

## Introduction

We are going to look again at the transfiguration today. Last time we covered the difficult fact of prophetic perspective because Jesus predicted the transfiguration in a way that united it with His coming glory. This is clearly the case when we remember the following things: a) Jesus is talking about His coming in glory in Matthew 16.27-28, **For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.** <sup>28</sup> Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. His coming in verse 27 can hardly be something different from His coming in verse 28 (the same is true in Luke's account of these same things, 9.26-27). b) Matthew specifically connects the prediction with the time of the transfiguration, and he identifies the particular people in view ("some of you standing here") to be Peter, James and John.

**And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light (17.1-2).**

When we weigh the unity of the events that Christ predicts (the unity of His coming in glory and the transfiguration), then we have to conclude that Jesus is speaking in the language of prophecy or prophetic perspective. In prophetic perspective, Jesus speaks about things that will happen at different times in the future, but He speaks about them in a concatenated way (or tightly packed way). He compresses separate future events into a single event without indicating time lines or historical process. It is as if history will jump from event to event without time in between (i.e., after six days you will see my transfiguration and my second coming; He is referring to the transfiguration-second coming). This is the way prophets see the future and talk about it (cf. John's proclamation that Messiah will come baptizing with the fire of judgment, Mat. 3, and the apostles' preaching in the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes, Mat 10).

The *lesson* is that *Jesus is now the glorious exalted Sabbath king coming in His kingdom!* His coming in glory is anticipated during His humiliation while He prays on the mount of transfiguration. His coming in glory is inaugurated at the resurrection, exercised by the Spirit in the time between, and consummated on the Day of Judgment. All of these things are His coming in glory.

The unity of His coming with the transfiguration sets a goal before us. We have to try to find ways to preserve the unity of the events in order to think about the events in the way our Lord presents them to us. Thus, striking as it may sound, some disciples actually saw His coming in glory on the mountain of transfiguration. Accordingly, this way of thinking about these events, this set of mind, must be the foundation on which we build application to take the text home in our lives. In a word, we need to consider how we find the gospel message in this narrative. We have to do some brainstorming on verse 2, of course, but we have to note how the narrative is larger than the actual transfiguration. We have before us the *transfiguration narrative*. Note how the textual unit is inclusive of verses 1-13 (cf. v.1, "going up" on a mountain, with v. 9, "coming down" from the mountain; cf. also the discussion about Elijah, 9-13 that connects with the appearance of Elijah during the transfiguration itself).

Therefore, my title is "Transfiguration as Gospel" and we have these three points to consider in working our way to application: the Father's love, the Savior's comfort, and the disciples' task. (Our goal is to think about the coming in glory as a unit, and about the transfiguration as a unit in order to lay hold of the gospel of the transfiguration).

### 1A. The Father's love

Luke makes it clear that it was in prayerful fellowship that God blessed Jesus with transfiguring glory. In prayer and flowing out of prayer, Jesus received encouragement for the intense suffering that He must shortly endure. <sup>28</sup> **Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.** <sup>29</sup> **And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white (Lk 9.28-29).** If we follow Matthew's narrative as a whole, we will see a number of ways that the Father displayed His love for Christ.

1) First, He gave the sign of the transfiguration itself

In the transfiguration, the face of Christ glowed like the face of Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex 34.29-35): **And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light (Mat 17.2).** In other words, His face was like the radiance of the sun and His clothes glistened (like the glistening reflection of light bouncing off an object clothed with droplets of water). This was a supernatural sign, a miracle with a message that revealed Jesus as the "greater than Moses" who was to come (Deut 18.18). Like the experience of Moses, "his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Ex. 34.29).

The sign manifested the glory of God; it stated that He is the express image of God, and that His glory is the glory of the Father. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear: **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (1.1-3).** He is the radiance of the glory of God, notably, on His way to suffering (Mat 16.21). In the miracle, the Father gave our Lord a taste of His coming glory. Jesus tasted of that glory at the same time that He displayed it on His face and clothes. The love of the Father made Jesus radiate divine glory. Being loved, He reflected the glory of God; in the same miracle, He received love and displayed glory. The Father is firm in having Jesus learn obedience through suffering, but His love gave our Lord a taste of glory to enable Him to endure what is still ahead in His humiliation.

2) Second, the Father sent Moses and Elijah

They spoke to Him about His suffering as accomplishment. <sup>30</sup> **And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9.30-31).** His accomplishment at Jerusalem refers to more than the mere fact of what will happen. His departure from this world through suffering is a redemptive *accomplishment*. Moses and Elijah spoke to Him about it. We know this further by the very choice of these OT figures that represent the entire old covenant that is coming to accomplishment (cf. fulfillment) in the person and work of Christ. Again, the Father's love shines on Christ encouraging Him in His monumental task. In other words, God gave the gospel, good news, to the Lord Jesus by the manifestation of glory, and defined the core of that good news by sending Moses and Elijah (the two of them particularly) to talk to Him about His death as accomplishment. The gospel that flows from love is here in the transfiguration narrative.

3) Third, the Father gave His word of acceptance and encouragement

**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him (Mat 17.5).** According to Luke, God's love and good pleasure translate into election: **This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him! (Lk 9.35).** The sovereign love of God is electing love; sovereign election is "loving election." Love is the fountain from which election, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification of sinners all flow (Rom 8.28-31). The Father set His love on the Son in the miracle, in the words of Moses and Elijah, and by calling Him **my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased**. Jesus belongs to the Father as His Son in a way that is distinct from all other human beings. We are sons of God because of Christ, but it can only be said of Jesus that He is "My Beloved Son." Jesus, in His person and work, pleases the Father. That is good news for Christ to hear as He engages the suffering that will come from the Father's hand (that is the deepest stroke that pierced Him on the cross).

4) Finally, the Father's love assures Christ of His authority

He tells Him that despite the fact that the authorities of Israel and Rome, and the powers of darkness (cf. the next narrative) seem to have a final say over His life; nevertheless, the Father gives Him ultimate authority to speak from the throne of the universe. Our prophet is our king. The Father says of the Son, "**Listen to Him**" (Mat 17.5). This is another way of describing His coming glory in all its sweetness before drinking the cup of death with all its bitterness. The Father's love sustains our Lord as He steps into the shadow of the cross. We have a virtual commentary on our text in the book of Hebrews: **But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom (Heb 1.8).**

## 2A. The Savior's comfort

By the Savior's comfort, I refer to the comfort that He gives to the disciples for He loves them to the very end no matter how ignorant they may be or how fearful in the presence of the Majesty of God.

**...Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear" (Mat 17.6-7).**

His touch is a personal and individualized expression of love: He walked over to them there with their faces on the ground, and He touched them with His love. It was a loving touch, a touch of love. Likewise, He gives us the touch of the Spirit now in the time between so we can lay firm hold on the comfort of His word to us. Sometimes, the word of the Father brings us distress, even as that word directs us to the suffering and death of Christ, and the cross we must share with Him. Here too, the Lord Jesus is our mediator and comforter.

Now, it is not by a physical touch, but by the working of His Spirit, but He comes to us personally. He gives us His own marvelous word of assurance and the comfort of His love: **Rise, and have no fear.** This word comes through to us when we cast ourselves down before Him acknowledging our fears and owning our needs.

## 3A. The Disciples' task

Some basics about their task are part of the message of the transfiguration narrative. Note the dialogue that took place as they descended from the mount of transfiguration:

**And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." <sup>10</sup> And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. <sup>12</sup> But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist (Mat 17.9-13).**

In a word, what we have here is the message to the disciples that not now but later they are to tell the vision of the coming of the kingdom as shown in the fact that the forerunner has already come. John the Baptist has already come (cf. if you know who John is then you know that the kingdom of God has come). Now they are still not ready to do the foundation laying work, but later they will confess His name and proclaim His glory. We now share in the coming glory in the apostolic word of the NT added to the OT.

## Concluding implications

### 1) Goal

A goal for studying this context is to think about the transfiguration narrative in light of prophetic perspective, to think this way for guidance in our walk with the Lord in our time between His comings.

### 2) Adjustment

We need to adjust how we refer to the time between. It is better that we speak of our experience now *in the time of* His coming, rather than in the time between His comings. At least, it seems better to speak and think this way in order to work with the text from the point of view

of prophetic perspective. Granted, we can use the language of the first coming, the second coming, and the time between His comings. But to get at this passage as best we can, we need to note how Jesus simply refers to His coming. Perhaps, we might speak of the time between His appearings, between His first appearing on earth in the accomplishment of His saving work and His second appearing when all that He accomplished is brought to consummation.

### 3) Prayer per Luke's account

Prayer is a means by which we, like Christ, taste the coming glory. Prayer is not only an important means of grace; it is a means by which we taste the glory of heaven to come ahead of time. Thus, it is a means in the Christian life that focuses on what shall be; prayer is an entry into the heavenly tabernacle, the holy of holies, and the glory of the Father. Thus, prayer is a crucial means in getting our minds right by setting them "fully on the grace that will come to us in the revelation of Jesus Messiah" (1 Pet 1.13). In turn, prayer aids heavenly mindedness that grounds child-like obedience and intelligent holiness (1 Pet 1.13-16; cf. against the Day of Judgment, 1.15 with Mat 16.27, at His coming in glory):

**Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."**

Prayer is a vital component of God-minded discipleship for prepared minds, for sober-mindedness, and for a mind set on the future.

### 4) The Father's love for us

Here is a marvelous thought: the Father proclaims His love for the Son in an address to His disciples. Now we have the record. The Father's love for Christ involves His love for us. He gives His encouragement to Christ about Him, but for His hearing. God speaks to Him in this way to speak the good news to His ears and ours. He tells us that He is pleased with Christ. He tells us that the work of Christ on the cross is a saving accomplishment. The good news to Christ to sustain Him for His task is good news to us because everything in our salvation depends on Christ, on the acceptability of His redemptive work. That He is beloved Son, that He is elect, and that He pleases the Father means that, if we cling to the Lord Jesus committing our steps to Him for obedience, then we are beloved sons and daughters, we are elect in Him, and we please the Father on the pathway of the repentant life. Yes, the transfiguration narrative is good news in the word about Christ that God gives to His disciples. Like the disciples, we too have assurance by this miracle-narrative of the Father's love.

### 5) The Father's command to us

We are to hear and obey the word of Christ; we are to **listen to Him**. The day has dawned and salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Chronologically speaking our glory is closer every day, but in prophetic time, the glorious day has already dawned, we are now in it as we wait for the brightness of the noonday sun. Dawn is part of and a promise of high noon and the radiant glory of the sun on a clear day with deep blue sky. Therefore, we are to walk as children of the light of the new day in the pursuit of truth, love, and holiness (Rom 13.12-14).

Pointedly, we are to listen to Him, to the Lord Jesus Christ because He is now the king coming in His glory. This means we are to hear, understand, heed, and obey. God-minded discipleship means that we commit ourselves afresh each day to learn from Christ in terms of His present enthronement as Sabbath king and Head of the church. He rules the church. He rules history. He rules the six days of the week, and He rules the seventh day on Sunday. What an encouragement for us to listen to Him to know that the scepter or rod of authority of His kingdom is uprightness. From Him we learn what is true, good, and beautiful.

**May we bow down before the majesty of our God in humble recognition of His matchless glory. May we acknowledge our sin. May we petition for enlightenment by Christ through the Spirit. May we worship the king all glorious above, now and forevermore, amen.**