



The Transfiguration of Christ.

[August 6.]

The Collect.

O GOD, who on the mount didst reveal to chosen witnesses thine only-begotten Son wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening; Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in his beauty, who with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The Gospel

Matthew 17:1-9

AND after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. 4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, *Arise, and be not afraid.* 8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. 9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, *Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.* (Matt 17:1-9)

This event (Transfiguration) is filled with both mystery and symbolism. It is a physical manifestation of a divine and spiritual truth. We note that the chapter begins, “And after six days...” – six days after what? It was six days since, in chapter 16, Jesus had rebuked Peter saying, “*Get behind me, Satan...*” when Peter rebuked Christ for his plan to go to Jerusalem and be offered up. Peter spoke out of pure ignorance of the necessity of the event. Christ was not comparing Peter to Satan, but charging that Satan was speaking through Peter. Six days after sharing the terrible news of His coming Passion, the Lord now invites His trusted three witnesses to a mountaintop experience on the peaks of Mt. Hermon.

These three were the close disciples of Christ. Is there a significance in the three (and not four, or five, or six) being invited? Three witnesses sealed the certainty for the sake of proven testimony in both the Old and New Testament periods. Jesus was about to present a proof of His resurrection before it ever happened. He had just predicted His crucifixion in Chapter 16, now He will lighten the hearts of His disciples with this wonderful observance of His glorified body. The witnesses will stand to testify of the event following the crucifixion. *"At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death."* (Deut 17:6) *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."* (Matt 18:15-16)

Though this event reveals the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a prophecy as well to the transfiguration of all who are the Elect of Christ. Those who belong to Christ will likewise be transformed at the Last Day into glorious bodies of light. *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."* (Matt 13:43) This mystery cannot be understood by all, for Christ adds the familiar qualification, *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."* Either at the moment of Death, or at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall also be transformed. *"Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* (1 Cor 15:51-55)

The high mountain probably relates to the snow clad Mt. Hermon, the highest in all the region. This was a confidential sharing in His glory as a witness to His coming resurrection. He took the disciples apart to show them. Sometimes, He takes you and I apart from the crowd to speak to us of things the greater number of disciples may not yet comprehend. But He never reveals anything to us that is not clearly laid out in His Word.

"And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." Moses had been buried for more than 1400 years, and Elias (Elijah) had been translated without the pains of death more than 900 years earlier. One (Moses) had suffered death; the other (Elias) did not die but saw the coming of the Lord. That represents all to whom Christ now speaks. *"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."* Moses also represented the law, and Elijah represents the prophets – all written in the Law and Prophets fulfilled on that mountaintop experience. The lonely grave of Moses somewhere on Mt. Nebo lies empty today as I pen this devotion. Someday, your grave will likewise lie empty. The Christian, like Christ, needs only a borrowed tomb; and the Christian, like Christ, will someday be changed and transformed into a glorious appearance of light.

Perhaps out of senseless amazement at this sight, Peter impetuously says: *" . . . Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."* Moses and Elijah are here by the power of God, not by their own power or righteousness. Sometimes, men begin to worship their preachers instead of the One who is being preached. They build altars of elaborate buildings for them and forget the Lord whom they profess to worship. They wish to build memorials to fallible men and not Temples to the infallible God.

God will settle that issue promptly, but reveal another mystery in the process. *"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."* This is perhaps the same Glory Cloud that receives Christ at His ascension. It is a Holy Presence that enshrouds and then reveals. God spake from the cloud. He will have no intermediary between Himself and man, except His Son, Christ Jesus. *"Hear ye Him!"* We may stand in the best of company of ministers and Christian family, but in the end, we all face the Lord Jesus Christ alone. *"And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, **Arise, and be not afraid.**"* When His people are fearful, Jesus always touches us and says, *"Be not afraid."* *"And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."* Moses represents the Law and could not offer help. Neither could the prophets represented in Elijah – only Christ came and died for our sins! These three disciples were just like the woman taken in adultery who, after all the charges of her soul's enemies, stole a glance up and saw no one but Jesus.

"And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead." This was a mystery reserved, temporarily, only for His trusted disciples – Peter, James, and John. For some reason not revealed to us, the Lord desired that no man knew of this until His offering was accomplished. Perhaps such general knowledge of this event would have stirred up so much opposition to His crucifixion that it would have been difficult to see it through.

We know from this event that there remain mysteries for which the time is not appropriate for revealing their full meaning to us. There are many mysteries in the Bible that have not been fathomed by the most scholarly of theologians notwithstanding their incessant claims to have grasped it all. One thing we know for certain: Christ was transfigured on the mountain in the presence of three witnesses. He appeared with the Lawgiver, Moses, and the prophet, Elijah. Both the Law and the Prophets were represented. To fully know Christ, we must know all of that which prefigures Him in the Law and the Prophets. And in the final analysis, He is the fulfillment of all that is in the Law and the Prophets. He is the Purpose of those two. We know, too, that all whose names are written in the Book of Life shall be likewise transformed into glistering garments of light at His appearing. Have you checked your wardrobe lately?