

Transfiguration of Christ - radio

“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. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 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. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only” (Matthew 17:1-8).

I’ve entitled this message, “The Transfiguration of Christ.” Just before this account, Jesus told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed and rise again the third day. From our sermon on that text, we saw that Christ must suffer, die and rise again because God must be glorified, because God was pleased to glorify His Son in the salvation of His people. This is the context for what we read here. Jesus honored His Father. He did His Father’s will -- all that was in His Father’s heart and mind (1 Sam. 2:35). God, therefore, has glorified His Son!

It was six days since Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer and die in humiliation at the hands of wicked men. He gave them a preview of what was coming in His death on the cross. This serves as the context for the transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain with Him apart from the others. He was transfigured before them. His glory shone forth. Peter later wrote that they were “*eyewitnesses of His **majesty***” (2 Pet. 1:16). They saw the majesty of Christ as the Lord of glory, the King of heaven (1 Cor. 2:8; Ps. 24). Not only did they see Jesus transfigured, but they saw Moses and Elijah appear with Him in glory. These two OT men appeared in their resurrected, glorified bodies (Php. 3:21). Peter then

spoke. But God the Father corrected him from heaven: “*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased! Hear Him!*” The disciples fell on their faces when they heard God speak. Jesus came and touched them and said, “*Arise, be not afraid.*” When they looked up, the cloud was gone and they saw Jesus only.

There are at least four important lessons taught in this account.

1. First, **Christ is glorified**.
2. Second, **Christ must have preeminence** (highest place of honor).
3. Third, **The NT is now come**. Christ, the head of the covenant is come. The NT now appears. He will fulfill and abolish the old. He will put into force the everlasting covenant by shedding His own blood.
4. Fourth, **Jesus only**. In the Gospel, we must see what these disciples saw: Jesus only!

Christ is glorified

The first thing we learn from the account of Jesus’ transfiguration is that **God glorified His Son because His Son honored Him in His life and death**. Christ, as the covenant head of His people, fulfilled the everlasting covenant that God made with Him before the world began (Heb. 13:20; Rev. 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:18-20). In that covenant, Christ must fulfill all conditions. In doing so, He saved His people and now gives them eternal life.

In John 17, Jesus spoke in prayer to His Father. He said, “*Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*” (John 17:1-4). You and I must know in the low bottom of our heart that Jesus Christ has finished the task God gave Him to do! He has actually saved His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Because of this, He is now seated in glory on the throne of heaven. “*When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Heb. 1:3). Having accomplished

the will of God in His life, He now goes to the cross to offer Himself in satisfaction to God for the sins of His people. *“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God”* (Heb. 10:6-7)! With the Son of God, saying and doing are the same thing. Therefore, on the certainty that He would fulfill all of God’s will, He said to His Father, *“Glorify thy Son.”* He speaks with authority as equal with His Father: *“Glorify thy Son!”* In John 12:23 Jesus told His disciples, *“The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified”* (John 12:23). And again, in John 13:31, after Judas went out to betray Him, Jesus said, *“Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.”* All of these speak about the same thing. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the Son of man, eternally redeemed His people from all their sins, from death, from the curse of God’s law, and from bondage to Satan. He gave Himself as a ransom offering to God for His people. By His precious blood, He paid the price of their redemption. On fulfillment of this eternal will of God, God bestowed upon Him, the God-man, the highest possible honor and glory. It is a glory that He deserved. God will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; 48:11), but He is pleased to give all of His glory to His Son as our God-man-Mediator! Christ honored His Father in obedience. He honored His Father by putting away the sins of His people, by perfecting them by the offering of Himself to God. He honored His Father by His triumph over all enemies. Because Christ humbled Himself in His life and the humiliation of His sufferings and death, God has highly exalted Him, *“who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Php. 2:6-11). The disciples see a glimpse of the glory of Christ in preview of all that God is about to bestow upon His Son.

I recently watched the acceptance speech of our newly elected president. In his speech, he recognized many who helped him during his campaign. Now, if I give public commendation to someone doing a good job, it may mean something to them, but not a lot to others because I am a nobody. But when a president openly commends those who served him before an entire nation, lavishing praise on them, it means a lot more. Here, **God the Father** openly acknowledges His Son! What do we learn from this?

We learn that **the measure of Christ's glory is the measure of the greatness of the One who bestows that glory upon Him**. There is none higher than God the Father. He speaks in the highest honor of Christ as **His Son**. He calls Him His **beloved Son**. He says He is **well-pleased** with His Son. And **He commands all to hear Him!** There is no higher honor than honor given by God the Father! He gives honor to Christ here in preview of what He was about to accomplish in His death. Moses and Elijah spoke to the Lord Jesus about the death He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. We therefore know that Christ's death was the subject of the conversation into which God the Father interjects this high honor of His Son! If God so honored His Son, we must highly honor Him! The high honor given to Christ by His Father is the measure of His accomplishments in His work on the cross: He put away the sins of His people, He perfected them forever, He triumphed over all enemies, He made known His Father's glory, and He reigns to give eternal life to as many as God has given Him.

In the OT book of Esther, the king of Persia gave high honor to Mordecai, a Jew. Mordecai had told of a plot to kill the king. When the king discovered what Mordecai had done for him, he asked his highest officer, Haman, *“What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring*

him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him. Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken” (Esther 6:6-11). Haman was a wicked servant. Nevertheless, in gross self-conceit, he imagined that the king would honor him. He had a high opinion of himself, though he was plotting to kill Mordecai. But the tables were turned on Haman. In this account in the book of Esther we see a preview of what is done in Matthew 17:1-8. **The coronation of Christ is the greatest upset victory in all of time and eternity!** The One whom man and devils despised is now exalted to the throne of God the Father and revealed to all to be the One whom the King delights to honor! This honor is so great and His sovereign rule so undisputed, that even His enemies must proclaim His greatness to the glory of God the Father (Php. 2:9-11). Every knee shall bow. Every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! Why? Because He alone is worthy. Because He alone has opened the book of God’s eternal will and fulfilled it in total. Because He saved God’s chosen people with an everlasting salvation! By His accomplishments and sovereign rule, Christ now gives eternal life to as many as His Father gave to Him before time began. By this, God is glorified in Him. God the Father therefore bestows all honor on Him!

Christ must have preeminence

The second thing we see in this scripture in Matthew 17 is that **Christ must have preeminence**. I think the greatest lessons in scripture are often given in the context of great mistakes by sinful men. Here, Peter wants to set up three tabernacles, one for each of Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Peter wanted to honor all three. He saw His Master as one among the others. But while Peter spoke these words, God the Father spoke from heaven to teach us the lesson of Christ’s glory. *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased! **Hear Him!**”*

Jesus is not to be honored **among** the great men of scripture. He is to be honored **alone!** He must have the first place of honor in all things. Moses and Elijah were

“holy men of old,” but they stood in glory with the Lord Jesus for the very reason why Christ must have all glory! It was **He who saved them from their sins and raised them from the dead and gave them glory with Him**. Christ must be all to us, or He will be nothing at all for us. He must have all of the glory, because He alone is worthy. No man deserves glory. The glory God gives to His saints is **the reward of Christ’s obedience**. They must claim, as Paul did, *“I am what I am by the grace of God”* (1 Cor. 15:10)! Moses and Elijah were holy men of old, but in themselves they were sinners. **No man is just before God except those justified by the obedience and blood of our covenant head, the Son of God in our nature**. In heaven, all the saints will cast their crowns at Jesus’ feet. There is not one thing we can claim as our own. As Solomon said, *“Of thine own have we given to thee”* (1 Chr. 29:14). And Paul said, *“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”* (Rom. 11:36). *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence”* (1 Col. 1:16-18). Christ must have preeminence because by Him all things were created. All things were created for Him. He is before all things. He is the head of the body, the church. It is for His people, the church, that He accomplished God’s will. **He created the church for Himself and He redeemed the church to Himself**. As the head of His people, the God-man, our Mediator, has been given all honor and glory. He must have the preeminence! He made everything in heaven and earth to fulfill His purpose of salvation for His people, and He has accomplished that purpose in His death and resurrection!

The NT is now come

The third thing we learn from Matthew 17 is that Christ is glorified at this time because this marks the transition between the Old and New Testaments. Moses gave the law to Israel on two tables of stone called, “the tables of the covenant” (Heb. 9:4). The law of Moses is a covenant of works. In a covenant of works, man

must obtain and retain God's favor by what he does. The ten commandments, along with the entire law of Moses, put requirements on Israel. God promised to bless them if they kept His law, and He promised to curse them if they did not keep it. Their very lives and all blessings from God depended on their continuous and perfect obedience. Any failure by Israel to keep (not merely try to keep, but keep) every commandment with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength, with gladness and joy, would bring God's curse upon them (Deut. 27:11-28:47). They could only live if they kept all of the law all of the time, perfectly. Of course, no man ever did and no man ever could keep such a covenant! The law says, "Do this and live!" but it gives sinners no hope and no help. We cannot keep God's law because it is holy and we are sinners. We cannot keep it because our heart is the source of evil. Jesus said, "*Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within*" (Mark 7:21-23).

In the law of Moses there were mainly two things. There were precepts to keep and there was a hint at how holy God could receive sinful men. Such an approach to God required a tabernacle where God would meet with men and make Himself known to them. It required a priesthood to mediate between men and God. It required sacrifices to make atonement to God for the sins of the people. And it required a sabbath to rest in the salvation work God would do to remove those sins. Thus, Moses represents the Old Covenant, which was a covenant of works. In that covenant, God placed requirements on man for obedience. Man must meet those requirements to live. And God gave representations in that same law for how sin would be dealt with.

Elijah also appeared on the mount of transfiguration. He was the most prominent of all OT prophets. He represents all of the prophets. These two men appeared with Jesus on the mount. Moses represented the covenant of works and laws which foreshadowed and pointed to Christ. Elijah represented the OT prophets that spoke of Christ's sufferings and death and the glory that would follow (1 Pet. 1:10-11). But when the cloud was raised, only Jesus was left. This signifies that the NT was

now come by Jesus Christ and that the OT was to be done away. The NT is a covenant of grace. In the covenant of works, sinful man must meet all conditions. Men can break a covenant of works. All men have. And a covenant of works brings men into bondage, because it demands what they can never give. But in the NT, all conditions are put on Christ, the covenant head. He is the head of the entire Church, the elect of God, those Christ created and purchased with His own blood to be His body (Act 20:28; Col. 1:16-20).

The NT is not new because it was only set up when Christ came. Actually, the NT is an everlasting covenant. It was established before the foundation of the world. In Heb. 13, God says, “*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect...*” (Heb. 13:20). Until Christ, the OT was in force. But when Christ offered Himself to God, He put the NT in force. As head of the covenant of grace, God made all of the promises to Him. All of God’s people receive those promises with Him as their head. All of the promises depend on Christ fulfilling the will of God. This He did when He “*gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father*” (Gal. 1:4). When Jesus gave the cup to His disciples in the last supper before His death, He said, “*This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (Matt. 26:28). The conditions of the NT were that Christ would stand for His people, that He would fulfill their obligations to God for obedience and endure the punishment for their sins. His death was the culmination of His obedience. It fulfilled all of the conditions of the NT. This testament is a covenant of grace. In a covenant of works, man can break the covenant. But every promise in the covenant of grace depends only on Christ, therefore, man cannot break this covenant. Unlike the covenant of works that brings men into bondage, the NT frees men from sin to serve God in newness of spirit (Eph. 4:24; Rom. 6:4; 7:6).

When Moses and Elijah departed from the scene on the mount, it signified that the OT was fulfilled in Christ. On fulfilling it, God glorified His Son to the highest place of honor. He fulfilled all of the law for His people. He is the high priest who

offered Himself, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He is the Lamb offered. He tore the veil that prevented sinful men from approaching holy God. All those whom He saves **approach God by His blood** (Heb. 10:19). By His death, our Lord Jesus, as the covenant head of His people, fulfilled the OT. That law is now put away for all He died to save: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”* (Matt. 5:17).

Jesus only

When the disciples heard God the Father speak, they fell on their faces. But Jesus came and touched them. When the cloud dissipated, they saw Jesus only.

At Sinai, the people could not come near the mount. *“But now once in the end of the world Christ has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Heb. 9:26). To every believer, God says, *“when Christ had by Himself **purged our sins**, He sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high”* (Heb. 1:3). It is because the NT has been fulfilled in His blood that Christ now speaks peace to His people to their great comfort.

The sum and substance of all that God says in scripture is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The Gospel of Christ is the NT in His blood. The Gospel is the light that gives the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4,6). The law instills fear in the heart of sinners. It identifies our guilt. It exposes our sinful corruptions and reveals our utter helplessness to keep it. The law calls for our curse. But OT scripture foreshadows the coming Redeemer. The OT tells how God put His people in Christ. The Israelites in the house where the blood was sprinkled were saved by that blood. The one thing that God was looking for that night was the blood of the passover lamb. *“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”* (1 Cor. 5:7). In the NT, God deals with all of His people in Christ. *“As in Adam all die, even so, in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Cor. 15:22). God considers only Christ, and for His sake alone, forgives all of the sins of all of His people. It is the obedience of Christ alone that God sees as the righteousness of His people. God rewards His people for what He has received from His Son. **All that Christ**

has done is all I have to be saved to the glory of God. And this is true for every believer. When God shows us Christ and His glorious achievements for sinners in the Gospel of His grace, then, with eyes of God-given faith we see and trust, and boast in, and rejoice in, and hope for, Jesus only.

The message of Christ's transfiguration is that by Himself He has accomplished **all** to save His people from their sins, according to the will of God. And for this, He is honored by God the Father with incomprehensible glory. All for whom He died will be with Him in glory. He speaks peace to us, saying, "Be not afraid." All is fulfilled. Christ has accomplished all. It's not about me or you. It's about Jesus only! It's not about my service, it is about His. It is not about my faith, it is about His faithfulness. It is not about my experience, it is about His experience. Oh, that we would see Jesus only! My sin raises up objections in my conscience. Doubts and fears swallow me up. But God the Father in scripture lifts our eyes out of the sadness and shame and confusion of ourselves to see **Jesus only! He is glorified.** Behold Him! Our Lord Jesus spoke in prophecy in Isaiah 45:22, "*Look unto **me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else***" (Isa. 45:22). "*There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

When Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer, die and rise again, Peter rebuked Him. Jesus then rebuked Peter. Six days later, Peter was granted this high privilege of seeing a preview of Christ's glory. What grace is this! Our Lord Jesus saw no sin in Peter (Num. 23:21)! In addition, Peter not only saw Christ in His glory but he heard God the Father speak from heaven! Yet soon after, Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times! What do we learn from this?! We learn that we are sinners. We learn that we are saved for no reason found in us, indeed, it is in spite of us that the Lord saves us. And why does He do this? It is for His great name's sake! He will be glorified in our salvation! It will be in spite of our sin. Christ has done all to fulfill the OT and put the NT in force. He offered Himself to God for our sins, shedding His own blood. Every blessing promised is our **because of Him**. God the Father has glorified Him! And we sinners, saved by His grace, now glorify God for His mercy (Rom. 15:9)!