

A New Vision of Jesus

Feb. 19, 2023

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Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (Matthew 17:1-9).

1. Iceland Tour

Last November, our daughter Ahreum, Christine and I had the opportunity to visit Iceland to celebrate her graduation from school. We stayed there for a week. Many people try to visit Iceland to see the Northern Lights. Due to the weather, we weren't able to see the Northern lights. But we were able to do a one-day tour of the country.

When we first got to Iceland, I thought it was a tough country with difficult living conditions. In early November it was cold, windy, and the sunrise was late. Cost of living was much higher. However, after a one-day tour, I realized that Iceland had been blessed by God in many ways. I found that God had been taking care of the people in Iceland. The one-day tour completely changed my impression of Iceland. Here are some photos from the trip.

2. Who is Jesus?

As my view of Iceland has changed, I wonder whether our view of Jesus can change. I mean can we see a different vision of Jesus throughout our lives? The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Lord, Creator, Messiah, Redeemer, Bread of Life, and Son of the Living God. There are many other identities of Jesus throughout the Bible.

Our passage today Matthew 17 tells us of the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. In our passage, the disciples see a new vision of Jesus. Six days after Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of the Living God at Caesarea Philippi, Peter, James, and John travel with Jesus up a high mountain. We do not know the exact location, but many say it might be Mt. Hermon or Mt. Tabor. The location is less important. What is important is the experience that the disciples have with a new vision of who Jesus is.

Verse 2 says, "**he (Jesus) was transfigured before them.**" His face is shining like the sun, and his clothes become white as light. The term "transfigured" means a change that occurs when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Jesus' face in the passage reminds us of Moses, whose face shone after encountering God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:29). Moses' and Jesus' shining faces are a reflection of God's glory. Yet, the passage gets us to ask the question, what is the meaning of Jesus' shining face? Before we answer this question, let us take a look at what happened to them.

Suddenly the three disciples notice that Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus. Why are there Moses and Elijah? It is because they are the most important figures in the Old Testament.

Moses says Deuteronomy 18:15, "**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to him.**" Moses predicted the coming of a great prophet. Malachi 4:5 says, "**See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.**"

Elijah was considered the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah. In verse 12, Jesus says, "**Elijah has already come.**" Jesus means the coming of John the Baptist. The appearance of Moses and Elijah confirms the coming of the messianic age and Jesus' messianic mission.

What do you think Moses, Elijah and Jesus talked about? Matthew does not tell us the content of their conversation, but Luke says, "**they appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem**" (Luke 9:31).

Luke tells us that they talked about Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Moses and Elijah's conversation with Jesus affirms that Jesus is the Messiah who comes at the climax of the eschatological age.

3. A New Vision of Jesus

In verse 4, Peter says to Jesus, "**Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.**"

Why does Peter want to build three shelters on the top of the mountain? It is because Peter is reminded of the Feast of the Tabernacles or the Feast of

Booths. During this time, people celebrated and remembered Israel's wandering in the wilderness.

Today, Jews erect booths for temporary dwellings that resemble the living structures that the Israelites had during the Exodus. The Feast is a reminder of God's presence, protection, and guidance. Peter would have thought it would be good to do something similar in order to remember Jesus' transfiguration.

What did the three disciples learn from this experience? At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the disciples, "**who do you say I am?**" Peter says, "**You are the Christ and the son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:15-16).

But after the transfiguration, Peter calls Jesus, "**Lord.**" The term "**Lord**" most often is used to mean God of Israel in the Old Testament. This is why Psalms 23 reads, "**The Lord is my shepherd.**"

"**Lord**" means God of Israel. In this, Peter is saying that Jesus is God. John's Gospel 1:1 & 14 say, "**In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.**" ... "**And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.**" The Word refers to Jesus.

Here John says that Jesus is God. Where do you think John got this concept of Jesus? I believe it is from the transfiguration of Jesus. James 2:1 says, "**Lord Jesus Christ.**" These three disciples learned that Jesus is God.

Through the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples learned that Jesus is not just human but also divine. They saw a new vision of Jesus in the transfiguration. Why is it important for them to have such a new vision of Jesus? Knowing that Jesus was God would help the disciples understand the resurrection of Christ after Jesus' death on the cross. If God is omnipotent, the Lord Jesus who is God can do anything including rising from the dead.

4. Listen to Him

Verse 5 says, "**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'**"

While Peter was talking, the disciples heard a voice from the Lord confirming that Jesus is the Son of God. These are the same words that God spoke at Jesus' baptism.

We also learn one more thing from the transfiguration. The Lord says, "**listen to him**" (meaning Jesus). What does this mean? It means that the disciples were told to trust and obey Jesus, even though it would be hard for them to understand Jesus' death and resurrection.

The voice of the Lord scares the disciples, and they fell to the ground. Jesus tells the disciples to get up. When the disciples get up, they only see Jesus. Moses and Elijah have departed.

While they are coming down the mountain, Jesus tells the three disciples not to tell anyone until he is raised from the dead. Why would Jesus tell the disciples this? It is because the disciples did not fully understand and would not be able to explain what they saw. The disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah, but they would not be able to explain Jesus' death and resurrection until much later.

5. Why is the Resurrection Important?

On April 9, we celebrate Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. Why is the resurrection of Jesus important to us? The resurrection is the most important thing that makes Christianity what it is today. Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity and there is no church. The resurrection of Jesus transformed the lives of the disciples and every follower of Jesus after that.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17 & 19, "***if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still in condemnation for your sins... And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world***" (NLT).

Disruption and decay on earth is inevitable following death. We have seen this on a mass scale in the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Death can sometimes seem senseless, and it makes us lose hope. Even if we have a reason to look forward to the future, we will all one day pass away and return to dust.

However, Jesus' resurrection signals a new life that we have because of Christ. Our struggles, suffering and death that we experience on earth are transformed into blessings, joy and an eternal life with God.

6. Conclusion

The transfiguration of Jesus gave the disciples the opportunity to see a new vision of Jesus. Jesus was not only the Son of God but God himself. God in Jesus rose from the dead and gave each of us a new hope of also being risen from the dead when Jesus returns.

7. Application

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. It marks the beginning of the season of Lent. Just as the wilderness is crucial for the Jews, Lent is very important for Christians. During Lent, we experience God's presence, protection and guidance and change our habits to make an extra effort to seek a new vision of Jesus during the Lenten season.

The three disciples had an awakening moment on the mountain where they saw the transfiguration of Jesus. What are we going to do this year to see a new vision of Jesus on the mountain top? I pray that each of us finds a plan to

see Jesus in a new way this Lent season. May the resurrection of Jesus be meaningful in a new way. And may we be true witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus to the world. Amen.