

Bible Stories

THE TRANSFIGURATION

2 Peter 1:16-18

August 26, 2023

Before we come to our story for today, we need to review 3 important conversations that will set the context for what's to come.

The entire episode occurred at Caesarea Philippi, located 25 north of the Sea of Galilee - sitting at the base of Mount Hermon, 9,232 ft.

The first conversation began when Jesus asked His disciples who the people were saying He was. The disciples responded:

"Some say John the Baptist and some say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Jesus: *"Who do you say I am?"*

Peter: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus: *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

Next, Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that at that time Jesus began to explain to His disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders and be killed..... and on the 3rd day be raised to life.

That was a lot of hard information to process. Their beloved teacher had just said that he was going to die ---- at the hands of the religious establishment, no less!!! How could this be true? (Obviously, they had all quit listening and missed the "raised from the dead" part.)

Well, it could not be true and trust Peter to be the one to stick his foot in it.....

- Matthew 16:22 - Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Peter probably thought he was helping..... He wasn't.

- Matthew 16:23 - Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Harsh response? No, I would say.

During His encounter with Satan in the wilderness, the devil had tried, unsuccessfully, to get Jesus to abandon the plan. In essence saying, "You don't have to die, you know, Jesus. Just bow to me and I will give you everything you're willing to die for. Easy breezy!!"

"You don't have to die to accomplish the goal," was one of the fiercest temptations Satan used against Jesus and now he was using one of Jesus' closest friends to tempt him again into abandoning the plan. But nothing, not even the good intentions of a mis-guided friend, was going to get in Jesus' way.

The cross was on the horizon and He was walking steadily toward it ---- YOU matter that much!!!

But Jesus wasn't finished. It wasn't just that the disciples and the crowds had a misconception about His mission, they also had a misconception about what it would cost THEM to follow Him, so Jesus turned to the crowd:

- Mark 8:34-38 - *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

Wow! Talk about a buzz-kill! Can't you just feel the energy change in the crowd? Someone might have actually thought, "Let me get this straight.... You *AREN'T* going to defeat the Romans. You *AREN'T* going to restore us to our former national glory? You *KNOW* you are going to die and seem to welcome it, weirdly, *AND* you expect *US* to follow in your footsteps? I'm *OUT!!*"

No doubt, Jesus knew the unsettled and confused mood of the crowd, so He spoke one last time:

- Mark 9:1 - *"I tell you the truth," he said, "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."*

A whole week went by..... (Matthew and Mark say 6 days and Luke says 8 days)

One day, as evening was drawing on, Jesus took, Peter, James, and John, and led them across the fields, and far up a rugged mountain. The weary disciples silently followed. (DA – ch. 46)

Eventually the sad little procession stopped. Peter, James and John collapsed to the ground, while Jesus continued a few more steps in order to be alone in prayer.

At first the disciples prayed too - after all, that's why Jesus had brought them to this place. They tried to remain interested in what was going on, but it didn't take long before their eyes grew heavy and soon they were fast asleep.

I understand this. In my youth I was a hiker and I have climbed a dozen or so 14-ers in Colorado (Mountains over 14,000 feet). Even though you are weary from the journey, there is always joy and an adrenalin rush when you reach the top.

On one climb, on La Plata Peak, 14,343 feet, I decided, at about 13,500 feet, that I was tired and didn't want to continue. Down I sat in a beautiful alpine meadow of green grass and flowers. I was determined to watch as my friends ascended the remaining 843 vertical feet, but soon the adrenalin wore off and my eyes grew heavy and I fell asleep. My friends returned victorious, but I had 2nd degree burns on my face.....

As His disciples slept, Jesus prayed for strength to endure the coming test and for His longing that the disciples' faith would not fail.

He prayed that they would be given a glimpse of his glory and divinity. He prayed that His kingdom would be revealed to them and that they would be strengthened to behold it. He pleaded that this revelation would comfort them in the hour of His supreme agony with the knowledge that He is the Son of God and that His shameful death was a part of the plan of redemption.....

Suddenly the heavens opened. As His divinity met the glory coming from above, a Holy radiance surrounded Jesus. Rising from the ground, Jesus stood in godlike majesty. His face shone like the sun and His clothes were as a bolt of lightning.

The disciples awakened and in fear and amazement they gazed upon the glorious scene.

As their eyes adjusted, they realized that Jesus was not alone. He was in deep conversation with Moses and Elijah.

These 2 men understood the burden Jesus carried because, during their lives, they too, had longed for the salvation of men. They had been sent to comfort and reassure Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of their remarkable conversation.

In awe and fear and because he couldn't think of anything else to say, Peter exclaimed, "*Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles; one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.*"

The words had barely left Peter's lips, when suddenly a bright cloud enveloped them. A voice from the cloud said, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*"

As they beheld the glory that surrounded them and heard the voice of God speaking directly to them, they fell to the ground in abject terror. There they remained, faces hidden, until Jesus came near and touched them. "*Get up,*" he said. "*Don't be afraid.*"

Daring to lift their gaze, the disciples saw only night. The heavenly glory was gone. Moses and Elijah were gone. They were once again alone with Jesus.

Why do we do with this story?

For Jesus, this moment in time would have had great meaning. I personally think that He was weighed down by Satan's temptation, through Peter, to choose an easier route, and He knew He needed strength to resist.

Both Moses and Elijah knew what it meant to soar, but they also knew what it meant to crash. They understood weariness. They understood temptation.

- *Moses, who had stood toe to toe with Pharaoh, was wearied by the forty years of wandering with Israel. For a moment he allowed his faith to let go of infinite power and in doing so, failed to enter the Promised Land.*
- *Elijah, who had stood undaunted before King Ahab and had faced the whole nation of Israel and the 850 priests of Baal and Asherah - alone, fled for his life before the threats of Jezebel.*

Moses and Elijah were sent to comfort, encourage, uplift and strengthen Jesus to resist Satan's greatest temptation.

At the end of the story, Peter, James and John received a direct instruction from God, "Listen to Him."

Why do you think God felt the need to remind the disciples to listen to Jesus? Well, it's because they weren't. They heard only what they wanted to hear. They tuned-in only to those things that fit their paradigm and rejected anything that did not fit.

Not long before this night, Peter had declared that Jesus was the Son of God. However, Peter's understanding of the Mission of the Son of God was completely different than the reality as Jesus knew it.

Peter, along with every other person in Israel believed the Messiah's Mission was earthly... for Israel only. Their Messiah was going to defeat Rome, kick all the Gentiles out and restore Israel to its rightful place. Israel would, once again, be a land flowing with milk and honey. Israel would be great again under the leadership of this warrior Messiah.

Yes, Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, but he had also rebuked Jesus for daring to say that He would die, and all the disciples had failed to hear that the resurrection would follow.

Jesus revealed His glory in order to give His disciples hope in the dark days to come. But they missed it. They failed to receive what God desired to give them -- a knowledge of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow.

They could have been spared so much grief and confusion if only they had heeded God's command.

Even so, they received a great blessing. They saw and heard things that are beyond human comprehension. They were, as Peter would later testify, "eyewitnesses of His majesty."