

THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Matthew 17:1-2.

In his account of the transfiguration Luke says, "As He was praying, the fashion of His countenance was altered." Communion with God will transfigure and transform life. Prayer leaves its imprint on the face and its effects in life because it reaches down into the very heart.

The transfiguration followed Christ's announcement to the disciples that He would soon go to Jerusalem and there be arrested and put to death. Peter had told Him that such would not happen to Him. Jesus rebuked him and then showed the disciples the real meaning of discipleship. It meant the cross. Christ Himself shrank from suffering and death. His human nature exerted itself. The disciples were amazed and terrified at the prospect ahead. Both Christ and the disciples needed strengthening. Christ took, Peter, James, and John with Him up into a high mountain apart to pray. While Christ prayed the disciples, worn and weary, went to sleep. When they awoke, the face of Christ was ablaze with glory, and with Him were Moses and Elijah.

The disciples had seen Christ under circumstances but never had they seen Him in such effulgent glory. His face was radiant and His raiment was as the gleaming whiteness of snow. They had seen sunset glories, but they had always faded into night fall. They had seen the heavens studded and emblazoned with the stars. They had seen the moon shine in its silvery radiance as it reflected its glory. They had looked upon the beauties of the earth and beheld them glorious and resplendent. They had seen the beauteous rarities of nature the material heavens so pure and unvarnished. They had feasted their eyes upon the pure white lily, but when they saw the transfigured Christ in His dazzling brilliance and glorious beauty, all other beauties faded into unattractive dimness. His transfigured beauty and celestial glory defy analysis or description.

I. The Personalities of the Transfiguration.

These personalities are in three groups.

1. There were Peter, James, and John.

These three were with Christ in the house of sorrow, on the hill of vision, and in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter was always one of the select few chosen for any special occasion. He was the impetuous, forward, outspoken disciple -- the one into whose texture of life were woven the varied threads of character. He was bold, daring, courageous; ready at a moment to do what he deemed should be done. He it was who said to Jesus concerning His crucifixion, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." He had affirmed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He it was who smote off the ear of the servant of the high priest in Gethsemane. He had followed Christ afar off on the crucial night when Christ was arrested. When Christ was under arrest, Peter denied with bitter oaths that He had ever seen Christ.

But this same disciple repented in bitter tears and later declared. "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Peter was the one who preached at Pentecost when three thousand souls were saved. He remained true to Christ from then on to the end of his life. Tradition has it that Peter was crucified, but, feeling unworthy to die as Christ died, he requested to be crucified with his head down instead of up. He wrote the epistles which bear his name.

Then there was James, one of those who had left all and followed Christ. James was pastor of the large church in Jerusalem and also the presiding officer at the Jerusalem council when the question of Gentiles being admitted to the church was decided. He called himself the "bondslave of Christ." He wrote the book of James. He declared, "shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." He died a martyr, thus sealing his testimony with his blood.

John was also there. He is known as the beloved disciple. He followed the Lord faithfully, submissively, and effectively. His heart yearned and burned for the Master and His work. He wrote the gospel that bears his name and also the three epistle of John. It was John who first recognized the Lord that early morning hour as He walked on the shore, after the disciples had spent a fruitless night fishing. On the isle of Patmos John wrote Revelation as he saw the visions and glories of Christ. Naturally, Jesus would want John near Him on an occasion like this.

2. There were Moses and Elijah.

"And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with them." Here were two heavenly visitors, Moses the courageous deliverer, and Elijah the bold reformer. Moses had received the law and schooled Israel in it. Elijah had called the people back to it.

Here was Moses who was hidden at his birth; who was miraculously saved as he was set afloat on the waters of the Nile in an ark made of bulrushes; was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter; was educated in all the wisdom of Egypt. At the age of forty he made the supreme decision which made him immortal -- choosing rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." At the age of forty he slew an Egyptian whom he saw abusing an Israelite. He fled to the Midian mountains, married, became a herdsman, and remained there for forty years. While there he saw the burning bush and heard the voice of God calling him to go and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He saw his shepherd's crook converted into a snake. He saw his hand become white with leprosy and then made clean again. He saw the 600,000 men and women, besides the children, leave Egypt for the Promised Land, led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He cried to God and was directed to "Go forward!" He saw the waters of the Red Sea open, Israel pass through on dry ground, and the Egyptians destroyed. He had died, and had been buried "by Nebo's lonely mountain." Hundreds of years have come and gone. Now he is back on the earth again.

There, too, was Elijah. He had spoken God's message boldly and faithfully while on the earth. He had defied kings in their corruptions, counts in their injustices, and individuals in their sins. Elijah had prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not for the space of three years and six months. He it was who called all the nation together on Mount Carmel for a showdown between the God of Israel and the gods of Baal. The fire from God had come down and consumed the sacrifice. Then he had prayed for rain. He sent his servant to the top of the mountain to look for a cloud. When he came back the seventh time he said, "I see a cloud about the size of a man's hand." That was enough for Elijah. He ordered that all get down from the mountain. The rain poured. The drought was broken. God revealed Himself unto the people again.

3. There was the central personality, Jesus.

"He was transfigured before them." The glory of His person was here shown in radiant splendor. Here His person flashed into prominence. Here His magnificence flamed and His majesty flashed. "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." His transfigured appearance filled Peter, James, and John with overwhelming awe. The glory of the light of heaven was upon Him. His whole being flashed with splendor. This change did not come from without; it came from the glory which flashed from within Him. His countenance flashed with bright, ethereal glory; his voice reach-

ed a tone of sweeter music. Everything around glowed and sparkled.

II. The Purpose of the Transfiguration.

1. One purpose was to strengthen Christ.

We must not forget the humanity of Christ. The human in Him shrank from the horrible and shameful death He was to die. This is shown by His prayer in Gethsemane, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He could not have had the human element and at the same time have failed to dread human sufferings. When He went to the mountain to pray, His praying was not in vain. The Father was with Him, and transfigured Him, and strengthened Him. God did not take away the cross but He strengthened His Son so that He could endure it.

2. Another purpose was to strengthen the disciples.

After the Father had spoken, Jesus said, "This voice came not because of Me, but for your sakes." They had been shocked at Christ's announcement of His coming sufferings and death. Their morale had hit zero. They certainly needed bolstering. No one can know how much this experience strengthened them. They never, to their dying day, forgot the sight of the transfigured Lord.

III. The Power of the Transfiguration.

This is found in the revelation of the supremacy of Christ. When God spoke, He did not speak about Peter, James, and John; He did not speak about Moses and Elijah; He spoke about His Son: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him."

In the dazzling glory which revealed the supreme place and perfect holiness of Christ, the disciples "fell on their faces, and were sore afraid." Jesus spoke and said: "Be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." He was the One on whom the interest of the transfiguration centered. His figure stands out, solitary, above, and beyond all. The exclusiveness of His official work, the centrality of His place, and the hopes converging in Him were revealed. Jesus, and Jesus only, is the Redeemer of the world. He is the only unchanging source of the believer's comfort. "Jesus only" is the way to God. "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

These words, "Jesus only," constitute the gospel in two words. They are God's answer to the cry of the ages. "Jesus only" is the key which opens the door of good will, reveals the secret of believers, and gives confidence in God. "Jesus only" is the one panacea of mercy, pardon, and salvation. As Peter, James, and John descended from the mountain, the topic of their conversation was not the dazzling light, not Moses and Elijah; it centered in "Jesus only." His personality, purpose, and power dominated the whole scene. They did not think of anybody or anything except Jesus.

"Jesus only" is the theme for the scholar, the message for the preacher, the discussion for the student, and the basis of hope for the world. "Jesus only" is the clue to powerful preaching. This was the secret of apostolic preaching and power. He occupied their thoughts; He inspired their message; He gave strength for their tasks; He gave them compassion for the lost. Theirs was not a message of human philosophy; theirs was more than a mere social gospel. Theirs was not a message of cultural salvation. Their message centered in the ineffable and omnipotent Son of God. They saw Him as the world's greatest

personage and as man's only hope. The preachers of greatest power through the ages have been the men whose preaching has been centered in "Jesus only." They did not deal in little moral essays which leave Christ, His deity, His virgin birth, His vicarious sufferings, His spilled blood, or His resurrection out.

"Jesus only" is the need of and supply for every soul..Are you lost? He is your salvation. Are you weak? He is your strength. Are you hungry? He is the Bread of Life. Are you thirsty? He is the Living Water. Are you in sorrow? He is your comfort.