

The Unveiling of Jesus Christ, Part 1

Luke 9:28-31

Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 9, and verse 28. Luke 9:28.

We've come to a place in Luke's Gospel of particular wonder, and God, here, by the Spirit, is giving us a brief look behind the veil to see the glory of Jesus Christ. That's what's on display, here, in Luke 9:28-36. So without further ado, let's get right into the text. I'm going to read starting in verse 28. "Now about eight days after these sayings he," Jesus, "took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

"And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 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. 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.

"As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!' 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."

It's a text of glory, the glory of Jesus Christ. And there's a couple of things that I want to say, here, just by way of introduction to the text and just to, kind of to clear up a couple of theological misconceptions, or maybe get some theological clarity. The first thing to say, by way of introduction, is this; we call this, The Transfiguration. That's how I refer to this text. That's how, usually, you can find it in your Bibles the heading that says, The Transfiguration. The word, transfigure, *metamorphao*, comes from Matthew and Mark. But Luke doesn't use that word here in this text. *Metamorphao* can

mean, transfigure. It can mean, transform, and that's not quite accurate in a translation.

It can also mean, and this is how Matthew and Mark intended, it can also mean, changed in appearance, as in outward appearance. But an actual transformation is not what's intended. So there's a change in appearance, that's the idea. And that's to say, Jesus did not transform. He didn't change from one thing to another. Nothing is truly changed, here.

Rather, what has happened is that the veil has been pulled back, and we are seeing the deity of Christ that has been veiled beneath the humanity of Christ. In the incarnation, during his first coming his first earthly coming, Jesus' humanity covered his deity. So in this account, we get a glimpse, we get a bit of a preview of his future glory. That's the first thing to clear up. Jesus didn't actually change from one thing to another. He remained the same.

Another misconception I want to address, here, is that we tend to see this account as exceptional, as out of the ordinary.

And that's for good reason because from our perspective, the embodiment of brilliant, shining glory in a human being is not an everyday experience. Humanity, as we look around the room and at each other, we're pretty much the same. Yeah, we dress up our bodies with colorful garments. Ladies add shiny, dangly things. The men, well, they're the men. But there's nothing really too remarkable about the likes of us. There's nothing really that's too much different among us.

Paul tells us, 1 Corinthians 15:40, that "there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, and the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, the glory of the earthly is of another." We are more accustomed to the latter, the earthly, not the former, the heavenly. And so for us, seeing the heavenly glory of Jesus Christ, yes, it's exceptional to us.

But if we pull back out of this narrative a bit and we try to look at this, as it were, from the perspective of eternity, this is the Son of God in his normal state of being. This is not exceptional for him. What's exceptional for him is to be veiled, and his glory veiled. From everlasting to everlasting, the Second Person of the Trinity is utterly glorious. He is divinely

brilliant. In fact, as Hebrews 1 says, "He is the radiance of divine glory." He's beautiful in his holiness. He is parallel in majesty, in every way, with the other members of the Triune Godhead.

John, the Apostle John, was present on this occasion, as we just read, and he witnessed this unveiling as a, as a very young man. He was the younger brother of James. And much later in his life, as a senior saint, really, John saw this same glory again. I'd like you to turn over just quickly by way of introduction to Revelation chapter 1, Revelation chapter 1 and verse 9. The risen, the exalted Christ visited John while he was in exile on the isle of Patmos, and he gave him the words, there, to write in the book of Revelation, all the visions, all the things that are unpacked in Revelation; Jesus Christ, the exalted Christ, gave those things to John personally.

And in the very first chapter of the Revelation, we get a fascinating picture of, and I'll say it again, of the normal glory of Jesus Christ. It's kind of strange to put, normal and glory, in the same sentence, but that is what it is for him. Notice Revelation 1, verse 9, "I, John, your brother and partner

in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it out to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira, to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'

"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool," like, "like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and

the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'”

You got to keep that picture in mind as you go back to, go back there now to Luke chapter 9. And think about what we read, as verse 29 says that “as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.” That is a brief, brief picture of what John saw in Revelation chapter 1. He, there, is pulling back the veil, and we’re seeing a preview of that post-Resurrection glory, the glory of his exaltation. This is his normal state. We need to understand that. In his incarnation, Philippians 2:7, “having assumed the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.” As the song says, “He is robed in frail humanity,” we need to realize this unglorified state as temporary, as he’s doing his work here on earth.

We need to realize this is temporary. He continues on with human nature, on into the future, on throughout eternity. It’s added to his divine nature, the two natures in one Person of Christ. That is the mystery of the incarnation. That is the union of those two natures in one Person. But he continues on at

the father's right hand. Yes, robed in humanity, but shining in glory.

So what we're seeing in this account is not exceptional for Jesus Christ. It's normal. It's exceptional to us because we're accustomed to looking on humanity in its inglorious and fallen and sinful condition. But in Christ, we see humanity exalted. We see the glory of God robed in the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. And today for us, in this text the veil is opened. So what's the significance of this? Why this narrative at this time in Luke's Gospel? Why this unveiling of Christ's future glory? That's the question we want to answer. So for today we're going to look at the unveiling, verses 28-31. Next week we're going to hear from God the Father about the significance of this unveiling.

Luke sets the scene for us there in verse 28, very short summary statement of summary about the setting. "About eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray." That is packed with information. Four things Luke gives us, here, about the setting. Number one: He gives us the time and the context. "About eight



days after these sayings.” He tells us, number two, about the people who were there. It’s Jesus along with Peter and John and James. Oh, and we’ll, they’ll be joined later by three other persons, but right now, Jesus, along with Peter and John and James. Then he gives us, number three: the location, “up on the mountain.” Finally, number four, he tells us about the purpose, and the purpose is, purpose here is to pray. So the time and the context, the people, the location, the purpose.

First, the time and the context. “About eight days after these sayings.” After what sayings? What, what is he talking about, there? Luke is pointing us all the way back to really, to verse 18, where again we saw Jesus praying. And he was praying again before a significant revelatory event. What did he reveal back in verse 18? What came out of that? His identity, that he is the Christ of God, verse 20. He extracted that, as it were, out of Peter.

That is followed by the promise of his suffering and his resurrection as well, verse 22: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, then on the third day be raised.” After

that, Jesus spoke to the disciples along with a gathering crowd, telling them that following him meant following him into suffering, verse 23: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

We’ve gone all through that text. We learned about the demands of discipleship. We learned about Jesus’ preparation of his disciples, and anyone who’s willing to follow him, to face the scorn and the rejection and the despising that comes from being associated with a cross-bearing, crucified Savior. Not acceptable in the Roman world. Not acceptable to the Jews. But for all those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, the very salvation of God, the wisdom of God in a cross-bearing, crucified Christ.

After verse 23, we saw this, we’ve studied through this, Jesus provided several reasons for following after him, verses 24-27. And the final reason that he gave, verses 26 and 27, that final reason, was an essentially an outline of his Messianic career. Gives bookends to the two Advents. He says basically, there, embrace shame now to see glory then. He revealed the second coming in verse 26, which is in glorious judgment on

unbelievers. And then he encouraged the believers, there, with a promise, verse 27, "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

So about eight days after all of those sayings, by the way, if you're reading in Matthew and Mark, you see that it was after six days, that's what they say, after six days. Luke says, "about eight days after." There's no contradiction here. The other writers count the intervening days only between the sayings and the Transfiguration. They count the intervening days. Luke is inclusive. He counts the day of Peter's confession at the beginning; he counts the day of Transfiguration at the end.

So about eight days after these sayings, Jesus, here, provides a sneak preview to his three disciples. And I just want to say quickly that this is not the fulfillment of the promise he gave in verse 27. Some of those standing there would be witnessed, witness, not just to this as those three Apostles are, Peter, John, and James, but some of those standing there listening to Jesus on that day of Peter's great confession, they

would witness his death in Jerusalem, his burial, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into heaven to be exalted on high. They would witness also the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit that Jesus said that he would send. They would witness the formation of a new assembly, the church of Jesus Christ.

And so this transfiguration account, it's not the fulfillment of verse 27. It's a preview, it's a preview of future glory. It foreshadows kingdom glory. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God when he paid the penalty for sin at the Cross. He inaugurated the New Covenant when, when he triumphed over death in the resurrection, when he was exalted to the right hand of God.

But here in this preview of kingdom glory, what is Jesus doing with this? Why does God want to show the glory of Christ to these three men? Because Jesus intends to encourage his disciples by the unveiling of the glory of not just the kingdom but the King himself. He already told them in verse 22 that the Christ, the Son of man, would suffer as the sin-bearer, that

he'd be rejected and killed. He unpacked the shame of the cross that they need to embrace.

And now Jesus turns to show that the glory that is going to follow the suffering, that that's true, too, that he wants to unpack that as well. He wants to finish what he started, that whole sentence in verse 22, helping them see what's meant by the reference in verse 22 to "on the third day be raised." So he's really giving them, here, a foretaste of glory divine.

Okay, so that's the context. Now second, just by way of setting up the scene, here, Luke tells us about the people, the people. Jesus took his inner circle with him, the three of the twelve, Peter and John and James. And you say, "Why these three, and why no more?" Well, I believe Jesus chose these three men, these guys formed his innermost circle of disciples, and he chose these three men because of the significant roles that they would play after the formation of the Church.

Peter, you know this, was the clear leader of the Twelve, always outspoken, sometimes putting his foot in his mouth, but

other times he's nailing it. He's nailing it. He's the leader of the Twelve, and his presence, here, at the Transfiguration, would, would help to establish his place of prominence and even pre-eminence among the Twelve. The authority of his testimony would be crucial in establishing the church in Jerusalem.

John, the next one to be named, he's the longest-living Apostle, the one we just read from in Revelation chapter 1. He provided oversight to the Church over many decades in its, in its nation, formative years. The continuation of his testimony would be vital for the establishment of the Church, especially as it moved beyond Jerusalem into Asia Minor. John's voice of testimony would remain authoritative as he was the longest-living Apostle.

James, James here, what's his significance? He was the first apostolic martyr. He's the first of the Twelve to be put to death, and he would seal the truth of this very testimony with his blood. Dying for the truth would be a significant testimony to the veracity of his, of his witness, a bold statement of authenticity.

You may remember that Jesus took these three back in chapter 8 verse 51, he took these three, Peter, John, and James, into Jairus' house, into the inner chamber where Jairus' daughter was. They witnessed Jesus, there, raising her from the dead. That's pretty significant. Here, he allows them to see his unveiled glory. Later, he's going to take these same three men with him to pray in Gethsemane as he is contemplating the immediate bearing of sin prior to his arrest.

So you say, Okay, I understand those three. Why not bring the other guys as well? I mean, isn't, isn't Jesus egalitarian? Doesn't he see all these men as equal? Yeah, he sees them as equal, but he's also making a choice, isn't he? He is sovereign, after all. It's his decision who he wants to use in whatever way. There's a, no unfairness in this, no injustice. It's all grace; it's all kindness; it's all mercy.

None of these men deserve to see anything, just as none of us deserve any of the mercies of God. That's why they're called mercies. We don't deserve grace, which is why it's called grace.

And God can dole out his grace as he sees fit, and use different people in different ways, some for this purpose, and some for that.

We could guess, though, that Jesus wanted to keep the circle of information, here, small, possibly to prevent a security leak. We read in verse 36 that Peter, John, and James kept silent and told no one in those days of anything of what they had seen. Matthew and Mark tell us it was Jesus who silenced them, actually, gave them a command, Mark 9, "He charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." So he kept the circle of information and knowledge small on this point. That's important. We won't get into all the reasons for that right now, but it is important.

Third thing, third piece of information that Luke provides to set the scene, very important, is the location. And this will become even more important, more significant as we come back next week. But Jesus took Peter and John and James, it says there, "up on the mountain." Matthew and Mark call this mountain "a high mountain." None of the Gospel writers named the



mountain, so we're asking the question as we try to interpret the text, which mountain?

They'd been in the region of Caesarea Philippi, which is up north of Galilee, north of the Sea of Galilee, and Luke uses, here, the definite article the. He calls it, the mountain. So for anyone who is in the region of Caesarea Philippi, in that area, that would refer to Mt. Hermon. Other mountains have been proposed. There's Mt. Tabor in the Jezreel Valley. There's Mt. Meron, north, northwest of Galilee.

Setting aside all the details about why those are probably not accurate, most commentators do agree that the scene of the transfiguration is best located at Mt. Hermon. It is the perfect location for solitude, to not be interrupted by crowds. It's the perfect place for private prayer.

Mt. Hermon sits about 9,200 feet above sea level. Each of its three peaks possess a commanding view of the surrounding region. Most of the year the peaks of Mt. Hermon are covered with snow. The snow runoff, it feeds the upper Jordan into the

Sea of Galilee down through the lower Jordan, flowing down from Galilee down into the Dead Sea. So that's the mountain we're talking about, Mt. Hermon, high, exalted, lifted up.

So we've got the time, we've got the context of the excursion, we've got the participants, now the location. Let's get to the purpose. What is the purpose? Jesus took them up on the mountain to pray. To pray. Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to let us know that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. Luke is like that. He's a, always showing us how Jesus prays, and how he prays not just on special occasions, but as a matter of regular habit. His life is saturated with prayer. Luke 5:16, "Jesus would often withdraw to desolate places to pray."

It's instructive for us, isn't it, to withdraw from this distracted world, turn off all devices, turn off everything, get away from all screens, get away from all the noise, and pray. Luke is also keen, though, to show us the connection between prayer and between that and special, revelatory events, significant events, in Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus, you remember, was praying at his baptism, Luke 3:21, "When the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him, and

the Father said, 'You are my beloved son. With you I am well-pleased.'"

He's going to pray at the end, in Gethsemane, prior to his arrest, Luke 22 for, Luke 22:40, where he's going to encourage his disciples: "Men, pray! Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Jesus prayed prior to choosing, then naming and appointing of the twelve Apostles, Luke 6:12. He'll be praying again in Luke 11:1. That gives him an opportunity, there, to teach his disciples to pray, Luke 11:1 and following.

The same vicinity of our passage, we've already looked at it, Jesus prayed in verse 18, prior to eliciting and drawing out the good confession from Peter before he revealed his identity as the Christ of God, before he unpacked the suffering of the Messiah, the resurrection. Now mentioned again in verse 28, again in verse 29, Jesus is praying prior to another significant event: the unveiling of his glory.

So you can say, Well, what is he praying about? What's he saying? What merits this private excursion up the mountain,

climbing up the rugged slopes of Mt. Hermon for solitude with these three of his closest disciples? What is he praying about? Why is he trying to get away?

We might imagine that after, just in a human way, we might imagine that after revealing his impending suffering and death to his disciples, Jesus might personally, here, just as a man, be in need of prayer. Not hard to understand that. It's not hard to imagine that he sought strength from the father, be obedient to the father's will. In fact, there in verse 31, we read it, the topic of conversation with Moses and Elijah is his departure, which he is about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

What he was facing not very long from this point had to be much on his mind, and so he sought, here, help from the father to stand firm, to walk through the suffering, to embrace the scorn and rejection, and more than that, to embrace the father's wrath and absorb that for sins.

We can also see Jesus' concern, here, though, to encourage and strengthen these three disciples. That's really what this is

about. That's what he's praying for. He spoke about his forthcoming rejection and death, and when he used the language of the cross, we covered that several weeks ago, when he used that language, no doubt that unsettled the disciples something serious. Shaken their faith. Those sayings and the sayings about the cross in particular were unnerving. These guys are fairly confused, upset, dis, disrupted. It's disconcerting to think.

But what they understood from the Old Testament about the Messiah, and then this talk of a suffering and dying Messiah, none of that fit into their eschatology. They couldn't understand this. In fact, in Mark's account, after the transfiguration, as they're descending the mountain, Jesus charged them to tell no one what they'd seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. And they obeyed; they kept the matter to their, themselves, there, Mark 9:10 says.

But we find out that they kept questioning him as to what this "rising from the dead" means. What are you talking? They'd seen Jesus raise Jairus' daughter. They understood what resurrection was. They didn't associate it with Christ because resurrection means, well, you've got to die first. Doesn't make

sense. Death by crucifixion. Jesus' body buried in a tomb? Then rising from the dead? None of that factored into their thinking.

In fact, everything Jesus has taught them since Peter made the good confession, "You are the Christ of God," they'd expected Jesus to talk all about glory, all about triumph, all about overcoming, overthrowing the Roman yoke of oppression, the exaltation of Israel over the nations, ruling with him on thrones. I like that! But instead of glory, Jesus told them all about suffering. That wasn't in their plan. So they've got to be wondering, Is he the Messiah? Is he part one of the Messiah, and then there's a part two? Are we on the right track? Are we following the right guy?

Look, even if they didn't give voice to these thoughts, they're certainly confused, they're alarmed. So Jesus seeks to address that. He comes in, steps in, again, like a gentle shepherd, to meet that need for stability, to provide them with that much-needed encouragement and strength.

If you let your eyes skim over the verses ahead, you'll see how the unveiling of his glory at the appearance of Moses and Elijah in glory, how the visitation from on high, this cloud of divine, shekinah glory, all of that is going to have the effect of validating Jesus and everything that he'd said. It's going to authenticate every word he'd spoken, everything he taught.

So we might well imagine Jesus praying something like this: Father, I know these men are rattled. They're shaken. All the talk of my crucifixion, all the talk of their bearing their cross and following me into scorn and rejection and suffering. They're unsettled, Father. Please give these men certainty. Please give these men confidence that I am indeed your Son, that I am your chosen Messiah.

You know why we're warranted in making that assumption? Because that's how the father responded. That's what the father allowed them to see and then to hear. He pulled back the veil of Jesus' flesh and showed the glory of his deity. They saw something. And then he told them. They heard something. "This is my beloved Son, my chosen one, with whom I am well-pleased.

Listen to him.” No doubts. Full certainty, all in keeping with Luke’s purpose in writing Luke chapter 1.

So based on the father’s answer, we know what Jesus prayed for. He prayed for their courage. He prayed for their confidence. He prayed for their stability. He prayed for their strength. He re, he prayed for their remaining steadfast in faith.

You know what the exalted Christ is doing right now at the father’s right hand? He’s praying for every single one of us by name, that we’ll remain steadfast and strong and faithful and stable and certain and confident, that we’ll have courage. Does that comfort you? Because it sure comforts me. God answered, here, he strengthened them. So having been encouraged like this, these three Apostles, they’re going to be useful in the future, very, very useful to encourage and strengthen the other men.