



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Transfiguration

Sermon Notes

Luke 9:27-36

July 22, 2012

²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” ²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”— not knowing what he said. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

- Since the Reformation began nearly 500 years ago, the Protestant Church, especially the Reformed tradition within the greater Protestant movement, has placed supreme emphasis on the authority of Scripture over and against the authority of man and the Church.
- Most certainly the recommitment to biblical authority is one of the great outcomes of the Protestant Reformation. However, one of the unintended consequences of the reaffirmation of scriptural authority appears to have been – among other things – the viewing of virtually all human authority with tremendous suspicion. In fact, it seems that since the Reformation, many Protestants have not ceased “protesting” against human authority, even though human authority is clearly established by God as stated in Scripture.
- Unfortunately reaction against human authority has even extended to the Apostles, with most Protestants failing to recognize the unique apostolic authority that was given to each of the Apostles, due to their place and function with Redemption History.

- Yet, the Apostles were established by Christ Himself for the establishment of the Church and the completion of the scriptural canon. In fact, on multiple occasions, the Apostle Paul defends his own apostolic authority thus establishing the validity of his testimony as one sent directly by the risen Christ. Consider that Paul even writes in his Epistle to the Ephesians the following:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.. Ephesians 2:19-20

- Furthermore, when Christ gives the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:16-20, the eleven remaining Apostles (Judas, of course being the one not present) were the original intended audience. Also, several weeks later, just prior to His Ascension, Christ, once more speaks to His disciples, saying [in Acts 1:8], “⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
- Today, we often quote this very verse, without realizing that Christ was originally speaking, not to the masses, but to His appointed Apostles. Even more, **Acts 1:8** is essentially an outline for the Book of Acts, and we *fulfilled* by the Apostles (otherwise, Christ’s words would have not proven true). Most certainly this passage – and others like it – apply to us, for we learn that we can trust the words of our Lord and that – in the case of Acts 1:8 – **we are “the ends of the earth!”**
- And so, throughout the Gospels we often see Christ acting, not *primarily* for the benefit of the masses, but for the benefit of the Apostles, that they may be adequately prepared and equipped to continue the work Christ called them to when He was gone from this earth.
- Once such example of this, as we saw several weeks ago, was Christ’s feeding of the 5,000. And one of the greatest examples of Christ acting for the benefit of His Apostles is the Transfiguration, which we come to this morning.

- | |
|---|
| <p>I. The Transfiguration
 II. The Two Witnesses
 III. The Request of Peter
 IV. The Words of the Father
 V. The Silence of the Apostles</p> |
|---|

- Last week, we read how Christ had promised that “...whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” Then, our Lord tells His disciples, “²⁷ **But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.**”
- Scholars have often debated the meaning of Christ’s words here, and there appears to be several possibilities here:

1. The “kingdom” that Christ is referring to is the Kingdom of God that will be inaugurated by His resurrection and subsequent ascension. Basically, this view asserts that when Christ is raised from the dead, ascends to the right hand of the Father, and “sits” enthroned as the Risen and Exalted Lord, the Kingdom of God begins. If this view is correct, the “kingdom” that Christ is speaking of is essentially the “kingdom of saints” that begins at Pentecost (i.e., the kingdom of the Church). John Calvin appears to have held to a form of this view.
 2. Another perspective is that the “kingdom” spoken of here is a promise of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which would have served as a foretaste of the coming Judgment and Christ’s return in glory.
 3. Yet another view is that Jesus was speaking of His Transfiguration when “some standing here” (namely, Peter, James and John) would witness a glimpse of Christ’s eternal glory.
- Given that the account of the Transfiguration occurs immediately after these words of our Lord, and the fact that only “some [standing here]” witnessed the glorious event, I believe that possibility 3. is the most likely.

The Setting of the Transfiguration

²⁸ *Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.*

- Luke writes that “about eight days after these sayings” (i.e., Peter’s confession and Christ’s challenge to His disciples, all taking place at Caesarea Philippi), he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.
- We are not sure what mountain that Luke (and Matthew and Mark) are speaking of where the Transfiguration occurred; however, the three possibilities that are most likely are Mount Hermon, Mount Tabor, and Mount Meron. The one that is the strongest possibility, because of the tradition of the Church Fathers, is Mount Tabor, located in southern Galilee, six miles from Nazareth (however, since Scripture is silent, we cannot speak with authority, nor is such knowledge necessary for properly understanding the text).
- According to Luke (Matthew and Mark do not mention this detail), the purpose of Jesus going up on the mountain was “to pray.” This detail adds to the overall mood of the scene and as Darrell Bock states, “In Luke, when prayer is present, something significant usually follows.”

I. The Transfiguration

²⁹ *And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.*

- Luke states that as Jesus was praying on the mountain, His appearance changed in a significant way. In fact, Luke literally states that “the appearance of his face was other.”
 - This type of description reveals that this was not just a change in lighting or perspective, but a fundamental change in the face of our Lord.
 - According to Matthew (Matthew 17:2) and Mark (Mark 9:2), Christ’s face was **transfigured** (*metemorphothe*).
- Not only this, however, but “his clothing became dazzling white.”
 - Matthew (Matthew 17:2) describes Jesus as “white like light” and mark (Mark 9:3) that his “clothes glistening, very white as no bleacher on earth could bleach them.”
 - The point is that **Jesus revealed a holy, pure and dazzling glory that none of the disciples had ever seen before.**
 - Indeed, this brings to mind an allusion to Moses in Exodus 34:29-35:

“²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.”

- Yet, what becomes clear in this passage as it continues is that Jesus is, indeed, **the One who is greater than Moses** (recalling the promise from Deuteronomy 18:15).
- Most certainly, the main point of this part of the text is to emphasize that what the disciples saw was a glimpse of the eternal, unspeakable glory of the eternal Son of God.
- According to scholar David Gooding, the purpose of this event was to convince the disciples “beyond any shadow of doubt of the real existence of the other world, the eternal kingdom. Our world is not the only one: there is another. Next they were given to see that the other world is not just future to our world, but concurrent with it, though also before and beyond it. They further saw that though that world is normally invisible to ours, Christ had contact with both worlds simultaneously; and what is more, though he was still on earth, his person and clothes could and did take on a radiance suited to the glory of the other world.”

- It was the great Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nazianzus, who wrote, “hew as bright as the lightning on the mountain and became more luminous than the sun, initiating us into the mystery of the future.”
- Given this glimpse into eternity, it is no surprise why Luke describes the crucified, risen and exalted Christ outshining the noonday sun when He appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus in Acts 8.

II. The Two Witnesses

³⁰ *And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah,* ³¹ *who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

- And so, as Christ is transfigured before the eyes of the Apostles, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory as well.
- There appears to be about four reasons why Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration.
 1. The first was because the two of them together represent the two possible endings of life. Moses died at an old age and was buried, according to Deuteronomy 34:1-8, by God. Elijah, on the other hand, was taken up to heaven directly and did not die (2 Kings 2:1-12). Therefore, with both of them, we see the hand of God in death, thus giving us hope in His sovereignty over it. But, also, with Elijah, we get a shadow and foretaste of the resurrection-life that will be ushered in by Christ’s coming death, burial, and resurrection.
 2. Secondly, Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets. Therefore, as John MacArthur writes, “they represented the two great divisions of the Old Testament...while Moses gave the Law, Elijah guarded it.” But what is significant here is that because they represent the two main parts of the Old Testament, they are bearing witness to the fulfillment of the Old Testament by Christ.
 3. The third reason is an extension of the second, and that is that Moses and Elijah are the two great witnesses of the Old Testament that bear witness to the truthfulness of Christ’s life and testimony. This puts the event of the Transfiguration squarely within the biblical tradition established by Deuteronomy 19:15. And what better Old Testament witnesses than Moses and Elijah!
 4. Finally, Moses embodies that office of Prophet that Christ is fulfilling, as revealed in Deuteronomy 18:15 (“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen -”). Further, Elijah represents the hope of the *eshaton* (the “last days” or “end times”) – Malachi 4:5-6. Darrell Bock writes, “Thus, Moses looks back to the exodus and Elijah looks forward to the fulfillment of primes in the *eschaton*.”

- Luke also provides us with an interesting detail regarding Moses and Elijah. He writes that the two Old Testament saints, “**spoke of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.**”
 - In the original Greek, Luke literally states, “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his **EXODUS.**”
 - Most certainly, Luke’s point here is that Jesus is the *fulfillment* of the Old Testament, and in particular the great Exodus that was led by none other than Moses.
 - Luke’s use of **EXODUS** also places tremendous emphasis on Christ’s coming work of deliverance and salvation, which will occur “**at Jerusalem.**”
 - Again, we begin to understand, as this passage unfolds, that Jesus is greater than Moses...greater than Elijah, and consequently, the salvation that He will provide will be **greater than the Exodus of the Old Testament.**
 - The point of this verse (speaking “of His departure”) is that the great **Exodus of Christ will occur in Jerusalem and will be initiated by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension** – all of which will occur in Jerusalem.
- This conversation was, most certainly, intended for the benefit of the Apostles, as they would one day look back (after the death of Christ) and realize that His crucifixion was not this epic tragedy, but part of God’s foreordained plan to redeem His people and initiate the greatest Exodus of all time.

III. The Request of Peter

³² *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.* ³³ *And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”— not knowing what he said.*

- Luke adds that the disciples were sleepy at this time, and awoke to behold the glory of Christ and the presence of the two witnesses. The fact that the disciples were tired shows how busy they had been. This will also occur in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to the arrest of Christ in Luke 21:45).
- But, then, as the disciples fully awake, the two men – Moses and Elijah – “were parting from” Jesus. As they were doing so, **Peter impulsively says, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”**
 - Luke then adds that Peter did not know “what he said.” In other words, he didn’t “get it.”

- Peter’s request to make tents for the three men was a reference to one of the great festivals in the Jewish calendar: **The Feast of Tabernacles**.
 - During this fall festival each year, men and older boys would set up tents or booths to live in for an entire week in order to commemorate God’s faithfulness to the nation of Israel during the wilderness wanderings.
 - It was also a time of great joy and celebration, praising God for the current harvest and His bountiful provision. It would have been somewhat similar to the American Thanksgiving.
 - Finally, it looked forward to the day when God’s people would dwell with Him forever in their permanent home in heaven.
 - But the Feast of Tabernacles **was never intended to be a permanent institution – simply a shadow of what was to come**.
- Yet, it appeared that Peter wanted this experience to continue for much longer.
 - David Gooding calls Peter’s request “a most unfortunate suggestion.”
 - Yet, one may ask, “Why was Peter’s suggestion wrong?”
 - There are at least two reasons why:
 1. First, it was as though Peter was putting Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the same level by honoring all three of them with their own tents or booths. Philip Ryken writes, “The other great prophets are not on level terms with Jesus. He is their Savior and their god, and thus they bow before him. Moses and Elijah were not there to show that Jesus was one of the prophets, but to testify that he is the one and only Christ.”
 - Unfortunately, the Jewish establishment in the first century had exalted Moses and Elijah to such a level that they were essentially “mythological” in their minds. (Consider in the United States how we view George Washington and even Abraham Lincoln). Perhaps up until this point, even Peter had been influenced by this sentiment.
 2. Secondly, Peter’s request was an attempt to **delay God’s plan of redemption – His Exodus – through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ**.
 - This is exactly why Luke writes that Peter **did not know “what he was saying.”**
 - God was not going to be forced, regardless of how sincere the motive, to alter His necessary plan of redemption for His people. Peter would soon learn this truth.

- Not only this, but the request of Peter seems to be not too dissimilar to the request of David. For David requested that the tabernacle be made permanent and into a Temple (something God had never required).
 - Consequently, the Temple – to this day – became a “shrine” and a place that we deemed “mystical” in a sense.
 - Yet, Christ would not allow Himself to be localized into a single place of worship by Peter. Imagine the implications if He had. People would be making “pilgrimages” to this day to the “supposed” place of the Transfiguration in order to gain a “glimpse” of God’s presence.

IV. The Words of the Father

³⁴ *As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.* ³⁵ *And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”*

- Then, immediately following Peter’s request (actually, Luke writes that “as he was saying these things), **“a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.”**
- There are several reasons why we learn of the “cloud” here and the fear of the disciples:
 1. The presence of the cloud is significant and brings to mind several Old Testament passages that foreshadow the eschatological coming of the God and His subsequent judgment.

Psalm 97:2: “Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.”

Zephaniah 1:15: “A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,”

Ezekiel 30:3: “For the day is near,
the day of the LORD is near;
it will be a day of clouds,
a time of doom for the nations.”

Isaiah 4:5: “⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy.”

Daniel 7:13-14: “¹³ “I saw in the night visions,

and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.”

- Even in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, at Christ’s coming, the cloud is present. (“¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”)
2. The image brings to mind Moses in the wilderness and therefore anticipates the greater **EXODUS** through the work of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 13:21-22: “²¹ And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²² The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.”

Exodus 16:10: “¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

Exodus 19:16: “¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Exodus 24:15-18: “¹⁵ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”

Exodus 40:34-38: “³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.”

- In fact, in Exodus 40:35, the same verb is used as the one Luke uses, translated “to overshadow.”
 - The point is that the **cloud** represents the very presence of Almighty God. Consider as well that in Acts 1:9 (also written by Luke) during the Ascension a “cloud takes Him [Jesus] out of their [the disciples’] sight.”
 - Consider as well that Leviticus 23:43 states that Israel dwells “in the cloud” (i.e., in the presence and providential care of Almighty God).
-
- Then we read, Verse 35, “³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”
 - Notice here the significant elements of the Father’s endorsement of His Son:
 - First, He calls Him “Son” – an element that is an allusion to Psalm 2:7.
 - Secondly, He refers to Jesus Christ as “my Chosen One.” Recall, at His baptism, the Father said, “My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”
 - Thirdly, the Father commands, “**listen to Him!**”
 - Ultimately, the words of the Father are a fulfillment of the Old Testament (see also Psalm 89:3 and Isaiah 42:1: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights”).
 - But the Father’s words also echo the great promise of Deuteronomy 18:15-19: “¹⁵ ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— ¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ ¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’”
 - Indeed, the Promised One, the Prophet greater than Moses has come!

V. The Silence of the Apostles

- Finally, the glory of Christ passes, and Elijah and Moses leave, leaving the Lord alone in the presence of His disciples.

- The emphasis on here is **Christ alone**.
- Moses could not bring about the true Exodus, only Christ could.
- Elijah could not usher in the final judgment and great resurrection, only Christ could.
- And now, there are the disciples, standing face to face with Christ alone. This scene is as simple as it is profound. Yet, these three disciples will never be the same from this experience.
- John Calvin writes, “We are placed under His tuition alone, and commanded from Him alone to seek the doctrine of salvation.”
- What is so fascinating here, though, is that we may covet this type of “mountaintop experience” that the disciples had, but consider the words of Peter from his epistle:

“¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.” 2 Peter 1:16-18

- This is clearly a reference (“we were with him on the holy mountain”) to the Transfiguration.
- But here is the profound truth:

“¹⁹And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,” 2 Peter 1:19

- In other words, the three disciples beheld the Majesty of Christ, but there is something we can have even greater confidence in than a “mountaintop experience” – **the Word of God**.

“What the Scripture says about Jesus is even *more* certain than what he heard and saw on the mountain! The gospel is more complete; it contains everything we need to know about Jesus, and not just the glorious glimpse that the disciples were given. It is also more permanent. What Peter experienced on the mountain lasted for only a little while, but God’s Word is eternal. Whenever we have any questions about Jesus, or about the true way of salvation, or about what God wants us to do, we can go back to the Bible again and again. The way to know Jesus and his glory for sure is to believe in the Bible.” Philip Ryken