

26. A glimpse of Deity

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The Jewish people were told that they would die if they ever see God face to face. Yet, Moses enjoyed the time with God alone on the Mount Sinai. Time to time, the Second Person in Trinity appeared to His beloved, such as Abraham, Jacob, Joshua and of course Moses. The Bible described Him as the Angel of the Lord. That was the OT appearance of Jesus Christ without His glory.

Today, we are going to see Jesus in His glory on the earth, as known as "Transfiguration. This word 'Transfiguration' means "a marked change in form or appearance; a metamorphosis or a change that glorifies or exalts." A metamorphosis is a change on the outside that comes from the inside. Our Lord's glory was not reflected, but radiated from within.

If you have been in Christianity long enough, you've heard the phrase "The Mount of Transfiguration." It is the only time Jesus showed a glimpse of His glory to any human on the earth.

No other religious leader could show his glory like Jesus. Was this a show off by Jesus? No. It was to show His disciples that He is the Messiah they have been waiting for.

A. A GLIMPSE OF THE DEITY OF JESUS

Matthew 17:1-3 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

The text does not name the place where this miracle took place. Many Bible scholars believe that it was on Mount Hermon which rises to about 9400 feet above sea level. It is located close to Caesarea Philippi.

The transfiguration was the significant point of Jesus' ministry. It was the half way point toward His difficult journey. At this point, Jesus could look back His cradle and looked forward His cross. He knew that it was the time for Peter, John and James to have a glimpse of His glory.

The real miracle in this transfiguration is not Jesus showing His glory and majesty. Because that was what God has - glory all around Him.

The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying this glory.

Heb 2:5-7 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands.

Do you know we too have transfiguration? When we received Jesus as our Savior and the Lord, He transfigured our hearts to be His by sending His Holy Spirit into us.

When we get to heaven, we will have another transfiguration from mortal to immortal.

Why Moses and Elijah? Because Moses represents those who die and go to glory, and Elijah represents those who are caught up to heaven without death (as in the rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They also represent the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah).

Matthew 17:4-8 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

What were they talking about? According to Luke 9:31, they were talking about His impending death on the cross. Maybe they were thanking Him on behalf of the mankind.

For the believer, death is not a one-way street into twilight zone. It is an exodus—a release—from the bondage of this life into the glorious liberty of the life in heaven – freedom from the world system, freedom from a vain and empty life, and freedom from iniquity.

Have you ever waken up from your sleep and started to blurt out something that doesn't make any sense? The person who woke you up look at you funny? Another thing, did you notice when you catch someone sleeping, they startle to wake up and start to lie, "I was not sleeping." Yeah sure, you were checking holes in your eyelids. That is what Peter was doing.

The Gospel writers Mark and Luke point out that Peter didn't know what he was saying when he was talking. But the effect of his words was to put Jesus on an equal level with Moses and Elijah, building equal tabernacles for each of them.

When God said to Peter, "Hear Him," it was God's way to say, "Shut up, Peter."

It was a nice thought for Peter to say, "Let's stay here forever." Yes, it is great to have mountain top experience with God. But the people who need the Lord Jesus are down in the valley. We must come down to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to them.

Matthew 17:9-13 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is (1) coming first and will (2) restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

The Jewish people had been taught that Elijah would come first to prepare for the establishing of the kingdom. Was the presence of Elijah on the mountain the fulfillment of this prophecy according to Mal. 4:5-6?

Mal 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Jesus gave a twofold answer to their question. Yes, Elijah would come as Malachi prophesied. But spiritually speaking, Elijah already came in the person of John the Baptist in spirit and power.

When will Elijah come to restore all things? Some people believe that Elijah will be one of the "two witnesses" whose ministry is described in Revelation 11:3. Some people believe that the two witnesses are Elijah which no one disputes, and Moses, since he represent the law of the OT. I disagree. I believe that it was Elijah and Enoch according to Heb 9:27. Who are two people have not tasted death yet? Elijah and Enoch. According to Heb 9:27, everyone will face death and then face God. God's Word is true and without error. According to Rev 11:8, they, too, will die to fulfill Heb 9:27.

Heb 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment

B. THE DEITY OVER THE DEMONS

Matthew 17:14-16 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

Whenever we have mountain top experience, there are troubles and problems waiting for us at the foot of the mountain. However, there are two good things about valley deep experience. First, it won't last forever. God will bring it to the end and He will be with us throughout the whole valley. He will not give us more than what we can handle. Second, we get to be closer to the Lord while we are in the valley like never before. Through the valley deep experience, we get to know more about Jesus in depth and He gets the glory. It is no wonder why James says the same thing in his book.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Matthew 17:17-21 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Our Lord's first response was one of sorrow. The disciples' unbelief and spiritual undiscipline were a burden to Him. What must our Lord feel as He looks at powerless believers in America today?

“Removing mountains” was a Jewish figure of speech for that which was incomparably difficult, since mountains were thought to be the most stable of all things. Mustard seeds were used to define a proverbially small quantity. Jesus is thus telling the disciples that nothing God asks them to do will be impossible if they trust Him.

Some Bible teachers teach that we need our faith bigger than a mustard seed to get anything done. That is not what Jesus said. He says, “if you have faith as a mustard seed,” that means “as small as”. Yes, in many times our faith are not even as big as a mustard seed.

What was the reason for the disciples couldn’t cast out the demons from the boy? Jesus answered them, “Because of your unbelief.” I believe that most of us have the same problem today. Lack of faith in God, lack of prayer, lack of discipline in our spiritual lives and lack of meditating on the Word, that is why we have unbelief. Remember, Jesus didn’t do miracles because of the people’s unbelief in Nazareth.

C. THE DEITY OVER HIS OWN DEATH

Matthew 17:22-23 Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

These frequent reminders about Jesus’ suffering and resurrection were forgotten by the disciples until after His resurrection.

D. THE DEITY OVER NATURE

Matthew 17:24-27 When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?” He said, “Yes.” And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” Peter said to Him, “From strangers.” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.”

Can you imagine what kind of fish story Peter is going to tell to all of his friends after this catch? “Once I caught this big fish with a mouthful of money.”

Being a former tax collector, Matthew is the only one who recorded this miracle in his Gospel. But he was affirming our Lord’s kingship through the miracle.

What a paradox! The King of kings was too poverty-stricken on the earth to pay the annual temple tax of only a half-shekel! As we learned from Heb 2:5-7, our Lord Jesus laid aside His majesty and glory and rich to come to set us free from our slavery. What a God we have!

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Mountain top experience is there to prepare us for valley deep experience.

To have mountain top experience with God more often, we need to be in the Word and spend time in prayer. There is no other way.

2) It is not that difficult for us to put someone who is godly or whom we admire on the pedestal and almost to the point we believe everything that person says. We must not do that.

There is only One who deserves our adoration, complete trust and worship. That is our Lord Jesus.

3) Lack of faith, lack of prayer, lack of discipline in our spiritual life, and lack of the Word of God equal unbelief.

God will not do His mighty work in our lives, if we have unbelief.