening to Him were going to get to see Him in glory, coming in His kingdom. In order for some of His listeners to see Him coming in His kingdom in glory, He took 3 of His closest disciples with Him to a mountain to give them a preview of what is to come.

(Reason #2) To prove that life is truly gain when it is given up to Him.

Jesus also declared one week before the transfiguration that, "*whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.*" Jesus said that in Luke 9:24. Jesus made the claim that in order to gain life, one must give up his life for Jesus. That is a huge claim of Jesus, but that claim did not come without evidence to back up His claim.

Jesus showed these three men His glory, and they got to see Moses and Elijah. That certainly would solidify that life is truly gain when it is given up to Jesus. The abundant, eternal life comes when a person gives everything he is to Jesus.

(Reason #3) To provide witnesses to validate His statement about His death and resurrection.

Just before this transfiguration event, Peter had made that great profession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One of God, and the Son of God. That statement of faith led Jesus to begin telling His disciples that as the Christ of God, He was going to suffer and die.

The disciples did not want to hear that. They thought He was to reign as king over Israel and establish a peaceful kingdom for Israel, but God had other plans. Jesus needed to suffer and die first. Peter even tried to rebuke Jesus. Peter tried to tell Jesus that God would forbid Jesus from dying, but Jesus said in Matthew 16:23, "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.*"

Jesus had just told them He was going to die and be raised back to life. They were going to have a hard time believing Jesus. In order to validate that statement, Jesus took three of His disciples on a mountain to show them His glory and show them a discussion between Him, Moses, and Elijah about His death and resurrection. Luke recorded that they were talking about Jesus' departure from this earth that would soon take place in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

(Reason #4) To prove His authority.

The fact that Moses and Elijah were there to talk about Jesus' accomplishments would indicate to these three Jewish boys that Jesus really did have authority above and beyond Moses and Elijah. And to top it off, Peter didn't get rebuked by God the Father with the phrase "listen to Moses." God the Father told Peter to listen to Jesus. After the Father spoke, all they could see was Jesus. Moses' and Elijah's ministries had come and gone. It was time to focus on Jesus.

Jesus' transfiguration proved to His disciples that He had authority to say what He said. Even Moses and Elijah were subject to Christ.

(Reason #5) To humble the disciples and deepen their dependence on Him.

Peter tried to speak up and say something in a moment when he should have just stayed quiet. Peter said let's make three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He probably would have gone on to say, and three more, one for James, one for John, and one for me, but while Peter was still speaking, God the Father said to Peter, hush.

Maybe Peter's suggestion of making the tabernacles meant that Peter thought he had woken up, and the kingdom had been established. He could have been so overwhelmed in the moment and in light of the feast of booths taking place, he thought, this is it. The kingdom has arrived.

Regardless of Peter's intentions, one thing is certain. Peter was humbled in that moment. The disciples may have gone up on that mountain with Jesus in pride. These were the inner three. They may have thought, we are the elite group here. But as they came down from that mountain, you can be certain, they were in awe of Jesus, and they were not thinking highly of themselves.

(Reason #6) To allow Jesus' disciples to be eye-witnesses of His glory.

Peter spoke about the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16 when he said, "*we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*" John also noted in John 1:14, "*and we saw His glory.*" Peter and John were two eyewitnesses of Jesus in glory. I think one of the reasons why the transfiguration happened was so that these two could know what they believed, because they knew what they had seen. In fact, it was Peter and John who would later say in Acts 4:20, "*for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.*"

(Reason #7) To give a preview of His future glory.

In Mark 8:38, Jesus boldly declared that He will come in the glory of His Father. The transfiguration gave the disciples a preview of coming attractions. This was a preview of the millennium. Jesus had just declared that he was going to die, but also that He would rise again

and come again in glory. This event, I'm sure, would plant seeds in the minds of the disciples that Jesus had the power to bring in a glorious kingdom, even if He died.

(Reason #8) To prove that Jesus knows everything regarding eternal life.

Jesus spoke consistently about eternal life. He made it clear that apart from Him, no one has eternal life. The transfiguration proved to those three disciples that Jesus really did know what He was talking about. Because of Jesus, these men got to see eternal life in action. They got to see Moses and Elijah, two men who are eternally alive after physical death. Jesus' transfiguration proved that He knows everything regarding eternal life.

Question #6 - Does the Bible teach that anyone other than Jesus could be transfigured?

I don't think there is anything in the Bible that truly compares with Jesus' transfiguration. I have, however, observed 3 instances in the Bible that appear to be similar to the transfiguration, but I wouldn't say that they are equal to the transfiguration. They are just similar.

(Biblical Observation #1) Moses' face was radiant after spending time in the presence of God.
Exodus 34:29-35

When Moses would meet with God and receive instruction from God, there was a shining radiance to Moses' face that reflected the glory of God's presence. When Moses spent time in the presence of God, his face literally shined. People were afraid to look at him because of this. He had to cover his face with a veil because people were too afraid to even look at him. As far as Moses was concerned, he didn't even know his face was shining. It was others that saw him differently even though he didn't feel different.

(Biblical Observation #2) Believers are told that they will one day receive glorified bodies like Jesus. **1 Corinthians 15:53; 1 John 2:2**

Believers in Jesus are told that one day we will be given new physical bodies. Right now, we have bodies that are all on the same path. Every one of us has a body that is getting closer to death with every passing second. But one day, our bodies will change, and we will be given new bodies. These heavenly bodies will be bodies that will never die and decay. After Jesus was resurrected, He was seen in a body that was fit for eternity, and one day all believers will have a body that is fit for eternity.

(Biblical Observation #3) Believers are told that looking on the glory of Christ transforms them into the image of Christ, from glory to glory. **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

Paul develops the argument that those who focus on law as a means of righteousness before God are blinded like they have a veil over their face. They can't see truth and can't see Christ, but for those who look to Christ as the means for righteousness before God, they have the veil lifted and are free from the law. They are free from the slavery that the law produces, and they are free from the penalty the law demands.

Now, the law was delivered in glory. That is why Moses' face shone. But, the law was a ministry of death. The law enslaved people to sin, even though it was glorious. The law couldn't free people, but Christ's work on the cross could. When Christ came and nailed that law to the cross, He provided a far more glorious ministry of the Spirit that gives life.

And for those who have placed their faith in Jesus, the more they focus their life on Him and the more they look to Him, the more they will transform to be like Him. From one degree of glory to

the next, the more a Christian looks at Christ and looks to Christ, the more that person will look like Christ.

Question #7- Is there a lesson we can learn from the transfiguration?

Spending time in the presence of the Lord will change you.

How much time have you spent in prayer this week? How much time have you spent reading the Word this week? How much time have you spent being taught the Word this week? How much time have you spent thinking about God this week?

And can the people around you tell? Do the people you spend your time with see Christ radiating from your face? Do you the people you work with say, there is something different about the Christian person, he has this spirit about him that tells me he lives in light not in darkness? Have your friends and your family noticed a change in you? Can they see that Christ is transforming you day by day to be more like Him?

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