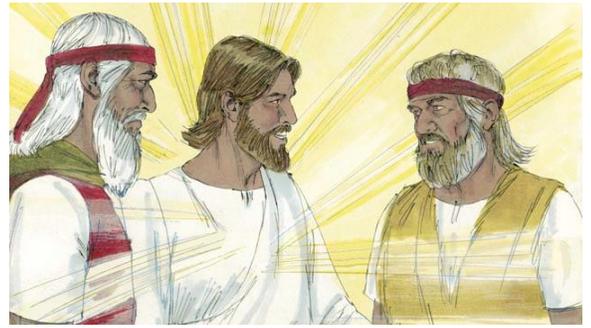


2 Kings 2:1-12

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9



THERE APPEARED TO THEM ELIJAH WITH MOSES

Each year in our church calendar we read one of the gospel accounts of the Transfiguration on the holy day celebrating this event (August 6), and again on this last Sunday in Epiphany. It is fitting for us especially at this time of the year, as we prepare for Lent, to discuss the Transfiguration. Jesus Christ appeared in his heavenly glory to his disciples, even as he was preparing to suffer persecution, crucifixion, and death.

There are accounts of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9. This year we have the account in Mark, but in our discussion it is useful also to review the other two accounts, especially Luke's.

Mark 9:2-9. *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, ³and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." ⁸And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. ⁹And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.¹*

• *After six days ...* (v.2). Matthew agrees with six, and Luke says it was "about eight days." All three apparently wished the reader to see that the Transfiguration followed about a week after events in the region of Caesarea Philippi, which all three have recorded in the same order. Review these in Mark:

(8:27) Jesus asked his disciples, "*Who do men say that I am?*"

(8:29) Jesus asked, "*Who do you say that I am?*" and Peter replied, "*You are the Christ.*"

(8:31) Jesus said he would suffer and be rejected and killed, and after three days rise again.

(8:32) Peter rebuked Jesus for saying this.

(8:33) Jesus, seeing the other disciples, rebuked Peter in turn and said, "*Get behind me, Satan!*"

(8:34ff) Jesus called everyone and said, "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself ...*"

(9:1) Finally Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.*"

Consider these facts: (1) Time was running out for Jesus. His questions revealed his concern that he had not been recognized, let alone received, even by his own disciples. (2) Peter's recognition of the Christ and his subsequent rebuke revealed his belief, which was the prevailing idea, that Messiah would come in the power of God – not suffer and die on a cross. (3) Jesus rebuked Peter and called *the multitude* to turn from the ways of the world and follow him. (4) Finally, he made the statement in 9:1. Discuss how each of these four things gave reasons for the Transfiguration, which followed a week later.

• *... Jesus took with him Peter and James and John ...* (v.2). These were the principal apostles. Jesus also called them to be with him at Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). They were not necessarily the most gifted apostles, but they did seem to be the most convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Such men are always important to God.

• *... and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves* (v.2). Most believe this was Mount Hermon, about 12 miles NE of Caesarea Philippi. Obviously, the Transfiguration was not to be a public event.

• *He was transfigured before them ...* (v.2). What happened next is in some respects beyond human

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

understanding, but the gospels are faithful to report what *appeared* to be happening. Luke (9:29) adds that Jesus was *praying* when his appearance began to change. Certainly Jesus was not concerned or praying for himself. Could his prayer have been in response to Mark 8:27-33? Was he concerned for the salvation of his friends and family, and wondering whether they would believe in him and be saved through his death? Or was he praying especially for his disciples and those who would be saved through them, as he did in John 17? Certainly there was much to pray about. This was a discouraging time for our Lord. He loved his disciples and knew they were dispirited when they heard him speak of his suffering and death.

- *His garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them* (v.3). This is what the disciples saw. Peter never forgot. Years later he recalled this scene, and hearing the voice from heaven, when he wrote, “*We were eyewitnesses of his majesty,*” (2 Pet 1:16-18).

For us as well as the disciples, there are two ways to look at the Transfiguration of Jesus. One is to see it as a revelation of his deity, emphasizing his sinlessness and contrasting him with the rest of mankind.

The second is to see the Transfiguration as a vision of what lay ahead for Peter and James and John, and ahead for all who receive new life in the Son of God; that is, to see what Paul saw when he wrote, “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” (Rom 8:18). The latter view is preferred, since Jesus sought always to draw men to himself. “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself,*” he said. (John 12:32). And today, when you and I look at the Transfiguration, may we also see in it a sign of the glory that awaits each child of God!

- *And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus* (v.4). Moses was the giver of the law, and Elijah (at least in Jewish tradition) was the greatest of the prophets. The disciples didn’t understand at the time, but after Jesus rose from the dead, the Bible says Jesus *opened their minds to understand the scriptures*. “*Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled,*” he said (Luke 24:44).

Mark wrote only that Moses and Elijah were *talking to Jesus*. Luke said they *spoke of his departure, which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem*. (Luke 9:31). Beyond this, no one knows what was said.

Certainly this was no committee meeting. Even Moses and Elijah, themselves in glory, would have worshiped Jesus, the Son of God, their Savior and King. But just as certainly, in the presence of these two great men of God, Jesus found support to meet the coming storm. What was there to reassure him?

First, the history of mankind’s regard for the law would have been laid open for Jesus to consider. Moses would say every person, including himself, had sinned and led lives of disobedience. *They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one.* (Ps 14:3). Without the cross, all men would be forever condemned. By giving up his own life on the cross, Jesus could justify and redeem sinners like you and me. Thus, Moses bore witness to the *necessity* of the cross.

Second, Elijah would speak of the forgotten central truth of prophecy, that “a dying Messiah is the great article of true Jewish theology,” as one commentator put it. By taking the sins of men on himself, our Lord Jesus would fulfill prophecy and be perfectly obedient to the will of the Father. *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.* (Isa 53:5). Thus, Elijah bore witness to the *inevitability* of the cross.

And finally, in this time of his transfiguration, which seemed brief to those who were watching but maybe not to Jesus, the future also would have been laid open. He would have seen beyond his death on the cross to his risen life as our Savior and King forever to “the joy set before him” (Heb 12:2).

Jesus would know then that not only the prisoner who died with him at Calvary, but millions more, would rise to live with him forever. He would see that his suffering and shame would become the glory and crown of many who would receive him in faith and confess with Peter, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matt 16:16).” Surely these things encouraged our Lord in his resolve to fulfill the will of the Father and give his life as a ransom for many. The writer to the Hebrews said he endured the cross *for the joy that was set before him* (Heb 12:2, above). The *joy set before him* was simply this: that you and I would believe in him, and receive new life in him and live forever with him in eternity.

If you are not yet sure of these things, *now* is a good time to open your mind and heart to the truth. *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 6:23).