

# Transfiguration: Preview of a Coming Attraction

## Luke 9:27-36

This message based on a sermon by David O. Dykes.

### INTRODUCTION

In our text, we are going to see Jesus goes up onto a high mountain to pray. In the process of praying, something happens that could be called a preview of a coming attraction. Each week there is a TV show that gives previews of upcoming movies and rates them "thumbs up" or "thumbs down." To be honest some of the movies those critics rate "thumbs up" I have found to be terrible. But *this* preview in Luke 9 really is a two "thumbs up!"

This next event in Luke 9 has been called the transfiguration. The three synoptic Gospel writers all mention the Transfiguration and so the obvious question to ask is

Why did the event take place?

In order to understand why, we need to look at the background to the story. In Luke Chapters 8 and 9, the central issue is: *Who is Jesus?* We see this question asked three times in these two chapters.

1. The first time the question is asked is in Luke 8:22-28. Jesus has just walked on the water and calmed the raging storm. And in Lk 8:28 the disciples ask the question: **"Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"**

2. The second time the question is asked is in Luke 9:7-9. Jesus and his disciples had been performing marvelous miracles – driving out demons and curing the sick and this comes to the attention of the local ruler Herod the Tetrarch. St Luke records Herod saying: **"John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?"**

3. And the third time this question is asked is in Luke 9:18-20. Jesus is alone with his disciples at prayer and asks the question (9:18): **"Who do the crowds say that I am?"** They gave various answers that they had heard. But then Jesus asks them (9:20), **"But who do you say that I am?"** Peter answered, **"The Christ of God."**

At that point Jesus begins to tell them plainly what it meant for Him to be the Christ or the Messiah. He said (9:22), **"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."**

And now in our passage today God the Father himself answers the 64,000 dollar question, "Who is Jesus?" with the simple and clear words: **"This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"** (Lk 9:35).

Focus for a moment on Luke 9:26-27. **"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."** What is event is Jesus talking about here when He speaks of His coming in glory with the holy angels? Jesus is talking about His second coming, His glorious appearing; that sure hope that we all share as believers in Jesus Christ.

If that is what He is talking about in verse 26, then the statement He makes in verse 27 is so important: **"But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."**

Does that mean that Jesus thought some of the disciples would not die before the second coming? If so, then was Jesus wrong? Or was He just talking about seeing the invisible kingdom, Christ ruling as Lord in our hearts? But did you know that in all three

of the gospels where Jesus makes this statement (Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 19:27), Jesus makes this promise immediately prior to the event we call the Transfiguration. It seems natural to interpret this promise as a reference to the three disciples who were going up onto the mountain with Him just a few days later—they would *literally* see the glory of the Kingdom (or as Mark puts it, “the kingdom of God come with power”). And in light of that, it is natural to conclude that the event of the transfiguration is somehow related to the second coming of Jesus in glory.

Let’s read Luke’s account of the transfiguration beginning at verse 28:

- 28 Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.  
29 As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.  
30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah,  
31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.  
32 But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.  
33 Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"; not knowing what he said.  
34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud.  
35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"  
36 When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

In this message we will look at three simple elements of the Transfiguration, and ask three personal questions. We will examine the vision, the visitors, and the voice.

## **I. THE VISION: HAVE YOU GLIMPSED THE GLORY OF JESUS?**

Luke tells us here that Jesus “**took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.**” Often in scripture, when God’s wanted to get people’s attention, He takes them to a mountain.

In the days of Moses, God brought the people of Israel to a mountain (Mt. Sinai) to receive the 10 commandments. And while they were there He came down upon the mountain with a cloud and filled the sky with thunder and lightning and He spoke with such authority that the people trembled.

His intention was make sure Israel never forgot what happened that day; that they would never forget their God and His glory. He wanted them to always remember that they served a glorious, awesome God who had the power and the authority to expect they should listen to Him.

In the days of Elijah, God once again brought His people to a mountain (Mt. Carmel) and there He challenged the pagan prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth to a contest. And in the midst of that contest, God sent fire from heaven and consumed Elijah’s sacrifice. His intention was make sure Israel never forgot their God and what He did on that day. He wanted them to always remember that they served a glorious, awesome God who had the power and the authority to expect their allegiance to Him.

And now – once again – God brings people to another mountain, and His intention is to make sure that the disciples never forget who Jesus is and the reality of His kingdom and power.

This is a very important event in Jesus' life, because it confirms He was not merely a man. He was God in the flesh. For most of His 33 years of human existence, His human flesh obscured and veiled His Deity. But at this time, His *true* divine nature was revealed.

Over in the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit pulls back the veil and lets us know who Jesus really is. There says that the Son is **"the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"** (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus and the three disciples go up on this mountain to pray. Sometime during His prayer the veil of Jesus' earthly body was pulled back and Luke tells us (9:29), **"the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening."**

In his account of this same event Matthew says, **"... He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light."** (Matthew 17:2). And Mark records, **"... He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them."** (Mark 9:3). John would later write, **"... we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14 NKJV.)

On this mountain it was like the heavens opened up, and Jesus' human body took on His eternal qualities, all the characteristics of God. It was the glory of His divine nature which had been veiled and would again be veiled until His resurrection from the dead. He shone with an incredible brightness! His face changed into that of the wonderful God He had always been.

Dr. Dwight Pentecost wrote in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, "This transfiguration was a fulfillment of the prophecy spoken the previous week. It was a miniature and premature picture of the second coming of Christ to establish his kingdom. It was a revelation of the glory which will be revealed to the world when He comes again." This same glory would later be revealed to Stephen at his death, to Saul on the Damascus Road, and to John on the island of Patmos. And finally, his glory will light the whole world at His second coming for every man to see.

In 2 Peter 1:16 Peter says that he and the other two disciples were, **"eyewitnesses of His majesty."** He writes about this experience and says that Jesus, **"received from God the Father honor and glory."** The word "glory" carries with it the idea of glowing brilliance. When the angels visited the shepherds outside Bethlehem, Luke tells us the *"glory of the Lord shone all around them."* (Luke 2:9.)

Have you glimpsed that glory? What do you think Jesus looks like now? How do you picture Him in your mind? Do you picture Him as having long brown hair, a beard and loving eyes? That might have been what He looked like in the flesh, but remember, that was only his human body, a covering He wore for 33 years.

What would you do if you saw Jesus today? I read some true news stories about people who claimed to have seen images of the Lord:

A few years ago a woman in New Mexico was frying tortillas. One of the tortillas burned and the result was an image that looked like a face; she thought it looked like Jesus. She took the tortilla to her priest and he agreed it looked like Jesus, so he blessed it. The woman and her husband took the blessed tortilla back home and placed it in a box surrounded by cotton to make it appear as if it was floating on air. They built an altar around it and started praying there. Word began to spread about the holy tortilla and soon thousands of people visited their home to pray before the holy tortilla. People are desperate to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

A few years ago, a lady in Arkansas turned on the kitchen light in her mobile home. The reflection of the light on the mobile home beside her looked like a man's face. She turned the light off and the image disappeared. When she turned the light back on, the image reappeared. She was certain it was a miracle—she could see the face of Jesus! News soon spread and hundreds of people were visiting her trailer to walk into her kitchen and flip on the light. Because of the crowds, she started charging a dollar a person. A local television station interviewed one of the men who had paid his dollar to see the image. He was pretty skeptical. He said, "I want my dollar back, it looked more like Willie Nelson to me."

Do you want to see Jesus? Don't go to a tortilla or a trailer—go to the Word of God. Go read Revelation 1 and you will see what Jesus looks like now. John saw Him and he wrote **"His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ... His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."** (Rev. 1:14, 16) Sound familiar?

That's how Jesus appeared on this mountain. Today, you don't have to see the glory of God with your eyes—in fact, it would blind you. But you *do* need to see Jesus in His glory with your eyes of faith. Have you had the vision of His glory? Once you do, you will never again doubt Jesus is God in the flesh. Now let's consider:

## **II. THE VISITORS: DO YOU ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF JESUS?**

**"And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah,"** (Luke 9:30). Two visitors appear on the mountain and they are talking with Jesus. One is identified as Moses and the other as Elijah.

Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Noah and Jonah, or Abraham and David? Once you understand the significance of Moses and Elijah, you'll begin to see why Jesus allowed the disciples to witness His transfiguration. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets, but it goes much deeper than that. Verse 31 tells us they **"spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."** They were talking about Jesus' upcoming death.

Moses and Elijah are unique because they both had unusual deaths. In fact with Moses, God personally handled all the funeral arrangements. And Elijah's wasn't actually a death at all; it was more like a "departure."

The last chapter of Deuteronomy tells us on the day Moses died God took him to a tall mountain and showed him the Promised Land. Basically God said, **"This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."** (Deuteronomy 34:4). Moses died there and it says **"And He (that is God) buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day."** When you jump over to the little New Testament book of Jude, we find the archangel Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses (Jude 9). Now, here Moses is 1,600 years later standing before Jesus. He stands there as someone who died and was raised up again. Finally, Moses got to enter the Promised Land, because the mountain where Jesus was transfigured is in the heart of the Promised Land. That's Moses, what about Elijah?

We know what happened to Elijah. We are told in II Kings 2 Elijah didn't die. Instead, he was "caught up" by a chariot of fire and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind. Now, think about those two deaths. Moses died and was raised. Elijah didn't die, but was caught up to heaven. Is that ringing any bells for you yet? The Transfiguration is a preview of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which will launch the Kingdom of God.

Paul speaks about it in I Thessalonians 4:16-17: **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”** Moses and Elijah represent the two categories of people who will be claimed by Jesus when He returns.

### **1. MOSES—The forerunner of those who will be Raised up (dead and buried)**

The Bible says when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first. Moses is a representative of all of the precious saints who have died. The moment a Christian dies, their soul and spirit goes to be with Jesus. Paul wrote, **“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”** (2 Corinthians 5:8) Many bodies of believers through the years have been buried, or burned or lost at sea. When Jesus returns, these bodies will be resurrected and these folks will live with the Lord forever. Do you have a loved one who has already died? Perhaps your grandparents or parents or spouse or children have already died. When Jesus returns, they will be resurrected, like Moses. And you will recognize them just as Peter, James, and John recognized Moses.

### **2. ELIJAH—The forerunner of those who will be Caught up (alive at His coming)**

Those of us who are alive when Jesus returns won't die—we will be raptured. The English word “rapture” doesn't appear in the Bible. We get it from the Latin word *raptio*, which is the translation of the Greek word *harpadzo*, from 1 Thessalonians 4 which means “caught up.” Just as Elijah didn't die but was “caught up” to heaven in a chariot of fire, that's what will happen to us when Jesus returns.

The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in 132 BC. Seventy-two translators were used so the Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the “Septuagint” (LXX). Long before Jesus promised His return and Paul wrote about it, the translators of the LXX were translating II Kings 2. Can you guess which Greek word they used to describe what happened to Elijah when he was “caught up” in a fiery chariot? They used the word *harpadzo*—exactly the same word Paul used in I Thessalonians 4:17. So, Elijah was “raptured” without dying and that's what is going to happen to those of us who know Jesus.

Again, in I Corinthians 15:51-52, we read what's going to happen: **“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”** Then Paul goes on to say, **“then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’”** As we are being raptured, those of us alive will be singing, “Death where is your sting—you didn't get me!” Those saints who are in the grave will be raised up from the grave saying, “Hades, where is your victory? You thought you had me, but I'm set free!”

Are you excited about the Second Coming of Jesus? The first Christians were. Dr. Alexander McClaren writes: “The Early Church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death or heaven. They were not looking for a cleft in the ground called a grave—but for a cleavage in the sky called glory!”

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a preview of a coming attraction—the Second Coming of Jesus. It will be a powerful event too, strong enough to raise the dead and to rapture living Christians. I have read that in journalism, the largest headline print possible is called “Second Coming type.” The impact of a news story is revealed by the type size of the front page headline, such as “Pearl Harbor Bombed” or “Japanese Surrender” or “JFK Shot” are large type—but they aren't the largest. That is reserved for the Second

Coming. I'm not going to be around to read the Second Coming headline, because when Jesus comes, I'm going to be meeting Him in the clouds.

Now, let's look at the third element of the Transfiguration.

### **III. THE VOICE: DO YOU LISTEN TO JESUS ALONE?**

The three disciples were in such awe at the scene it seemed almost like a dream; they were even sleepy. But verse 32 says they came fully awake and saw Jesus and the two other men. Simon Peter was always good at saying the most inappropriate things in the most solemn of occasions. He does it again saying, "**Master, it is good for us to be here.**" Peter really had a grasp for the obvious! But like the many of us, he kept on talking and got deeper in trouble. He said, "**let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.**" He wanted to build shrines to commemorate this occasion. He made a big mistake when he put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. But God is about to correct his misunderstanding. While Peter was saying this, God interrupted him.

At that moment a cloud enveloped them. This was a cloud of God's glory. Just as the cloud had covered the mountain where Moses met with God, this cloud settled on top of the mountain. Then the disciples heard the voice of God the Father. He said, "**This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!**" Then the disciples saw Jesus alone. What a lesson! Peter was so influenced by that mountaintop experience, he wrote about it in one of his letters ten years later: II Peter 1:16 - 18:

**16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.**

**17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**

**18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.**

Well, you might say, "that's all great for those disciples, but I've never heard a voice from heaven. How do I hear Jesus speak so I can listen to Him?" Well good for us Peter in the next three verses tells how we listen to Jesus today, through scripture. Listen to what Peter writes:

**19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;**

**20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,**

**21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**

Here are some lessons for us to take to heart as we conclude today:

#### **Lesson 1: Visit the mountaintop—to worship Jesus**

There is a great lesson about worship here. Worship is not a place; it is a person. You don't need a building and you don't even need a mountaintop. It's not about a place; it's focusing on the glory of Jesus. It's meeting Jesus and *listening* to Him. Did you notice the Father didn't say, "This is my Son, *talk* to Him?" Sometimes worship is just being still and quiet and listening for that still small voice. Jesus is speaking—are you really listening?

#### **Lesson 2: Leave the mountaintop to serve Jesus**

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain and build three shrines. If I could, I believe I would loved to stay on the mountain top just enjoying the sweet fellowship with Jesus. That's the danger of mountaintop experiences. We want to linger there. We don't want to leave. Next week we are going to see while Jesus and the three disciples were on the mountain, the other nine disciples were in the valley trying to help a boy who was demon-controlled. Jesus is going to leave the mountaintop and go into the valley to resume touching, loving, healing and forgiving people. That's a great lesson for us. It's great to spend time on the mountain but you've got to go into the valley to serve the Lord by helping hurting people.

## **CONCLUSION**

Peter, James and John saw the glory of Jesus on that mountain. They stood in awe of the glory of the Lord as He was transfigured before them. Jesus truly is the Lord of glory. But here is a truth I want you to come to grips with today. If you are in Christ Jesus because you've been saved, the Lord of Glory lives in you! Are you letting Jesus shine through you? There is an awe, a beauty, a glory about Christ which shines in the life of His believers. That glory gives to our lives the quiet and radiant peace which allows us to have the strength and the courage to handle everything life throws at us.

"A man was asked by a pastor to come to church for 4 Sundays, He was a skeptic but the pastor thought if he would come maybe he would be convinced to accept Christ. At the end of the fourth Sunday, the man approached the pastor and said, "I have given my life to Jesus Christ."

The pastor was pleased and said, "Tell me about it?"

The man looked at the pastor and said, ""Well, Pastor it wasn't your preaching. The man paused for a moment. He went on, "On the third Sunday morning, I saw an elderly lady fall down on the icy sidewalk. I stopped to help her and I saw the radiance on her face, even in the midst of such difficulty.

So I asked her what gave her life such a radiant glow and she said simply, 'If you knew my Lord Jesus Christ and felt his love in your life, you would have the same look of radiance on your face.'

"I became a Christian," the man said, "because the glow on that woman's face was like a light shining into the darkness of my soul."

The glory, the light, the radiance of the Transfiguration is still with us as we allow the spirit of Christ to live through us. Jesus is still the Lord of Glory. He came to show us the glory of the Father. He was crowned not only with thorns, but with glory in His death. He was raised in glory from the dead and ascended to sit at the right hand of the glory of God the Father. Today He lives in glory through His people, the church. And some day soon He is coming in glory to take us home. Are you ready for His glory?

# Preview of a Coming Attraction

Luke 9:27-36

I. THE V\_\_\_\_\_: HAVE YOU GLIMPSED THE G\_\_\_\_\_ OF JESUS?

II. THE V\_\_\_\_\_: DO YOU ANTICIPATE THE R\_\_\_\_\_ OF JESUS?

1. Moses—The forerunner of those who will be **raised** up (dead and buried)
2. Elijah—The forerunner of those who will be **caught** up (alive at His coming)

III. THE V\_\_\_\_\_: DO YOU L\_\_\_\_\_ TO JESUS?

1. Lesson 1: Visit the mountaintop to W\_\_\_\_\_ Jesus
2. Lesson 2: Leave the mountaintop to S\_\_\_\_\_ Jesus