

The Lord's Transfiguration On The Mount.

Text: Matt 17:1-9

Suggested Hymns:

37, 273, 747, 327, 462

1) How it transpired

2) What Effect It Had On The Disciples

3) How We Are Made Partakers Of His Glory

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 17:1-9, *¹ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; ² and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*

³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. ⁴ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" ⁶ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

⁷ But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." ⁸ When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The reason for which the Son of God was made flesh and dwelt on this earth in the form of a servant, patiently enduring mockeries, bonds, stripes, wounds and death, was to restore again to us what we had lost by the envy of Satan and by the sin of Adam.

We read in 1 John 3:8, *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* He came to take away sin and to destroy all the evil which the devil has brought into the world.

He came to take away the evils which beset and oppress us, and to restore to us in body and soul that pristine health which man had when he was formed by the hand of his Maker.

This healing the Lord begins in us, in this life, by forgiving us our sins, by helping us *put off the Old man with his evil deeds*,¹ and by prompting us through His Word and Spirit to a holy life. He will finish our healing on the day of our resurrection, when He will call our bodies from the dust of the earth purified from sin, that we, healed in soul and body, may *“live under Him in His kingdom, in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”*

This healing which costs us nothing cost the Son of God dearly. He had to purchase it for us in a hard servitude, by lowliness, meekness, suffering, bleeding and dying. He had to become what the prophet had foretold in Isaiah 53:3, *A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* Yet even in the days of His flesh it was already manifested in many ways, that His servitude would not be in vain, but would bring forth for man the fruit of everlasting salvation and blessedness.

When Jesus cast out demons He showed that He had come to break the fetters with which Satan had bound us. When He healed the sick He gave evidence that He has come to heal our sicknesses. When He quieted the raging winds and calmed the surging waves He indicated, that He quiets the billows of an uneasy conscience and gives peace to the heart. When He raised up the dead He exemplified that He had come to abolish death and to bring life and immortality to light.

But it was on the Mount of His transfiguration where the Lord gave to three of His disciples the highest and brightest sample of the salvation and glory which we obtain by His servitude.

As Jesus was transfigured no more the form of a servant, but only the glory of divine majesty was seen in Him. Likewise we will be transformed that no more wounds and bruises, weaknesses and death will be found in us, but only health, strength and beauty. We read in Philippians 3:21 that He *will transform*

*our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*²

Therefore in our labours, trials, struggles and weaknesses, in the death of this present life, the Lord's transfiguration should be to us a shining star of hope. To awaken and refresh our hope let us today in the spirit of our mind joyfully witness *The Lord's Transfiguration On The Mount*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How It Transpired

The transfiguration of Christ took place a week after He first told His disciples that He must suffer and die at Jerusalem. This prediction of His suffering and death was very offensive to the disciples, so much so that Peter took Jesus aside and said to Him: *"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"*³ Peter, not yet rightly understanding the Lord's mission, thought that Jesus should be spared such shame and suffering, but Jesus replied, *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

His transfiguration so soon after this occurrence was to show the disciples that His suffering and death were not against His glory, but rather through dishonour He would obtain the highest honour; for from that same body, which was to be spitted on, stripped and nailed to the cross, divine glory shone forth.

Our text begins, *¹ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves.* For witnesses of His transfiguration Jesus chose three of the most prominent of His disciples, Peter, James and John.

Peter had taken special exception to the Lord's saying that He must die at Jerusalem, James was to become the first martyr among the apostles being put to death by Herod at Jerusalem, and John was to become the principal defender of Christ's divinity. With these three the Lord went up into a high mountain.

This mountain is not named by the Evangelists, but the earliest church fathers agree in saying, and it is generally accepted, that it was mount Tabor, the highest mountain in Galilee and a secluded place.

When they had arrived on the mountain Jesus prayed and while He prayed⁴ *He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*

The apostles compare the glory shining forth from the Lord with the brightest visible light known. We mortals know of nothing, and can imagine nothing brighter than the sun or more shining than the light. Human language lacks the words fully to express the glory of the invisible God, and the Scriptures speak to us by way of comparison to convey to our minds some idea of what it is.

Yet we must not think that the Lord's countenance shone with a glaring light which would have blinded the eyes like the noonday light of the sun. It was a lovely, beatifying light; for the disciples were ravished with delight as they looked upon the Lord.

We cannot adequately describe the glory of Christ transfigured. Suffice to say that when we die in the Lord; then we will know His glory, when we will see Him face to face.

Coming down the mountain the Lord commanded the disciples, saying: *"Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."* His transfiguration was not yet to be made public, because it was something which belonged to His state of exaltation.

Hence we should content ourselves to walk by faith until the day of our exaltation, when we shall *"meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*⁵

But this we may ask: From where came the glory visible in Him? It came not from without, but from within.

In the Old Testament there was one man of whom, in a certain sense, we may say that he was transfigured. It was Moses. When he came down from the mount, where he had conversed with God, his face shone⁶ that the children of Israel could not bear to look at him. That light shining in the countenance of Moses was impressed on him by his discourse with God. It was from without and not from within.

But it was not so with Jesus Christ. He was God. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the God-head bodily. In His state of humiliation He ordinarily kept

His divine majesty hid so that the eye of man could not discern it, but there on the mount it shone forth in Him. Therefore His very garments were made white as the light.

The light in Moses' countenance, being only communicated from without, was hid when he covered his face with a veil, but the garments of Jesus were no obstruction to the brightness streaming from His body. It was the brightness of His Divinity made visible to the bodily eye of the disciples, and to that brightness His vesture could be no obstruction.

For this we have the testimony of both Peter and John. Peter writes: *“We were eye-witnesses of his majesty ... on the holy mountain”*⁷ and John says, *“We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”*⁸

Note well this wonderful occurrence on mount Tabor, and learn from it that divine glory is in very deed communicated to the humanity. It was the same body which shone in divine glory and which was raised on the cross covered with shame, just as St. Paul accused the Jews that they *“crucified the Lord of glory.”*⁹

³ *And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.* Elijah had not died, he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Moses died on Mount Nebo but was buried by God Himself. Here Moses appeared together with Elijah; so his body had been raised again from the grave.

There is another life after this present life. Moses and Elijah were not dead, they lived and were in communion with God, otherwise they could not have conversed with the Lord. When man departs this life he enters on another and an altogether different life; for this present is a bodily and that other a spiritual life.

This is exemplified here, for those two men had long since departed out of this life, yet they lived and their bodies were now in such a condition that they could appear and disappear. Of that spiritual, heavenly life we know nothing certain except only what the Scriptures tell us.

That we ourselves may enter that life and learn all about it, we must give heed to the subject on which those two men conversed with Jesus. On what did they speak? Did they talk on monkery, or fasting, or church ceremonies, or the mourners bench, or holiness meetings, or doing right? Here were two men from the celestial city speaking with the Son of God. They did not engage in flimsy talk, but chose a subject of vast and vital importance, and the conversation taking

place on earth we may surmise that it concerned the weal and woe of us earth-born mortals, and so it did.

We read in Luke 9:31 that they *spoke of His decease* [Jesus' death] *which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*. This was the important subject, this the topic of their conversation, the Lord's capture, trial, death, burial and resurrection.

Do you think: Oh is that the outcome? That tedious old story, heard a hundred times! Had they not something more interesting, the glories of heaven or the mysteries of the spirit world, to talk about?

Friend, if you find the history of Christ's death a tedious old story, you are certainly of a different mind than Moses and Elijah. To them the death of Christ at Jerusalem was the great, the all-absorbing subject, and the same is the case with all the saints standing before the throne of God; for their song to the Lamb runs thus: *"For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God."*¹⁰

The Lamb's blood and death is the admiration of the saints in heaven, their song and their happiness. If to you all this is a tedious old story you are not fitted for the company of the saints; neither will you be found there, unless you put away your carnal mind and crawl to the cross. The cross of Christ is your salvation. O make it the talk of your soul; commune on it in your heart.

2. What Effect It Had On The Disciples

From that heavenly conversation the disciples might or ought to have learned the true meaning of Christ's suffering and death, but they were so filled with amazement that they could scarcely realise what they were thinking or doing.

This is evident from the words of Peter; for he said: *"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."* Peter was so enthused that he forgot everything. His wife, his friends, his property were all forgotten. He wanted to stay on that mountain and never to come down again. Peter forgot even himself; for he spoke only of three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah, but none for himself.

His soul was so ravished with joy that all his desire was to see the Lord always. Peter was indeed talking foolishly when he spoke of building tabernacles there.

Just from the Lord's conversation with Moses and Elijah, Peter ought to have understood that Jesus must come down from that mountain to die a shameful death at Jerusalem, but "***he did not know what to say.***"¹¹

From the effect of the Lord's transfiguration on the disciples we may learn a few things concerning the life in the new heaven and the new earth. The disciples at once knew Moses and Elijah, not by pictures which they had seen, — there were no photographs of those men — they knew them by intuition.

The saints in heaven will recognise one another, and what joy it will be to meet the martyrs and all those who loved and confessed Christ on the earth! It is joy to meet with those whom we dearly love. But this earthly joy is a mere shadow of what will be in those realms where love is perfect.

Fascinated by the sight of the Lord's glory Peter forgot everything else. When we shall see the Lord face to face all will be forgotten which could disturb our happiness. The former things will then have passed away. Earthly loves, earthly affections and aspirations, earthly cares and afflictions will be past and will trouble the heart no more.

The seeing of the Lord's glory will afford full satisfaction. Heaven is the place where tabernacles are built and not taken down; tabernacles which will remain, when the mountain on which Peter proposed to build will be no more.

"***We know,***" says St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1, ***that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*** From those tabernacles none will wish to remove; they will all say: "***it is good for us to be here.***"

Is it your desire to be there? Does your heart consent to Paul, when he says: "***In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven?***"¹²

The lover of Jesus is resigned to the Lord's will, whether to live or die, but his longing is to depart and to be with Jesus, and his soul says: The sooner the better.

3. How We Are Made Partakers Of His Glory

Does your heart tremblingly say: Ah indeed! Who would not desire to see the glories of heaven? But how shall I be found worthy to enter there? I have sinned and my garments are spotted.

Let me direct you to a circumstance in this text which will teach you where to seek your worthiness.

The garments of Jesus were of earthly fabric and though He wore good garments so that the soldiers crucifying Him thought it worth while to cast lots for His coat, it is safe to conclude that by much travel His garments were more or less soiled and dusty.

Yet by the glory flowing from His body *“His clothes became as white as the light.”* If we are to be found *“qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light,”*¹³ our souls must be dressed in white. But to make the soul pure and white earthly powers and human skill are all in vain.¹⁴

There is only One who can make the soul white. It is Jesus of whom the prophet Malachi said ³ *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.*¹⁵

This refiner and purifier is Jesus, who made His own earthly garments white as the light, and shining as His raiment was, is but an emblem of the *“garments of salvation”*¹⁶ which He has earned for us.

Dressed in His righteousness, the robe of His merits, our souls are gloriously arrayed in the sight of His Father; for of Him the Father bears this testimony: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* If the Father is well pleased with His Son, He must also be well pleased with those who are in Christ.

O you who have walked in sin, you who have soiled your soul and loaded your conscience, you who have made your members weapons of unrighteousness, turn to Jesus Christ. He can make white and pure.

Be the spots in your soul ever so dark, your deeds ever so black, Christ's glory will ever always overcome them. We read in Isaiah 1:18, ¹⁸ *“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet,*

They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

Turn to Jesus, beseeching Him to make white your garments, and doubt not that His blood cleanses you from all sin.

This is the Father's command that you come to Jesus; for He says: ***"Hear him!"*** Hear Jesus Christ. What has He to say? He says: ***"I am the LORD who heals you."***¹⁷ Acknowledge that you are sick, sick unto death and hear Him saying, ***"the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."***¹⁸ ***"Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."***¹⁹ ***"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."***²⁰

Turn to Jesus Christ; incline to Him the ears of your heart and hear Him speaking to you in many words of great promise, and you will soon learn to say:²¹

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heav'nly land. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Colossians 3:9

² 1 John 3:2

³ Matthew 16:22

⁴ Luke 9:29

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:17

⁶ Exodus 34:29

⁷ 2 Pet. 1:16

⁸ John 1:14

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:8

¹⁰ Rev. 5:9

¹¹ Mark 9:6

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:2

¹³ Colossians 1:12

¹⁴ Jeremiah 2:22

¹⁵ Malachi 3:3

¹⁶ Isaiah 61:10

¹⁷ Exodus 15:26

¹⁸ Matthew 18:11

¹⁹ Matthew 9:2

²⁰ Luke 12:32

²¹ Hymn 327