

THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST

Luke 9:28-36

All great leaders have a select inner circle with whom they discuss the more delicate matters. During the earthly ministry of our Lord there were three disciples who stood in this peculiar relationship to Him. Of the Twelve, it seems that Peter, James and John were nearest to Christ in sympathy and understanding, so He chose to have them with Him at times of special stress and importance. Most unusual were the privileges enjoyed by these three men. To them were given some of the greatest privileges ever bestowed on human beings. Their peculiar relationship to Him led them into the very holy of holies in His life. These three confidants doubtless were the ones who best understood His purposes.

About a week after Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi, the Lord Jesus took this inner circle with Him to the summit of a lofty mountain to pray. Neither of the writers of the gospels recorded the name of the mountain, but it is now generally agreed among the scholars that it was Mount Hermon, the most lofty, grand and impressive mountain in all Palestine. Its snow-clad peak, towering more than nine thousand feet, could be seen for miles in all directions.

There, Christ Jesus was transfigured. As He prayed, His face and even His clothing took on a glory that revealed the absolute purity of soul and the utter yieldedness of spirit which were within Him. The glory of His person flashed in radiant splendor. His face was aglow with the radiance of heaven, and His raiment was as white as the light. His whole appearance became wonderfully glorious. His magnificence flamed and His majesty flashed.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ and they carried on a conversation. Of particular interest to us is the subject of the conversation between Christ, Moses and Elijah. They spoke of our Lord's coming death at Jerusalem. Thus the importance of the sacrificial work of our glorious Lord is suggested in that it was the topic of conversation at that particular time.

The transfiguration of Christ was one of those wonderfully beautiful and deeply spiritual experiences which defy human analysis or satisfactory description. The glory which the disciples saw as Christ underwent that remarkable change was that of the absolutely sinless soul of Christ shining through the veil of flesh and revealing the amazing beauty of His inherent character. It was the glory and beauty of His spotless humanity. Both His face and His garments shone with a radiant, glorious beauty. Even His clothing glistened with a whiteness beyond anything nature could produce or art imagine. His whole being flashed with splendor. His transfigured appearance filled Peter, James and John with overwhelming awe. They never forgot the impressive view of their transfigured Lord. Mortal eyes had never seen such a sight in all the generations of men.

Certainly we cannot condone the wrong of these three men in going to sleep at the time when Christ was talking with these two Old Testament patriarchs. It was not an ordinary event that was being enacted before their eyes. What remarkable patience the Lord Jesus demonstrated in this case! Being omniscient, He knew the weaknesses of these men when He selected them. He knew that they would go to sleep during the transfiguration. And yet, being a Lord of grace, He still selected them. What a testimony to the patience of the Lord of glory! He knows our frame, that we are but dust. He knows all of the machinations of our hearts and still He loves us.

After being aroused from their slumber, Peter, John and James gazed in speechless amazement at the sight being unfolded before their very eyes, that of their glorified Lord. They observed that the Master had been joined by Moses and Elijah. Moses was a representative of the law, and Elijah was a representative of prophecy. These two patriarchs had come from the realm of glory to talk with Christ about His coming death in Jerusalem. Thus law,

prophecy and grace met on that memorable occasion. Very dramatically it was impressed on the disciples that both the law and the prophets recognized the necessity of Christ suffering and dying in order to accomplish the task which He came to perform.

Although the disciples had never seen Moses or Elijah in the flesh, they recognized and knew them. Incidentally, this observation goes a long way in answering the question that is sometimes propounded as to whether or not we shall know each other in heaven. Their recognition of Moses and Elijah ought to settle the question for us as to whether or not we shall recognize in glory those whom we have known here on earth. As the disciples readily recognized Moses and Elijah, whom they had never seen, so shall we, as Christians, know each other in resurrection glory. Oh, what a day that will be when first of all we shall see Him by whose grace we have been saved, and then we shall look again into the faces of our dear ones whom we have loved long since and lost awhile!

Peter was quite enamored with the circumstances prevailing there. He was so thrilled that he did not care to return to normal and routine living. But, as was so often the case, he allowed his ecstasy to warp his judgment. Always the spokesman of the group, he could not keep his tongue under control. There could not have been a more appropriate time for him to have kept his mouth shut. But, he made another one of those numerous mistakes for which he was noted.

Wanting to detain the visitors from the heavenly realm on the earthly scene, he impulsively made the proposal that all of them remain there on the mount. He even suggested the erection of three tabernacles to the honor of Moses, Elijah and Christ, respectively. Any person, who speaks as quickly and as frequently as did Peter, will always say things that he regrets later. Peter's terrible mistake on this occasion was to suggest that the Lord Jesus be put on the same plane with Moses and Elijah who were but mere men. Instead of practically reducing Christ to the level of Moses and Elijah, he should have exalted Him to His rightful place of preeminence, far above and beyond them or any others.

The impetuous apostle did not know the full meaning nor the possible effects of his statement. So, it is not surprising that no response was made, or at least none was recorded. God did correct Peter's estimation of His only begotten Son by declaring both His deity and His supremacy. He said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." The people in general had not been hearing Christ as they should. Believing that God had spoken only through Moses and the prophets, they had rejected the teachings of Christ. But, that day on the mount God thundered forth an ultimatum that settled the matter of His Son being an authoritative teacher.

Christ's transfiguration established His superiority over Moses and Elijah. Awe-stricken and fearful, the disciples hid their faces. Approaching the disciples and touching them, Christ reassuringly said, "Arise, and be not afraid." When they opened their eyes and looked, the others had disappeared, and "they saw no man, save Jesus only." He dominated the whole scene. They did not think of anybody except Him. He is the only Saviour. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

After the three disciples had enjoyed their amazing and thrilling experience, they descended the mountain with Christ. It was a good thing that He had not consented to Peter's proposal to stay on the top of the mountain. There was plenty of work awaiting them at the foot of the mountain, work of mercy and healing. All of us, like those early disciples, need the mountaintop experiences, but we also need to be brought back to the valley where the needy and suffering multitudes are always present. Multitudes need the tender, loving and healing touch of Christ on their lives, but they will never experience it unless we carry His gospel to them.