

Listen to Him! 5-15-05

Matthew 17:1-13 (NIV)

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."¹⁰ The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"¹¹ Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

One of the most amazing wonders in the world of nature is the metamorphosis of a caterpillar. Caterpillars can look so plain, even ugly, but what they are transformed into is so beautiful. It is the same creature, though its outward being is changed. We just see the releasing of what was already locked within that crawling creature. Today we are going to look at a passage that uses that same word, metamorphosis, translated as transfiguration.

Mark and Matthew write that it was six days after the conversation in which Peter declared that Jesus is the Son of God. (Mark 9:2) Luke said eight days. (Luke 9:28) Luke's record may have been calculating the day of the conversation and the day of the transfiguration in addition to the days in between. Remember, the conversation concluded with Jesus declaring that there were some there that would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Matthew 16:28) It appears that the disciples' understanding of that prophetic word from Jesus was that it was fulfilled in this event, the transfiguration. (2 Peter 1:16)

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

He took the inner three disciples. Though it was only a week before that He had rebuked Peter for desiring man's ways over God's, He still chose Him to witness this event. God is a loving Father whose discipline is for our good, not hostility. He forgives and readily welcomes us back into His favor.

Luke tells us the purpose of going up the mountain was to pray. Having revealed the difficulties that lay ahead, Jesus knew they all needed to be in prayer. It has been

Commented [notes1]: ² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.
Mark 9:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.
Luke 9:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."
Matthew 16:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.
2 Peter 1:16 (NIV)

traditionally thought that the mountain was Mount Tabor, but recent archeological discoveries show that it was occupied at the time. Notice Matthew said they were alone. Today it is believed that this was Mount Hermon, just beyond Caesarea Philippi. It is a high mountain, the highest in the vicinity, unoccupied at the time.

² *There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

Luke tells us that this happened as He prayed. (Luke 9:29) This is not a description of the sun breaking through the clouds and shining a little spotlight on Jesus. This is not merely the radiance that Moses had when he came down from Mount Sinai. This is the source of that radiance. If the Israelites could hardly stand to look at Moses, imagine the brilliance of the source of Moses' reflected brightness. His face shone like the sun. Go outside today and look at the sun. That is what His face was like! Can you imagine Peter, James and John's thoughts as they witnessed this? What would you think? You would probably become fearful. Or maybe they realized that the glory of God that had been set-aside for the incarnation was breaking out as He entered into the heavenlies in prayer. John will see something similar in the first chapter of Revelation. (Revelation 1:13-16) In fact, John used the same description for His face, "shining like the sun".

No wonder John would later write, "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all*". 1 John 1:5b (NIV) Luke wrote that His clothes were as bright as a flash of lightning. (Luke 9:29) That is when the guests appeared.

³ *Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*

Moses was the most revered of all the prophets, for he was the one that received the Law. Elijah was said to be the greatest of the prophets. I do not know how the three disciples knew who they were, unless Jesus spoke to them by name. Considering the fact that Jesus had begun warning the disciples of what was to come, many speculate that this was pep talk about what lay ahead. We have a confirmation of that in Luke's gospel, ³⁰ *Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.* Luke 9:30-31 (NIV)

But who was encouraging whom? As Jesus was all man, dependent on the Holy Spirit and prayer for guidance, and that He had come to this mountain to hear a word from His Father for what lay ahead, I think these departed prophets were actually encouraging our Savior. There seems to have been a temptation to take another route. We saw it in the wilderness temptations, in Peter's plea, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. I wonder if they were confirming to Jesus what the Holy Spirit was directing Him to do from the perspective of the Law and the prophets. You will notice that after the resurrection Jesus explained to the disciples that everything in the Law and the prophets had to be fulfilled. (Luke 24:26-27)

You might wonder if Jesus, the Son of God, needed any encouragement. Do not forget that He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15) As a man, He was dependent on the Holy Spirit for God's direction. It should not surprise us that He needed encouragement. That is why He tells us to encourage one

Commented [notes5]: ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Luke 9:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Revelation 1:13-16 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Luke 9:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:26-27 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

another. (Hebrews 3:13) We all face difficult times in our lives when we are tempted and want to take what appears to be the easier route. That is when we need someone to come alongside us and point us to the Word of God.

Commented [notes10]: ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

It is interesting that Elijah did not die, (2 Kings 2:11) and that an angel had to fight over Moses' body. (Jude 1:9) It makes me wonder if that does not have something to do with them being the ones sent to speak with Jesus on the earth.

Commented [notes11]: ¹¹ And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 2 Kings 2:11 (KJV)

Every once in awhile I feel I need to stop and remind us that we are not reading a fairy tale. This is not a myth. This is a historical record. The three disciples actually witnessed this! In a later letter, Peter wrote that they were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

Commented [notes12]: ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. Jude 1:9 (KJV)

One way in which we can tell they did not distort the record is that they record their own blunders.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

Commented [notes13]: ¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16 (NIV)

Open mouth insert foot, Peter, does it again. Who knows what dumb thing we would have said had we been there. There stood Jesus in His brilliant glory with two of the greatest prophets to ever have lived, speaking of this momentous turning point in history, and Peter offers to build them little huts so they will not get a sunburn. The air must have been very thin up there. Maybe he was thinking of the feast of booths that came in that season. But you have to love him, because we would have probably done something even more stupid, like asked for an autograph. Can you see yourself trying to convince someone that what you got was really their signature? "You met Moses and Elijah! How high did you say that mountain was?"

God bless Peter; he makes us all feel normal! Aren't you glad Jesus chose him? Moreover, maybe that is why He did. He helps all realize that without the Spirit we are helpless. (John 15:5) Maybe Peter was wondering how he could make the experience last a little longer. When you have one of those mountaintop experiences, you do not want to go back down to the valley. However, as Hannah Hurrah writes in her book, *Hinds Feet on High Places*, the mountaintop experience is for the valley. It equips you to shine the light of Jesus in the valley. (Matthew 5:14) It is not for your personal pleasure and fulfillment alone. It is preparedness to make you fruitful in the valley. You were not meant to stay on the mountaintop. That makes you no earthly good. Just as in this story, it is to equip you for the job you have to do in the valley. Jesus was on His way to the valley of the shadow of death, and His Father was giving Him what He needed, just as He will be faithful to give you what you need if you look to Him. (Psalm 84:11)

Commented [notes14]: ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14 (NIV)

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The bright cloud enveloped them. It must have reminded them of Moses in the cloud on Mt. Sinai. God the Father spoke! Did you notice He interrupted Peter? It was not a time for man to talk. It was time to listen. (Psalm 46:10) God said what He said at Jesus' baptism with one slight variation. God is pleased with His Son. He always has been and always will be because they share the same perfect heart. If you want to

Commented [notes16]: ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalms 84:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁰ Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. Psalms 46:10 (KJV)

please the Father, you had better be in the Son. That is the only way we will ever please God. Jesus invites you to receive His righteousness, to clothe yourself with Him, to walk and live in Him. (Galatians 3:27)

The added expression was "Listen to Him!" If you are one of those folks that says, "If God would just speak to me, I would do whatever He said", then here it is. He spoke. He has a word of instruction for you, me, and every soul on the planet, "Hear Jesus!" When Moses predicted the coming of the Messiah, he said, "You must listen to him." Deuteronomy 18:15b (NIV) There is one thing that is needed in life, listening to Jesus. (Luke 10:42) He spoke it through Moses 3500 years ago, to this group on the mountain 2000 years ago, and to your heart today! God says, "Listen to Jesus!" If you want to make the most of life in a fallen world, listen to Him. If you want to have eternal reward in the presence of God, listen to Him. If want to know what is right, what is the most profitable, what is best for you and those around you, listen to Him. Do you want your Creator's advice for how to live your life? Then listen to Him.

There is only one reason we will not listen. I have seen it repeatedly until it breaks my heart over the stubbornness of man. We decide what we want to do, and then knowing it is not God's will, we abandon our life of prayer. Oh, we go through the ritual, but we quit letting Him speak to our heart. I can tell you without hesitation, that road you think is leading to pleasure is the path to pain. You say, but I am already in pain. Yes, and nobody knows like Jesus who has been walking with you through it, but taking your own way out is only going to result in more pain. Stop listening to man and listen to Jesus. He speaks to your heart. He speaks through His word. (Psalm 119:105)

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

Biblical encounters with God always have this affect. The person falls on their face trembling. (Revelation 1:17) God's presence is overwhelming. We need it in our daily lives. We need to be overwhelmed with the holiness and majesty of God. It puts us in our place. And as soon as we see ourselves as He sees us, helpless and weak, sinful and needy, then Jesus comes to lift us up and give us hope. He tells us not to fear because fear is so readily used by the evil one to keep us immobile. (1 John 4:18) God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7) As the disciples got back to their feet, the experience was over. Elijah and Moses were gone. The cloud was gone. It was back to the real world, or maybe I should say they were in the real world and it was back to this temporal passing world.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Just as Jesus told people not to tell of their miraculous healings, (Matthew 8:4) and the demons to be quiet about Him being the Son of the Most High, (Mark 3:11-12) Jesus did not want the word to spread and hasten the coming of the crucifixion. There was a set day and hour for that to come to pass, and there were still things to be done.

Commented [notes18]: ²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Galatians 3:27 (KJV)

Commented [notes19]: ⁴² But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. Luke 10:42 (KJV)

Commented [notes20]: ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. Revelation 1:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ⁷ For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7 (KJV)

Commented [notes24]: ⁴ Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." Matthew 8:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ¹¹ Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."
¹² But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was. Mark 3:11-12 (NIV)

Do you have a hard time keeping a secret? Imagine how hard it would be to keep from telling people you had seen Jesus shining like the sun while He talked with Moses and Elijah. I would have a hard time.

¹⁰ The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"¹¹ Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

After seeing the transfiguration, they could not doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. However, they also knew the prophecies that Elijah would be coming first.

(Malachi 4:5) If Jesus was the Messiah, where was Elijah? Everyone was waiting for him. Was this encounter on the mountain what the prophecies meant?

Jesus clarified things for them when He said, "He already came". Then they understood it was John in the spirit and power of Elijah. John the Baptist had turned their hearts toward the coming Messiah by leading them to repentance. But the world killed John, just as they were going to kill Jesus.

One month ago, Passover was celebrated. Jews around the world celebrate it with a Passover Seder meal. They set a place for Elijah at the table. They poured him a glass of wine. They even got up at one point in the ceremony and went to the door to see if he was coming. He already came! Jesus said so.

Elijah came. The Messiah came. God spoke. Are you listening? Jesus said the road to hell is wide and crowded, but the road to life is narrow and with few on it.

(Matthew 7:13-14) Our culture is telling us that is not true, and that statement is intolerant. But God said, "You better listen to Jesus!" I hear every excuse imaginable to ignore the word of God, but God says, "You better listen to Jesus!" You might stumble along the way, like our favorite disciple, Peter, but Jesus will be there to help you get back on the path as long as you are willing to listen to Him. (Psalm 37:24) In addition, once you listen, you know you have to either obey or rebel. Either you are for Him or against Him. (Mark 9:40) Either you love Him enough to obey, or you love yourself primarily. (Deuteronomy 11:22)

This mountaintop experience so affected Peter that, decades after the event, he wrote the church to try to help them grasp that these stories were actual events. ...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice ... and you will do well to pay attention to it... 2 Peter 1:16-19 (NIV) Because of this experience, Peter believed we should have more confidence in what the prophets foretold. He was declaring that the transfiguration confirmed what they had written. His conclusion was that we had better carefully pay attention to what God said when He spoke, as a light illuminating our dark world, until the day dawns and the morning star, Jesus, rises in your hearts. He is coming again. Until then, let us pay attention to what God said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him! Are you listening?

Commented [notes26]: ⁵ "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. Malachi 4:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: ¹³ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Matthew 7:13-14 (KJV)

Commented [notes28]: ²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. Psalms 37:24 (KJV)

Commented [notes29]: ⁴⁰ For he that is not against us is on our part. Mark 9:40 (KJV)

Commented [notes30]: ²² For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Deuteronomy 11:22 (KJV)