

The Transfiguration of Jesus
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Original: 4-14-24 and 4-21-24

Text: Mark 9:1-13 (see also Matt. 16:28-17:1-13; Luke 9:27-36)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Transfiguration of Jesus

Central Idea of Message: The glory shining through Jesus in the transfiguration will one day shine through each Christian too, and should even be in process now in every Christian's character as each is transfigured/transformed into his likeness.

Introduction: Episode 43. Jesus has just laid down the challenging rules of engagement for those who would choose to follow him. In simple terms, the cost of discipleship is willingness to die even a cruel death for the sake of Christ Jesus, since we are told to take up his cross and follow him.

The transfiguration of Jesus affirms his path as that of a suffering and dying Messiah. He himself would do exactly what he had just demanded that his followers do. Such a challenge had, undoubtedly, begun to separate the sheep from the goats.

Here is Mark's narrative of the transfiguration, which is very likely based on Peter's eyewitness experience.

I. The Transfiguration on the Mountain (vv. 1-8)

A. Jesus' announcement (v. 1)

1. He told the multitude in very solemn terms ["Truly I say"] that some of those standing there at that time would see something quite remarkable
2. Some of those standing there would not "taste death" until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power
 - a) Not taste death
 - (1) Graphic reference to a violent type of death (cf. Lane 312)
 - (2) Jesus was also predicting the death of each of those listening, even the ones selected to see the impending glorious presentation of the kingdom of God
 - (3) This is the prediction even for men who would be faithful to God
 - b) See the kingdom of God: curtain pulled back

- c) Come with power: Jesus' glory and dignity on display
- 3. **Jesus declared that a powerful display of God's kingdom and Jesus' own glory and dignity would soon be displayed to a select few**
- B. Jesus is transfigured (vv. 2-4)
 - 1. Jesus takes the "inner circle" with him: Peter, James, and John the brother of James
 - 2. Brought them up to a high mountain by themselves: perhaps Mount Hermon
 - 3. Jesus was transfigured before them (vv. 2-4)
 - a) He assumed a different, heavenly form (v. 2)
 - b) His garments became radiant and exceedingly whiter than any launderer on earth could ever get them (v. 3)
 - (1) Something supernatural happened to his garments
 - (2) His glory emitted an unprecedented and inexplicable white glow
 - (3) White expresses his purity and holiness
 - c) Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus (v. 4)
 - (1) Probably representing the Old Testament Law [Moses] and the prophets [Elijah]
 - (a) Moses and the prophets had spoken of the Messiah
 - (b) Writings from both had been fulfilled in Jesus
 - (c) **The Law and the prophets met in Jesus and endorsed his gospel, thus Jesus' work was a designed continuation, expansion, and fulfillment of the work of Moses and Elijah, indeed of the entire Old Testament**
 - (2) Elijah is the more prominent one according to the grammar and Moses is said to be "with him"
 - (3) God provided a miracle that registered with both sight and sound
 - (4) But how did the three from the inner circle [Peter, James, and John] recognize historical figures whom they had never seen [Moses ca. 1445 B.C. and Elijah ca. 860 B.C.]?

- (a) The disciples likely knew the Old Testament Scriptures well enough to discern the identities of these two men based on descriptions of each one of them in the Old Testament
 - (b) **Jesus might very well have called Elijah and Moses by name**
 - (c) **God perhaps allowed the three disciples to experience a heaven-like recognition of those whom they had never met just as Moses and Elijah surely recognized each other**
 - (d) Please note, again, the value of the Old Testament, which had faithfully recorded much from the life and times of both Moses and Elijah
 - (e) Moses had died before entering the Promised Land and God had buried him where nobody knew and with no grave marker, presumably so neither his body nor his grave would be set up as a shrine to be worshiped
 - i) See Deut. 34:5-8
 - ii) See Jude 9
 - iii) **We see that Moses finally made it to the real "Promised Land"!**
 - (f) Elijah, the rugged Old Testament prophet and nemesis of Ahab and Jezebel, had been taken to heaven alive in a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11)
- (5) What were Moses, Elijah, and Jesus talking about?
- (a) Luke 9:31 records that they were talking about Jesus' departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, meaning the betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion
 - (b) "Departure" is probably a reference to his impending death on the cross
 - i) Leaving the disciples behind to carry on the work

- ii) Leaving the earth after his post-resurrection appearances
 - iii) His ascension (Acts 1:8-11)
 - (6) This conversation confirmed that Jesus was following God's path for his life, which included execution by crucifixion
 - 4. Vision only or physical reality? Who knows?
- C. Peter's impulsive reaction (vv. 5-6)
 - 1. He, addressing Jesus as [Rabbi] Teacher, told Jesus that it was good that he, James, and John were there (v. 5)
 - a) Addressing Jesus at this time as Rabbi suggests that Peter still didn't fully grasp the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, and certainly not as the Son of God (cf. Lane 320)
 - b) Peter suggested constructing three tabernacles [booths made of intertwining branches like huts]: one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus, but why?
 - (1) Commemorating the event?
 - (2) Honoring each?
 - (3) Just babbling ridiculously out of fear?
 - (4) But could erecting tabernacles not have led to idolatry?
 - (5) Jesus didn't let him build any!
 - c) Peter probably didn't want to leave
 - (1) Wanted to extend the experience and even relive it over and over, hence, the suggestion of building three tabernacles
 - (2) We can't stay on the mountain forever - yet
 - d) Peter's idea for three shrines is a bad one, if for no other reason than placing Moses and Elijah on an equal par with Jesus, when in reality neither is even close!
 - e) Peter would later reference this day in 2 Pet. 1:16-18 because it had made a lasting impression
 - 2. Peter, James, and John were all three terrified (v. 6)
 - a) Please note the objective [verifiable by others] nature of this incident
 - b) This was no illusion or subjective mirage

- c) Mark said that Peter did not know what to answer regarding the vision of the transfiguration
 - d) Maybe it would have been better not to say anything
- D. A cloud formed (v. 7)
- 1. The cloud formed and overshadowed them all, which certainly reflects the Mount Sinai experience of Moses
 - 2. A voice was heard speaking out of the cloud, which constitutes a theophany
 - a) **A theophany is an encounter with God in some tangible way, typically through seeing a vision or a physical reality, or hearing a voice**
 - b) **This cloud likely represents the Shekinah [glory] of God, which is symbolic of God's divine presence, so now the three disciples had experienced in the transfiguration of Jesus both a Christophany and a theophany**
 - c) "This is my beloved Son, listen to him!"
 - (1) Affirmation of Jesus' identity as more than "the Christ," he is the Son of God (Turlington 339)
 - (a) As Peter had just earlier confessed
 - (b) Revealed only to these three "inner circle" disciples at this time
 - (c) Same statement spoken at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17)
 - (2) Jesus is on a higher level than Moses or Elijah, than the Law or the Prophets (cf. Cooper 147)
 - (3) He is to be heard!
 - (4) Listen to him instead of to others [including Peter right then]
- E. The theophany is suddenly over (v. 8)
- 1. The three looked and Moses and Elijah were gone
 - 2. Only Jesus remained
 - 3. Jesus was still Jesus before, during, and after the transfiguration event

II. **The Prediction of Death and Resurrection (vv. 9-13)**

- A. Jesus issues an order of silence with a deadline (v. 9)
 - 1. As they were coming down from the mountain

2. The order not to relate what they had seen until the Son of Man should rise from the dead was presumably because their understanding of Jesus as Son of God and Messiah was still too superficial and, therefore, incomplete such that what they might say would likely generate *more confusion than clarity*
 - a) Son of Man
 - (1) Title of deity, messianic
 - (2) **As Son of Man, Jesus would, strangely, both suffer and be exalted**
 - b) Jesus was telling them plainly that he must die and that he would rise from the dead, but both his crucifixion and his resurrection would stun them, for they, ridiculously, anticipated neither
 - c) **The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus would provide the three disciples with much needed clarity to the meaning behind the transfiguration**
- B. The three disciples began to discuss with one another what rising from the dead might mean (v. 10)
 1. They were dumbfounded
 2. What should have been simple to understand soared right over their heads!
 3. **These three disciples believed in the resurrection of the body after death (cf. John 11:24), for they were not Sadducees [who didn't believe in angels or in the resurrection of the body], but they could not fathom the Messiah [Christ], the Son of God, being crucified in order to be raised**
- C. Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first (v. 11)?
 1. The discussion between the three disciples resulted in them asking Jesus why the scribes, the experts in the Old Testament and the Law, say that Elijah must come first
 2. On this fact the scribes were quite accurate, which is one part of the Old Testament that they had not misconstrued
 - a) See Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6
 - b) John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi (Matt. 11:13-14)
- D. Jesus' response (v. 12)
 1. "Elijah does first come and restore all things"

- a) Repentance from sinfulness was the only way the tribes of Israel could be restored in relationship as the people of God
 - b) By preaching a powerful message of repentance, John the Baptist was preparing the way for the ones who would repent to receive Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Matt. 17:11-13)
 - c) "Elijah does come and restore all things": now the disciples begin to understand that John the Baptist had fulfilled the prophecy of Mal. 3:5 (cf. Robertson 1:340)
2. Jesus then asked the three, "How is it written of the Son of Man that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"
- a) Son of Man: Jesus' favorite designation for himself
 - b) The suffering and treatment with contempt were predicted in Ps. 22:6 and Isa. 52:13 - 53:12 and Jesus was now applying these texts to himself
 - c) Please note the predictions from 700 years earlier and their fulfillment in Jesus!
- E. Elijah has indeed come (v. 13)
- 1. **John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the coming of a prophet in the likeness of Elijah who ushered in an era of spiritual renewal for Israel, although many hearers rejected his message**
 - 2. And the Scriptures had predicted that this forerunner of Christ, whom we now know to be John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 17:11-13), would be mistreated much like Elijah was [a wicked woman married to a king desperately wanting to execute the prophet]
 - a) Ahab and Jezebel [Elijah]
 - b) Herod Antipas and Herodias had fulfilled this prophecy by ruthlessly mistreating and beheading John the Baptist
 - 3. Jesus was saying that the horrific mistreatment which had murdered John the Baptist awaited him as well

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) With the exception of Enoch and Elijah, death is coming for the best of men and women as well as for the worst (v. 1).

(2) The Bible says that Jesus was *transfigured* right in front of Peter, James, and John. This is the same Greek word [metamorphoô] used in Rom. 12:2 which says that Christians are not to be conformed to this world but *transformed* [transfigured] in character (v. 2)!

(3) The glory shining through Jesus in the transfiguration will one day shine through each Christian too, and should even be in process now in every Christian's character as each is transfigured/transformed into his likeness (v. 2).

(4) The transfiguration of Jesus was a stunning glimpse of his return in glory (v. 3).

(5) Like Peter, we should want to extend and even relive powerful spiritual experiences as often as possible, but still be willing to come down the mountain and serve the interests of Christ, forever motivated and guided by those exceptional moments of insight and inspiration (v. 5).

(6) Mountain-top spiritual experiences are often used by God to prepare us for ensuing challenges (v. 5).

(7) Moses and Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 2:11) were as real as Jesus, and were alive (cf. Deut. 34:1-7), so the appearance of Moses and Elijah to Peter, James, and John demonstrates the reality of life after death (v. 8).

(8) Suffering and even death will be transformed into sparkling, radiant glory for every person who has repented of sin and placed faith in Jesus as Lord!