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“What really happened at Mount Transfiguration” (Matthew 17:1-13)

17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

4 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.”

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

9 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.”

10 The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

11 Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

Have you ever tried to stare at the sun? If you have, then you would know how difficult that is. It is not only difficult but also harmful to your eyes. Ultraviolet light from the sun floods your retina, resulting in sunburn and, in some cases, literally burning a hole in your retinal tissues. So, it is not a good idea to stare at the sun!

When Peter, James, and John went with Jesus to a high mountain, they were treated to something like a bright sun shining before their eyes. It was Jesus who transfigured into a blazing light before their eyes.



Why Moses and Elijah?

Before their very eyes, Jesus changed. He was no longer an ordinary man. His face shined like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. NIV rendered it ‘as white as snow’ (vs. 2). And that was not all. When the disciples closely looked at Jesus, two other men were standing next to Jesus and talking to him. They were Moses and Elijah, two of the most recognizable characters of the Old Testament.

Why these two people? Why not Abraham or King David?

Moses represented the law, while Elijah the prophets. The phrase ‘the law and the prophets’ is an expression (Matt. 22:40) that sums up the teaching of the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah stood before Jesus, acknowledging and welcoming Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah that the OT anticipated.

Did Peter figure out what was going on? His comment proves he did not. He said to Jesus, “let us build three shelters for the three leaders, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus.”

Wrong! Wrong! You do not equate Jesus with Moses and Elijah! How can you equate God with the prophets? Moses and Elijah are not equal with Jesus, just as you do not equate Jesus with Buddha or Confucius or Mohammed.

(Read the passage carefully and find that only Jesus was changed like a dazzling light. There is no mention of the same for Moses and Elijah. Their job was to focus on Jesus, not attract people to themselves.)

When Peter finished saying these non-sense words, a bright cloud came over and covered them. And the disciples heard a distinctive voice,

“This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (vs. 5).

While Peter’s head was all confused, heaven made it clear who Jesus is, the Lord’s anointed one (the Messiah), that he is well-loved by God, and that we should all listen to him!

Peter was terrified at the voice from above. The disciples fell face down. Jesus touched them and said, ‘rise, do not fear.’ As Jesus lifted them, they saw only Jesus. Moses and Elijah were there no more! The servants were gone, and only the Master remained.



Years later, Peter recalled the Transfiguration event:

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 Pet. 1:16-18)

You can see how important this event was for Peter. How would you have responded if you were on the Mt. Transfiguration that day? Would you not also fall face down in total fear? And would you not appreciate the comforting hand of Jesus as he lifted you?

Who Do You Say I am?

To understand the significance of the Transfiguration event more fully, we must go back to what happened to the disciples six days earlier (recorded in Matthew 16).

All the disciples were with Jesus in the Caesarea Philippi region, known for temples of various gods and goddesses. The disciples must have seen worshippers coming to worship their deities. There, Jesus asked them, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ They gave various answers like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, etc. Then, Jesus asked,

“But what about you? Who do you say I am?” (vs. 15).

That is a crucial question for all of us. We need to have an honest answer to this question.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a long-time agnostic. He taught English literature at Oxford University. He asked the same question, ‘who is Jesus?’ He studied the gospels very carefully and ended up with the trilemma: He is either a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord.

- A lunatic because he was deluded into thinking that he was the Messiah who came to save the world. He acted like one, and he did not know what he was doing.
- A liar because he knew he was not the Messiah. But he acted like one and deceived others. He was a liar and a con artist.
- The Lord because he was the Messiah. Everything he said and did was sincere and trustworthy. We must believe in him as the Saviour and Lord of our lives.



C.S. Lewis concluded that Jesus is the Messiah. From an agnostic, he became a strong follower of Jesus Christ. He wrote over forty books, mostly on Christian

apologetics (defending Christian faith), including *Mere Christianity* and the *Screwtape Letters*.

“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”

You see, it is indeed a pivotal question. Six days earlier, Peter answered the question confidently, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vs. 16). But I wonder how much he understood about this confession.

After Peter’s confession, Jesus dropped a bombshell on them.

‘He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life’ (Matt. 16: 21).

What did Peter say then? He said, ‘Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!’ (vs. 22). Peter did not understand how the Messiah could suffer and even die at the hands of evil people.

So, the Transfiguration incident was a memorable lesson designed for Peter, James, and John (cf. Matt. 16:28). Yes, they needed to listen to what the Messiah said: that he would suffer and die, but he would rise from the dead! The voice from heaven said, ‘Listen to him.’

To help Peter understand the suffering-and-glory aspect of the Messiah, Jesus took them to Mt. Transfiguration. Jesus showed them the resurrected Moses and Elijah, ultimately himself in glory (in dazzling white as bright as the sun).

Lesson for Us

So, what is the point of the Transfiguration miracle to us?

This miracle reminds us of the importance of seeing Jesus as God wants us to see, not as we want to see. Peter had a very different view of the Messiah, and his view had to be corrected. It took M. Transfiguration to start that process (and it would continue well after Jesus ascended into heaven until the Holy Spirit came).



What is your faith composed of? Are they based on the teachings of the Bible? How much of your personal assumptions and convictions determine what you believe?

We must let go of our perception of who God is and who Jesus is, based on our logic or assumptions. Instead, we need to feed our minds with the Word of God and allow the Scripture to teach us who God is. We need to have the Kingdom mindset, the Kingdom values, and the Kingdom worldview.

That is one thing the Transfiguration miracle teaches us.

May the Lord bless you.