

INTRODUCTION

In this series called Parables and Miracles of Jesus, I am constantly reminding you that there is a parable in every miracle and a miracle in every parable. Today we're going to examine the miracle of the Transfiguration of Jesus. When you understand the spiritual significance in this miracle, it can transform your life.

Sometimes people miss the meaning of the miracles of Christ. It reminds me of a story that made the rounds a few years ago about the governor of Montana who commissioned an artist to paint the thoughts that went through the mind of General Custer at Custer's last stand. The artist worked away for weeks and weeks, and finally, there came the day for the unveiling of this painting. Imagine the governor's surprise when he saw a cow with a halo around its head, standing in the center of the picture, and coming over the hill was a file of Native-Americans with sacks of cotton on their backs.

The governor said, "What do you mean by this? What does this portray?" And the artist said, "Well, governor, it should be very clear. These are the thoughts that went through General Custer's mind at the battle. He was thinking, 'Holy cow! Where did all these cotton-pickin' Indians come from?'"

That artist missed the point of his assignment! In the same way, some people just read through the miracle of the Transfiguration and miss the powerful truth contained there.

Matthew 17:1-9: "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.' When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'"

The transfiguration of Jesus is an important turning point in Jesus' ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record it. The Transfiguration has been the subject of many religious paintings, but none is more famous than Raphael's Transfiguration that hangs in the Vatican Museum. This was Raphael's last, and some say greatest, work. Raphael really didn't want to paint this picture because he was old and he wanted to retire in Florence in peace. But when the Pope gave him an order, he had to comply. It is considered one of the earliest examples of the baroque style of painting. Jesus is seen floating in the air talking to Moses and Elijah while Peter, James, and John are lying prostrate on the little mount. At the bottom, Raphael included the scene that was happening at the foot of the mountain where the other eight disciples were trying to help a young man who was tormented by a demon. Judas is the scheming character in black in the left

background. Some art experts
observe Judas bears a striking
resemblance to Pope Clement VII
who commissioned Raphael to
paint this scene. Perhaps Raphael got the last word!

Transfiguration
By Raphael
1518-20
Oil on Wood

However, the actual site where the Transfiguration happened was far from Raphael's imagination. Most scholars believe the Transfiguration happened on Mount Tabor, about 15 miles from Nazareth. I've been to the top of Mount Tabor many times. There is a winding road leading to the top with switchbacks too sharp for a tour bus to negotiate. So, ancient Mercedes taxis make the 10-minute drive to the top. Some of the taxi drivers have been driving the route for over 30 years, and some of the cars have over 600,000 miles on them. The drivers know the route so well they spend most of the time with their heads turned talking to the passengers. My favorite is one guy who drives really fast and every time he screeches around a turn he goes, "Oh hallelujah!" The passengers do a lot of praying!

In this message I want to share with you three life-changing lessons that we can learn from the Transfiguration.

I. SEEING THE REAL JESUS TRANSFORMS YOU FROM AN ADMIRER TO A WORSHIPPER

"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." (17:2)

His disciples had witnessed Jesus' power through His miracles, but when Peter, James, and John saw the *real* Jesus shining like a supernova, they *knew* Jesus was more than an ordinary man. As He was praying, He was transfigured. The Greek word is the verb *metamorphoo*. We get our word metamorphosis from it. It means "a change on the outside which comes from within." When a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, metamorphosis has occurred. Jesus was changed from an ordinary looking man into a figure of light with brilliant beams radiating from his body. The reason His clothes became white was from the light emanating from His body. I imagine Simon Peter rubbing his eyes, wondering if he was really seeing what he thought he was seeing.

This is a very important event in Jesus' life, because it confirms He was no mere man. He was God in the flesh. For most of His 33 years of human existence, His human flesh obscured and veiled His Deity. But at this time, His true divine nature was revealed.

The writer of Hebrews pulls back the veil and lets us know who Jesus really is. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (Hebrews 1:3) Respected theologian, Dr. Kent Hughes, wrote in his commentary: "For a brief moment the veil of Jesus' humanity was lifted and His true essence was allowed to shine through. The glory which was always in the depths of His being rose to the surface for that one time in His earthly life. Or, put another way, He slipped back into eternity to His pre-human glory. It was a glance back and a look forward into His future glory!"

The word "glory" carries with it the idea of glowing brilliance. When the angels visited the shepherds outside Bethlehem, the "glory of the Lord shone all around them." There is a brilliant light associated with the character and nature of God. There was a light glowing from within the Holy of Holies called the Shekinah glory of God. Peter, James and John saw this Shekinah glory in Jesus. Have you glimpsed that glory? What do you think Jesus looks like now? What is your mental image of Him? Do you picture Him as having long brown hair, a beard and kindly brown eyes? That might have been what He looked like in the flesh, but remember, that was only a disguise He wore for 33 years. That picture of Jesus has prevented many folks for seeing Him in all His glory.

Do you have any idea what Jesus will look like when you see Him? You don't have to wonder because the Apostle John saw a vision of the glorified Christ and he wrote, "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire...His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:14, 16) Sound familiar? That's how Jesus appeared on the mountain.

In Exodus 33, Moses asked God directly to let him see His glory. God told Moses if he looked at His face, he would die instantly. So, the Lord placed Moses in a cleft in the rock and His glory "passed by." Moses was allowed to glimpse the "afterglow" of God's glory but that was enough. Moses came down the mountain with his face shining and glowing as if he had gotten the sunburn to end all sunburns. My friend, you don't have to see the glory of God with your eyes—in fact, it would blind you. But you do have to see Jesus in His glory with your eyes of faith. Have you had the vision of His glory? When you do, you can no longer be satisfied as an admirer of Jesus, you will fall down before Him in worship the same way Peter, James, and John did.

II. ANTICIPATING JESUS' RETURN TRANSFORMS YOU FROM A BELIEVER TO AN EVANGELIST

"There appeared before them Moses and Elijah, taking with Jesus." (17:3) Two visitors appear on the mountain and they are talking with Jesus. One is identified as Moses and the other as Elijah. By the way, people wonder if we will be able to identify each other in heaven. This passage removes any doubt that we will maintain our personal identity in heaven.

Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Noah and Jonah, or Abraham and David? Once you understand the significance of Moses and Elijah, you'll begin to see why Jesus allowed the disciples to witness His transfiguration. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets, but it goes much deeper than that.

Matthew doesn't record the subject of the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah, but in Luke we're told, "they were talking about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." They were talking about Jesus' upcoming death. The New Testament uses the word "departure" interchangeably with "death." Just before he died, Paul wrote, "The time of my departure is at hand." I like that. "Departure" means you are headed somewhere.

Moses and Elijah are unique because they both had unusual deaths. They weren't actually deaths at all; they were more like "departures." The last chapter of Deuteronomy tells us on the day

Moses died God took him to a tall mountain and showed him the Promised Land. Basically God said, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham...I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it." (Deuteronomy 34:4) Moses died there in Moab and it says, "The Lord buried him in Moab...but to this day no one knows where his grave is." (Deuteronomy 34:6)

There is evidence Moses was raised from the dead, because we read in Jude verse 9 that the archangel Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. So, it's entirely possible Moses was raised, because there he was, 1,600 years later standing before Jesus. Finally, he got to enter the Promised Land, because Mount Tabor is in the heart of the Promised Land.

We know exactly what happened to Elijah. We are told in 2 Kings 2 Elijah didn't die. Instead, he was "caught up" by a chariot of fire and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind.

Now, think about those two deaths. Moses died and was raised. Elijah didn't die, but was caught up to heaven. Is that ringing any bells for you yet? The Transfiguration is a preview of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These two visitors at represent two kinds of saints at the return of Christ described in 1 Thessalonians 4.

A. MOSES represents those who will be raised from the grave at Jesus' return

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

The Bible says when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first (they have six feet further to go). Moses is a representative of all of the precious saints who have died. The moment a Christian dies, their soul and spirit goes to be with Jesus. Paul wrote, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8 KJV) When Jesus returns, these bodies will be resurrected and these folks will live with the Lord forever. That includes the bodies of Christians who have been burned, lost at sea, or otherwise destroyed. Have you had a loved one who has already died? Perhaps your grandparents or parents or spouse or children have already died. When Jesus returns, they will be resurrected, like Moses. And you will recognize them just as Jesus recognized Moses

B. ELIJAH represents those who will be caught up at Jesus' return

"After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Those of us who are alive when Jesus returns won't die—we will be raptured. The English word "rapture" doesn't appear in the Bible. We get it from the Latin word *rapio*, which is the translation of the Greek word *harpazo*, which means "caught up." Just as Elijah didn't die but was "caught up" to heaven in a chariot of fire, that's what will happen to us when Jesus returns.

The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in 132 B.C. Seventy-two translators were used so the Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the "Septuagint" (LXX). Long before Jesus promised His return and Paul wrote about it, the translators of the LXX were translating 2 Kings 2. Can you guess which Greek word they used to describe what happened to Elijah when he was "caught up" in a fiery chariot? They used the word *harpazo*—exactly the same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. So, Elijah was "raptured" without dying and that's what is going to happen to those of us who know Jesus.

We read what's going to happen again in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, [die physically] but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." Then Paul goes on to say, "then the saying that is written will come true:... 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?' As we are being raptured, those of us alive will be singing, 'Death where is your sting—you didn't get me!' Those saints who are in the grave will be rising up taunting the grave saying, 'Grave, where is your victory? You thought you had me, but I'm set free!'"

Are you excited about the Second Coming of Jesus? The first Christians were. Dr. Alexander McClaren writes: "The Early Church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death or heaven. They were not looking for a cleft in the ground called a grave—but for a cleavage in the sky called glory!"

You are always wise and prudent to make plans for your funeral. Prearrangement makes sense. But I'm really not looking for a cemetery; I'm looking for Jesus. Years ago, before the blessing called the no-call list; we used to get a lot of calls from telemarketers. They always seemed to know exactly when you sitting down for supper when they called. One on evening I got a call from a telemarketer selling cemetery plots. I let her read through her prepared statement and then I said, "I have a couple of questions." She could sense a sale so she said, "Of course, ask me any question you have." (Good telemarketers have a script anticipating every conceivable question, with a good answer provided) I said, "Do you rent those cemetery plots?" "What?" "Do you rent those cemetery plots?" I could hear her turning through the pages of her script trying to find the question. Finally she said, "Why would you want to rent a cemetery plot?" I said, "Well, first of all, I don't think I'll ever need one because Jesus is going to come back and rapture the church. But even if I do die before He returns, I won't need a grave very long, because He'll be coming back to raise me from the dead." By now I could tell she was flustered because she didn't say anything—so she finally just hung up. That's the first and only time I've ever had a telemarketer hang up on me!

When you live looking for the return of Christ, you can't be content to simply believe, you will possess a desire to share the gospel with those around you who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. We have the message of hope and forgiveness while people around us are dying without any hope.

Imagine for a moment that salvation is like being rescued from drowning. If you know the Lord, there was a time when you were drowning and somebody shared Christ with you—they threw the life ring of the gospel to you and you grabbed it. Now you're safely sitting in the boat called

the church. But all around you there are people drowning and they're calling out for help. You're sitting on the life ring. Are you going to be content to sit there with your own salvation, or will you share the good news? When the truth of the Second Coming grabs you, you can't be content to be merely a believer; you'll become a personal evangelist.

III. OBEYING GOD TRANSFORMS YOU FROM A FOLLOWER TO A LEADER

"A voice from the cloud said, 'this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!'" (17:5)

Simon Peter was always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. He was the kind of guy who felt it was his job to fill every moment of silence with some verbal observation. He does it again saying, "Lord it is good for us to be here." Peter really had a grasp for the obvious! But like the rest of us, he kept on talking and got deeper in trouble. He said, "Let's build three tabernacles here: One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." These were to be shrines to commemorate this occasion. He made a big mistake when he put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. But God corrected his misunderstanding. He said, "THIS is my Son, listen to HIM!" Then the disciples saw Jesus only.

This is first of several times that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to experience the presence of God. These three were with Him when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. They heard the agony in his voice and saw the sweat drops of blood on His forehead. The lesson here is that the more time you spend with the Lord, the more you are motivated to be a leader instead of just a follower. Even though Peter denied the Lord three times, he went on to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was the fiery preacher at Pentecost who stood up boldly and preached that the Jewish leaders had murdered the Messiah. Three thousand people were saved on that day. James went on to become the first of the disciples to die a martyr's death. In Acts 12 we're told Herod had James killed by the sword. Tradition says Herod had James thrown off the pinnacle of the Temple, the southeastern corner of the wall around the Temple Mount. It is a 200-foot drop to the rocky valley below. This tradition says James survived the fall, but Herod had soldiers finish the job with a sword. Along with Stephen, James led the way for thousands of others who have lost their lives because of their faith in Christ.

It's still happening in the world today. On my recent visit to the Middle East, I heard from very reliable sources about a Muslim woman who accepted Christ. Her husband took her into the desert and murdered her. It was widely known, but there was no prosecution, because it was considered an honor killing.

John went on to live the longest of all the twelve. Diocletian boiled him in oil, but he survived. He was then exiled to the Island of Patmos where God gave him the vision contained in the Book of Revelation.

In the last verse of Matthew 16, Jesus said some of the disciples would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His glory. John saw it and wrote about it!

The Transfiguration changed them forever. Years later Peter remembered this experience on the mountain when he wrote: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." (2 Peter 1:16-18)

God is calling every follower to become a leader. Worship is NOT a spectator sport. Your relationship with Jesus shouldn't be one of many parts of your life—it IS your life. Will you step up and become a leader?

CONCLUSION

The transfiguration teaches us a great lesson about worship. Worship is not a place; it is a person. You don't need a building and you don't even need a mountaintop. It's not about a place; it's focusing on the glory of Jesus. It's meeting Jesus and listening to Him. Did you notice the Father didn't say, "This is my Son, talk to Him?" Sometimes worship is just being still and quiet and listening for that still small voice. Remember when God called little Samuel's name? Samuel said, "Speak Lord for your servant is listening." Most of us rush into the presence of the Lord with a shopping list of needs and say, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." Jesus is speaking—are you really listening?

His players held legendary Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, in such high regard that whenever he spoke, nobody else would talk. Quarterback Bart Starr once said, "Coach Lombardi spoke with such authority that when he said 'sit down' you didn't even bother to look and see if there was a chair, you just sat down where ever you were." Oh, that we would listen and obey like that!

Will you allow His Transfiguration to transform you? Just pray: "Lord, speak to me. I'm listening. Jesus, I believe that you are MORE than just a man. You are God, and I worship you. I want to be ready when you return. I want to tell everyone about you before you return! I will be a leader, not just a follower! Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening."

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes