

Jesus' Transfiguration

Matthew 17 - Jesus' Transfiguration

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A. Jesus is transfigured.

1. (1-2) The transformation of Jesus before His disciples.

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.

a. **Jesus took Peter, James, and John:** Jesus did not invite all the disciples, but only these three. Perhaps Jesus did this to prevent the account of this amazing miracle being told of before the time was right (Matthew 17:9). Perhaps He did it because these three needed a closer eye than the others!

b. **He was transfigured before them:** What does it mean to be **transfigured**? The word speaks of a *transformation*, not merely a change in outward appearance. The effect was extremely striking; Jesus became so bright in appearance that He was even difficult to look at (**like the sun**).

i. Essentially, this was not a *new* miracle, but the temporary cessation of an ongoing one. The real miracle was that Jesus, most of the time, could keep from displaying this glory.

ii. This happens as a fulfillment of Matthew 16:28. We should remember that chapter and verse divisions were certainly not in the original writings of the apostles, and did not come until the 16th Century.

2. (3) Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

a. Why **Moses and Elijah**? Because they represent those who are caught up to God (Jude 9 and 2 Kings 2:11).

i. More specifically, 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)

b. Also because they represent the Law (**Moses**) and the Prophets (**Elijah**). The sum of Old Testament revelation comes to meet with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration.

b. **Talking with Him:** What did they talk about? Since Moses and Elijah figure together in prophecy (they may be the witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13), they may have talked about the outworking of God's plan, both with the coming passion in Jerusalem, and the eventual Second Coming.

3. (4-5) Peter's equating Jesus with Moses and Elijah is dramatically rebuked by a voice from the cloud of God's glory.

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!"

a. **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:** Mark 9:6 and Luke 9:33 point out that Peter didn't know what he was saying when he said this. But the effect of his words was to put Jesus on an equal level with Moses and Elijah, building equal shrines for each of them.

b. **This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!** The Father, from heaven, rebukes Peter's attempt to put Jesus on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah. Jesus is unique, the **beloved Son** - He deserves our special attention, so **Hear Him!**

c. This clearly puts Jesus above the Law and the Prophets. He is not merely another, or even better law giver or prophet. Jesus is the **only begotten Son**.

4. (6-8) The disciples react with a holy fear.

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.

a. **They fell on their faces and were greatly afraid:** The disciples react in the way most people do when they encounter God in such a close way, or hear His voice from heaven (Exodus 20:18-19, Isaiah 6:5, Revelation 1:17).

i. Encountering a holy God is never a light, frivolous thing. The easy manner in which some recount their "meetings" with God betrays their shallow understanding of who God is.

ii. However, we can compare the reaction of the disciples with how we, if abiding, can appear before Jesus: *And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming* (1 John 2:28). The work of grace is

so amazing, that it gives us this great confidence.

b. **Arise, and do not be afraid:** The disciples are again in awe of Jesus. This helps explain the purpose of the Transfiguration - to reassure the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, even if He would indeed be crucified.

i. Note the context: Jesus just revealed His humiliation and sufferings to them. It makes sense that they receive another divine testimony to Jesus' status as the Son of God at this time.

ii. This event truly impressed the disciples with Jesus' glory. Peter mentions it later in 1 Peter 1:16-18.

5. (9-13) The problem of Elijah coming first.

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 coming first and will 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.

a. **Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?** The disciples had heard that **Elijah must come**, according to Malachi 4:5: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*

b. **Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things:** Jesus reassures the disciples that Elijah will indeed come first. But the first coming of Jesus' did not bring the *great and dreadful day of the Lord*. Instead, the Malachi 4:5 coming of Elijah is probably best identified with the appearance of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13, and the Second Coming of Jesus.

c. **But I say to you that Elijah has come already:** Yet, there is also a sense in which **Elijah has come already**, in the work of John the Baptist, who ministered in Elijah's *spirit and power* (Luke 1:17).

B. Jesus casts out a difficult demon from a boy.

1. (14-16) A demon too tough for the disciples to handle.

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."

a. **Have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic:** This particular boy's epileptic symptoms were demonic in origin (Matthew 17:18), though this certainly could not be said about every case of epilepsy then or today.

b. **So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him:** Sometimes Jesus' followers fail, but Jesus never does. The man was wise for going straight to Jesus when His followers failed.

c. There are "ranks" of demonic powers (Ephesians 6:12), and evidently, some demons are stronger (more stubborn, resistant) than others. Since the disciples had been given the authority to cast out demons before (Matthew 10:8), apparently this demon was more difficult than most.

2. (17-21) Jesus easily casts the demon out.

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."

a. **Because of your unbelief:** Jesus laid the inability of the disciples to cast out the demon at their **unbelief**. To be successful in casting out demons, there must be trust in the Lord God who has total authority over the demons.

b. **If you have faith as a mustard seed:** The faith that we must have is a faith that has more to do with what *kind* of faith it is than with *how much* faith there is. A small amount of faith - as much **as a mustard seed** (a very small seed) - can accomplish great things, if that small amount of faith is placed in a great and mighty God.

i. Little faith can accomplish great things; but great faith can accomplish even greater things. What matters most is what our faith is in, the *object* of our faith. "The eye cannot see itself. Did you ever see your own eye? In a mirror you may have done so, but that was only a reflection of it. And you may, in like manner, see the evidence of your faith, but you cannot look at the faith itself. Faith looks away to itself to the object of faith, even to Christ." (Spurgeon)

c. This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting:

We show our faith in and reliance on God through prayer and fasting. It displays an occupation with and dependence on Jesus.

i. Great prayer and fasting also display earnestness before God that brings answer to prayer. Often, we pray dispassionately, almost asking God to care about things we care nothing about.

ii. We must be willing to go far in breaking demonic dominion. If the devil knows you will give up easily, then it won't be much of a fight. God looks for steadfast warriors who are willing to sacrifice and fight until the battle is won.

D. Jesus and taxes.

1. (22-23) Jesus reminds His disciples about His future sufferings.

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.

a. The Son of Man is about to be betrayed: Though they were frequent, these reminders about Jesus' suffering and resurrection were forgotten by the disciples until after His resurrection (Luke 24:6-8).

b. And the third day He will be raised up: Jesus rarely told His disciples about His coming death without also telling of His coming resurrection. We know that the disciples didn't really comprehend the glorious triumph of the resurrection, because they were **exceedingly sorrowful**.

2. (24-26) Time to pay the temple tax.

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."

a. From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers? Peter gave the quick and natural answer to this question. But then Jesus explained that He is not liable to pay this tax, because the Father doesn't require it of His own Son.

3. (27) Jesus pays the tax anyway, and by miraculous provision.

"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."

a. **Cast in a hook:** Peter was a professional fisherman who used *nets*, not a **hook** and a line. It must have humbled Peter to fish like this manner, and we can imagine that he hoped none of his other fisherman friends saw him trying to catch one fish at a time.

b. **Take that and give it to them for Me and you:** Jesus trusted in the miraculous provision of God. It's not everyday - or any day - that you catch a fish and take a coin out of its mouth. But Jesus used God's provision to pay His taxes - not out of obligation before God, because He is the Son - but out of a desire to not **offend**.