

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Luke's Gospel: The Transfiguration and the Epileptic healed (Luke 9:28-45)

Hello, and let me say good morning to everyone who has been able to get up on time to listen to this broadcast. I want to start with this thought: There are occasions when I might recount an event or story which I think is particularly good or special. Unfortunately, due to my lack of memory at times or just a poor delivery, the hearer can sometimes be somewhat underwhelmed. This is usually followed by an effort to make the best of it with the well known phrases such as "You had to be there really" or "It was good at the time" which I am sure many of you listening are familiar with.

Well, my subject today which covers Luke 9:28-45, leaves me feeling a bit like this. We will be looking at the story that is commonly known as the Transfiguration of Jesus. I can't help but feel that by the end of the broadcast I will not have brought out half as much as I should from the passage. Naturally you really had to have been there! In fact we are probably all a bit guilty of underestimating this event. We are likely to say "Oh yes, I know that one quite well." What a mistake we make! We know the words, but do we really appreciate everything about this story? Do we really appreciate what actually happened? It is my opinion that, as believers, we will not fully understand this part of the Bible until we see our Lord Jesus face to face in Glory.

This passage has been given to us as a glimpse of the reality of who Jesus really is and acts as an assurance to the things He has promised for us. If you are not sure of this then I would point you to 2 Peter 1:16-18: *"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."*

Peter was writing to beleaguered Christians who were unsure if the claims of the Lord Jesus were really going to happen. Was He really going to come again? Will He really make things right in this world? Many people in the church, as well as those outside, were also working on these doubts to cause even more distress to the Christians at that time. Peter tells the readers that the things the Lord Jesus has said He will do He will certainly do. How did Peter know? Because he saw the majesty of the Lord and it is recounted in this passage we have this morning so that we too can be encouraged and have our faith assured by this reminder of the One in whom we believe.

So let us begin to consider the passage we have this morning. The verses that precede it contain a number of well known stories. They include the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17) and Peter's confession of Jesus being the Christ of God (Luke 9:18-26). Luke 9:27 has the statement about some of the disciples not tasting death until they see the kingdom of God. Our passage is the realisation of that statement. The Lord had given a public demonstration of His power and grace in the feeding of the five thousand, but the wonder of seeing His glory and majesty is saved for those who truly knew who He was.

So, eight days after this statement Jesus takes Peter, James and John up onto the mountain for prayer (Luke 9:28). Peter, James and John were often a select group who were taken to special occasions or events by the Lord. I don't think we should read into this that they were somehow super Christians and that we could never be like them. They were still ordinary men. We are reminded of this in Luke 9:32 where it says they were very sleepy, despite all that was happening around them. But they were to have key roles in the early Church. Peter would be the one to announce the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. James was probably the first of the apostles to be martyred when he was killed by Herod in Acts 12:2. John was the last apostle who would provide the book of Revelation. It is likely that, knowing that they would have these responsibilities, they were given particular help through witnessing events like the Transfiguration.

Luke 9:29-31 describe the events where the Lord's appearance is changed and the two men, Moses and Elijah, also appear before Him and talk of His work. There are a number of suggestions as to why these two men are selected. Some say that they represent two important Old Testament principles, with Moses representing the Law and Elijah the Prophets. Another suggestion is that Elijah did not die but was taken up by God in 2 Kings 2:1, and Moses was buried by God so that nobody would know where his grave was, as found in Deuteronomy 34:6. These are perfectly acceptable reasons but I don't think we need to concern ourselves with why these were the two men and others were

not. Later in the passage we have a very clear indication of where our focus should be. It is also helpful to look at Luke 9:31. Here were two great men of the Bible appearing before the Lord and they only spoke of the work of the Lord. We have no mention of what Moses or Elijah did in their lives. The conversation is only about what the Lord was going to do when He went to the cross of Calvary.

We then get a marvellous section, from Luke 9:32-36, which is instigated by Peter's decision to involve himself in the event. He only decides to make a comment as the other two great men were departing (Luke 9:33). He suggests the setting up of three tents in honour of all three. It is almost as if he feels that he can say something now that the other two great men were on their way, but the Father intervenes (Luke 9:34-35). The cloud comes over them all and makes the declaration to correct the mistake that Peter had made. Moses and Elijah were great men of the Bible, but this Jesus that they were with was the Beloved Son and only He was to be considered. No other tents of worship were to be set up when considering the Father's beloved Son.

It is always wonderful that in every record of this event in the Gospels we are given a statement that the disciples were left alone with, or saw only the Lord following this declaration. They are left in no doubt as to who was being described. Peter, James and John did not speak of this event again until the Lord had been returned to heaven following His death and resurrection. We can look again to 2 Peter 1:16-18, which I quoted at the beginning, where we are told of this event and the importance of it.

Following this we are given a narrative of the next day, covered by Luke 9:37-43. They had come down the mountain by now and the Lord is immediately brought back into the sinful, helpless and faithless world that He had come to save. What a contrast it is and how sad a scene! We have a great crowd that is there again but are they doing what the Father had said? Were they listening to His Son? I think Luke 9:43 is very informative as it says that they were astonished at the majesty of God. But they were only interested in the miracles and not in what the Lord had to say about God and about His work of salvation.

A child is brought to the Lord that is possessed by an evil spirit or demon (Luke 9:37). I will not draw any comparisons with any known medical conditions as it is made clear in the words used what this problem was and we will gain no help from trying to fit it in with any other condition. The boy was possessed and ill. No physician could help and even the disciples could not do anything despite their efforts and relationship with the Lord (Luke 9:40). Only the Lord could provide the answer and He provided a full and complete recovery from the problem. Again, another small picture of the Gospel presents itself here. In our helpless state, only the Lord Himself is able to give the solution and cure we so desperately need.

In the middle of this event, in Luke 9:41, Jesus makes a striking statement: *"O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."*

At first glance, this could seem quite a harsh and unfair statement. Surely the man was doing the right thing in bringing his son to the Lord? We know that only He can save. However, I think that this statement is in relation to the nation of Israel and their state. They had been given all of the tools required to deal with this problem and if they had been faithfully following the laws and statutes of the Old Testament there would have been no opportunity for this to occur. The lack of faith and obedience of the nation had led to this terrible condition of spiritual decay and weakness. God had been long-suffering with Israel for many years. Now the Son had come, but there was still no response, they were still in this condition and they were only interested in the miracles. They had no intention of turning to God.

Finally, the Lord speaks to the disciples in Luke 9:44 and we get their response in Luke 9:45: *"Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.' But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying"* (Luke 9:44-45)

The Lord regularly told the disciples that He was to be put to death. He even told them that He would be resurrected. It would seem that the disciples never really grasped this concept. Here we are even told that it was hidden from them. It may seem odd that things are hidden from the disciples but the wisdom of God always prevails. The work of salvation had to happen and perhaps this concealment was a means of ensuring that the required events leading to the crucifixion would not be hindered by the efforts of a desperate disciple. This must have been particularly difficult for the three who had been on the mountain with Him. How could One who had shown such glory and had been declared as the chosen and beloved Son of God now be talking about His own death at the hands of men. The two would not have made sense! Thanks be to God that the two are true so that our salvation is provided. We know that we can be made fit for God for all eternity.

Now that we have had a brief look at the content of (Luke 9:28-45) I would like to draw out three specific topics which have I have been focussed on whilst looking at this passage. Hopefully they can be of help to each of us whenever we happen to be reminded of this part of the Bible.

My first point is that the events that are recorded here bring out the wonder of Who the Lord Jesus really is. Something of the Lord's glory is revealed here in the changes that took place in His very Person. His face changed and His clothes became white and dazzling (Luke 9:29). There was nothing special in the clothes. They had just climbed up a mountain don't forget! Yet the glory of the Lord was able to change them to something that we can't even achieve today with our best efforts. Just as an aside, I don't think this was a full revealing of the Lord's glory due to the fact that Peter could stand and see it. However, the scene must have been incredible. Indeed there was no man like this one! When Moses had come down from Mount Sinai, during the giving of the Ten Commandments, his face shone because it reflected God's glory (Exodus 34:29). The shining here came from the Lord Himself.

We can be thankful to Peter who enabled an even more emphatic statement of who the Lord is to take place. He makes his mistake in the statement about making three tents: one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah (Luke 9:33). It is understandable as the disciples had not been fully aware of how this had happened due to their tiredness so all three people were shining. But note the difference in the terms. The description of the Lord's glory is always stated by the use of the word "was". This suggests that it came from within Him. Moses and Elijah are said to appear "in" glory. A small point maybe, but I feel that this shows a fundamental difference that the Lord has glory from within Himself because of who He is. The other two benefit from being in glory, suggesting it being given to them. Despite these thoughts or considerations of small words, we can be in no doubt that the declaration from the Father sets out the proper order of things. It is almost as if the Father cannot allow this mistake to be made by Peter. He makes the declaration of just who the Lord is and His uniqueness. No other man has ever had such a statement made about Him. We know a similar statement was made at His baptism (see Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-22) and here again the Lord is declared as the Beloved Son.

What a lesson for Peter and what a lesson for us! There is no one who can compare to the Lord Jesus. This should be the case in our lives and in our hearts. How important for us to see that we should not allow others to be measured up to Him. So often we have a tendency to follow great speakers and people in a high office or position. Usually they have good qualities that are of value. In Christian circles we may be inclined to look up to those who seem to have good Christian principles or be good at teaching from the Bible. We see in the first epistle to the Corinthians this was an issue because they were saying they followed Paul, Apollos or Jesus. But what a mistake to make when we are reminded of the glory of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-17). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:1 that we should imitate him as he imitates Christ, and that is the key point.

If people in Christian circles have virtues or abilities that attract us and they are genuinely of worth then it is because they are Christ-like. This should lead us to look to the Lord more, and not the individual. John the Baptist made the telling statement in John's Gospel: *"He should increase and I must decrease"* (see John 3:30)

Hopefully the Transfiguration story reminds us of this important principle which makes us see Jesus only, just like Peter, John and James. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus and His saving work then this should serve as a reminder to keep Him at the centre of our considerations. If we have not yet made that decision to follow Him, then this serves as a demonstration that there is indeed no one like the Lord Jesus and He is someone worth following.

My second point is this passage acts as a good reminder of the great work that Jesus undertook in giving us salvation. It is a mini picture of the great step He took in coming down to this earth. We see that Jesus is shown in glory. There is also the declaration from the Father as to the wonderful relationship between the Father and the Son (Luke 9:35). Then He comes down from the mountain, the lofty position as it were. No more shining, the glory set aside. He is met by all the people who cannot help themselves (Luke 9:37-42); they all want something but they are not sure what. In the midst of it all, we see the dreadful effects of sin as the young boy is brought to Him.

What a contrast between the two scenes! A reminder of the great step of the Lord in coming down into this world from glory. He had been in the Father's presence and enjoyed that wonderful relationship with Him. But, He came to this earth and took the place of poverty, rejection and service. The prophet Isaiah states in Isaiah 53:2 *"there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him."* What a statement, that the One who was the delight of the Father would take such a place. Yet he did make that step. He came to this earth which wholly rejected Him; endured all the suffering and shame; endured the cross and died for us. This passage acts as a small picture of that great step of service that the Lord undertook for us.

My last topic is based upon the statement of the Lord in Luke 9:41 where He declares that the generation is faithless. In some respects we may be forgiven for thinking that this is a strange statement to make in this chapter. Many wonderful things had taken place already. Jesus had worked miracles (Luke 9:10-17), Peter had shown faith that Jesus was the long promised chosen one of God (Luke 9:18-20). Now we have the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Even the scene where this statement was made was one where a father had shown some level of faith in bringing his son to be healed by Jesus (Luke 9:37-42). Surely we have lots of examples of faith being shown by the people?

However, there is a need for Jesus to make this statement because there was still a remarkable lack of faith being shown. I have already stated that the nation should have been better able to keep things like demon possession at bay. But there is still a bigger issue that was being avoided. The teaching of the Jews was one of a promised Messiah, a chosen one, from God. It was a well accepted teaching. In Luke 9:1-62 we have an amazing display of Jesus demonstrating all the things that made it clear that He was that chosen one they were waiting for. But was it ever really grasped? Did they really have faith in Who this Person was and what He would come to do?

Even Peter didn't demonstrate this. His proposal in the passage demonstrates his lack of appreciation of just who the Lord was and is. The disciples doubted and feared when they were told of the Lord's impending death (Luke 9:43-45). They thought it impossible when they were told about the resurrection (Luke 9:45). If they really knew Who Jesus was and had absolute faith and trust in Him, they would never have doubted; they would have accepted the words as the truth they were.

The faith that the Bible speaks of is more than the faith that is commonly spoken of in the world around us today. We have "faith" in so many things but it is something that is usually based on a kind of probability. If an event is slightly more probable of a positive outcome then we will put faith in it. It is not something that is guaranteed and there is an acceptance that there is a chance of failure or misplaced faith. It also tends to be independent of the general traits of someone or something. For instance, if we call for an ambulance we have faith that it will arrive because that is what is expected of that service. We have no indication of the reliability of the character or personality of the driver. This is not the faith of the Bible. Faith is to be shown in who God is and who Jesus is. Our faith should be as much in the person, even if the first thing we hear of is the work of salvation. Faith in the Person of the Lord will naturally lead to a greater acceptance of the work of salvation and what we have been told in His word.

The Lord tells us in Luke 9:41 that this was the problem here. There were lots of followers of miracles and events, but no acceptance of the Person of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. This is shown in the Gospels where many turned away and rejected Him when they were challenged to follow Him and turn away from their sinful lives. This was particularly seen in the Pharisees who had so much knowledge of the Word of God but could not see when God was in front of them. It also showed them to be less than they thought they were. Again the challenge is to see that our faith is truly in the Lord Jesus Himself, the wonder of His very person. A sad thing it would be for us if we never allowed our faith to go beyond the salvation we are told about in the Gospel.

As I said at the beginning, I don't think my comments will have done this portion of Scripture justice. A twenty odd minute talk on the event never could. Even with all the time in the world it could still be said that you really had to be there to get the full picture. Despite all of this, I hope that my thoughts on this section will be of help and encouragement. I also hope that it serves as a reminder constantly to refocus our lives and our thoughts towards the Lord Jesus, who is the only Person who is worthy of them.

As I close, I would bring out one more thought that should be an encouragement to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who trust in His work of salvation in dying for us on the cross of Calvary. This event of the Transfiguration took place prior to the crucifixion of the Lord. All believers know that He rose again and went to be with His Father in Heaven and this should give us hope. This scene was a special one given only to three disciples many years ago. But it is only a glimpse, a brief prelude to the final wonderful event. There will come a time when all those who believe will be able to have the full joy of seeing the Lord in His full glory in heaven. The wonder of this shall be that it will not be just for a short period of time, there will be no distraction from a sinful world, no need to "come down the mountain". We shall be able to enjoy this wonderful scene for all eternity and share in His glory. I trust that every listener has this hope within them through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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