

INTRODUCTION

Did you hear the funny story about the skinny teenager named Billy? He was so thin he had to run around in the shower to get wet. Billy got a job at Six Flags sweeping the grounds, but there was a problem. Billy weighed so little that when the Texas wind would blow, he would lose his balance and couldn't sweep the grounds. His boss saw the problem and told Billy to put a bunch of rocks in his pockets to make him weigh more. So Billy started doing that, every morning before he swept he put rocks in his pockets. Billy was a religious guy, so as he put the rocks in his pockets, he would pray this prayer (wait for it...). “Now I weigh me down to sweep.”

If you are my age or older you might remember where you were on Monday night, July 21, 1969. I was gathered with my family in our living room, and even though it was almost 10 p.m. the kids were allowed to stay up. That was the night that Astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped onto the surface of the moon. He had prepared and practiced what he would say, but at that moment, he was so full of adrenalin that he didn't get it exactly right. He said, “That's one small step for man (he meant to say “a man”); one giant leap for mankind.” Since that statement, 46 years ago, has humanity made more giant leaps forward? After Apollo 11 there were six more manned visits to the moon. There would have been seven, but halfway there, Apollo 13 said, “Houston, we have a problem.” Today, NASA can't even afford to send Space Shuttles into orbit.

In terms of science and technology, we have made great strides, but morally and spiritually, I think our nation and world has regressed. Four years after the first moon landing, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized the killing of unborn babies. They are about to weigh in on the subject of marriage. Let me just remind you that they are the law of the land, they are the Supreme Court of the United States, but they are not THE Supreme Court. There is a much more powerful Judge in heaven and in James 5:9 we read that the Judge (capital J) is standing at the door.

And we're all alarmed at the global expansion of what the White House calls extremism. Let's call it what it is: All these extremists are militant Muslims who are hell-bent on killing infidels. And infidel is anyone who doesn't agree with them. This week ISIS claims to have 71 trained soldiers in the U.S. I think they saw last week in Garland that they better not mess with Texas!

You may be thinking, “Pastor, you're painting such a dark picture. Are you trying to make me depressed?” I just want to paint a dark background to tell you that the only hope for this world is Jesus. Our world is getting darker, and that only makes the brightness of the HOPE we have in Jesus Christ shiner brighter. When you shop in a fine jewelry store, the jeweler often places diamonds and jewels on a piece of dark velvet; it makes the diamonds seem brighter by being on the dark background. I'm not afraid. I'm not pessimistic. I'm excited because Jesus is coming back and I've read the last chapter, and we win!

When we come to our passage of scripture today, it is all about the Blessed Hope we have in the return of Jesus. It is the account of the transfiguration of Jesus. But the transfiguration is a preview, a foretaste of the second coming of Jesus. As you know the chapter and verse divisions weren't in the original Bible. And there should be no division between Mark 8 and 9.

Mark 8:38–9:13. Jesus said, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” So this is the context of what happens next – Jesus returning to planet earth in all of His glory. The text continues in Mark 9. And he said to them, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.” He didn’t mean that some of them wouldn’t die, He was telling them a few of the disciples, three to be exact, would be part of an experience where they would SEE the glory of God’s Kingdom. Keep reading. After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them (even whiter than extra-strength Clorox). And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters (meaning tabernacles or shrines)—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant. And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

The transfiguration of Jesus is an important turning point in His ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record it. The Transfiguration has been the subject of many religious paintings, but none is more famous than Raphael’s “Transfiguration of Christ,” hanging in the Vatican Museum. This was Raphael’s last, and some say greatest, work. Raphael really didn’t want to paint this picture because he was old and he wanted to retire in Florence in peace. But when the Pope gave him an order, he had to comply. At the bottom, Raphael included the scene that was happening at the foot of the mountain where the other eight disciples were trying to help a young man who was tormented by a demon, which is the message for next week. If you look to the left you can see Judas as the scheming character in black. Some art historians observe that Judas bears a striking resemblance to Pope Clement VII who commissioned Raphael to paint this scene. Perhaps Raphael got the last word!

The scene below is darkness, but when you focus in on the top of mount, there is brightness. Jesus is seen floating in the air flanked by Moses and Elijah while Peter, James, and John are lying prostrate on the ground.

So what is the purpose of the transfiguration? It was more than just Jesus showing off that He was God in the flesh. There is an important truth He was trying to communicate. In this message, let’s examine the main truth, and then look at three applications of this truth.

HERE’S THE MAIN THOUGHT: THE TRANSFIGURATION IS A PREVIEW OF THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

One of my favorite roles in life is being Dee Dee—that’s my grandfather name. I love Dee Dee duty. When I get to hang with my grandkids, it’s a happy Dee Dee duty day. Sometimes we go to the movies. Of course, before the main movie, there are always previews of coming attractions. So when every preview ends, we all vote on whether or not we want to see it. We give it a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down. And if it really stinks, we give it a thumbs-down and hold our noses. If we really like it, we give it two thumbs up. The transfiguration is a like a preview of a coming attraction, a literal attraction, the second coming of Jesus Christ. And it is a two-thumbs-up for sure!

In the Journalism trade, the largest headline type is called Second Coming Type. It is reserved for only mega-events. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, when JFK was assassinated, and on September 12, 2001, newspapers used Second Coming Type for the headlines. I think it’s fascinating that even a secular field like journalism recognizes that there is no bigger news than the second coming of Jesus. Actually, according to the Gallup Poll, 66% of Americans say they believe Jesus is going to return. That’s 25% more than those who claim to be born again.

One day the newspapers will announce Jesus has returned. But trust me, you don’t want to be here reading those headlines. Actually, I think that there are enough believers at the Tyler Paper that they won’t publish the morning after the rapture. But I suspect the Washington Post and the New York times will publish that day!

He took Peter, James, and John up the mountain, and they were given a front-row seat to the preview of when Jesus returns in majesty and glory. Let’s learn three personal applications from the Transfiguration.

I. WHEN YOU SEE THE GLORY OF JESUS YOU’LL KNOW WHO HE REALLY IS

When Jesus was on the mountain, the Bible says He was transfigured. The Greek word is the verb *metamorphoo*. We get our word metamorphosis from it. It means “a change on the outside which comes from within.” When a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, metamorphosis has occurred. Jesus was changed from an ordinary looking man into a figure of light with brilliant beams radiating from his body. The reason His clothes became white was from the light emanating from His body. I can just imagine Simon Peter rubbing his eyes, wondering if he was really seeing what he thought he was seeing.

In the Old Testament, God often revealed Himself through a blazing radiance that was called the Shekinah glory of God. When Moses first dedicated the Tabernacle in the wilderness, a brilliance light and cloud filled the Tabernacle so that the priests weren’t able to look at it. And again when Solomon dedicated a Temple to God, the Shekinah glory was revealed. The Bible says, “The priests then brought the ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim...then the temple of

the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.” (2 Chronicles 5:7, 14)

This is a very important event in Jesus’ life, because it confirms He was not merely a man. He was God in the flesh. For most of His 33 years of human existence, His human flesh obscured and veiled His Deity. But at this time, His true divine nature was revealed.

Dr. Kent Hughes writes: “For a brief moment the veil of Jesus’ humanity was lifted and His true essence was allowed to shine through. The glory which was always in the depths of His being rose to the surface for that one time in His earthly life. Or, put another way, He slipped back into eternity to His pre-human glory. It was a glance back and a look forward into His future glory!” The Transfiguration was a foretaste of glory Divine!

John never forgot this day. In John 1 he wrote, “And we beheld his glory; the glory of the only begotten of the Father.” Many years later Peter wrote about this day. He said, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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 Peter 1:16-18)

When you see Jesus at His return, He won’t be the olive-skin, brown-haired human version who walked the dusty roads of Galilee. He will be the glorified Christ, as Peter saw Him. Some people claim that when they see Jesus they are going to run up and give Him a Holy Hug. No, we’ll all fall before Him. Isaiah was worshipping and saw the glory of the Lord and he fell to his face and said, “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips.” Have you seen Jesus for who He really is? He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

II. WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THE RETURN OF JESUS YOU CAN BE READY

Jesus was giving the disciples a preview of His return. We don’t know when Jesus is coming back. Throughout history there have been religious nuts who claimed to know the exact day when Jesus would return. They were all wrong. And when you hear someone else predict the day of the second coming, you can know they are speaking lies. Jesus said nobody knows the day or the hour—only the Father in heaven. But Jesus told us to be ready. So we have to stay ready. He said, “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Luke 12:40)

Why did God send Moses and Elijah to meet Jesus there? Why not Noah and Jonah, or Abraham and David? Once you understand the significance of Moses and Elijah, you’ll begin to see why Jesus allowed the disciples to witness His transfiguration. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets, but it goes much deeper than that.

In Luke 9, the Bible says, “They were talking about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” They were talking about Jesus’ upcoming death. The New Testament

uses the word “departure” interchangeably with “death.” Just before he died, Paul wrote, “The time of my departure is at hand.” I like that. “Departure” means you are headed somewhere.

Moses and Elijah are unique because they both had unusual deaths. They were more like departures. They represent the two categories of faithful people who will be claimed when Jesus returns.

A. MOSES is the forerunner of those who will be raised up (dead and buried)

The last chapter of Deuteronomy tells us on the day Moses died God took him to a tall mountain and showed him the Promised Land. Moses died there and it says “God buried him, and to this day, no one knows where his grave is.” There is a Jewish rabbinical commentary called The Assumption of Moses, which claims Moses’ corpse was assumed into heaven. We don’t know for sure, but when you jump over to the little book of Jude, you read that the archangel Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. (Jude 9) So, it’s entirely possible Moses was raised, because there he was, 1,600 years later standing before Jesus. Finally, he got to enter the Promised Land, because Mount Tabor is in the heart of the Promised Land.

The Bible says when Jesus returns the dead in Christ will rise first (they have six feet further to go). Paul wrote, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

Moses is a representative of all of the precious saints who have died. When Jesus returns, these bodies will be resurrected and we will live with these folks and with the Lord forever. Have you had a loved one who has already died? Perhaps your grandparents or parents or spouse or children have already died. People always want to know if we’ll recognize our loved ones in heaven. Well, Moses and Elijah were distinct persons who were recognized. How did Peter, James, and John recognize them? They had never seen them before. Were they wearing nametags that said, “Hello, my name is Elijah?” Obviously, not everything that was said or done at the Transfiguration was recorded. So Jesus identified the visitors. Be assured that we will recognize our loved ones in heaven just as Jesus recognized Moses and Elijah.

B. ELIJAH is the forerunner of those who will be caught up (alive at His coming)

Elijah didn’t die. We know exactly what happened to him. We are told in 2 Kings 2 Elijah didn’t die. Instead, he was “caught up” by a chariot of fire and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind. That is what is going to happen to those of us alive when Jesus comes back. We’ll be caught up to heaven. The Bible says, “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Those of us who are alive when Jesus returns won’t die—we will be raptured. The English word “rapture” doesn’t appear in the Bible. We get it from the Latin word *raptio*, which is the translation of the Greek word *harpadzo*, which means “caught up.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 describes what will happen to both the Moses group, and the Elijah group when Jesus returns. “Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep (die physically), but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” Then Paul goes on to say, “then will be brought to pass the saying, ‘death where is your sting? O, grave where is your victory?’” As we are being raptured, those of us alive will be singing, “Death where is your sting—you didn’t get me!” Those saints who are in the grave will be rising up taunting the grave saying, “Grave, where is your victory? You thought you had me, but I’m set free!”

That’s what Jesus revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration. But there’s a final application.

III. WHEN YOU HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD YOU WILL FOCUS YOUR LIFE ON JESUS

Peter was so overwhelmed by the transfiguration and by seeing Moses and Elijah that he said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Thank you, Dr. Obvious. That’s the understatement of the millennium. But Peter missed the point. He suggested that they build three shrines—one for Moses, one for Jesus, and one for Elijah. Peter made the mistake of putting Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. That’s the same belief that Muslims embrace. They claim that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus were all great prophets, but Jesus wasn’t the Son of God.

But to clear up any misconception, God the Father spoke from heaven. He said, “This is my son, whom I love. Listen to Him!” Then when they looked up, Elijah and Moses were gone. Only Jesus was there. I’ve always loved the way the King James Version translates verse eight: “When they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only.” (Mark 9:8 KJV) I want you to focus on those last two words: JESUS ONLY.

In a nutshell, those two words summarize God’s plan for the ages: Jesus only. It’s not Buddha, it’s not Mohammed; it’s not Confucius; it’s Jesus only. The way to heaven? It’s not good works; it’s not baptism; it’s not religion; it’s Jesus only. How about Creation? It wasn’t the big bang theory; it wasn’t evolution; it wasn’t chance. It is Jesus only. The Bible says all things were created by Him, and for Him, and to Him. What about the Bible? It’s Jesus only. In the Law we see the foreshadow of Jesus; in the Wisdom books we see the feelings of Jesus; in the Prophets we see the foretelling of Jesus. In the Gospels we see the facts about Jesus. In the epistles we see the fruits of Jesus, and in Revelation, we see the Faithfulness of Jesus. It’s Jesus only.

This old world isn’t getting any better, we aren’t going to improve ourselves out of this mess; our only hope is JESUS only. Are you looking for Jesus? Are you living for Jesus? The Bible says, that we are looking for the BLESSED HOPE and the glorious appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Fanny Crosby lived most of her life in blindness. She wasn’t bitter about being blind; in fact she said that her blindness was a blessing. It allowed her to see things that seeing people never would. And she often boasted that the first thing she would see would be her Savior’s face. She

wrote over 9,000 songs and poems. Can you claim her words in this song? “Blessed assurance Jesus is mine! Oh what a foretaste of glory divine.” In the same song she wrote, “Watching and waiting. Looking above. Filled with His goodness; Lost in His love.”

OUTLINE

MAIN THOUGHT: The Transfiguration is a preview of the second coming of Jesus

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“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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 Peter 1:16-18*

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“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” *1 Thessalonians 4:17*

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“When they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only.” *Mark 9:8 KJV*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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