

Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36

NIV Harmony 119-20; *Loyal* 149-53; *Compassion* 124-26

Introduction

1. Recently we have had some summer thunderstorms. The displays of lightening and the rumbling sound of thunder are awesome and may even cause us some fear.
2. We can only imagine the awesome scene, witnessed by three, during Jesus' Transfiguration.
3. It was the perfect storm not of lightening and thunder but of blinding light and the booming voice of God from heaven.

4. Read Matthew 17:1-13.

A. The Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-3; Lk 9:28-31a; Mk 9:2-4)

1. According to Matthew and Mark, six days had passed since Jesus' first prediction of His impending death and resurrection. Luke says it was "About eight days after..." All three accounts agree that it had been about a week since Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah.
2. The events of that previous week included: Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah (Mt 16:13-20), Jesus' prediction of His death (Mt 16:21-23), Jesus' call to radical discipleship (Mt 16:24-27), and Jesus' promise that some would see the kingdom (Mt 16:28). All of these events are related and come to a confirming culmination with the Transfiguration of Jesus in this passage.
3. Jesus called His inner-circle of three disciples—Peter, James, and John—to go on an excursion with Him.
4. They went with Jesus up on a "high mountain, where they were all alone." (2a)
 - a. Mt. Tabor in far southern Galilee is the traditional site, and it is possible that the Transfiguration took place there since Jesus and the disciples could have travelled there from Caesarea in a week's time.
 - b. However, Mt. Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi in far northern Galilee, is a more impressive and logical place for these events since Jesus and the disciples had just been in nearby there.
 - c. The place is not as important as what happened there.
 - d. As we often find in scripture, a high mountain (e.g., Sinai, Horeb, this mountain) as the place to encounter God and to receive His revelation.
5. Jesus was "transfigured" (Gk., *metemorphothe*) before these three disciples. (2)
 - a. Warren Wiersbe writes, "As far as the record is concerned, this is the only time Jesus revealed His glory in this way while He was on the earth. The word translated *transfigured* gives us our English word 'metamorphosis.' A metamorphosis is a change on the outside that comes from the inside....Our Lord's glory was not *reflected* but *radiated* from within. There was a change on the outside that came from within as He allowed His essential glory to shine forth (Heb. 1:3)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 149-50).
 - b. Like a butterfly coming out of the cocoon that surrounds it, the glory of Jesus burst forth from within Him and became visible to these three disciples.
6. Words fail to describe what these three disciples must have experienced.
 - a. Jesus' clothes and appearance became brighter than even the sun. (2)
 - b. The three disciples saw Elijah and Moses "talking" (Gk., *sullalountes*) with Jesus. (3)
 - c. Moses represented the Law, and Elijah represented the prophets.
 - d. Wiersbe writes, "What were the reasons behind this event? For one thing, it was God's seal of approval to Peter's confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:14). It was also the Father's way of encouraging the Son as He began to make His way to Jerusalem....Beyond the suffering of the cross would be the glory of the throne, a lesson that Peter emphasized in his first epistle (1 Peter 4:12-5:4)" (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 124).
 - e. Robert Stein notes, "There are three main explanations. (1) The preexistent glory of the preincarnate Son temporarily broke through the limitations of his humanity (cf., Phil 2:6-9; John 1:14b); (2) A glimpse of the future glory of the risen Christ is given to the disciples. Even as the first passion prediction (Luke 9:22) does not end in an announcement of death but in the promise of resurrection. So the discussion of Jesus' departure is followed by a glimpse, of the glory awaiting him at the resurrection (24:26; cf. also Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 1:21). (3) A glimpse of the glory of the son of Man at the time of the parousia is given to the disciples....Although the last explanation is the primary understanding of the event for Luke, elements of the second may also be present" (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 283).

B. Jesus' Conversation with Moses and Elijah (Lk 9:31b-32)

1. The details of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah are unique material found only in Luke.
2. According to Luke 9:31 they, "...were speaking about Jesus' departure (Gk., *exodos*)."
3. They were discussing God's plan for Jesus to be crucified, resurrected, and ultimately ascend back to the glory of heaven.
4. Wiersbe writes, "This may have been the greatest 'Bible conference' ever held on earth! Even apart from the great glory that was involved, here you certainly had the greatest speakers: Moses, the law; Elijah, the prophets; and Jesus, who came to fulfill the law and the prophets. You had the greatest topic: Jesus' 'decrease' (the Greek is *exodos*) that He would accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses had led Israel out of bondage to Egypt, and Elijah had delivered them from bondage to false gods, but Jesus would die to set *a sinful world* free from bondage to sin and death (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:14-15)" (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 125).
5. Jesus was on the way to His exit (Gk. *exodos*) from this world, but His exit would usher in the kingdom of God on earth in the new exodus of God's people from bondage to sin.

C. Peter's Plan (Mt 17:4; Lk 9:33; Mk 9:5-6)

1. Peter, ever the man of action, didn't know what to say or do, but he came up with something!
2. According to Matthew and Mark, Peter and the other two disciples were "frightened" (Gk., *ekphoboi*) (Mt 17:6; Mk 9:6).
 - a. This parenthetical note most likely records Peter's personal testimony of his thoughts and feelings as communicated to Mark.
 - b. Luke's account adds that the disciples had just awoken to this transcendent scene because "they were very sleepy" (Lk 9:32).
 - c. Robert Stein notes, "Only in Luke do we find this explanation of Peter's unconsidered offer to build three shelters....Luke clearly painted a sympathetic portrait of the disciples" (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 285).
3. In a frightened and startled state, Peter blurted out a plan of action: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (Mt 17:4)
 - a. What do you think or feel that Peter was suggesting when he offered to build these shelters?
 - b. Craig Blomberg writes, Matthew does not explain Peter's remarks..., but the 'shelters' from (Greek *skene*) will call to mind the wilderness tabernacles of Moses' day and suggest some attempt on Peter's part to make a dwelling place for the three so as to encourage them to stay longer. 'It is good for us to be here' will then mean not that it is good that Peter, James, and John can help put up the tents but that it is good that all of the participants can preserve this moment for some length of time" (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NAC, 263-64).
4. Peter and the other two disciples had again missed the point of Jesus' teaching about suffering followed by resurrection.

D. A Voice from Heaven (Mt 17:5-8; Lk 9:34-36a; Mk 9:7-8)

1. Then a cloud (Gk., *nephele*) covered them all. (Mt 17:5)
 - a. A cloud is an important symbol in scripture for the presence of God.
 - b. This cloud is reminiscent of Moses' meeting with God in a cloud on Mt. Sinai (cf., Ex 19:16-22).
 - c. It is also reminiscent of the cloud that filled the tabernacle at its dedication (cf., Ex 40:34-35) and later the temple in Jerusalem as Solomon dedicated it (cf., 1 Kgs 8:10-11).
 - d. God was present with them on the Mount of Transfiguration.
2. Then they heard a voice from heaven, which was, of course, the voice of God the Father.
 - a. In Matthew's and Mark's accounts, the voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him." (Mt 17:5 Mk 9:7).
 - b. The first sentence is a restatement of God's word about His Son at His baptism. It is a combination of God's word in Ps 2:7 ("my son") and Isa 42:1 ("whom I love").
 - 1) Psalm 2 is not only an enthronement psalm for kings of Israel but also for the Messiah.
 - 2) Isa 42:1 is the opening verse of the first of the four Suffering Servant Psalms of Isaiah. These psalms speak of a servant, a nation or individual, who will suffer for the salvation of all people.
 - 3) Jesus was affirmed as both God's Messiah and Suffering Servant by God, the Father.

- c. However, Luke's account of what the voice said is slightly different, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen (Gk., *eklelegmenos* – "one having been called forth"). Listen to him" (Lk 9:35).
 - 1) Stein notes, "This is the only place where this title ["whom I have chosen"] is used in the NT, although a related term is found in 23:35 (cf. also John 1:34, which is textually questionable, and 1 Pet 2:4,6). It is used in the LXX of Aaron (Ps 105:26), the Suffering Servant (Isa 42:1; 44:1f; 49:7), Moses (Ps 106:23), and David (Ps 80:20-21, LXX)" (Stein, 286, brackets mine).
 - 2) Both the phrases "whom I love" and "whom I have chosen" appear in Isa 42:1 regarding the Suffering Servant of God. The two different terms used by Matthew/Mark and Luke point back to the same OT text and to the same person—Jesus, the loved and chosen Son of God.
- d. In addition, in all three accounts, the Father also says, "Listen to him!"
 - 1) Blomberg notes, "The heavenly voice adds the words, 'Listen to him!' Jesus must still be followed and obeyed, even as he heads off to die. The words echo the language of Deut 18:15b on heeding the prophet like Moses who would arise in later days" (Blomberg, 264).
 - 2) Jesus is the final prophet whom God sent and to whom they must listen to hear God's truth.
- e. These powerful words spoken by the Father from scripture are divine confirmation of what Jesus had disclosed about Himself to His disciples a week earlier—He was to be a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah.
- 3. The disciples were "terrified" (Gk., *ephobethesan*) and fell facedown. (Mt 17:6)
 - a. Blomberg states that their reaction was "...more terror than reverence, though this term like their posture, may suggest an element of worship as well. The disciples' reaction and Jesus' response closely resemble the closing episodes of the two sea rescue miracle stories (8:25-27; 14:26-33)...." (Blomberg, 264).
 - b. As in other awesome and terrifying situations, Jesus told them, "Don't be afraid." (Mt 17:7)
- 4. Then, as quickly as the Transfiguration had occurred, it was gone. (Mt 17:8)
 - a. The three disciples were left standing on the mountain with only Jesus.
 - b. The vision of Moses and Elijah was gone, as were the cloud, the bright clothing, and the divine voice.
 - c. What now?

E. Coming Down the Mountain (Mt 17:9-13; Lk 9:36b; Mk 9:9-13)

- 1. Luke simply recorded that "The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen" (Lk 9:36b).
- 2. Jesus gave these three disciples "strict orders" not to disclose anything that they had experienced "...until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (Mt 17:9)
 - a. Jesus spoke of Himself using the now familiar term "Son of Man."
 - b. The Messianic secret was still in force until Jesus' mission was completed.
- 3. The disciples naturally had questions about the meaning of what they had just witnessed and this command from Jesus.
 - a. Luke did not record their questions.
 - b. Mark recorded their first question was to ask what rising from the dead meant? They discussed that question among themselves as they came down the mountain. (Mk 9:10)
- c. Both Mark and Matthew record another question which they directly asked of Jesus was "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (Mk 9:11; Mt 17:10)
 - 1) Jesus confirmed that they were correct about what the scribes taught. (Mt 17:11)
 - 2) The way has been prepared for Him as His Elijah, John the Baptist, had come and suffered just as scripture foretold (Mt 17:12).
 - 3) Now it was Jesus' duty to fulfill scripture by suffering, dying, and rising from dead according to God's plan (cf., Pss 16, 22, 110; Isa 52:13-53:12).
- d. Jesus' answered this question the same way in both Matthew and Mark except for one insight that Matthew adds, "Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist" (Mt 17:13).
 - 1) Of course, Jesus spoke about John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come before Messiah.
 - 2) Matthew's conclusion indicates that at least these three disciples now "understand" (Gk., *sunekan*) God's plan that is unfolding in both the ministry of John the Baptist and now Jesus.

D. Reflections

1. Transfiguration is metamorphosis, change on the outside that comes from the inside.
 - a. Jesus was transfigured because His divine nature on the inside was briefly expressed outwardly in this special encounter.
 - b. We must be transfigured, as God's Spirit sanctifies us. We must change what others see on the outside because God has changed us on the inside by His grace.
 - c. We must let the glory of Jesus in our hearts shine forth for all to see and hear in our actions and words.
2. Like Peter, James, and John, sometimes we just need to be with Jesus, in God's presence. It is not always about doing something for the Lord. Doing things through sacrificial kingdom service is important but so is simply being with the Lord and listening/seeing what He reveals to us in those holy moments alone with Him.
3. We must be listening for God's voice of guidance and for visions of His plan in our daily lives. We won't always have the dramatic experience of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, but God is always speaking and showing us the way if we will only open our spiritual ears and eyes to hear and see what He reveals.
4. Sometimes God gives us unusual experiences or times of learning to help us along in our journey of faith and to prepare us for future ministry.