

The Transfiguration

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[0 : 00] Can you turn back please with me to the passage we read in Luke chapter 9.

This evening we're going to be looking at the section from verse 28 to verse 36, the section that's known as the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We'll maybe read the words of verse 35 again. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one, listen to him.

We're all aware of how important it is in our judicial system to have eyewitnesses who are prepared to stand up and tell a court exactly what they saw as a crime was being committed.

It's very hard for the justice system to try and convict somebody who's accused of a crime if there are no witnesses to that crime actually having taken place.

[1 : 11] And so to be an eyewitness, it's a vitally important role. And it's a role that if you're going to be an eyewitness, and some of you may have been in various court cases, it's something that you're going to need to have a good memory for.

Because certain lawyers, if you're on the stand giving witness to a particular crime that was taking place, the defence lawyer will try to ask a series of questions about what it is that you thought you saw.

And from smaller details to some of the bigger details about your testimony, the defence lawyer will try and see if he can find any inconsistencies, even in any of the small details, and so then tell the judge or the jury or whatever, well, if the eyewitness can't be trusted in these small details, then how can you possibly trust them when it comes to the main thrust of their evidence?

And so to be an eyewitness in a trial, we have to make sure that we have a good, clear recollection of the incident that took place. Now, if that incident that you were trying to recall was a life-changing incident, then it would be even more easy, it would be even easier for us to be able to recollect what actually took place.

You see, this incident that we have read together about, the transfiguration, is an incident that Peter would never forget. It wasn't because of his untimely comments in verse 33 that he would never forget this particular incident, but he was an eyewitness of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ being revealed on earth.

[2 : 53] And for the rest of his life, this man Peter never forgot what he saw. And so in the second letter that he writes, he recalls how he saw the glory and the majesty and the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ upon that mountain.

Because this was an incident that would live with him for the rest of his life. Because as in the months and years that followed this incident, he became more and more aware of what this incident meant.

It was something that would stay with him forever. And tonight what we are going to do is we are going to listen to what this passage has to say to us. We're going to use some of what Peter says about this passage, but we're going to seek to apply the teaching of this passage to our situation as we approach another Lord's table.

Now, we're going to put Peter, by way of introduction, on the stand just now. Because it was Peter himself who classed himself as an eyewitness. And so we're going to ask Peter a number of questions, just by way of background to this particular situation.

So the first question we're going to ask Peter is, tell us, Peter, how you managed to end up being on this mountain with James and John and with Jesus, and how you managed to witness this particular occurrence.

[4 : 11] Well, Your Honour, Peter would turn around and see. For me to explain that, I need to tell you about a couple of conversations that Jesus had with his disciples. So, Your Honour, you need to bear with me while I tell you about this particular conversation.

Because Jesus asked us one day who people thought that he was. And we gave some various answers, because most people at the time did think he was some kind of religious man from the past.

But then, Your Honour, Jesus changed the question as to who do people think, as to who do we think that Jesus was. And I answered that he was the Christ of God.

But, Your Honour, after I gave that answer, Jesus started talking about his death. And he started talking about suffering. And being honest, Your Honour, I took offence at what I heard Jesus saying.

So I tried to correct him. But I really ought not to have done that, Your Honour, because I made a fool of myself. I ought not to have done that, because I was thinking from an earthly perspective, and not recognising what Jesus actually had to do.

[5 : 08] And so Jesus corrected me. In no uncertain terms, he corrected my misunderstanding. But it was after that, Your Honour, that Jesus said that some of the disciples would not die until they saw the kingdom of God.

Now, I'll be honest, Your Honour, I didn't have a clue what that meant. But, until eight days later, or just about a week later, when James and John and myself went with Jesus up to this mountain, as was the norm, Jesus would pray.

And he prayed, and he prayed, and he prayed, and he prayed, and we just couldn't stay awake. And then all of a sudden, I don't know what it was that aroused us from our sleep, but when we opened our eyes, we saw that Jesus looked completely different to how we'd ever seen him look before.

His face was totally transformed. His clothing, it was so bright, we could hardly see it. And to be honest, Your Honour, if I was there on my own, I would have maybe doubted what I was seeing.

I thought maybe my mind would have been playing tricks on me, but I wasn't on my own, because if John was here, he would tell you the same thing. If James was here, he'd tell you the same thing as well. We saw Jesus, his appearance, transformed when he was on that hill, on that mountain.

[6 : 19] And Your Honour, it has never left me until this day. So that's a background here. Let's notice three things of what this passage sees to us. The first thing that this passage tells us is the brightness of the glory of Jesus.

We've all had the privilege of having a tremendous summer this year. We can't really complain as we head into the winter months about bad weather because of the good weather we've had up to now. Now, one of the particular groups in our society who were delighted by the heat wave that swept across Britain in July were the various manufacturers of sunglasses.

Because the sun was so bright, you had to have something covering your eyes, and the manufacturers of sunglasses were delighted, because it meant their sales for the year were going to be up. But when we think of the incident here of Peter, James, and John, they had no such thing as sunglasses to stop the dazzling light from Jesus being transformed.

Rather, they were confronted with this light that they had never seen before. Well, what is this light? Well, light, as you will know in the Bible, signifies the holy presence of God.

And here, what Peter, James, and John are seeing and witnessing is something that's from another world. They're not witnessing some phenomena of this earthly world that we live in.

[7 : 43] They were witnessing something that had its origins in heaven above. And they were confronted by this glory radiating of Jesus. In the same way that the heat radiates from the sun, so on this mountain the glory was radiating from Jesus.

And they were left in no uncertain terms that they were seeing something remarkable for the first time. Well, what were they seeing? Well, they were seeing here on earth for the first time the glory of Jesus' divine nature being revealed.

Because up until that point, people were looking at Jesus, and some people may be a bit confused, thinking, well, how can this carpenter have all this knowledge and this ability and this power to transform lives physically and spiritually?

And so they knew he had abilities that nobody else had, but that was only a glimpse of the power that he had, the glimpse of who he really was, because it was a human nature that was being witnessed by the people who were seeing what he was doing.

But on this mountaintop, the veil was being lifted away. And so Peter, James, and John were being confronted by the reality of who Jesus is. You know what it's like when you go to a wedding, and as the congregation stand and the bride comes down the aisle, there's a veil over their face, and you can make out certain features of the bride's face through the veil.

[9 : 13] But at a certain point throughout the ceremony, the veil is taken up and is put over the bride's head, and you see there the beauty of the bride. On this mountaintop, the veil that had been covering the glory or the divine nature of Jesus was being moved up and over so that people were being confronted by the reality of who exactly was right in front of them.

And it was none other than the Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth himself. And Peter, James, and John, it's no wonder they were stunned by what they saw, because they saw a sight that had not been seen at any point before.

But you have to ask the question, when we're speaking about this brightness of the glory of Jesus, we've got to ask, well, why is it that Jesus was transformed or transfigured in this particular way?

And part of the answer is that it was to encourage the Lord Jesus for the work that he was going to be doing. When Jesus is here, receiving and experiencing the glory and the power once more that he had in heaven above, he has been reminded of what is his.

He has been reminded of who he is. Do you remember at the start of his ministry when the devil was trying to tempt Jesus? He began his temptations by saying, if you are the Son of God, if you are the Son of God, if, if, if.

[10 : 40] Whereas here on this mountaintop, Jesus is being reminded, has been encouraged by the glory that he has of himself, being reminded that although the people who he's living among in this world were despising him and were rejecting him, were trying to exploit him, some trying to kill him, although the people were responding like that, it didn't take away from who he was.

And so as he had that glory before he left heaven to come into this world, he is here experiencing that glory again, the glory that he will once again have when he leaves this world.

But there's something that must happen before Jesus can have this glory once again. And this something that must happen is the most important event in the history of the world.

This something that must happen is his death on that cross at Calvary, the great sacrifice to set us free from our sins. And here, as Jesus was aware of what was waiting for him at Calvary, of what he was proceeding towards, as Jesus has been reminded of the glory that will once again be his, he is encouraged as he approaches that cross because that glory will once again be his because he is the Son of God.

You see, when we speak about the glory of Jesus and when we read about this description of how Peter, James and John were amazed at his majesty and at his honour, and when we read in the next section of this young boy who was healed and we have the summary there in verse 43 that all were astonished at the majesty of God, you see, there will come a day when every single person who has ever lived will be confronted by the majesty of God.

[12 : 30] Because when the Lord Jesus returns, his glory will be seen. But by that point, it will be too late to do anything about it. But it will be seen and he will return in power.

And when we are confronted by the majesty of God at the end of this world, we need to make sure that we have made our peace with God before that event has actually happened. I just want to ask you a question tonight.

Have you made your peace with God yet? Are you ready to meet with Jesus? Are you ready to be confronted by the majesty of God? If not, then don't let another hour go past without asking the Lord to have mercy on you and to save you.

Well, we've seen here how this passage tells us something of the brightness of Jesus' glory. The second thing I want to think about is the presence of Moses and Elijah here.

Look at verse 30. Behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure. You can ask the question, well, why were Moses and Elijah present with Jesus on this mountaintop?

[13 : 39] What was the significance of their presence here with Jesus? And to answer this, we have to think something about what Moses and Elijah represent.

Because very simply, they represent the way in which God has communicated to his people in the Old Testament. Moses is tied up with the law, the law of God.

Elijah is tied up with the prophets of God. And so when we have Moses and Elijah present here, we're being pointed to the fact that the messengers of God, of God's truth in the Old Testament, their presence here, as Jesus is being encouraged as he proceeds towards the cross, means that somehow the work of the law and the work of the prophets is tied up with the work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary.

And so Moses and Elijah are here encouraging Jesus as he moves towards this cross because their work, God's work of his people in the Old Testament, depends on the work that Jesus is going to carry out by dying on the cross at Calvary.

Because Moses and Elijah are as interested in the sacrifice of Jesus as the people in the New Testament church would be interested in the sacrifice of Jesus.

[15 : 00] Because the Old Testament law and prophets point forward to this great sacrifice. The New Testament church points back to this great sacrifice because Jesus is the key to understanding the whole of Scripture.

Now that means on a practical level that we can't afford to neglect any part of Scripture. It's always a temptation for us if we're maybe pushed for time in our quiet times to maybe go to something in the New Testament that will be maybe slightly easier for us to understand than to carry on our readings through the Old Testament.

And the danger of doing that is at a time if we can go months and months and months without getting anywhere near the Old Testament. If we neglect the Old Testament we'll be neglecting part of God's work that pointed forward to the cross of Calvary where Jesus died for us.

If we neglect the Old Testament in favor of the New Testament without a proper balance then we'll be unbalanced believers and we won't be living as God would want us to be living. So the presence of Moses and Elijah here was to draw our attention to the fact that their work and the whole of the Old Testament was dependent on the work of Jesus at the cross at Calvary.

Some of you will have heard the reports last month of what took place in St. Petersburg that the leaders of the G8 met together to discuss various financial matters and defence matters and as it was to discuss the deteriorating situation in the Lebanon at that time.

[16 : 36] And normally when you have a meeting of the G8 you don't tend to find out in detail what was being discussed. Normally you will have some kind of bland statements that try to summarise what it is that was discussed at the meeting between the various leaders.

Now that was until this last G8 summit in St. Petersburg and to the great hilarity of the media and of certain political watchers Tony Blair forgot to switch off his microphone.

And so we heard a conversation between George Bush and between Tony Blair as to what they thought of Kofi Annan and how they were going to try and deal with the various situations in the Lebanon.

And it was quite embarrassing for them and some of you will have read the transcript of the conversation in some of the newspapers. But normally we don't get told what the ins and outs of the discussions were at the G8.

Now when this meeting that had infinitely more significance than any G8 meeting ever will when this meeting took place on this mountaintop between Moses and Elijah and the Lord Jesus Christ were not left guessing as to what their discussion was about because we're told quite clearly in verse 31 that they spoke about his departure.

[17 : 55] The topic of conversation was what Jesus was going to do on the cross. Now in some of the other versions of the scriptures that you may have in front of you it'll be classed as his exodus or his exit but they're all trying to point us in the same direction pointing towards that event whereby Jesus would leave this world after accomplishing what he came into the world to accomplish.

But when we have the word translated as exodus it correctly tells us and links us in to something happened in the Old Testament that has significance for what Jesus was going to do at the cross at Calvary.

Because the word exodus conjures up in our minds images of these hundreds of thousands of Israelites leaving the land of Egypt. They're leaving because Pharaoh had finally relented.

The firstborn throughout the whole of the land of Egypt had died. The angel of death had gone and killed the firstborn in every household in Egypt except those who were covered by the blood of a lamb that was slain.

And the blood put on the lintel and on the sides of the doors. the doorposts to make sure that when the angel of death saw that it passed over because the blood was protecting them from that death.

[19 : 15] And so because of the protection that God had given to them the Israelites this Old Testament people because of the protection he had given to them they were secure and they were safe from this judgment of God.

And so then they were free to leave. The exodus could then take place with all of these people then leaving the land of slavery land of captivity and heading towards the promised land.

You see at the cross of Calvary it's an exodus that's taking place because at the cross of Calvary there are a people who are going to experience what it is to be protected from the wrath of God because of blood that has been shed.

It's not their own blood it's not the blood of a four-legged wee lamb rather it is the very son of God because he is going to be the sacrifice the lamb who is going to die for his people and because he's going to put himself in that position where he's going to know no protection from the wrath and anger of God because he's carrying our sins he's paying the penalty for our sins he's dying the death we deserve because he's going through that we will never ever have to face the wrath and anger and judgment of God for our sins if we're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when Moses and Elijah are speaking of the exodus of Jesus they are aware of what Jesus is going to do they are aware that the blood of Jesus is going to be shed now you see well how is this encouraging to Jesus?

[21 : 00] You said earlier on that part of the reason for the transfiguration was to encourage the Lord as he proceeded towards the cross how does that encourage him? Well very simply in this way you remember when Peter gave his evidence at the start of our sermon he said you know I took offence at what Jesus said when mentioned his exodus there wasn't this support or this encouragement rather Jesus hears a voice from the from the pit of hell almost no you can't do that and yet you see the contrast between the reaction of the disciples and the reaction of Moses and Elijah here because they are not dismissing what Jesus has to do far from it they are concentrating on what Jesus has to do and they are encouraging Jesus as he approaches the cross because they know he has to die to allow his people to live because if he doesn't die then we will be slaves to sin forever and we'll never ever enter into the presence of God so the encouragement that Jesus receives is by being is having the glory once again that is his is being encouraged by Moses and Elijah as he approaches the cross to realise that his work is not going to be in vain but that his work is being anticipated by in heaven above you see there's one challenging application from thinking about what Moses and Elijah and Jesus spoke about and it's this we find it so easy as Christians to talk about the weather our work football whatever and yet for some reason and I include myself we find it difficult at times to speak about our Lord and what he's done for us and when we consider that here in the presence of heavenly beings in the presence of glory the topic of conversation was the departure the exodus of the Lord Jesus Christ does it not challenge you and me as to why we are not having our topic of conversation about being the Lord

Jesus Christ and what he's done for us if in glory we're going to be speaking about what Jesus has done why are we not speaking about it here on this earth it is a challenge that I have to face and it's a challenge that you have to face as well we can find it easy to talk about anything almost at times except Jesus we've seen tonight how the brightness of the glory of Jesus is seen in this passage we've seen and talked about something of the presence of Moses and Elijah and we've seen here thirdly the voice that's heard from heaven Moses and Elijah are appearing to leave the scene when Peter decides to speak and we have Peter's words in verse 33 Master it's good that we're here let us make three tents one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah not knowing what he said you can't really blame

Peter in some senses for wanting to stay here on this mountaintop with the Lord and seeing his Lord being glorified you can't blame him for wanting to stay there because if we'd been in the same situation we'd probably want to stay as well but unfortunately Peter is falling into the same trap that he fell into earlier on in the chapter when he tried to correct Jesus about his death because Peter is still looking on the earthly level to a degree because as far as Peter is concerned all he wants is the presence of Jesus with him all the time he couldn't bear the thought of Jesus dying and being parted from his Lord and he wanted to be in this situation on the mountaintop with Jesus forever if he could but there's an inherent problem there for Peter is that if Jesus didn't face the death on the cross and if Jesus had stayed on that mountaintop then there would be no salvation for men and women boys and girls like us because we cannot get away from the death of Jesus it is not enough simply for Jesus to have lived he had to die and for Peter to want to keep

Jesus away from death and to stay in that position on the mountaintop there that would not have secured his eternal freedom and this is something that time and again we cannot escape from the death of Jesus some people are quite happy to talk about the life of Jesus and his impact upon this world and the great teaching that he's given and they'll very rarely speak about his death apart from saying well it's a bit of a tragedy what happened but I'm quite sure other tragedies happened at that time as well but you see it's not simply talking about his death in that kind of blasé manner the death of Jesus is what gives us life tonight those of us who are believers in here we could not have a relationship with God without this death and for Jesus to have stayed on this mountaintop and done what Peter had asked him to do would have meant he wouldn't have gone to the cross and he wouldn't have set us free and so when Peter says this he's not corrected by Jesus as he was when he was spoken to about his death instead this cloud envelops them and this voice booms out from the cloud the words of verse 35

God the Father speaking this is my son my chosen one listen to him now Peter James and John they knew their Jewish history they knew that when the clouds came down or they knew that clouds had a special significance in the Old Testament that thinking of the glory of God the Shekinah glory speaking of the temple and speaking of how God has revealed himself on Mount Zionai with the clouds and they knew that when it came to speaking about God the Father's presence that clouds signified God was there and here they're being spoken to out of this cloud by God and they've been given words that in some way are quite reminiscent to some of the words that were given at Jesus' baptism except this time it's not to encourage Jesus as it was at his baptism rather it's to encourage the disciples as they will then move on from this point see and witness their Lord dying then witness the resurrection of the Lord and go out into the world with the gospel message because they are the ones who are going to be encouraged by hearing the voice of God here because the voice of God says to them two things the first thing it does is that it tells them exactly who Jesus is

[27 : 55] Peter is having it confirmed that this is the Son of God the Christ of God that this isn't someone that they can have their own impressions of this isn't someone that they can decide which bits to take and which bits to leave that this is someone special this is the Son of God and they've been told that he is the Son of God that he is the chosen one of God the one chosen to die to set his people free but not only that the disciples are told to listen to what Jesus has to say it's not enough for them to recognize who he is they have to listen to respond to what he says and so they are told specifically to listen to what Jesus says because the words that he will give to them are words that they will then take unknown to them at this time throughout the world so that men and women boys and girls would be saved you see tonight for most of us our problem is not a problem of recognition because you know growing up in the culture that most of us have grown up in certainly some of us anyway we grow up recognizing who Jesus is we know that he is the Son of God or we have an appreciation as to what that might mean him being the Son of God and for us that's maybe not one of the key challenges tonight the challenge might be in the second half it's listen to him if we have this knowledge of who Jesus is why are we not listening to what he says to us those who aren't believers tonight if you say you believe that Jesus is the Son of God if you say that you believe he died on the cross and those who do believe in him will spend an eternity in heaven with him because that's what the Word of God says then why don't you listen to him when he says come to me

I'll never cast you away you see we have a responsibility not only to recognize who Jesus is but to respond to what Jesus says we have a responsibility as unbelievers tonight to respond to what Jesus says and to flee to him and to trust in him and to know the rest and salvation that he alone will give as believers tonight we have a responsibility to listen to what he has said to us in his Word to listen to the direction that he gives and as we approach the Lord's table to listen to his command do this in remembrance of me it's not enough to recognize Jesus we have to do what he says and those of you who are believers tonight those of you who do recognize Jesus and are trusting in him as Lord and Savior then do what he says and remember his death by sitting at the Lord's table on the Lord's day it's very simple you see I'm not ready do you love the Lord well you're ready because that is the requirement to sit there if you love the Lord the words of God the Father as this is my son my chosen one listen to him

God the Father says we have to listen to what Jesus says let's make sure we are listening and we will be there obeying the command of Jesus to remember his death on the Lord's day morning I want to close by thinking about what I certainly feel is one of the most tremendous things about this passage it's certainly not an original thought it's many other folks have come up with it long before I have but it's this think of Jesus he has been in the world for 30 odd years by this point probably 32 turning maybe 33 he's been in the world for that length of time he has taught in many different villages he has come across an awful lot of unbelief yes there have been some who have been touched by his words he has healed an awful lot of people to the point that he's now trying to be or people are now trying to exploit his healing potential and he knows that the thought of the cross is no longer just a thought that's years away but that it's getting closer and closer and closer and it's not an appetizing thought because

Jesus had a human body in the same way we had a human body and we don't like pain we don't like the prospect of pain we would run a mile from it but yet Jesus knew that was coming and yet think of this when Jesus is there being transformed and transfigured and he's seen again the glory that belongs to himself the glory that's waiting for him in heaven above do you know what the most remarkable thing is he turned around headed back down the mountain and headed on that path to Calvary now from a human perspective we would be thinking that surely the temptation would be great to say well I've done enough surely surely I don't have to go to that I've taught them I've healed them I've shown them your ways your truth surely that's enough humanly speaking we would think that would be a temptation if we were in that situation but Jesus here knowing the glory that he had knowing the glory that was waiting for him in heaven he turned went down the hill went back into that situation of unbelief healed this boy carried on that path knowing he was going to be betrayed knowing he was going to be arrested knowing he was going to be tried in a kangaroo court knowing he was going to be convicted knowing he was going to have nails thrust through his hands through his feet hanging on that cross dying there and the worst thing of all he knew by doing that he would experience the forsaking of his God of his Father for the first time in his existence he left that glory to come down and go to the cross what a marvellous saviour we have he was willing to do that for us he was willing to go through all that for people like us who let him down but yet people like us whom he loves and who he has made his own people what a tremendous Lord and may we know his presence and may we know a clear vision of him as we proceed into the rest of this weekend and seek to give him glory and give him honour in Jesus name we'll pray

Lord our God we thank you for the passage that we have been thinking about tonight we thank you that it tells us something of the glory that our Lord Jesus possesses and we are so thankful that he was willing to leave that glory not just once but twice to go to that cross so that he would die for us we can scarcely ever even think for a moment that we were ever worth that but yet in your sight our souls were worth that so that your son would die to set our souls free and so we pray that tonight we would not only recognise how glorious and how majestic our God is but that we would seek to listen to what you have to say to us and we pray Lord that you would encourage your people as we approach your table we pray Lord that you would challenge and lead those who are not yet your people to the cross at Calvary and we pray that you would save souls and that you would take all the glory in Jesus name

[35 : 34] Amen we're going to conclude tonight by singing in Psalm number 121 Psalm 121 we're going to sing the whole of this Psalm logros GET Sorry Sir what's wrong andec that you would know we are not yet in the head