

47. A glimpse of Deity

September 18, 2016

The tourists who visit Great Britain would love to visit Buckingham Palace in London. This nineteen state room palace is not only a great landmark for any tourist, but also it is the place where you can get to have a brief glimpse of the royalty – Queen Elizabeth, her husband, whatever his name is, and other royalties, because it is the official London residence of the British monarch. If you're in the right place at the right time, you might just get a royal wave.

If seeing a human king or queen was special, can you imagine what it would be like to see the King of kings in heaven? There will be no visiting hours, because we will be there for eternity, if you are a born-again Christian. You will get to talk with the Lord and have that great supper of the Lamb with Him.

The ancient 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 Mount Sinai. From time to time, the Second Person in Trinity, appeared to His beloved, such as Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, and Gideon. The Bible described Him as THE Angel of the Lord. That was the OT appearance of Jesus Christ without His glory that is known as Christophany.

This morning, we are going to see Jesus in His glory on the earth, also 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 means "a change on the outside that comes from the inside." Our Lord's glory was not reflecting someone's glory, but simply 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 whom they have been waiting for.

A. A GLIMPSE OF THE DEITY OF JESUS

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 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 5,000 men.

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 to His cradle and look forward His cross. He knew that it was the time for Peter, John, and James to have a glimpse of His glory.

"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.

Jesus allowing His glory to be shown was not a new miracle, but the temporary pause of an ongoing miracle. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, kept from displaying His glory.

This is the same Shechinah glory that lit Mount Sinai with its "consuming fire" in Exodus 24:17; it is the same glory that went before Israel through the wilderness and filled the Tabernacle in Exodus 40; it is also the same glory that would stun Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul, 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 mentioned, 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 the bondage to Egypt, and Elijah had delivered them from the 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.

Under the leadership of Moses the Israelites came out of Egypt and arrived at the border of the Promised Land, but Moses couldn't go into it because of his disobedience to the Lord. However, God shows His generosity and kindness to Moses that He eventually brought him into the Promised Land after he died as we see here.

Another thing I'd like to point 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. As 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, eh?

While Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are conversing, guess what three privileged disciples were doing? Sleeping. I am rather comforted because of these guys. Even these famous spiritual disciples often snoozing when they should have been paying attention. From time to time, while I study for the services, I fall asleep and drool down 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 to what he did here.

In v33, we find Peter's comment that should be considered as contempt against Jesus. Peter puts Jesus on an equal level with Elijah and Moses – one tabernacle for each! Peter was elevating the status of Elijah and Moses while he was demoting Jesus. Jesus isn't just another Moses or Elijah or even a greater Moses or Elijah. Jesus is THE Son of God.

When we don't know what to say, it is best not to say anything at all. Peter thought that he had to say something while he knew nothing. Silence is sometimes most appropriate. I've never regretted just keeping my mouth shut.

It was a nice thought for Peter to say, "*it is good for us to be here.*" 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.

B. THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

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 Malachi 4:5-6?

Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 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 John the Baptist was not a reincarnation of Elijah according to his own words, but he did minister in the role and spirit of Elijah.

C. THE DEITY OVER THE DEMONS

Matthew 17:14-23 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 "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. 16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." 17 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." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 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. 21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." 22 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, 23 and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

Whenever we have a mountain top experience, there are troubles and problems waiting for us at the foot of the mountain. However, there are two good things about the 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 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.

Our Lord's first response was one of sorrows. The disciples' unbelief and spiritual indiscipline were a burden to Him. What must our Lord feel as He looks at the powerless believers due to their lack of faith in America today?

You see, "Removing mountains" was a Jewish figure of speech for that which was incomparably difficult, since the mountains were thought to be the most stable of all things. Mustard seeds were used to define a proverbially small quantity. Jesus is 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, many times, our faith is not even as big as a mustard seed.

What was the reason 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.

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

D. APPLICATIONS

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