

CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURED FACE

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*"His face did shine as the sun."
Matthew 17:2.*

WHILE our Lord Jesus Christ was upon this earth, He was as much Divine as before He left His Father's court in Heaven. He never ceased to be God, nor was the Godhead for a single moment separated from His Humanity. He was, therefore, always glorious. Yet there was a greater Glory about Him than could usually be seen. This may seem to be a paradox, but it is true. For Christ to be glorious was almost a less matter than for Him to restrain or hide His Glory. It is forever His Glory that He concealed His Glory and that, though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor. Though He was God over all, blessed forever, He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

Our Lord's humiliation was all perfectly voluntary and I should not be surprised to learn that, when alone, His face was frequently radiant with Glory as it was on this occasion of His Transfiguration. I can easily imagine that He may often have returned to what must have been His natural condition when there were no human eyes to gaze upon Him. If you carefully read the four Gospels, I think you will see that there are indications that the Glory was always there, ready to flash forth. What was it that made those who came to take Him in the garden of Gethsemane, go backward and fall to the ground when He said, "I am"? Was it, do you think, because the light of Jehovah gleamed upon them at least in some degree? Certainly there was a mystic Glory shining about Him at times, and those who came near Him appear to have been arrested by it. I fancy that it was something more than natural eloquence which made the officers return without Him to the Pharisees and chief priests who had sent them to take Him, while they excused themselves by saying, "Never man spoke like this Man."

A sort of radiance would shine forth from Christ, in some dim degree, now and then, but, on this occasion, He took off the veil—no, perhaps it would be more correct to say that He lifted just a corner of it and permitted these three highly-favored individuals to see what was always there, though usually concealed from their eyes! "We beheld His Glory," wrote John. "We were eyewitnesses of His Majesty," wrote Peter. They certainly saw the Glory which may, I think, have been manifested at other times when Christ was alone—but whether that was so or not, He had a good reason for letting it be seen on this one occasion—and it may be that we shall gather some instruction while we meditate first, upon the transfiguration as a whole, and then turn our thoughts especially to the brightness of Christ's transfigured face.

I want you to notice under what circumstances Christ revealed His Glory to His three disciples. And my first observation is that it was in a lone spot. They were on "a high mountain apart." Learn from this, dear Friends, that if we would see Jesus in His Glory, we must get apart from the multitude. He may come to us when we are with His people, as He came to the disciples in the upper room, but there was a kind of loneliness and seclusion even there, for the world was shut out and none were there but His own followers. Our Lord delights to talk to His beloved ones when they are in retirement. Leave the servants at a distance from the sacred meeting place, even as Abraham did, and go up to the top of the hill, alone, or with some specially chosen companions.

We who live in London need more solitude—I mean, at least, that we need to find for ourselves more opportunities for solitude than those who live in retired spots. They almost inevitably walk the fields at eventide and we may hope that, like Isaac, they there have communion with their God. But if we have not any fields to walk in, we must somehow manage to get alone. The best visits from Christ are like the best visits we have from those we love—not in the busy market, or in the crowded street, but when we are alone with them! Our blessed Master also, on this occasion, revealed His Glory when He was in prayer. Luke says that, “as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening.” Prayer is the key of all mysteries. When Christ would, as it were, unlock Himself, the casket, so as to let His disciples see His inner Glory, He prayed—and this should teach us that if we would see Christ's Glory, we also must pray. And if we would glow with the Glory of Christ, we must be much in prayer. These are practical Truths of God—much more practical than many imagine. We are far too often like Martha, “cumbered about much serving.” We need to be more like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, looking up into His dear face and listening to His gracious words. The active life will have little power in it if it is not accompanied by much of the contemplative and the prayerful. There must be retirement for private prayer if there is to be true growth in Grace.

When our Lord's disciples did see His Glory, it was revealed in an amazing light. And this may teach us how truly Divine He is, for “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” It may also show us how He has come to us as the Light of God—not in the blackness of darkness, to overwhelm us in despair and make us sit like the Egyptians during that darkness which might be felt—but Christ is “the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world.” And when we see Him, we shall perceive this. The Glory which the disciples saw was a light that was perceptible by the eyes and there is about the Glory of Jesus a moral, mental, spiritual light which we shall behold when we see Him as He is. This will be the main thing that we shall see when we are favored with a sight of Him.

Something is to also be learned from the persons to whom our Lord revealed His Glory. They were very few. There were only three of them and I venture to say that among the saints of God in all ages, there have not been many who have seen our Lord Jesus Christ to the fullest. Blessed, indeed, are the eyes that have so seen Him, but they are very few. All of us who have believed in Jesus, have looked unto Him and have been lightened, and have found salvation through Him—but, even among us there are some who have missed many of their rightful privileges. They are partially blind and cannot see afar off. By the Grace of God they will get to Heaven all right, but they will have much darkness on the road. There are few of us who so abide in Christ, from day to day, as to see Him as distinctly as He is to be seen. I must confess that I envy some saints, whose biographies I have read, who have seen the Lord far better than I have. And I aspire, I hunger, I thirst to see as much of Him as can be seen on this side of the river of death! Why should we not all do so? Eyes are meant to see light. And spiritual eyes are intended to see Christ! And they are never so fully used for their true design as when they are constantly fixed upon Him—all lower lights being forgotten and permitted to burn out—while He becomes the one great Light in which the soul basks and revels. Mark this then, you multitudes of professors—out of the 12 Apostles, only three saw the Transfiguration—and what a small proportion were those three to the great company of men and women who at that time were disciples of Jesus!

Yet these three were very special persons. Some say that Peter was one of them because he loved his Master much. They say that John was another because his Master loved him much—and that James was the third because he was so soon to die—the first of the Apostles who would become a martyr for the faith of Jesus Christ. I do not think, however, that is a good conclusion to draw, for I should not say that Peter loved Christ more than John did. Peter was open-hearted, bold, enthusiastic. To my mind, there is something very lovable about Peter and, in my opinion, we need more Peters in the Church of the present day. Though they are rash and impulsive, yet there is fire in them and there is steam in them so that they keep us going. As for John, you can all see that it was well that the man whose head was to lie in the bosom of Christ, who was so affectionately to care for the Master's mother and who was to see His Lord “in the isle that is called Patmos,” should behold Him once in His Glory, that He might recognize Him when He again appeared to him. And as for James, we can easily believe that there were special traits of beauty about his character that made him to be one of those three—his early martyr death and the fact that he was the brother of John—certainly lift him up to a very high position among the Apostles of Christ.

There were three, I suppose, in order that there might not be any question concerning their testimony to the Transfiguration. Two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish a case in a court of law. A thing that cannot be proved by

three honest men as witnesses, probably cannot be proved by thirty—and if three men join to testify to a lie, probably thirty will not speak the truth!

These three Apostles were specially chosen to see Christ in His Glory because they were afterwards to behold Him in His greatest agony. I cannot imagine what must have been their feelings when they first saw Him brighter than the sun, and then beheld Him red as the rose with bloody sweat. I know not which sight a man might more desire—to see Christ robed in light, and brighter than the sun, or to see Him crimsoned with His own blood, the very essence of His being poured out in agony for us. “Oh,” said Rutherford, “but was He not bonny when He wore the red shirt of His own blood for you and me?” Oh, the loveliness of an agonizing Savior! I cannot compare Him in these two so strangely differing experiences—one would have needed to see Him in both to understand either of them.

These Apostles saw their Lord in His Glory and also in His agony. And perhaps somebody here is saying, “Oh, I wish I could be favored with those two sights. I wish I could, in vision, if not in actual fact, see the Lord Jesus Christ.” Dear Friend, do not ask for anything of the kind! Be content to see Him by faith, for that is the only sight that you really need. Remember, also, that although Peter saw Christ thus, he yet lived to deny Him. And although James and John saw Him, they also forsook Him and fled with the rest of the Apostles. Well did Peter, therefore, set the Revelation of Christ in the Scriptures even above the Revelation on the Mount of Transfiguration when he wrote, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His Majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and Glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent Glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from Heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

Sacred Scripture, accepted by faith, will give me a better view of Christ than even if—

“Tabor’s glorious steep I climb,”

for—

*“At the too-transporting light,
Darkness rushes o’er my sight.”*

Therefore it is better, calmly and quietly to see Christ in the Scriptures, than to wish to behold Him either in His Glory or in His agony.

Another thing which we may learn from our Lord Jesus Christ having shown Himself to His Apostles thus robed in brightness is that we are scarcely aware of the glory of which the human body is capable. Nobody knows what beauty may surround these bodies of ours—they are only “vile” in certain aspects. You know what a difference there is in the appearance of a man when his face is lighted up, as we say, or when he is sitting still and a photographer is taking his portrait. The moment the operator begins to take the cap off the camera, the man’s soul vanishes and his true likeness is not there at all. But see him when he is full of animation, when he is speaking upon some delightful theme—his face lights up and his whole appearance is changed. I have known some persons who have seemed to me to have a singular brightness upon their face when they have been speaking about Christ and, very often, the faces of the dying are lit up with a wonderful splendor. There is actually, as physicians know, a kind of luminosity that does arise from the human face in certain stages of disease—that is a brightness which is not to be desired, but our flesh is capable of becoming marvelously transformed when it shall please God to make that change in us! We shall, ourselves, wonder that such bodies as these can become so light, so bright, so ethereal! The body of Christ became so and we, in our measure, are to be raised in the likeness of His glorious body. “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” And this image of the heavenly, which the Apostles saw upon the holy mountain, is a kind of index to us of the evident possibility of these poor bodies of ours being clothed with supernal splendor!

Now I want to talk to you, though only for a few minutes, about Christ’s transfigured face, concerning which our text says, “His face did shine as the sun.”

I. First, from this Truth of God we learn that JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME IN HIS GLORY AS HE WAS BEFORE.

He was transfigured, but He was not transformed into another person. Matthew says that “His face did shine as the sun.” Then, *His face was the same as it was before.* It was His face that the Apostles saw. All the familiar features of His

Countenance were there, though illumined with supernatural radiance. So, whatever Glory may come to Christ in the future it will be the same dear lineaments that will be lit up with heavenly brightness.

And as there was no change of feature, so there was no change of nature. *The transfigured Christ was the same Savior whom the Apostles had known before* and I like to think that, though now He reigns exalted high, He is, so far as His identity and Nature are concerned, the same as He was when here below. Nothing has changed in His heart, or in His purposes, or in His designs towards His people!

Further, when He was glorified, *His disciples were with Him*, for Matthew says that He “was transfigured before them.” Do not imagine, dear Friends, that our Lord Jesus Christ will forget His disciples when He is in His highest Glory. No, even then they will be with Him, for this is part of His great intercessory prayer for them, “Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My Glory.” Circumstances change some people—they rise in the world and then they do not know their poor friends and relations. But Christ was not changed in heart by the wondrous transformation which He had undergone in being clothed in light. After the Transfiguration He spoke to His disciples with the same gentle, human, tender tones as before. He laid His hand upon them in the old-fashioned, familiar way, and said, “Arise, and be not afraid,” just as, when walking upon the water, He had said to them, “It is I. Be not afraid.”

No, dear Friends, there was no change in Him, for, as I have already reminded you, even when He was thus manifesting His Glory, *His talk was concerning His decease at Jerusalem*. There was no swerving from the great objective for which He had descended from Heaven—and there was no change, either, in His feelings or in His manner towards His people.

O Beloved, have you known Christ here? Then you shall know Him hereafter! Have you trusted Him on the Cross? Then He will not disown you when He wears His many crowns and sits upon the Throne of God. You shall say, when you see Him in the day of His greatest Glory, as we sang just now—

*“This is the Man, the exalted Man,
Whom we unseen adore.”*

Oh, yes! You shall see the nail-prints shine resplendent and you shall know that He is, indeed, your old familiar Savior who was with you on earth—and now you are to be with Him forever in Heaven!

II. Our text also teaches us a second lesson, namely, that THE GLORY OF CHRIST SURPASSES ALL HUMAN EXPRESSION.

We can measure the illuminating power of the gas that we burn. We talk of it as having so many candle-power, but will any gentleman who is quick at calculations compute for us the candle-power of the sun? No, that is a task he can never accomplish, for the sun has more light than all other lights put together. So far as we are concerned, all the lights that we can make or imagine cannot equal the sun—he is the very source of all the light that floods the world on our brightest days.

So is it with Christ. *He has in Him all brightness and Glory*. If there is any virtue, if there is any goodness, if there is any excellence, it is all in Him. One said of Henry the Eighth that if the portraits of all the tyrants who ever lived had been lost, they might all be painted again from his one face. And, surely, I may change the expression and say that if all the beauty, all the goodness, all the love and all the kindness that there ever were among men should be forgotten, it might all be reproduced from the Character of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We cannot really see the full glory of the sun—some have been blinded by looking at him too intently. And *no mortal eye can gaze upon all the splendors of Christ*. You may see much of Him, but there is such a wondrous mystery—such a marvelous excess of Glory about Him that if any man says, “I know Him fully,” he proves that he knows Him not! Paul wrote to the Philippians, “that I may know Him.” Yet he had known Christ for many years. I suppose that he knew a great deal more about Christ in the first year of his Christian life than most of us know after 20 or 30 years, yet, after that long period of gracious instruction which the Holy Spirit had given him, he still had to write, as the expression of his most ardent desire, “that I may know Him,” for he felt that he had not yet comprehended, with all the saints, what are the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of the love of Christ which passes knowledge!

There is an inexpressible Glory about my Master—I can never exaggerate in speaking of it. I can never go to any excess in praising Him! I can never extol Him so much that anyone shall truthfully dare to say to me, “You have said too

much in honor of your Lord.” No, if all human tongues were eloquent and all did speak His praise *forever*—and if all angelic voices never spoke except to laud and magnify Him—so glorious is He that the praises of all combined would not rise above the soles of His feet!

III. I gather from our text, in the third place, that THE GLORY OF CHRIST IS ALL MEANT TO CHEER AND TO ENLIGHTEN.

The light of the sun reveals and *Christ also reveals much to us*. In His light we see light. He who knows Christ knows God, who is Light. The light of the Spirit of God is given to such as know Christ. They have an unction from the Holy One and they know all things. Christ has brought immortality to light by His appearing. He is indeed a wondrous Revealer.

Christ, like the sun, is also a great Consoler. What comfort the sun spreads to us! How sad we should be if we were to lose his light! But, oh, what floods of comfort come streaming down to darkened hearts when Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, appears! No lonely watcher on the tower did ever sigh for the dawn as they do who love the Savior and have lost His company—and never were hands so heartily clapped with exultation at the light of the sun reappearing in the far North as we clap ours, in a spiritual sense, when Christ manifests Himself to us, for He is, indeed, “the consolation of Israel.”

Jesus, also, like the sun, is a great Healer. The Italians say, “Where the sun comes not, the physician will soon come,” but where the sun shines, his beams usually bring at least a measure of health to men. So, where Jesus is, there the sick revive, for healing is found beneath His wings. Thus the face of Jesus is as the rays of the sun, scattering no malicious vapor, no deadly darts of baleful wrath, but only goodness and love. Oh, that we would all look, by faith, upon His blessed face and receive all the benefits that He is waiting and willing to bestow upon us!

IV. I am obliged to speak very briefly upon each point where one might enlarge almost without end, so I ask you to notice, in the fourth place, that THE GLORY OF CHRIST IS SUCH THAT IT MAY BE REFLECTED BY US.

Everybody knows that the sun's light can be reflected. We owe much to reflected light. Well, the Glory of Christ is such that it can shine upon you so that you can see it and then, afterwards, you can reflect it, and refract it, and send it back upon others. You can give to others something of what Christ has given to you—and this is a very blessed thing. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” in order that we may let that light shine out upon others!

John says, “We beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and truth.” Well, now you can have *Grace and truth* and you can so live that you shall be the means of bringing Grace to others, and you can so display the Truth of God that some, who have not yet looked to Jesus, can see something of Jesus reflected in you! Some Christians are very poor reflectors, but when we are as we ought to be, we shall be like that invention you see sometimes for underground rooms where they try to send some of the daylight down by means of a reflector. The poor people of London are, many of them, both literally and spiritually, underground—very little light ever gets to them—so try to be reflectors, to shed the light upon them. Reflectors are not of much use when they get dirty. Unless they are cleaned, they cannot be of much service—and I know some Christians who need a good shower to cleanse them.

There are some professors who do not reflect much credit upon their profession, I am sorry to say, and they generally blame the minister when this is the case. I sometimes wish that some of you Christians would be more careful as to what you do, because the blame for your inconsistencies often falls upon me. If I could do you any good by bearing it, I would not mind, but it is not so—you bring discredit upon the name of one who wishes to live to the Lord in the best way he can, and who has quite enough faults of his own without having all those of other people unjustly laid at his door. “Ah,” say the fault-finders, “that is one of Spurgeon's people.” Of course they do! And I am blamed for your wrong-doing, although I am not in the least responsible for it. If the sheep go astray because the shepherd has not done his best to keep them from wandering, blame him. But if he has done all he could and the sheep then stray, so that the dog has to go after them, do not say that the shepherd ought to have the dog set on him! O, Beloved, try to reflect the Glory of God so that people shall ask, “What makes that man's countenance so bright?” And the answer shall be, “He has set his face so close to the Well-Beloved's face that he reflects the light that shines from it.”

V. Lastly—for our time fails us—we learn that THIS GLORY OF CHRIST WILL SOON BE MORE FULLY DISPLAYED.

In Heaven, the glorified face of Jesus is always to be seen, for we are expressly told that, “His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face.” Their eyes will be specially strengthened so that they can gaze upon it without injury—

“O long-expected day, begin”—

when we, too, shall be caught up to see that wondrous Countenance! Do not your desires often make you feel like a bird that wants to fly, but cannot, because it is held down by a chain? Then you sing—

*“My heart is with Him on His Throne,
And ill can brook delay!*

*Each moment listening for the voice,
‘Rise up, and come away.’”*

They who behold Christ in Heaven, even from the outermost rank of the saints, are to be envied above all earthly kings and princes. One said to an old saint, “You cannot see God’s face and live.” “Then,” he replied, “let me see God’s face and die!” And I will be glad enough to die a hundred deaths if I may but see Christ! One hour with Christ in Glory will more than make up for a weary lifetime of service, or suffering, or poverty, or persecution. I have often tried to imagine what the first five minutes with Jesus Christ in Heaven will be, but I have sought in vain to picture the novelty and freshness of that wondrous time when the soul, filled with amazement, will exclaim, “The half has never been told me!” The Queen of Sheba was astonished when she saw all the glory of King Solomon—but he was a mere nobody compared with our Lord Jesus Christ! Oh, what will it be to see Him?

Now I close with this thought—*the glorified face of Jesus is also to be revealed here on earth*. In a short time, according to His promise, He will come. I do not know that He is coming tomorrow, but I do not know that He is *not* coming then. His return may be a thousand years hence—perhaps, fifty thousand years hence, or it may be before that clock strikes again. But, whenever He comes, He will fulfill His own words, “Surely I come quickly.” One thing is certain, He will come again. In like manner as He went up into Heaven, He will return in His own proper Person, enthroned upon the clouds of Heaven, to hold the last assize. And, my Hearers, you will be there, every one of you! As surely as you are here, you will be there! When the earth rocks and the sky shakes, you will be there! When stars are falling like the leaves of autumn, and when Heaven and earth shall flee away from His Presence, you will be there! And, whether you love Him or not, you shall see Him, for “every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him.”

Are you ready for His appearing? Say not, “It will be a long while before it happens.” It may not be. It may be tonight. But if it is a long time, yet He will surely come and then where will you be? If you live and die without the Savior, how will you face Him? His eyes are as a flaming fire to search you out and burn into your very soul. Oh, seek His face this very hour! It still shines as the sun. You know that when you are out of doors and the sun is shining, you do not ask, “Where is the sun?” Why, my dear man, you cannot help finding out where he is! “Oh, but how can I look at the sun?” My dear man, nobody needs to ask such a question as that! You just open your eyes and look! It is the simplest thing in the world to look. And so, to look to Jesus, which is faith, is the simplest, easiest thing ever performed by man! And that is why it is so difficult to many people.

That is another paradox. If it were *really* difficult, men would do it, but because it is so easy, they say they cannot. “If the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it?” said the servants to Naaman, their master. “How much rather, then, when he says to you, Wash and be clean?” And so, when the message is, “Look and live,” you proud gentlemen want to have a much more elaborate system of salvation! You do not like to simply look to Christ, that you may be saved. But if there is a poor soul, anywhere, who is willing to have a whole Christ for nothing, he may have Him, and have Him now! Accept Him and God bless you, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *MATTHEW 16:24-28; 17:1-13.*

Matthew 16:24, 25. *Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever will save his life shall lose it: and whoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.* This is the law of self-sacrifice, based on the Sacrifice of Christ and leading up to the complete sacrifice of the redeemed. We are not our own—we are bought with a price. To try to keep ourselves to ourselves would be acting con-

trary to the whole spirit of the redemption which Christ has worked for us. And that is the last thing that any Christian should think of doing.

26-28. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There are some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.* By which, I suppose He meant that they should see Him in His majesty—that, notwithstanding the Cross, they should see something of His crown of Glory, as they did when they beheld Him after His Resurrection, and as they did, even better, when He ascended on high. And as they did, some of them, in vision, when they saw Him standing at the right hand of God, even the Father.

Matthew 17:1. *And after six days.* Luke says, “about eight days after these sayings,” but I suppose he counted the day before and the day after. “After six days”—and the first day was, probably, the first day of the week, so he was now coming to another Lord’s-Day. One of the high Christian festivals of the life of Christ was about to be celebrated. Jesus was not yet dead, therefore it was not the Resurrection that was celebrated on that day, but the Transfiguration. “After six days”—six days’ teaching concerning the Cross before He revealed His Glory.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, there are many in these days who delight to speak almost exclusively about the glory of the Second Advent. Now, God forbid that we should be silent concerning that great theme! But I think our teaching concerning it must be given after six days’ consideration of the sufferings of Christ. Let those who will, say, “We preach Christ *glorified*.” I mean to still say, with Paul, “But we preach Christ *crucified*.” When I have had my six days for that topic, then am I right glad to have another day to speak concerning Christ’s Glory. We must never forget His death—all our immortal hopes are centered in the death of our great Substitute! “After six days”—

1, 2. *Jesus took Peter, James, and John, his brother, and brought them up unto an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.* “White and glistening,” says Luke. “Exceedingly white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can whiten them,” says Mark.

3. *And, behold.* As if this was a great wonder! The Transfiguration of Christ could scarcely be called miraculous, for it is according to the Nature of Christ that His face should shine and His very raiment become glorious.

3. *There appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with Him.* Moses, the great representative of the Law of God, and Elijah, the chief of the Prophets—one who had died, and one who had entered Heaven without dying—thus representing both the quick and the dead!

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if You will, let us make here three tabernacles; one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.* If Peter had known that hymn by Dr. Watts—

*“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss,”*

he would have thought it appropriate to sing at that moment! And whenever we get up on the mountain, we have no desire to go down again! Our one thought is, “Oh, that this happy experience would last! Oh, that we might stay in this blessed company forever!” Yet our highest religious excitements cannot continue, even as the sea is not always at flood tide. The talk between those three—Jesus, Moses and Elijah—must have been well worth hearing. I would like to have been one of the three Apostles, to listen to the conversation of the three glorified ones. We know what they talked about, for Luke tells us that they “spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” And it is very singular that the Greek word which he used to describe Christ’s decease is the word, “exodus.” They “spoke of His *exodus* which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Moses knew all about the exodus out of Egypt, and what a type that was of Christ’s departure out of this world—the death of the lamb—the sprinkling of the blood—the slaying of the firstborn among the Egyptians, even as Christ smote sin, death, and Hell—the triumphant coming out of Israel with silver and gold, setting forth Christ’s Ascension to His Father with all His precious treasures captured from the hand of the enemy! How changed must the feelings of Elijah have been since the day when he said, “I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away,” for now he was seeing the King in His Glory, and talking with Him about His approaching departure!

How did Peter, and James, and John know that these two men were Moses and Elijah? They had never seen them in the flesh, yet they evidently recognized them—so, as they knew people whom they had not known on earth, I am sure that I shall know in Heaven those whom I did know here—I shall have the advantage of them in that respect. I suppose they said to each other, as soon as they saw these men, “That is Moses! That is Elijah!” Yet they had never seen them—and shall not we, when we meet our dear kindred and friends, say at once, “That is So-and-So, with whom I took sweet counsel on earth when we walked to the House of God in company”? Surely, the mutual recognition of the saints hardly needs a better support than this passage supplies!

5. *While he yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.* The Shekinah cloud, which was the type of the Divine Presence in the wilderness—bright, yet a cloud, softening the excessive Glory of the face of Jesus with its overshadowing, yet casting no dimness upon it—“a bright cloud overshadowed them.”

5, 6. *And behold a Voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear you Him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.* We cannot bear for God to come too near us, for we are such frail earthen vessels that if He reveals His Glory too much within us, we are ready to break.

7. *And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.* Yes, it was only Jesus who could give them comfort. And I have to say—

*“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find.
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.
But if Immanuel’s face appears,
My hope, my joy, begins!
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His Grace removes my sins.”*

The hand of a Man touched the Apostles, and the voice of a Man said to them, “Arise, and be not afraid.”

8. *And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.* And they did not need any other man “save Jesus only.” Let Moses, and Elijah, and all others go—so long as Christ remains. There will be the most blessed company for us so long as He abides with us!

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man until the Son of Man is risen again from the dead. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?* “May we not tell the story, of what has happened on this mountain? Elijah has come! If we publish this news, it may convince even the scribes that You are the Messiah.”

11, 12. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatever they liked. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them.* How He comes back to that point! Evidently the chief thought in our Savior’s mind was concerning His suffering. On another occasion He said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it is accomplished!” As the magnetic needle always points to the pole, so did the heart of Jesus always point to the Cross.

13. *Then the disciples understood that He spoke unto them of John the Baptist.* John had indeed come “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” yet Herod had put him to death, as other wicked men would deal with his Lord and Master whose way he so gloriously prepared.

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