

## INTRODUCTION

Did you hear the story about the little lady who got a job sweeping at Six Flags? She was about 4’10” and only weighed about 90 pounds, so whenever the wind blew, she lost her balance. She complained to her supervisor, so he suggested she put rocks into her pockets; the additional weight would keep her from being blown off balance. She tried it and it worked, but carrying the extra weight made her so tired, she complained to her pastor. He suggested she pray for strength each day. So she tried that. Every morning as she took the rocks to fill her pockets she would pray this prayer: “Now I weigh me down to sweep.” Ouch! In our text, we are going to see Jesus goes up onto a high mountain to pray. In the process of praying, something happens that could be called a preview of a coming attraction.

Cindy and I still enjoy going out on dates and one of our favorite evenings is dinner and a movie. Last Tuesday we ate at the French restaurant, Whataburger—at least they serve French fries. Now, when Cindy goes to a movie, she wants to see the whole thing. We have to be there in place before the previews begin and we stay after the movie until the last credits have rolled. After a particular preview, I will often give it a “thumbs up” if I want to see it, and a “thumbs down” if I don’t really care to see it. There aren’t many thumbs up these days! But *this* preview in Luke 9 is a two “thumbs up!”

Last week we saw that the Kingdom of God is an invisible, present kingdom (righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit according to Romans 14:17). But it is also a visible, future Kingdom that will be launched at the Second Coming of Jesus. Let’s skip back and read verse 27. “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God . . . ” For many years I didn’t connect that verse with the Transfiguration and I thought Jesus was talking about all the disciples (except Judas) seeing the invisible kingdom. But He was talking about the three disciples who were going up onto the mountain with Him—they would *literally* see the glory of the Kingdom. Look at verse 28:

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

In this message we will look at three simple elements of the Transfiguration, and ask three personal questions. We will examine the vision, the visitors, and the voice.

## I. THE VISION: HAVE YOU GLIMPSED THE GLORY OF JESUS?

I’ve been to the top of Mount Tabor many times. There is a winding road leading to the top with switchbacks too sharp for a tour bus to negotiate. So, there are Mercedes taxis to make the 10-minute drive to the top. Some of the taxi drivers have been driving the route for over 30 years, and some of the cars have over 600,000 miles on them. The drivers know the route so well they spend most of the time with their heads turned talking to the passengers. My favorite is one guy who drives really fast and every time he screeches around a turn he goes, “Oh hallelujah!” Well, Jesus and His three closest buddies walked to the top and He began to pray. The most significant experiences of His earthly life occurred when He was praying; that ought to teach us something. As He was praying, 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.

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.

The writer of Hebrews pulls back the veil and lets us know who Jesus really is. “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:3) A respected theologian, Dr. Kent Hughes writes in his commentary:

“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 word “glory” carries with it the idea of glowing brilliance. When the angels visited the shepherds outside Bethlehem, the “glory of the Lord shone all around them.” There is a brilliant light associated with the character and nature of God. There are three Biblical statements summarizing the nature of God. We are told (1) God is holy; (2) God is love; and (3) God is light. Sometimes people refer to the Shekinah glory of God. The word Shekinah is a Hebrew word that never appears in the Bible. However it appears in other Jewish writings, and it literally means, “that which dwells.” It came to be used to describe the glowing presence of the Lord that dwelt between the cherubim covering the Ark of the Covenant.

Peter, James and John saw this Shekinah glory in Jesus. Have you glimpsed that glory? What do you think Jesus looks like now? What is your mental image of Him? Do you picture Him as having long brown hair, a beard and loving eyes? That might have been what He looked like in

the flesh, but remember, that was only a disguise He wore for 33 years. That picture of Jesus has prevented many folks for seeing Him in all His glory.

There are three true stories about holy images:

A few years ago a woman in New Mexico was frying tortillas. One of the tortillas burned and the result was an image that looked like a face; she thought it looked like Jesus. She took the tortilla to her priest and he agreed it looked like Jesus, so he blessed it. The woman and her husband took the blessed tortilla back home and placed it in a box surrounded by cotton to make it appear as if it was floating on air. They built an altar around it and started praying there. Word began to spread about the holy tortilla and soon thousands of people visited their home to pray before the holy tortilla. People are desperate to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

A few years ago in Poland, a man discovered a tree with a strange shape in its bark. He thought it looked like the face of the Virgin Mary. He claimed he was healed there. Sixty miles away another similar tree was found, and it, too, had the face of Mary in its bark. Soon people from all over Poland began buying train tickets to visit these two trees. Thousands of worshippers have knelt before the two trees and have left money and other offerings there. People desperately want to be able to see and feel the power of God.

A few years ago, a lady in Arkansas turned on the kitchen light in her mobile home. The reflection of the light on the mobile home beside her looked like a man’s face. She turned the light off and the image disappeared. When she turned the light back on, the image reappeared. She was certain it was a miracle—she could see the face of Jesus! News soon spread and hundreds of people were visiting her trailer to walk into her kitchen and flip on the light. Because of the crowds, she started charging a dollar a person. A local television station interviewed one of the men who had paid his dollar to see the image. He was pretty skeptical. He said, “I want my dollar back, it looked more like Willie Nelson to me.”

Do you want to see Jesus? Don’t go to a tortilla, a tree, or a trailer—go to the Word of God. Go home and read Revelation 1 and you will see what Jesus looks like now. John saw Him and he wrote “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire. ... His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” (Revelation 1:14, 16) Sound familiar? That’s how Jesus appeared on the mountain. In Exodus 33, Moses asked God directly to let him see His glory. God told Moses if he looked at His face, he would die instantly. So, the Lord placed Moses in a cleft in the rock and His glory “passed by.” Moses was allowed to glimpse the “afterglow” of God’s glory but that was enough. Moses came down the mountain with his face shining and glowing as if he had gotten the sunburn to end all sunburns. My friend, you don’t have to see the glory of God with your eyes—in fact, it would blind you. But you *do* have to see Jesus in His glory with your eyes of faith. Have you had the vision of His glory? Once you do, you will never again doubt Jesus is God in the flesh. Now let’s consider:

## **II. THE VISITORS: DO YOU ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF JESUS?**

Two visitors appear on the mountain and they are talking with Jesus. One is identified as Moses and the other as Elijah. By the way, that confirms we will keep our personal identity in heaven.

Why Moses and Elijah? 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.

Verse 31 tells us “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 weren’t actually deaths at all; they were more like “departures.” 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. Basically God said, “This is the land I promised to Abraham. I’m letting you see it, but you will not cross over into it.” (Deuteronomy 34:4) Moses died there and it says “God buried him, and to this day, no one knows where his grave is.” There is a pseudoepigraphical Jewish writing called The Assumption of Moses claims Moses’ body was assumed into heaven. We don’t know for sure, but when you jump over to the little book of Jude, we find 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.

We know exactly what happened to Elijah. 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.

Now, think about those two deaths. Moses died and was raised. Elijah didn’t die, but was caught up to heaven. Is that ringing any bells for you yet? The Transfiguration is a preview of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which will launch the Kingdom of God. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “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. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be CAUGHT UP [Latin *raptio*] with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Moses and Elijah represent the two categories of people who will be claimed by Jesus when He returns.

### **1. MOSES—The forerunner of those who will be raised up (dead and buried)**

The Bible says when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first (they have six feet further to go). Moses is a representative of all of the precious saints who have died. The moment a Christian dies, their soul and spirit goes to be with Jesus. Paul wrote, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8) But the bodies of believers have been buried, or burned or lost at sea. When Jesus returns, these bodies will be resurrected and these folks will live 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. When Jesus returns, they will be resurrected, like Moses. And you will recognize them just as Jesus recognized Moses.

### **2. ELIJAH—The forerunner of those who will be caught up (alive at His coming)**

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 word *harpadzo*, which means “caught up.” Just as Elijah didn't die but was “caught up” to heaven in a chariot of fire, that's what will happen to us when Jesus returns.

The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in 132 BC. Seventy-two translators were used so the Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the “Septuagint” (LXX). Long before Jesus promised His return and Paul wrote about it, the translators of the LXX were translating 2 Kings 2. Can you guess which Greek word they used to describe what happened to Elijah when he was “caught up” in a fiery chariot? They used the word *harpadzo*—exactly the same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. So, Elijah was “raptured” without dying and that's what is going to happen to those of us who know Jesus.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, we read what's going to happen: “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!”

Are you excited about the Second Coming of Jesus? The first Christians were. Dr. Alexander McClaren writes: “The Early Church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death or heaven. They were not looking for a cleft in the ground called a grave—but for a cleavage in the sky called glory!”

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a preview of a coming attraction—the Second Coming of Jesus. It will be a powerful attraction, too, strong enough to raise the dead and to rapture living Christians. I have read that in journalism, the largest headline print possible is called “Second Coming type.” The impact of a news story is revealed by the type size of the front page headline, such as “Pearl Harbor Bombed” or “Japanese Surrender” or “JFK Shot” are large type—but they aren't the largest. That is reserved for the Second Coming. I'm not going to be around to read the Second Coming headline, because when Jesus comes, I'm going to be meeting Him in the clouds.

As I've said before, you are always wise and prudent to make plans for your funeral. Pre-arrangement makes sense. But I'm really not looking for a cemetery; I'm looking for Jesus. I told you before about the time the telemarketer called me wanting to sell me a cemetery plot. I thought I'd have a little fun and teach her something about the Bible. I let her read through her prepared statement and then I said, “I have a couple of questions.” She could sense a sale so she said, “Of course, ask me any question you have.” (Good telemarketers have a script anticipating every conceivable question, with a good answer provided)  
I said, “Do you *rent* those cemetery plots?”

“What?”

“Do you *rent* those cemetery plots?” I could hear her turning through the pages of her script trying to find the question.

Finally she said, “Why would you want to *rent* a cemetery plot?”

I said, “Well, first of all, I don’t think I’ll ever need one because Jesus is going to come back and rapture the church. But even if I do die before He returns, I won’t need a grave very long, because He’ll be coming back to raise me from the dead.” By now I could tell she was flustered because she didn’t say anything—so she finally just hung up. That’s the first and only time I’ve ever had a telemarketer hang up on *me*!

Now, let’s look at the third element of the Transfiguration.

### **III. THE VOICE: DO YOU LISTEN TO JESUS ALONE?**

The three disciples were in such awe at the scene it seemed almost like a dream; they were even sleepy. But verse 32 says they came fully awake and saw Jesus and the two other men. Simon Peter was always good at saying the wrong thing. He was the kind of guy who felt it was his job to fill every moment of silence with some verbal observation. The only time Peter ever opened his mouth was to change feet. He does it again saying, “Lord it is good for us to be here.” Peter really had a grasp for the obvious! But like the rest of us, he kept on talking and got deeper in trouble. He said, “Let’s build three tabernacles here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He was going to be the chairman of the building committee and they were going to have their very own Discover the Joy but not to build one building but *three*! These were to be shrines to commemorate this occasion. He made a big mistake when he put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. But God is about to correct his misunderstanding.

At that moment a cloud enveloped them. Last January, when we were visiting Mt. Tabor, the first groups to reach the top in the taxis were treated to an amazing experience. The entire mountaintop was enshrouded in a cloud. They couldn’t see more than about ten yards ahead of them. Within moments, the wind blew the cloud away and it was crystal clear. There was a cloud that day, too. But this was a cloud of glory. The Shekinah glory of God was present. Just as the cloud had led Moses through the wilderness, this cloud settled on top of the mountain. Then the disciples heard the voice of the Father. It was gentle rebuke to Peter because the Father didn’t say anything about Moses or Elijah. He said, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen, LISTEN to Him.” Then the disciples saw Jesus alone. What a lesson! Peter was so influenced by that mountaintop experience, he wrote about it in one of his letters ten years later: 2 Peter 1:16 - 18:

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 to 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.

### **Lesson 1: Visit the mountaintop—to worship Jesus**

There is a great lesson about worship here. Worship is not a place; it is a person. You don't need a building and you don't even need a mountaintop. It's not about a place; it's focusing on the glory of Jesus. It's meeting Jesus and *listening* to Him. Did you notice the Father didn't say, “This is my Son, *talk* to Him?” Sometimes worship is just being still and quiet and listening for that still small voice. Remember when God called little Samuel's name? Samuel said, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.” Most of us rush into the presence of the Lord with a shopping list of needs and say, “Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking.” Jesus is speaking—are you really listening?

His players held legendary Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, in such regards that whenever he spoke, nobody else would talk. Quarterback Bart Starr once said, “Coach Lombardi spoke with such authority that when he said ‘sit down’ you didn't even bother to look and see if there was a chair, you just sat down where ever you were.” Oh, that we would listen and obey like that!

Every experience of encountering Jesus could be called a mountaintop experience. Can you remember some experience of worship rating as a mountaintop experience? It might have been a camp, a retreat, an Emmaus walk, a revival or some other special worship experience. I was in Colorado Springs a few years ago, and I got up early and hiked out into the mountains near the retreat center where I was staying. I sang and walked and talked with Jesus. But, you don't have to literally be on a mountain, because I've done the same thing walking along the beach. I love those mountaintop experiences! But that leads to

## **Lesson 2: Leave the mountaintop to serve Jesus**

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain and build three shrines. If I could, I believe I could have stayed in those mountains or on the beach just enjoying the sweet fellowship with Jesus. That's the danger of mountaintop experiences. We want to linger there. We don't want to leave. Next week we are going to see while Jesus and the three disciples were on the mountain, the other nine disciples were in the valley trying to help a boy who was demon-controlled. Jesus is going to leave the mountaintop and go into the valley to resume touching, loving, healing and forgiving people. That's a great lesson for us. It's great to spend time on the mountain but you've got to go into the valley to serve the Lord by helping hurting people.

A man once told evangelist D.L. Moody, “I've been on the mount of Transfiguration with Jesus for the past five years!”

Moody asked, “During that time, how many people have you won to Christ?”

“None,” he answered.

Moody replied, “We don't need that kind of mountaintop experience! When a man gets so high he can't reach down and help sinners, there is something wrong!”

In my experience as a pastor, I've known folks who never leave the valley. They work, work, work for Jesus but they never visit the mountaintop and enjoy sweet intimacy with Him. Worship is almost a waste of time for them. Or they say, “The way I worship is by working for Jesus.” They look with disdain at mountaintop worshipers and wonder when they are going to come down and get to work!

I’ve also known some who only want to spend time in worship on the mountaintop. They enjoy the feeling of security and serenity that comes from being alone with the Lord. They look at the “workers” and shake their head at their toil and efforts.

In the very next chapter, we are going to see this beautifully illustrated in the two sisters Mary and Martha. The mountain-toppers are like Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet. The valley-workers are like Martha, banging pots and pans together in the kitchen. Jesus is teaching that we must maintain a healthy balance of worship and work.

## CONCLUSION

When we have been on the mountain and seen the glory of Jesus, we will be willing to go out into the valley and help others. You never know what kind of long lasting impact you have when you help someone in need. Consider the following true story. A poor Scottish shepherd was out walking one day when he heard a plaintive cry for help from a nearby bog. He ran to assist and found a boy mired almost to the waist in the black muck. Extending his walking stick, the farmer pulled the boy out. The next day, an elegantly dressed man came to the farmer’s small hut, offering a reward. The Scotsman refused. Just then the farmer’s teenaged son came to the door. Seeing him, the nobleman made the Scotsman an offer: “Let me take your son and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he’ll grow into a man you can be proud of.” The Scotsman liked this and shook hands on the bargain. In time, the boy graduated from St. Mary’s Hospital Medical School in London. He was Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin. Years later the nobleman’s son was stricken with pneumonia, but was saved through the use of penicillin. The nobleman was Lord Randolph Churchill, and his son was Winston Churchill, whose leadership kept England from bowing to Hitler. It all started because a poor farmer was willing to help a stranger in need.

Go to the mountain often and worship Jesus—but make sure you leave the mountain to go into the valley: that’s where there are hurting people.

## OUTLINE

### 1. THE VISION: HAVE YOU GLIMPSED THE GLORY OF JESUS?

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word. *Hebrews 1:3*

### 2. THE VISITORS: DO YOU ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF JESUS?

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. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be CAUGHT UP (Latin *raptio*) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. *1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*

1. Moses—The forerunner of those who will be raised up (dead and buried)

2. Elijah—The forerunner of those who will be caught up (alive at His coming)  
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. *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

### 3. THE VOICE: DO YOU LISTEN TO JESUS ALONE?

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 to 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*

1. Lesson 1: Visit the mountaintop to worship Jesus

2. Lesson 2: Leave the mountaintop to serve Jesus



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes