

LESSON 2 – WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH?



Reading Assignment:

Bible Reading: Mark, John
Text Reading: Benware Chapters 5 - 8

One evening when I was a young boy I was in my room during a thunderstorm. I was telling my mother about a phenomenon in the Arctic called a “White Out.” Just as I described how a person in a “White Out” sees nothing but white all around him, a bolt of lightening struck a tree just outside our home. The room and everything in it turned white and then a crash of thunder came. I jumped a foot. It took minutes to regain my composure. I was not in the Arctic, but the effect was the same. I will never forget how everything in the room lost its colour.

In this lesson I would like us to study a very unique event in the Gospel record. Just as everything in my room paled next to the whiteness of that lightening, everything in the world of three of the disciples paled in comparison to what happened that day in Israel.

First, remember the Gospel writers did not write a biography of Jesus of Nazareth. They wrote the four Gospels that were portraits designed to:

- Provide an accurate record of the events surrounding Jesus’ earthly ministry
- Prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah
- Show the way to eternal life through His name

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The Transfiguration fulfilled all three of these purposes. Interestingly, the Transfiguration is only recorded by three of the four Gospel writers. John does not tell us any details of the event. Recall, that each of the writers had a unique portrait to paint of the Messiah.

- **Matthew Jesus’ kingship and government**
- **Mark emphasized his servanthood**
- **Luke his humanity**

You should recall from the last lesson, that John's portrait emphasized the deity of the Messiah.

STOP AND WRITE YOUR THOUGHTS

Why do you suppose that John did not record this momentous event?

We will see the answer as we look at the other three accounts in Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; and Luke 9:28-36.

G. Campbell Morgan wrote:

The transfiguration is one of those passages in the Savior's earthly history which an expositor would rather pass over in reverent silence.

The Transfiguration answers first of all,
Who is this Man, Jesus of Nazareth?

Secondly,
What is His mission or purpose?

The Transfiguration is God's answer to mankind concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

GOD RARELY SPEAKS ALOUD

Let us begin with the context. Verse 5 of Matthew 17 records the Father speaking. Only three times in the Gospels does God the Father speak, therefore it is very important to study those rare occurrences. Many a novel has been written in which one of the characters rarely speaks. When they finally do speak, it is one of the most significant lines in the novel.

STOP AND READ

Read the following verses/chapters and fill in the blank with the term which best describes the event taking place.

God spoke at the

- _____ - Matthew 3:17
- _____ - Matthew 17
- Day of the _____ - John 12:28

Looking at each passage, let us see if we can find any common characteristics in these three events. John the Baptist says:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matthew 3:7

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 3:12

John the Baptist is clearly speaking of a coming judgment upon those who oppose the Lord. Now, turning to the Gospel of John [remember that John the Baptist and the writer of the Gospel are two different men], we hear the Lord speak to His Father concerning His impending betrayal and death.

Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

John 12:27,28

Finally, in Matthew 17:9-13, we see the subject is also His death.

And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

A careful study of all three passages reveals the following common characteristics:

- death or judgment
- Jesus' Heavenly approval as God's sent One
- Jesus' willingness to face the coming crucifixion.

A further clue to the commonality of the three utterances from God is found in verse 12, where Jesus is says

But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Matthew 17:12

The term "son of ..." speaks of one who is of the "exact" same nature. Thus the use of Jesus and Son of Man means that Jesus Christ is of the exact nature of men, that is, He was real flesh and blood being born of a woman. He was not a spirit inhabiting a body, or any other mystical concert. He was "very man of very man." When Jesus

died on the Cross for our sins, He did it as the last Adam, for only a man could die for another man. Only a man could shed His blood to satisfy God's justice that is demanded for sins. Only a man could accomplish the substitutionary death required by God the Father.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [of the penalty]. Hebrews 9:22

We should stop here and also note that only God could have paid the price of all men's sins. Upon the Cross, Jesus, the Son of God, endured an eternity of hell punishment for all men during those hours.

If Jesus had just been a man and not God, He could have paid for His own sins by death. If Jesus had just been a sinless man, i.e., a perfect man, He could have paid for the sins of other man, as a substitute. But then only one man's sins could have been paid for.

Because Jesus Christ was the infinite God-Man, He was sinless, He could shed real human blood for sins, He could pay the penalty of sin, and He could pay for all men's sins.

John did not write of the Transfiguration, because he was emphasizing the deity of Jesus, rather than the human aspect of Him. It was not God that died, but the infinite God-Man. Recall,

- ◆ Matthew wrote of His earthly human kingship showing that He descended from King David, a man of the human race,
- ◆ Mark wrote of a human servant giving His life for another
- ◆ Luke, in-depth portrayed His humanity.

Thus, just as we should have expected, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the chroniclers of the Transfiguration, for it related to the coming death of the Messiah, the Son of Man Who was both God and man. If He had not been human, the Transfiguration has no meaning.

The Transfiguration also answers the question posed by Jesus in Matthew 16:13,

*When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, **Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?***

The Transfiguration also eliminates all other possible identifications for Jesus of Nazareth.

- He was not John the Baptist – John’s task was to denounce sin.
- He was not Elijah the prophet - his task was to bring people back to the law.
- He was not Jeremiah the prophet - his task predicted judgment [Jeremiah 9:1].

All of these men fulfilled their duty as prophets of God, BUT only Jesus went beyond this and was the Messiah.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God.

Matthew 16:15, 16

Notice carefully, while Peter attests to the Messiahship, he was only able to understand this by revelation from God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 16:17

For Peter and for us, the Transfiguration is the authentication of Peter’s revelation and statement.

Uniquely, only three men were chosen to see Jesus in His full glory,

. . . glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

John 1:14

WHO WERE THESE THREE MEN?

JOHN

- ◆ was the disciple the Lord loved
- ◆ was the last apostle to remain on the earth
- ◆ was the writer of the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ

JAMES

was the disciple who first faced martyrdom by dying for the Lord whose glory he saw on Mt. Hermon at the Transfiguration.

PETER

was the disciple who, when faced with possible death, failed His Lord, but the one who after His Resurrection never failed.

These were the “inner three” disciples.

QUESTION?

Does it bother you that Jesus had an “inner three”? Did He like them better than the rest, better than any other men?

Write your thoughts

No, the real answer is that Jesus responded to their love and faithfulness to Him, to their heart attitude. Closeness to the Lord does not depend upon your skills or great accomplishments, or sinless perfection, for every man or woman fails as Peter showed. Closeness to the Lord depends upon your heart for the Lord; do you want to be close to Him, as John was? The Lord did not favour these three, rather He responded to their heart's desire to be near Him. John would write:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:5

Abiding speaks of this closeness of heart.

STOP AND STUDY

Using a concordance, look up the word, *abide*, and the word, *abideth*. Read all the Old Testament references to get a better definition of the concept. See how John used it throughout his Gospel. I believe you will find the time well spent.

WHY A TRANSFIGURATION?

The Transfiguration was for the disciples and not some grand exhibition to the world. Only three were allowed to come up the mount. Only three witnessed it. Not one of them recorded the event. Rather they allowed Matthew, Mark, and Luke to record what they had seen and experienced. John only alluded to it in John 1:14 and 1 John 1:1. From this we can see that this was a very personal event for the three disciples. In Matthew 17:2,

*And was transfigured **before them**: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

Matthew helps to explain what “transfigured” [metemorfwyh (aorist passive) from emprosyen (in (one's) sight) autwn] means.

Literally it means to “reveal what is inside the visible” or “change (meta) of form (morfh).” The classic example is that transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

In the chrysalis you cannot see the beautiful butterfly, but when it “metamorphosis's” the beauty is seen. However, the translators of the Bible did not chose *metamorphous* as this word had pagan associations [Robertson].

Matthew amplifies “transfigured” by adding: “*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light* (Matthew 17:2). Matthew’s strong association of the Jewish kingship certainly sees in this event an illusion back to God’s Glory as experienced by Moses

STOP AND READ

Exodus 33 and 34

Peter also alludes to his experience of the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eyewitnesses to His **majesty**.*

Majesty is used only three times in the New Testament and it “always speaks of splendours, overwhelming beauty, and glory, that which arrests and subdues the mind to the point of adoration and worship.” Thus, the glory seen came from inside the Messiah and was temporarily revealed to these three disciples.

The inward, invisible was briefly made visible to three men that needed the experience in order to help them carry out their Lord’s mission.

Thus, the outer chrysalis was

- ◆ the “man” - Jesus of Nazareth.
- ◆ The inner being was God, the Creator, the Saviour.

The transfiguration answered the question...

Who is Jesus the Messiah? >>>>>>>>> He is God in the Flesh!!!!!!

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

THE SECOND QUESTION - WHAT WAS HIS MISSION?

Many men had come before Jesus proclaiming the words of God to men.

Many had spoken of sin, of judgment, of Hell, of God, of mercy, of grace, etc.

But only one man could die for man and pay the debt of their sins.

Jesus' earthly purpose was to die. The Transfiguration would emphasize this purpose and mission; to die for others. Thus, at the transfiguration the subject discussed was His death.

Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

Luke 9:31

DEFINITION: EXODUS

A going out, or departure for another land.”

We have “Exit” signs in rooms to tell us the way out from a building if the lights fail. The “Exit” takes us into the light outside the dark building. So too, is our exodus or death. We leave this dark world and enter the light of God’s glory in heaven, if we know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour. The key here is that “Death is not the end.” There is no such thing as annihilation, re-incarnation, etc. How do we know this? Look at Matthew 17:3

And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Recall that Moses was present, identifiable, and visible to the disciples at the Transfiguration. Remember, the Transfiguration was “before **them**.” Thus, Moses represented the “exodus” of God’s people from the slavery of their taskmaster in Egypt. This was a **physical** deliverance that prefigured the **spiritual** deliverance the Lord would accomplish by His death.

But never forget that Moses grew old, died, and was buried by God Himself. Yet, before their very eyes, they saw Moses, not reincarnated, not annihilated, but alive in Glory.

So too, Elijah, was identifiable and real. Though he too grew old, he had never died. He was taken or caught up into heaven directly. It was he who battled the pagan priesthood and won. He symbolized the beginning of the coming exile. Neither Moses, representing the Law, nor Elijah, representing the prophets, could stop man’s rebellion and sin. Only death could remove the curse of sin. Thus,

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Matthew 17:5

But I say unto you, That Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of man is also about to suffer at their hands.

Matthew 17:12 [NKJV]

The true solution was not Law and warning, not a physical deliverance, nor a physical exile, rather it was the death of one qualified to deliver sinners from a spiritual death or eternal exile from God.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

1. The tabernacles or booths - Peter always tried to avoid the Cross and wanted to bring in the kingdom without it. He had been taught that the Messiah would come at the Feast of Tabernacles and then the 1000-year Millennium would begin with the Messiah as king.
2. Moses symbolized the need of the Old Testament saints, long dead, to have their debt sin to be paid.
3. Elijah symbolized the need of the New Testament saints, who would be either caught up to heaven or died before the Messiah would come into His glorious kingdom on earth. They needed their sins paid for just as the Old Testament saints.
4. We learn from Moses and Elijah that death is not the end. Further,
 - a. We know we can recognize the saints in heaven, even if we never knew them on the earth.
 - b. There is understanding of the spiritual events in heaven concerning the earth
 - c. People continue in similar activities in heaven as on earth. They do not have wings!
5. We learn that God's "afters" are worth waiting for

However dark it now seems, then there will be light enough in God's "afters" to explain the dark. We live in the dark "now" with the certainty of
After Light — Gain after loss [Matthew 17:16-23].

6. God chooses to whom and what extent things are revealed, not us [Matthew 17:1].
7. The true heroes are those who have never seen Him, yet serve Him.

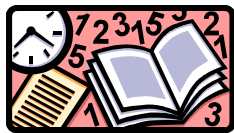
Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

John 20:29

REMEMBER:

Who is Jesus? - He is God with all His Glory

What is His mission or purpose? - To die on the cross to take God's wrath against our sins with His own Human Body so that we can have eternal life with Him for His glory and pleasure.



Homework Questions

Briefly write a paragraph on each of the following based upon your text reading, the Bible, and Lesson 2. Note: some of the questions are to prepare you for the next lesson by preparing you to think about the subjects. Your answer to these is based upon your discussion rather than a right or wrong answer.

LEVEL 2 & 3 – HC-104/204 COURSE*

- 1] Briefly explain why the Gospels are not biographies, but portraits of Jesus.
- 2] Give the three occasions with references that God spoke aloud in the Gospels. Briefly compare God's statements and discuss their differences and similarities.
- 3] Why must Jesus Christ be the infinite God-Man? Why could He not just be man or why could He not just be God?
- 4] Why was it important that Moses and Elijah appeared at the Transfiguration? What does this say to us? What did it mean to the three disciples?
- 5] Using your study of *abide* and *abideth*, summarize what it means to "abide in Jesus and He in you" [John 15:4,5]. Be sure to discuss why John was one of the "inner three."
- 6] If asked if there is life after death, what would you say? What Biblical authority would you use? How does the Transfiguration answer this question?

On your answer sheet indicate the

_____ % of the reading assignment completed:

_____ % of the Bible reading completed.

You may submit your homework answers either by mail or email. Email submissions may be sent either as an attachment or within the email. If sent as an attachment, they must be in Word, Word Perfect, or text format. If in doubt as to format contact us for further information. Send your homework answers to:

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* Only some lessons have distinct assignments for Level 3.