

17. Transforming into His image

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The movie Transformer came out this year and made millions dollars. The idea was some aliens from outer space which can turn into robots or cars and trucks instantly came to earth to have their battle. The entire human race just happened to be caught in the middle.

I watched a preview of this movie and was intrigued by how a robot can transform himself into a Chevy Camero or a semi truck.

But what I am really interested in is not transforming myself to a robot or a car, rather transforming into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This morning we are going to learn how and why Jesus briefly revealed His true glory to His three disciples and how we also can be transform into His image.

A. ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Luke 9:28-36 Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. 30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. 33 Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" 36 When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

Many Bible scholars believe that this transfiguration happened on the Mount Hermon which is located between Syria and Lebanon, and is under Syrian control currently. It is about 35 miles northeast of Bethsaida where the Lord fed 5000 men.

Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, John and James to this mountain range to pray and to be led by the Father in heaven.

"White and glistening" translates a word that has the idea of "flashing like lightning." Jesus' entire appearance was transformed in a brilliant radiance of light. As He prayed, Jesus was transformed right before the eyes of the disciples.

This was not a new miracle, but the temporary pause of an ongoing miracle. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying His glory.

This is the same Shechinah glory that lit Mount Sinai with its "consuming fire" in Exod. 24:17. It is the same glory that went before Israel through the wilderness and filled the Tabernacle in Exod. 40. It is also the same glory that would stun Saul on the road to Damascus and change His life forever in Acts 9.

Appearing also in "glory" were Moses and Elijah. Having come straight from the presence of God the Father, they bore the reflection of His splendor. Moses represented the Law; and Elijah, the Prophet's writings that Jesus had come to fulfill. And now, in this historic moment, the Old Testament was meeting its Messiah.

This may well have been the greatest "Bible conference" ever held on earth. Even apart from the great glory that was involved, here we certainly had the greatest speakers: Moses, the Law; Elijah, the Prophets; and Jesus, who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. We had the greatest topic: Jesus' "decease", which is 'exodus' in Greek, that He would accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses had led Israel out of bondage to Egypt, and Elijah had delivered them from bondage of false gods. But Jesus would die to set a sinful world free from bondage to sin and death.

However, there is a practical lesson here. We, too, can have a spiritual "transfiguration" experience each day as we walk with the Lord.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As we surrender body, mind and will, the Lord transforms us from within so that we are not conformed to the world. The theological name for this experience is "sanctification" - the process by which we become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Father's goal for each of His children.

A couple of side notes, in this meeting, God shows His generosity and kindness to Moses that He eventually brought Moses into the Promised Land after he died. Even though under the leadership of Moses the Israelites came out of Egypt and arrived at the border of the Promised Land, Moses couldn't come into it because of his disobedience to the Lord.

Another thing I'd like to point it out to you is that Peter, John and James somehow recognized Moses and Elijah even though they've never had a chance to see them before. Because of his flat face, I don't think that Moses was hard to be recognized. When we read the accounts of the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, whenever God spoke to him, he fell flat on his face.

In light of this, some of you are wondering, "Are we going to recognize our loved ones who are in heaven when we get there?" Yes, I even strongly believe that we will have a great family reunion without any argument. What a noble concept!

While Jesus, Moses and Elijah are conversing, guess what three privileged disciples were doing? Sleeping. I am comforted because these guys. Even these famous spiritual disciples often snoozing when they should have been paying attention. Time to time, while I study for the services, I fall asleep and drool on my Bible. Then I snore so loud and wake myself up.

Peter woke up and was stunned by what he saw. He didn't know what to say, so he said something stupid. It was something he did best – "Open mouth, insert a foot." I am sure that we can all relate with what he did here.

Peter's true mistake was in that he put Jesus on an equal level with Moses and Elijah – one tabernacle for each of them. We need to be careful with those whom we respect. We should never put another human on the equal level as the Lord. Human fails us, but the Lord never.

What Peter did was so bad that the Father in heaven had to get involved, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" It was His kind way to say, "Shut up, Pete."

Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus on three special occasions. The first was at the Synagogue ruler Jarius' home. The second was on the Mount of Transfiguration and the third was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Each of these events has something to do with death and that the three disciples learned from these experiences some valuable lessons about Jesus and death.

In the home of Jairus, they learned that Jesus is victorious over death. On the Mount of Transfiguration, they discovered that He would be glorified in His death. And in the Garden, they saw that He was surrendered to death.

B. A FAILURE OF TRANSFORMATION

Luke 9:37-42 Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him. 38 Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child. 39 And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him. 40 So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." 41 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." 42 And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.

The comment Jesus made in v41 was something we would expect from an over-worked kindergarten teacher, or an impatient army drill instructor, but it was made by the sinless Son of God. We are prone to forget how patient our Lord had to be while He was ministering on earth, especially with His own disciples who always arguing with one another who is the greatest.

When we compare all three Gospels – Matthew 17, Mark 9 and this chapter, we discover what was lacking in their lives. First on the list was faith. They were part of an unbelieving generation and had lost the confidence in God that they needed in order to use their power. But prayer and fasting were also lacking, which indicates that the nine men had allowed their devotional disciplines to erode during their Lord's brief absence. No matter what spiritual gifts we may have, their exercise is never automatic.

It isn't that prayer and fasting make us more "worthy" to cast out demons. The idea is that prayer and fasting draw us closer to the heart of God, and put us more in line with His power.

C. NOT UNDERSTANDING

Luke 9:43-45 And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, 44 "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to

be betrayed into the hands of men.” 45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.

Jesus had just revealed His glory in two pretty spectacular ways – the transfiguration and the casting out of a difficult demon. Yet, He reminded His disciples that His mission had not changed. He had still come to die on the cross for our sins, and the Son of Man was about to be betrayed into the hands of men.

His disciples couldn’t understand what Jesus intended to do with all these comments about crucifixion and betrayal. His popularity was all time high. While they were thinking physical level, Jesus was trying to convey His true spiritual purpose on earth to them.

D. THE TRUE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 9:46-48 Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, 48 and said to them, “Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.”

It seems that the favorite debating topic among the disciples was which of them would be greatest. As usual, the Lord Jesus dropped another spiritual bomb in their selfish minds, “Have childlike faith and trust, otherwise you ain’t gonna make to be the greatest.” There is a great difference between being childlike and childish.

E. NOT MUCH LOVE FOR THOSE ARE NOT WITH THEM

Luke 9:49-56 Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.” 50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side.”

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” And they went to another village.

This must have been frustrating to the disciples, because it showed that other followers of Jesus were able to cast out demons when they could not.

Perhaps John was trying to impress Jesus with his zeal for protecting His name, but the Lord was not impressed. Believers who think that their group is the only group God recognizes and blesses are in for a shock when they get to heaven.

When the disciples desired to call down fire from heaven upon them – as if they could, Jesus showed them that His mission was not destroy men’s lives, but to save them. Being like Jesus means being merciful to others, instead of harsh with them.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) We cannot be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ unless we dwell in His presence through the Bible and prayer and have faith in Him. There is absolutely no shortcut, no pill to make us to be super-Christians. Learning from the Bible and apply the principles and precepts of God into our lives.

2) Transforming into His image requires daily effort from us.

Each and everyday we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and deny our selfish desires and motives and pick up our crosses and follow Jesus.

3) We need to remember that as much as we long for miracles, however, they are not a cure-all.

Remember what happened to Peter during Jesus' trials? He had witnessed Christ perform hundreds of miracles, including His incredible Transfiguration. If glimpses of the supernatural strengthen faith, Peter's should have been ironclad. Yet, when he denied the Lord three times, his faith folded like a house of cards.