

Peter and His Epistles

Lesson 5: Jesus is transfigured, but Peter is Being Transformed

I. Peter is “growing in grace” (2 Pet. 3:18)

- A. From the first dropping of his fishing nets as he followed after Christ (Matt. 3:19) to his confident declaration regarding the power and coming of Christ (2 Peter 1:16-18), we can see that Peter is growing all along the way.
- B. This event is another important step towards his full understanding of who Christ is, what He must do and ultimately what believers are called to do.
- C. “The transfiguration” is not really a transformation. Jesus does not actually change His form. In reality, Peter, James and John are just allowed to see Christ’s true nature. And, it is glorious!
- D. “This glorious transformation of the appearance of Christ is the most significant event between His birth and passion.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 925)

II. The Setting

About a week ago (six days is the time for preparation before a revelation – see Ex. 24:16), Jesus had predicted His own death and declared that “...some of you standing here right now will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power.” (Mark 9:1)

Peter, James and John indeed get to see the Kingdom displayed with power!

III. The Transformation Mark 9:2-10, Matthew 17:1-13, Luke 9:28-36

A. The Mountain

1. Mount Tabor: south of the Sea of Galilee – 1900 feet high

Difficulties:

- a. Not located in the north. It is not in the route between Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum
- b. Has a walled fortress at its summit

2. Mount Hermon: above Caesarea Philippi – 9,232 ft high
 - a. Would have snow on its peak
 - b. Immediately after their desert they faced crowds that included “Teachers of the Law.” – this would not be likely in Gentile territory.
 3. Mount Meron: Northwest of the Sea of Galilee – on the way between Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum: 3926 ft.
 4. Other high mountain events in scripture:
 - a. Sinai (see Ex. 24 and Ex. 33) – Moses encounters Yahweh
 - b. Horeb (see 1 Kings 18 & 19) – Elijah encounters Yahweh
- B. The Transformation itself
1. Luke tells us it occurred as a response to Jesus’ prayer (Luke 9:29)
 2. The term “metamorphosis” means to “change into another form.” It is used here and in Matt. 17:2. It also “describes the believer’s progressive change into the moral likeness of Christ.” See Rom. 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18
 3. His clothes became “dazzling white” – (Mark emphasizes this in Mark 9:3)
 4. They see Christ’s unveiled glory

See Heb. 1:3 and John 1:14
 5. Moses and Elijah appear
 - a. We do not know how the disciples recognized them
 - b. We do know that they were there for a purpose

Luke tells us what they were discussing – (see Luke 9:30-31): His departure and what he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. “Departure” (Peter used the same word for his death in 2 Pet. 1:15) – literally means his “exodus” from Jerusalem.

Christ completes or fulfills the accomplishment of His goals. He has predicted His passion and now He must fulfill it.
- c. Some have conjectured that they were there to represent two important aspects of the Old Testament.

- 1). Moses represented the Law
- 2). Elijah represented the Prophets
- d. Others have postulated that they were there to emphasize the mode of Jesus' death – neither Moses nor Elijah's bodies were buried in the "usual" manner.
 - 1). Moses body was hidden: Deut 34:6
 - 2). Elijah "walked with God and He was not" : 2 Kings 2:11
- e. Still other believe that their function was to "announce the end"
 - 1). Moses: the model for the eschatological prophet (Deut. 18:18)
 - 2). Elijah: a forerunner (compare Mal. 4:5 with Mark 9:11-12)
6. Peter's suggestion: let us erect three tents (or booths)

Special Note: "He did not know what to say" (Mark 9:6) but he spoke anyway!

- a. "Couldn't we just stay here a little longer" – let's extend the spiritual experience much like we do during the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Lev. 23:39-44 – a seven day festival celebrating God's care for the Israelites as they journey to Canaan and a symbol of their "hope that God would one day literally return and 'pitch His tent' with His chosen people."

See Zech. 14:16-19 also.
- b. Peter was terrified. Perhaps he is proposing to build tents more similar to the Tabernacle. "He knows that no one could see the unveiled glory of God and live. His terror is based on a genuine fear for his own life and those of his two friends."
- c. The tents were meant to veil the radiance of God – to protect the disciples.
7. The Cloud – a vehicle demonstrating God's presence (see Ex. 16:10, 19:9, 33:9, Lev. 16:2, Num. 11:25)
 - a. "over shadowed" – same word used of the Spirit "overshadowing" Mary at the incarnation.
 - b. "bright" – Matthew gives the details recalling the shekinah glory

8. The voice – similar to the scene at his baptism – see Matt. 3:17 and Mark 1:11
 - a. Makes reference to both Psalm 2:7 and Isa. 42:1
 - b. Stresses that Jesus is both Son and suffering servant
 - c. Consider Daniel’s response to hearing God’s voice: Dan. 10:9
9. The message: “Listen to Him”
 - a. This is a fulfillment of Deut. 18:15 “He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.”
 - b. The tense is present imperative, it literally means “hear constantly” or “him be hearing.”
10. They go down from the mountain with an injunction not to tell anyone what they had seen.

IV. So what?

Peter (with James and John) experienced the “terrifying splendor of Jesus.” They saw Him glorified and they were afraid (see Matt. 17:6-7). Once again He reminded them (and us!) not to fear.

Our job is to constantly be hearing Him!

Discussion Questions:

1. Peter only makes one reference in his epistles to an historical event with Jesus. See 2 Pet. 1:17-18. Why do you think this moment made such an impact on him?
2. How would you respond if you literally heard the voice of God?
3. What are some practical ways you can be “constantly hearing” the voice of Christ?