

Transfiguration and the Kingdom of God

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Date: 21 April 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, we gather once again on the first day of the week. Because your son, Jesus Christ, died for our sins.

And he was raised on the first day of the week. He's the one who makes all things new. He's the one who makes us born again with new life.

And Lord, we want to once again this morning submit ourselves to you. To his lordship.

We want to be once again amazed by what Jesus has done for us. So we pray by your word, speak to us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Luke 9, 18-36 Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him.

[1 : 1 3] And he asked them, who do the crowd say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah. And others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.

Then he said to them, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, the Christ of God. And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. Now about eight days after these things, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

[2 : 4 5] And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said.

As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the crowd. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one.

Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

[4 : 0 0] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. You might be wondering why we're reading a passage about Jesus' transfiguration on Easter Sunday, when we're supposed to be celebrating his resurrection in particular.

And I have some good reasons for that. But one of the reasons is, one is, it does happen to be the passage that we're on, going through the Gospel of Luke.

And it's actually very related to the resurrection account, because this is really the first glimpse we see of the glory of the risen Lord, which we'll see in fullness after the resurrection and his ascension.

And we do celebrate the resurrection of the Lord every Sunday, as we gather to worship him on the first day of the week. And the main point of this passage for us is that we should take up our cross daily and follow Jesus, looking forward to the glorious kingdom of the Son of God.

As we do that, we're called to pray with Jesus, to see Jesus in his glory, and to listen to Jesus, as this passage tells us. So first, let's look at how we are to pray in anticipation of the fullness of Jesus' glorious kingdom.

[5 : 1 4] In verse 22, Jesus predicted his resurrection by saying that he will suffer, be rejected, and killed. But then on the third day, be raised.

So here, this is the first anticipation of Jesus' coming resurrection. And then after telling his disciples to follow his example of carrying the cross of humble submission to God, Jesus promised in verse 27, But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

So some among Jesus' 12 apostles will see the kingdom of God before they die. And there are people who make careers, academic careers, out of pointing out perceived errors and contradictions in the Bible.

And this verse is one of their favorite go-to examples. You see, Jesus thought that the full consummated kingdom will come during the lifetime of his followers, they say. He thought that he would return to judge the world before all of his apostles have died.

But that didn't happen, did it? But such an argument betrays a shallow understanding of the Gospel of Luke and the Gospels in general. There's a reason why in all three of the Gospels that include this account of Jesus' transfiguration.

[6 : 3 5] The transfiguration is preceded by, immediately by Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ of God. And secondly, Jesus' prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection. And then third, the invitation to his disciples to carry the cross and follow him.

And finally, Jesus' promise that there are some standing here with him who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. All of those events come together because they're interconnected.

And the transfiguration is actually a partial fulfillment of Jesus' promise that some of his disciples will see the kingdom of God before their death. It's not the full fulfillment of his promise.

That happens at Jesus' death, resurrection, and his ascension to heaven, which is connected to the coming down of the Holy Spirit. And that's why at his trial before the Jewish council in Luke 22, 69, Jesus says, But from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

That's the reference to Jesus' enthronement, reigning with the authority of God. And so it's after his death and resurrection ascension that Jesus begins his reign over the kingdom of God.

[7 : 47] And that's why in his sequel to the gospel of Luke, Acts, the book of Acts that Luke also wrote, he writes in chapter 2, 32, 33, This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are witnesses, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

And since his resurrection and ascension, Jesus has been reigning over his kingdom at the right hand of the Father. And since all 12 of his apostles, except for Judas the traitor, witnessed Jesus' resurrection and ascension before their death.

Jesus is quite correct to say, Some standing here will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. So the transfiguration that takes place today in our passage is a preview of that glorious kingdom of the Son of God.

Notice in verses 30 and 31, Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus about his departure, reference to his resurrection and ascension. And the way this works, it's kind of similar to the way we have movie trailers.

This is a preview in a similar way, because about a half a year, right, half a year to a year before the official premiere of a movie, studios usually drop the trailer.

[9 : 08] And the trailer is about a few minutes long, and the details are a little sketchy, but it gives you just a glimpse of the real thing to tell you, hey, it's here. And the transfiguration is like the trailer of the coming death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, which is the movie.

And then when you see the movie, it turns out, lo and behold, you discover that it's actually a two-part movie. Sounds familiar to some of you. And the sequel will be released at a later point, and that sequel is Jesus' second coming.

So these are all interconnected. Luke sees stages in the unfolding of the kingdom of God, and we're seeing that first, very initial glimpse, the trailer, to what's going to all transpire.

And since the transfiguration is a sneak preview of the resurrection and ascension, it makes sense that there are many literary parallels between the two accounts. For example, in verses 29 and verse 30, it tells us that Jesus' clothing became dazzling white.

And behold, two men were walking talking with him. And then later after his resurrection, it says in Luke 24, verse 4, that as his disciples stood by the empty tomb, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

[10 : 27] And even later, at Jesus' ascension in Acts 1.10, it says that while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes.

Similarly, in verse 32 and 34 of our passage, they mentioned the glory of Jesus and a cloud enveloping them. And at his ascension, it says in Acts 1.9, as the apostles were looking on, Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

And at his ascension, right? This cloud takes him out of sight. And later in Luke 21, 27, when Jesus speaks of his second coming, again, similar themes emerge.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. So Luke masterfully weaves these parallels between the transfiguration to the resurrection and to the ascension and even his second coming to show us, to give us a foretaste of the glorious kingdom of the Son of God.

And with that context in mind, Luke teaches us a lesson about how we have to wait for that, how we have to watch and pray. Notice in verse 28, it says that Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

[11 : 49] And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include the story of the transfiguration in their Gospels, but only Luke mentions that this happened while Jesus was praying.

This is intentional, of course, because in the Gospel of Luke, all the pivotal moments of Jesus' life and ministry are preceded by prayer. Just before the Holy Spirit descends on him and God the Father says, makes an announcement confirming his identity as his beloved son.

In Luke 3, 21-22, it says that Jesus was praying. Before choosing his 12 apostles, it says that Jesus prayed and continued all night, continued in prayer to God.

Luke 6, 12. Immediately before Peter's breakthrough confession of Jesus' identity that we saw in Luke 9, 18, it says that Jesus was praying alone. And here, before he transfigured to his glorious true identity, before his apostles, he was praying.

Sometimes people say that there's no need to pray since God has already ordained the outcome. But that's not the biblical way to think about prayer. In fact, God has ordained that some things will only happen by means of prayer.

[13 : 07] Jesus taught us, and I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. And just as it was the case in Jesus' life, God has ordained that we be directed and be made fruitful through prayer.

That's why the Bible teaches us to pray for the forgiveness of sins. Pray that people might be saved. Pray for open doors of ministry. Pray for healing. Pray that we might grow in spiritual maturity.

Pray that we might be strengthened with power by the Holy Spirit and know the love of Christ. These are all things that the Bible explicitly teaches us to pray for. God has ordained that these things will happen by means of prayer.

That means they will not happen unless we pray. Ephesians 6, 18 teaches us that we have to put on our spiritual armor as we live and wait for the consummation of the kingdom of God because we're still engaged in that spiritual warfare.

And in that passage, it teaches us that the way we put on the full armor of God is by praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

[14 : 19] That's why Christian author John Piper describes prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie. It's how we stand ready and maintain communication with our commander-in-chief.

That's why we so frequently find Jesus praying throughout the Gospel of Luke. And Jesus' praying is contrasted with the apostles sleeping in this passage.

It says in verse 32, look with me, Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory in the two men who stood with him.

Jesus had taken Peter, John, and James with him to the mountain so that they could pray with him. But they were soundly asleep when Jesus was transfigured and they were going to miss the whole thing until they became fully awake.

Then they were able to witness the glory of Christ. And interestingly enough, later in Luke 22, on another mountain, just before Jesus is arrested and killed, Jesus is once again praying and his apostles are once again sleeping.

[15 : 23] And Jesus tells them, Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Luke 22. Of course, Scripture is not teaching us here that sleep is bad.

We all need sleep. In fact, most of you need a little more sleep. But this recurring picture of the apostles sleeping is a figure of spiritual unreadiness, unpreparedness for spiritual warfare.

And it serves as a warning to us to be spiritually alert as we look forward to the glorious kingdom of the Son of God. That's why later in Luke 21, when Jesus talks about his second coming, he uses these figures.

He says, But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down. Weighed down is the exact same word that's used in our passage to say heavy with sleep.

Watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

[16 : 36] Instead of being heavy with sleep, with the vanities, the drunkenness, and the cares of this life, we have to be watchful and prayerful, standing at attention, prepared for the battle, ready to execute the orders of our Commander-in-Chief.

It's binary. It's either or. If you're not praying, then you're sleeping. Have you been sleeping? Hebrews 7.25 teaches us that Jesus always lives to make intercession for us at the right hand of God the Father.

He is at this very moment praying for us, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father, and He invites us to join Him as we await His return.

We are to pray with Jesus. And we're also to see Jesus in all His glory. That's the second point. And that's why Luke includes this passage in his Gospel.

Through the privileged eyes of Peter, John, and James, we are to see Jesus for who He really is. Remember what the prophet said about Jesus. In Isaiah 53, He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.

[17 : 55] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

This prophecy came true. There was nothing about Jesus' external appearance that was noteworthy or attractive. And we see throughout the Gospels that He was indeed despised and looked down upon as a carpenter's son by some people.

Philippians 2, 6-7 also teaches us that Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

That's what the apostles were used to seeing. Jesus in the form of a servant. Jesus having no form or beauty about Him. This Jesus who is despised by common men.

And this brief moment, Jesus sheds that form of a servant and reveals His divine, royal glory.

[19 : 09] And that's the preview of the risen and ascended Lord. And the visit by Moses and Elijah also reveal who Jesus truly is.

Some people say that these two figures appear because Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. And together, the law and the prophets, all of Scripture, Old Testament Scripture, are fulfilled in Jesus.

It's possible that's the case. This is an appealing hypothesis. But I think even more immediately and more likely, Moses and Elijah are mentioned here because of the crowd's speculation that we see over and over again throughout the Gospels, that Jesus is either the Elijah returned or a prophet, an old prophet of old, like Moses, for example.

And that identity of Jesus has been recurring throughout the Gospel. Five times already, people have asked, different people have asked the question in this Gospel, who is Jesus? And we have learned through Herod's musings and also through the Apostle's response earlier that we read that the three main options were John the Baptist, Elijah, and one of the prophets of old.

And Herod openly wondered, well, I beheaded John the Baptist so it can't be him. So could he be the Elijah or could he be one of the prophets of old? And because there were Old Testament prophecies, for example, Malachi 4 or 5 prophesied that God would send an Elijah before his coming.

[20 : 38] And Deuteronomy 18, 15 prophesied that God would raise up for his people a prophet like Moses, who is one of the greatest prophets of old. So there was this buildup and expectation precisely concerning whether or not Jesus was an Elijah or a Moses.

And so, behold, of course, Elijah and Moses appear to bear witness themselves that Jesus, yes, he is a prophet like Elijah.

Yes, he is a prophet like Moses, but he is not Elijah and he is not Moses. He is greater even than they because he is the Son of God, the Christ.

Even the subject of their conversation reveals the greatness of Jesus. It says in verse 31 that they were speaking of Jesus' departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

His death, resurrection, ascension, that's what he's referring to. And some of your Bibles probably have a footnote after the word departure. And if you follow that footnote down to the bottom, it will tell you that in the Greek it actually says Exodus.

[21 : 46] Moses led God's people out in their first Exodus, out of their slavery in Egypt to the promised land. But Jesus here is pictured as the greater Moses who brings them out not only from their physical bondage, but he brings them out ultimately from their spiritual bondage to sin and Satan and death.

And he brings them not only to a perishing, temporary, physical land that has been promised, but to the eternal kingdom of God. He will accomplish this, fulfill this. After seeing Jesus' glory and the two heavenly visitors, it says in verse 33 that as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here.

Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. Peter, for obvious reasons, doesn't want this heavenly visit to end.

And so he offers personally to make three tents for these guests. It's simple, it's a very simple but hospitable gesture to extend the stay of the guests.

But as he's saying this, Luke tells us that Peter did not get the full import of what he was actually saying. The implications of what he's saying escapes him because the word tent that he uses is the word that is translated tabernacle in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

[23 : 13] So Peter's offer recalls the great feast of the tabernacles. When God's people pitch tents for a week in order to dwell in it as a way of remembering and celebrating how God provided for them after the Exodus by providing for them in the wilderness between their Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of the Canaan land.

And during that period in the wilderness, not only did God people dwell in tents, they also built a tent for God called the tabernacle. They called it the tent of meeting because it was where God had promised to meet with his people.

Let's be missed the significance of this. Luke gives us other allusions to it as well. Look again at verse 28. Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

Does some of that sound a little odd to you? Does this strike you as a little odd that Luke says about eight days? Eight is such a specific number. It's not, you don't usually round up to eight, right?

There's a reason for that. If you compare it, this becomes all the more striking when you compare to the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark. Matthew 17, one says, after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

[24 : 38] Mark 9, two, after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves and he was transfigured before them.

Luke alone says, he rounds up, he gives an approximate figure even though he knows about eight days. Why?

Because according to Leviticus 23, 36, the Feast of Tabernacle is supposed to be celebrated for eight days. On the eighth day, you shall hold a holy convocation and present the food offering to the Lord.

It is a solemn assembly. You shall not do any ordinary work. And when it says in verse 29 that Jesus' appearance was altered or transfigured, that word appearance is the same word that God used when he was giving instructions to Moses for the building of the temple.

He told him, then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan, the same word, the appearance, for it that you were shown on the mountain. And given all these tabernacle connections, it's not surprising then what happens after this in verse 34.

[25 : 50] As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. In much the same way in Exodus chapter 40 verses 34 to 35, after the completion of the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled, same word, or overshadowed it.

And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The cloud that overshadowed the tabernacle overshadowed Mary in Luke 135 so that she conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit and now that same cloud overshadows Jesus and his apostles.

And why is Luke so concerned about getting this tabernacle reference across? Because the cloud of God's presence surrounds them here without the tabernacle, without the tent that Peter offered to build.

Because the tabernacle is unnecessary. Because the temple is unnecessary. Because Jesus is the new tabernacle. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

And that's why it says of Jesus' incarnation in John 1.14, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Literally, he tabernacled among us.

[27 : 25] And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus has come. He is God in the flesh.

That's why he has this glory. He's transfigured before them revealing his true identity. And all those who are in Jesus through faith are now also dwelling places of the Spirit of God.

And that's the privilege that Jesus makes available to us through his death on the cross for our sins. And by being raised victoriously from the dead. In the Old Testament, only Moses, the priests, and the Levites were allowed to enter the tent of meeting, the tabernacle.

God gave strict instructions lest they die. For example, in Numbers 18, 21-22. Even Aaron, the high priest, had to go through ritual cleansing before he could enter the tabernacle to make offering for people.

And all those provisions were given in the Old Testament to preserve and convey the holiness of God as someone who is separate from us. Because God has no part in sin whatsoever.

[28 : 43] Because God is of purer eyes than to see evil. Even to see evil. So it's right that Peter and John and James are here afraid as they enter the cloud.

They deserve to be struck dead right there and then. in the presence of the Holy God. That's what we deserve. We have no business trying to enter into God's presence for as Romans 3-23 says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We are not worthy of the glory of God. We have fallen short of it. But nonetheless, God tabernacled among us. And Jesus paid the death penalty that was necessary by dying on the cross for our sins so that we might not perish but instead live forever in that resurrection life.

Forever with God. And it's this resurrection of Jesus that serves as proof that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was accepted by His Father.

But Jesus doesn't work this wonderful salvation for everyone. only for those who repent of their sins and entrust their entire lives to Him.

[29 : 59] That brings me to my third point. Listen to Jesus. It says in verses 35-36, And a voice came out of the clouds saying, This is my Son, my chosen one.

Listen to Him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. Just as He did at the baptism of Jesus, God the Father announces His endorsement of Jesus and declares His identity.

That Jesus is not merely another Elijah. He's not merely another Moses but He's the Christ of God, the Messianic King, the Divine Son of God and that we ought to listen to Him.

And listen conveys both in the same as in the English, both the sense of hearing and the sense of obedience. Listen to Him. We don't want anyone, any one of you to come ever to this worship service wanting to hear Sean or Matt or what Ray has to say.

You need not pay any heed to my personal opinions. but you should pay every heed to what God has to say from His Word. That's why I deliberately point you to the text over and over again because I want to show you that what I am saying is there in the book and not here in my own head.

[31 : 37] in the context of our passage especially listening to Jesus means listening to what Jesus said earlier in verses 23 to 26.

Follow up there with me. Verses 23 to 26. If anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Following Jesus listening to him requires total submission. It requires absolute surrender because you can only serve one master. You cannot say yes to your selfish sinful desires and say yes to Jesus at the same time.

You cannot say yes to the sinful world and say yes to Jesus at the same time. Saying yes to Jesus means saying yes to him alone in every aspect of your life so that it's no longer you who live but it is Christ who lives in you Jesus only.

[33 : 11] Verse 36 says that when the voice had spoken Jesus was found alone. In the Greek the sentence structure is much more emphatic. It says when the voice had spoken was found Jesus only.

This is profound. Peter wanted this transcendent experience on the mountain to last a while. He wanted to pitch three tents so that Elijah and Moses can remain with them and Jesus but they depart and the apostles find Jesus only because Jesus only is necessary for your salvation.

because Jesus only is our Savior and Lord. Some people in the world are spiritual junkies.

They seek out one transcendent experience after another, one conference after another, one retreat after another, one prophecy after another, one sermon after another.

They just want their spiritual high to linger a little longer. But your faith and your confidence should not be in your subjective experience but in the objective reality of Jesus only.

[34 : 35] Some people in the world are legalistic. They believe that their salvation will be based on how moral they are, how much good works that they do.

But your faith and confidence should not be in your own righteousness but in Jesus only. He's the one who imputes his perfect righteousness to us when we believe in him.

The world will tell you that it's embarrassing to believe in Jesus and all of his teachings. That it's fantastical, that it's regressive. But don't listen to the world but listen to Jesus only.

for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words Jesus said of him the son of man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory. Your sinful flesh will tell you that it's futile to resist sin.

It will tell you that Christ is a kill joy. That carrying your cross daily in submission to Christ is not worth it. But don't listen to your flesh.

[35 : 43] Listen to Jesus only for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

The devil will tell you he'll speak to you that the Christian life is too costly that you're a fool to give up your life. What about all those relationships?

What about all those pleasures? What about all those dreams? But don't listen to the devil. Listen to Jesus only.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? This glimpse of Christ's divine glory was revealed to his apostles to assure them that following him is not in vain.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus which we celebrate today teaches us that this life is not all there is. There is life to come. His resurrection is the guarantee the deposit that we too will be raised to new life and we will live forever with him in his glory.

[36 : 54] And it's that promise that assurance that makes it worthwhile for us to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus as we look forward to the glorious kingdom of the Son of God.

At the end of verse 36 it says that they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. There was silence and awe because the apostles didn't quite grasp the significance of this revelation until the death resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

It's after they begin to speak boldly about Jesus Christ. And likewise we who live after Jesus resurrection are not to keep silent. We are to go through our neighborhoods our cities even to the ends of the earth to tell people about Jesus because we are to take up the cross daily and follow Jesus looking forward to the glorious kingdom of the Son of God.