

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-29 The Transfiguration

We as humans have a tendency to compare our experiences with the experiences of others. Some people do this with religious experiences too. They may brag or try to lift themselves up in the sight of others. The scripture tells us this comparing ourselves with others is not a good habit. In this story the disciples experience something greater than anything they had ever seen before. They alone saw the visible glory or light of God which Jesus had had eternally as his Son. Their response? They wanted to stay on the mountaintop in the glory. But Jesus had more important plans for each of them—to develop and grow their faith as they followed him.

About a week after Peter's confession of faith, Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves to pray. These three disciples made up the inner circle of Jesus. It may have been at night since Luke says the disciples were very sleepy. As Jesus was praying, he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. At that same moment, Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor. They talked with Jesus about his departure from this earth, which was about to happen.

With glory surrounding them, Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about the prophecy of his death—which was soon to be fulfilled (Luke 9:30-31). They discussed Jesus' exodus from Jerusalem. Moses, as the Old Covenant deliverer and lawgiver, and Elijah, as the worker of miracles are well known in scripture. Moses' work had been finished by Joshua, whose name means 'God is salvation' or 'the Lord saves.' Elijah's work had been finished by Elisha—another form of the name Joshua. They now spoke with Jesus, whose Hebrew name was Joshua, about the 'exodus' he was about to accomplish. He was bringing the new law of love and imparting the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver the oppressed from the bondage of sin. This would bring to fulfillment the work of both Moses and Elijah.

As Moses and Elijah were about to leave the transfiguration mount, Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say; he was so frightened. He probably meant the temporary shelters erected during the Feast of Tabernacles or during the harvest for farmers to stay close to the fields. Perhaps Peter hoped to extend the stay of these heavenly visitors, but that was not God's plan. Jesus had a work to finish in his few remaining days before his death.

While Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. The cloud is often a symbol of God's presence to protect and to guide. A voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt 17:5).

The full meaning of listening includes obeying him. A similar voice and message had come at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11), but probably this was the first time these three disciples had heard it. The message was for the disciples' encouragement, and to remind them that the

mountaintop was not the place where they should remain. When God is involved, the only true hearing is obedient hearing.

When the disciples heard the voice, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” So they kept the matter to themselves, discussing only with each other what ‘rising from the dead’ might mean. Their theology had no concept of a suffering and dying Messiah.

The disciples later asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jewish tradition stated that Elijah would return just before the Messiah appeared. This was based on the prophecy of Malachi (4:5) that stated Elijah would return before the final judgment. They had no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, so they asked, “When and where was the prophecy about Elijah fulfilled?”

Jesus replied, “I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:6-13)

Why was Jesus giving the disciples this experience at that time? It happened just a week after Jesus had given the disciples the difficult message at Caesarea Philippi. He had told them that he would be rejected by Israel and crucified at Jerusalem. The transfiguration was given to encourage and strengthen them in the face of Jesus’ coming suffering and death. God revealed to them that Jesus had given them the truth, and they needed to listen carefully to his words. This enabled them to see Jesus in a more complete way. After seeing the glory of Jesus, God’s plan was for the disciples to help others see Jesus in the same way.

This story is **important** because it shows that God is willing to share his presence and plans with his people, even the difficult truths. He wants to prepare us and strengthen us in the midst of trials.

The **main truth** of this story is what God said about Jesus: “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What happened to Jesus after he took three of his disciples to the top of the mountain?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that Jesus was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light, you are correct.
2. What did Peter say when he saw Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered he offered to put up three shelters—one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah, you are correct.

3. What did Jesus say to the disciples about telling other people about the transfiguration?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus told them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn this story by memory and share it with another believer who has never heard it before. Then ask this question, "People can have many different religious experiences, but how do we know that they are real?" The answer is: for those experiences to be valid, they must be centered on Jesus and in agreement with God's written Word.