



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Confirmation of the King (Luke 9:28-36)

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The transfigured appearance of Jesus is closely linked both chronologically and thematically to the previous account in which the identity and purpose of Jesus is revealed. As has been stated previously, this disclosure marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry. At this point Jesus' departure is fast approaching. His attention will become increasingly fixated on Jerusalem as he seeks to prepare these disciples for his impending death. The cross is before him and the disciples need to be strengthened and equipped for their role as apostles in God's unfolding plan of redemption. Jesus had just confirmed for them that he was the Christ of God, the promised king of Israel. Along with this exciting news they had also been told by Jesus that he was a king who would go to a cross. The path that he must walk was one of rejection, suffering, and death followed by resurrection. The disciples are struggling to understand how this dichotomy of king and cross, power and death, glory and suffering fit together in this drama in which they find themselves involved as main characters.

Into this setting, a smaller company made up of Peter, James, and John emerge from the twelve. These disciples are taken by Jesus to a mountain and witness events which leave them utterly speechless. In seeing Jesus' appearance change, the gospel writer places an emphasis on the motif of sight. He then invites his audience to "behold" the appearing of Moses and Elijah, one the great law-giver and the other the great prophet of God's covenant people. However we find that seeing is not enough as Peter distorts the import of this wonder. The narrative shifts to the importance of hearing and the superiority of the Son as the final source of divine revelation. Also within this account is the imprint which speaks of the OT story of the Exodus. These common patterns include the location on a mountain, the mention of Moses, Jesus' change of countenance, and reference to tents (tabernacles), the cloud, and fear. Yet the gospel's focus is not fixed upon the past, but with Elijah's appearance a new exodus is being revealed in which Jesus' mission of setting at "liberty those who are oppressed" is to be understood.

This event is the capstone of testimony provided to these disciples to corroborate the claim that Jesus is the Christ of God, and validate his announcement of his own departure at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes. The revealing of Jesus' identity and purpose has only taken place approximately one week earlier and is linked to the transfiguration not only by time, but also because each account had been initiated by prayer before a deeper aspect of his identity was made known to his disciples. Now they not only see Jesus as king, but as the son of Almighty God. After witnessing the glory of Jesus this inner circle of disciples is more interested in staying on the mountaintop while the God of heaven declares the appropriate response to this revelation. This begins by understanding the supremacy of the Son and ends in being a true disciple – one who listens to the words of Jesus.

Luke 9:28-36 - (28) Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. (29) And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. (30) And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, (31) who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (32) Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. (33) And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. (34) As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. (35) And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (36) And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

WITNESSING THE GLORY OF THE KING

As he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered – The transfiguration is the most spectacular of Jesus' supernatural wonders because the disciples are able to visibly gaze at his divine glory. J.C. Ryle says it's as if the veil that hangs over this world had been lifted and the deepest truths of what the Christian believes are illuminated. When God established his covenant with the nation of Israel centuries before there was another mountain. At Mt. Sinai Moses asked God to show him his glory. God responds by putting him into a cleft in a rock and tells him that he will cover him with his hand until he passed by, "but my face you cannot see". Even though Moses was not able to see God's glory directly, his face still shone with the reflected glory of God. In the same manner which the moon reflects the radiance of the sun so Moses reflected the glory of God to such an extent that he had to wear a veil when speaking to the people of Israel. Now hundreds of years later, we are on top of another mountain and there is glory once again. This dazzling brightness makes Jesus clothes "whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." This is not Mt. Sinai all over again, but we are again seeing the supremacy of Christ in comparison to the old order. Moses has reflected God, but Jesus produced the surpassing glory of God, it emanated from him. What should shock us most is the fact that Jesus did not experience some outward alteration, but that his inner being was made transparent to these who were in his company. The author of the book of Hebrews put it this way, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." The most astounding thing that happened on the mountain was that Peter, James, and John witnessed the glory of God and did not die.

BIBLE STUDIES

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Pennsylvania

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And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah – This narrative is written from the disciples’ perspective. They had just witnessed the change in Jesus’ appearance and now, to their surprise he was not alone. Not only were there two men with Jesus, but they were able to discern, most likely by their conversation, that these men were Moses and Elijah. This account employs words that highlight a sense of sight; the three are gazing upon an amazing scene and become transfixed by what is being played out before their eyes. From this occurrence they are witnessing testimony to the superiority of Jesus even if this truth might not be immediately evident to them in this moment. Before their eyes are the great lawgiver and deliverer Moses and the great prophet and sign of the end times Elijah (Malachi 4:5). Joined by Jesus on the mountain was one hailed by Jews as the originator of their nation and the other whose return ushers in the end times. As Moses introduced Israel to God on the mountain (Exodus 19) and Elijah showed the uniqueness of God over all other gods on another mountain (1 Kings 18), so Jesus revealed the true nature of God and showed that he was one with the Father. This long heralded Christ, the king which the prophets had promised and upon which the hopes of the people rested was none other than Jesus of Nazareth. It was further revealed by this incident that Jesus was God in flesh.

SATISFIED ON THE MOUNTAIN

Master, it is good that we are here – Up until this point the disciples were content to feast on the visual blessing of a glorified Jesus, and the conversation between two of the most significant prophets of Israel, who had long since died, but now appeared with their master Jesus. The sleep was cleared from their eyes and after having almost missed the greatest moment of revelation in Jesus’ ministry, the three were fully engaged in the moment. In typical Lukan fashion he portrays people in conversation regarding Jesus’ identity and mission. Their discussion concerned Jesus and his departure. Moses and Elijah were not informing him of the details of his departure for he had already communicated this to his disciples in the previous account. Their presence illustrates Jesus’ fulfillment of the divine plan spoken of in the OT in both the law and the prophet. Jesus’ departure is the spiritual fulfillment; the physical picture is seen in the first Exodus where Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and home to the promise land. In this new Exodus, Jesus will lead all God’s people out of the slavery of sin and death, and to their promised inheritance – the new creation in which the whole world will be redeemed.

Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah – Before unpacking Peter’s response, Luke reminds the reader that these words are spoken by a person who was so scared and overwhelmed by the situation he had no idea what he was saying. To us this proposal may seem baffling, so

let’s explore these comments. The word translated for tents in the Greek is actually tabernacles. After the glory of God came down on Sinai, the Hebrew people were commanded by the Lord to build a tabernacle. This would be an actual physical location in which God’s presence would dwell in the holy of holies. Only the high priest could enter and only once a year and never without blood through which he would make atonement for his sins and the sins of the people. What this worship structure declared was the infinite gap that existed between a holy God and a sinful people. What Peter is saying is that they need a tabernacle to protect them from the presence of God, a place where the people could come and worship a glorified Jesus on another mountain. It was tempting for them to think the experience was the pinnacle of their spiritual journey. They had been taken to a depth in their understanding of the person of Jesus that led to true worship, but the mountaintop is not where they were to remain. In traveling to the heights in their communion with the Lord, they must grasp its purpose and descend back down the mountain armed with this insight as they face the world from a heart that strives to listen to the Son.

LISTENING TO THE SON

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, . . . ; listen to him!” – No sooner had Peter uttered his comments than a cloud envelops them. In this moment God answers for himself the question posed repeatedly in this Gospel, “Who is Jesus?” He is the Son of God, the king, the one chosen before the foundation of the world to complete his plan of redemption and salvation. As revealed by Jesus, this plan requires him to become the suffering servant (Isaiah 53). A cloud had led the people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Now from this cloud God confirms the superiority of the Son and establishes him as the one to lead the people out of the spiritual wilderness and into a restored relationship with him. God requires that those who seek to traverse this course must listen to the Son. During this entire account Jesus has not spoken, but in Luke 9:28 his audience is reminded of Jesus’ previous teaching, and by reflection, his call to discipleship. There is no need to build tabernacles in the hopes that Moses and Elijah will return. Their day has passed. Their voices are drowned out by the voice of God. He stands alone on the mountain and his message is clear: commitment to God means listening to the chosen Son. Visions and spiritual experiences are not the essence of religion. Walking to the cross after Jesus is. This defines the divine expectation of listening to the Son.

Ryle, J. C. Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Gospel of Luke. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2012.

Stein, Robert H. Luke. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.