



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 16:28–17:8

Gospel of Matthew

“The Transfiguration of Christ”

TRANSCRIPT

Now if you will I'd like for you to turn for the Scripture reading to Matthew chapter 16 verse 28 and I want to read verse 28 through chapter 17 and verse 8. Matthew chapter 16 verse 28 through chapter 17 and verse 8. In the last verse of the 16th chapter of Matthew the Lord Jesus says,

“Verily I say unto you, There are some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’ And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine like the sun, and his raiment was as white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three booths, or tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he yet spoke,”

That does not communicate quite the sense of continuance and speech that the Greek text does; it literally is, while he was still speaking. And later on, incidentally, in Acts chapter 10 when Peter came to Cornelius’s house and preached the gospel there and came to the passage in verse 43

of the 10th chapter in which he gave the message of the gospel, “to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” we read while he yet spake, or while he was still speaking the Holy Spirit fell on those that were listening and Holy Spirit said there is no need to give the rest of your message Peter, you’ve already given the gospel and that’s what I can use and the Holy Spirit fell upon them right in the midst of his message. He didn’t even have to call out an invitational hymn [laughter] like “Just As I Am” or “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior.” Now that’s the same expression that’s found here. While he was still speaking. He was interrupted.

“Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were very much afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, except Jesus only.”

May God bless this reading of his Word.

The subject for today is “The Transfiguration of Christ.” One of the most astonishing of our Lord’s experiences, the one occasion in which the bright beams of his glory blaze through the sackcloth covering of his humanity, is the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. It’s strange then that commentators and preachers who are usually, as the Scots would say, gushing blethers, have become like Peter, who on the occasion knew not what to say.

I mention in the study that about 15 or 17 or 18 years ago, I was preaching outside of Pittsburgh in one of the suburbs of that city in a small church and was giving a series of messages that had to do with the transfiguration, and since I was doing some extra study that week on it, I asked for the privilege of looking at the library of the minister, who had a very good theological

library. And I still remember going into the library, looking for the theological section, reaching up and pulling down in succession the fine Baptist theology of A. H. Strong, looking up the transfiguration and finding nothing in it of the theological significance of this event.

Then seeing Charles Hodge’s theology sitting right by it and thinking that perhaps where the Baptists had failed the Presbyterians would not, [laughter] I reached up and took down Professor Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* and I again looked for the doctrine of the transfiguration and was disappointed to find nothing.

Louis Berkoff’s *Systematic Theology* was also on the shelf, and knowing that he was probably the best-known Reform theologian of the middle part of the 20th century, I took down that that volume, looked again for some information on the doctrine of the transfiguration and again found nothing.

And then I saw Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer’s eight volume set, and I thought, well, now surely Dr. Chafer will have something to say. And when I turned to the last volume under theology, which is the index volume, was a little gratified to notice that he had a number of references to the transfiguration, and so I looked them all up in succession, but was very disappointed to discover that even Dr. Chafer had nothing to say about the doctrine of the transfiguration.

And long after that I whenever preach I preached on the doctrine of the transfiguration, or the transfiguration, I would make the comment that it’s very rare that anyone ever hears a message on the transfiguration. And almost always in the messages someone would come up afterwards and say to me, that is the first message I’ve ever heard on the transfiguration of Jesus Christ.

Twelve years ago in a home Bible class here in the city of Dallas I made some references like I’m making them right now to the group that met in the home of a friend, and afterwards one young couple from a leading evangelical church in this city came up to me afterwards and said, we have grown up in this leading evangelical church, a very large church in this city, and we must confess to you that not only was that the first message we’ve ever heard on the transfiguration, but we actually, having grown up in that church thought, both of us, that the term, transfiguration, referred to the

ascension of the Lord Jesus. So we have then a situation in which we have one of our Lord's events, one of the major events in his life, that has been greatly neglected.

Why this silence? Well perhaps we could trace it to the fact that this event does not seem to be as vital as other events, and I surely would agree with something of that reason. For surely the transfiguration is not as vital as the incarnation by which the eternal Son took to himself an additional nature human nature and began his earthly ministry which would lead up to his death. And I surely would not think that this event is as important as the death of our Lord, for it is in his death that our redemption is established. And I think it's fair to say that we would not regard this as essential as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but I don't think that really fully explains this event which is given such important notice not only in the Gospel of Matthew but in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke.

It could be that it is thought to be somewhat impractical. What relationship does the transfiguration have to our daily life? Well we can understand the practical significance of the temptation, for example, in which the Lord Jesus overcame Satan through the ministry of the Word of God. That has very practical relationship to our daily life. And so it's possible that it has been thought that this is not as significant as other events in our Lord's life simply because it's not as practical. It doesn't touch our daily life.

I'm inclined to think, and this is not simply my opinion, but I'm inclined to think that the reason for the neglect of the transfiguration is traced to the fact that the transfiguration is a kind of formidable barrier for us. “The story strains our faith and baffles our imagination,” as one of the students has said. The shining of the face we can perhaps understand, and the glistening of the garments we perhaps can understand, but these visitors that come from the world beyond, Moses and Elijah, who had passed off of this earthly scene hundreds of years before, that's a very puzzling thing. And it may just be that the combination of these visitors from beyond and the voice that came from heaven that said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him,” means that

the event is taken out of our experience and consequently it has become strange to us and expositors have neglected it.

Now expositors are just like other people. They love the easy way. I have a friend who likes to say, when I think of Bible expositors and commentators, I think of the Scripture, “All we like sheep have gone astray.” And there is a great deal of truth in that, as anyone who has read commentaries a whole lot will agree. And the result is that students of the life of our of our Lord therefore turn aside from the mystery of the Mount of Transfiguration and dwell upon the carpenter shop or dwell upon his temptation, or dwell upon the parables that he taught by the seashore. Important, of course. Important. [We] want to expound the Sermon on the Mount or other things which seem a little more easy to relate to our everyday life. But nevertheless, we do have the transfiguration and we are responsible to interpret it as best we are able.

In the quietness of Caesarea Philippi and under the shadow of snow-crested Mount Hermon, Peter’s confession, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, had signaled the end of the ministry of the Lord Jesus to the crowds. From now on, while it’s true that he does speak to the crowds, his ministry has taken a new slant, and he begins to speak about his death that he should accomplish at Jerusalem, and he devotes most of his time to the preparation of the apostles for the days when he would no longer be here in the flesh.

Now having announced his death and having said a few words about how one may have true life—how one may truly find it—the Lord Jesus had said, there are some of you standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And we read that six or seven days, Luke I think says eight, so it’s roughly a week, a week later he took the three intimate, Peter, James, and John, and took them up into the mountain and there began to pray.

Now it is Luke who tells us that he went up into the mountain pray. Now these three intimates were chosen in order that they might have an experience which they may record for us. And you’ll remember that Peter in his second epistle tells us that he was with him in the holy mount.

He says, “We were with him in the holy mount and it was there that we became eyewitnesses of his glory.”

I’ve often thought of the events of our Lord, as I’m sure that you have. They’re great events of human history that I would like to have observed. Wouldn’t it be nice to have been with Alexander when he crossed the Hellespont? Or wouldn’t it be nice to have been with Julius Caesar in his campaigns in Gaul? I know when I was reading Caesar’s Gaelic wars in Latin that my mind frequently went back to those days and I wished that it would be possible for me to be there—not to engage in the hostilities, [laughter] you understand—but to be a reporter and report the events.

I would like to have been with Wellington at Waterloo. I really have a sneaking desire to have been rather with Napoleon, but nevertheless I know how the British feel about Wellington and that’s all right with me. Of course, I would rather have been with Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville than any other place [laughter]. And I would like to have been with Daniel by the side of the lion’s den, mind you, [laughter] not in it.

I’d like to have been with Paul. I’d like to have been with Luther and Calvin and the other greats. But most of all, wouldn’t it have been wonderful to be on the Mount of Transfiguration with Lord Jesus? I’m surprised really that Peter, James, and John did not say more about this event than they have said.

Scripture says that he went up into a high mountain apart, probably a reference to Mount Hermon rather than Mount Tabor. Now the early church thought that perhaps it was Mount Tabor and so in that belief they constructed three tabernacles, or three churches, on the top of Mount Tabor to correspond to the three tabernacles which the Lord did not permit the apostles to build. [Laughter] But it’s most likely that the mountain referred to here is Mount Hermon, which was a high mountain, ninety-two hundred feet approximately high.

What did he pray? Well, of course, we cannot say with dogmatism what he prayed because the Scriptures do not reveal that. But in the light of the fact that he has just announced his passion, I think it’s a safe guess to suggest that he was praying in view of the passion, which has now become

one of the major themes of his thought and of his teaching. And I think that what we have on the Mount of Transfiguration is the beginning of the prayer life emphasis of our Lord, which will finally reach its climax in Gethsemane when he shall pray, “O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me.” So it is prayer in view of the passion.

And if I may suggest this to you, it seems to me that the transfiguration, the glorification of our Lord, for Luke says, they, Moses and Elijah, appeared with him in glory, the glorification of our Lord is the answer of the Father to the prayer of the Son. And it is essentially this: There is no removal of the cup of Calvary, but in order to encourage you, I want you to know that that which lies beyond the suffering is the glory of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Now the text of Scripture says that as he was praying, he was transfigured before them. Now that’s a remarkable statement, and I really truly believe that we could spend the rest of the hour discussing what is implied in the fact that our Lord Jesus in the midst of prayer was transfigured before the apostles. Luke tells us the fashion of his countenance became different: *heteros*. Now Luke’s account, it seems to me, stresses the outward change that took place in our Lord.

Matthew’s account stresses the inward. For the word, *metamorphoō*, which is the word that is used here—we get the English word metamorphosis from it—is a word that refers to the transformation of the essential character or essential being of a person. And the text says, he was transfigured before them. So I think that what is involved here is a glorification of the Son in anticipation of the historical glorification of the Son. In other words, in the way he was transfigured, there is a transfiguration not only of the outward but also of the inward. And you’ll notice, too, that it says his face shone like the sun and his raiment was white as the light. Isn’t that striking? Even his garments took on a different look.

Now I think we all know that when a person is in the presence of God, transformation takes place in that person. Moses was in the mount receiving the law and when he came out his face so shone before the children of Israel that they feared to approach him. And you’ll remember that he had to put a veil on his face, which he took off when he went in again before the Lord. And after he

finished speaking with the children of Israel giving the message, he put on the veil again. They were afraid to approach him.

Stephen, who was communing with the Lord even in his death when they were stoning him to death, had a face so they said that looked like the face of an angel. In other words, communion with the Lord Jesus transforms a man's not only outward look but even his inward being. Paul puts it doctrinally when he says, we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image and from glory to glory. It is true that communion with the Lord Jesus ennoble the whole man, ennoble his soul, ennoble his appearance, ennoble his gestures, ennoble his habits.

And it isn't a lengthy time that takes place before the person who communes with the Lord Jesus manifests that in transformed life. In fact, the face is a kind of index of the soul. Many of our missionaries have commented upon the fact that as they have gone out to the mission fields they have noticed the transformation that took place when the gospel of Jesus Christ came to the savages of Africa or to the listless Chinamen of the East, the sharp-eyed Japanese, or the brutish-appearing East Indies men.

The transformation that took place when the gospel of Jesus Christ came was not only a transformation of the inward but also of the outward. The gospel works that way. I think that one of the most interesting things in this connection is what the artists did with their attempts to portray the Lord Jesus during the Middle Ages. There were two faces which the great artists of the Middle Ages held it to be their just ambition to represent. One of them was the face of Christ, which has always been the artists' despair. And then there was the face of the Virgin Mary.

First of all, medieval artists sought far and wide for the most beautiful countenances in order that they might find the face that had perfect line, perfect color, perfect form, but then nobler minds began to realize that mere outward good looks is not the most important kind of beauty. And so they began to search for young maidens who manifested on their countenance the effects of communion



with God and of the greater virtues of the Christian life, humility, wisdom, knowledge. And they usually found that this would appear much often on peasant girls' faces.

And so you can see all of the faces in the art galleries of Europe of the attempts of the artists to picture the Virgin Mary. My wife dragged me through all of them. [Laughter] Being an artist, she was very interested in that, and I looked at picture after picture after picture. And I must say that she herself did not particularly like that aspect of the art that we were looking at, so that pleased me very greatly.

Well the Lord Jesus was transfigured before them and his raiment was as white as the light and then remarkably, Matthew states in the 3rd verse, “Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with them,” and Luke tells us that they spoke of his decease, his exodus, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now these two witnesses are witnesses that cross his path to the kingdom. Now I wish it were possible to speak at great length about the reasons why Moses and Elijah are the two that do witness of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, but let me simply say this for the sake of time. There is hardly any question that Moses is the great representative of the law, and probably Elijah is associated with him as the greatest of the prophets—the one who was sought by God to call the children of Israel back to obedience when they were in disobedience. It's as if the law and the prophets are gathered together in the presence of the Lord Jesus to testify of the sufferings that he would accomplish in Jerusalem. For the law and the prophets do testify of him.

Now we speak of his decease, his exodus. The Greek text has the word *hexodos*, which is the word from which we get our English word, exodus. But they are speaking of an exodus, a departure, that is greater than the departure out of Egypt. They are speaking of the exodus of redemption, and they are speaking of the exodus of the redeemed, who are redeemed through the shedding of blood of the Redeemer and who are delivered by that great event.

What do you think they should have spoken about? You think they ought to have spoken about how the Jericho Juleps and the Jerusalem Jimbos were getting ready in spring training for the

baseball season? Or are they thinking about how the Bersheeba Bears and the Dan Donkeys will do in the coming National Football League race in the fall? No, of course not. They’re not thinking about stupid things like that, the things that we think about.

Perhaps they are speaking about politics. When will Pilate get the axe, and who shall succeed Herod? [Laughter] No, the theme of heaven is the theme of the cross of the Lord Jesus. And that’s the thing they’re interested in. You see, the interests of earth are not the same as the interests of heaven. The interests of heaven gather around the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glory of the great God who sits on the throne and the manifestation of his attributes and of his essential being.

Never is it, never do we have a more striking contrast than when we look in the Scriptures and look at the things that heaven is interested in and then look at the things that we’re interested in down here on this earth. They spoke of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. It’s the theme of heaven and hell.

Now let me stop for just a moment and say that I think that the fact that they appeared, Moses and Elijah, and spoke of his decease, speaks a rather master word on a couple of stirring topics. It gives us some light on life after death. Job said in those famous well-known of his, “If a man die, shall he live again.” And that’s a question that has troubled all of us. Death in the light of nature is the extinction of the vital spark, someone has said. It is, in the language of the biologists, the failure to correspond with environment and therefore the close of life.

Now against that dark conclusion, men have protested down through the centuries. They have sought all kinds of ways by which in human reason they might seek to prove that there is life after death. Most men have refused to believe that when the last breath has been given there was nothing left but a little piece of red clay. Sometimes, under the influence of nobler thinkers of men, they’ve been assured that death not does not end all, and they’ve clung to that hope with stubborn tenacity with nothing really to support it.

I think every one of you, I say, you, who has lived to be sixty years of age, realize and feel the deep assurance that life has not been large enough for your ambitions, your aspirations, your capacities, and that you ought to, or you would like to have another hundred years or so at least. Wouldn't it be nice to live as long as Noah, for example? Well no, I'm not so sure about that. But you nevertheless feel, no matter how long you've lived, but particularly when you reach the age of sixty, and you know there's not much time left, that you haven't done what you would like to have done.

Savages who had no revelation at all believed that there was life after death, and so they buried their dead with his spear and his drinking cup with him in the grave. You needn't bury me with my '71 Chrysler incidentally, I won't need it. Eurydice dies and Orpheus is assured that there is life after death, and even asks Pluto to for the possibility of seeing that she returns to life, loses her through a foolish backward look.

I guess the greatest and most stirring argument for life after death is the argument of Socrates and the Phaedo. With his cup of hemlock he conducts what someone has called the most appealing argument that has ever comforted the hearts of men. But of course, we have the light of divine revelation. We have our Lord Jesus who has said, “In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” Now there we have a sure word from someone who has already been there.

The Apostle Paul says that to die and to be with Christ is far better than any kind of existence that we have down here. So, if we have looked to divine revelation we can unmoor our boats and sail out on the sea of eternity with the greatest cheerfulness and assurance. That is, if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a double kind of life after this life, not just one.

I have a good friend who is a Bible teacher. He likes to quote an epitaph that appeared on a graveyard in a cemetery: “Behold a man as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now, soon you will be. Prepare for death, and follow me.” And then he said that some wag wrote below it:

“To follow you we’re not content, until we know which way you went.” [Sudden, loud laughter] It is important. It is important to know which way we’re going.

We believe in life after death because the Scriptures have told us that and since the Scriptures constitute the fundamental principium of the Christian, the Bible is the Word of God. That’s our presupposition, and we’re prepared to stand by that against all of the presuppositions of the scientists and philosophers and psychologists, and all of the others who have their own presuppositions. But we like that one. And we have found that God has answered that presupposition with the conviction of the Holy Spirit, as he has witnessed within that the Scriptures are in truth the product of God, and so we can look with confidence to the future.

There’s one other thing here. It gives us a little light on the condition of the dead. Now we’ve often wondered, is there conscious life? Well yes, the Scriptures seem to suggest that because the Lord Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today thou shall be with me in Paradise. The Apostle Paul said, to depart this life is to be with Christ. So that the New Testament and the Old Testament agree in affirming that when we leave this life we pass immediately into the presence of the Lord.

But is it possible that when we are in heaven we shall have consciousness of things that are happening down here on the earth? Well I think we have some hints here, only hints. Bunyan believed that that was true, because remember when they called at the gates, he pictures Moses and Elijah and some of the other saints looking out over the gates, in token of the fact that they were interested in the things that are transpiring down here on the earth.

Now that’s a very comforting thing, really. That means that when I get to heaven you can think of me appearing over heaven wondering what’s going on in Believers Chapel. [Laughter] I’ve often said to my students at the theological seminary when they depart from the faith my ghost will disturb them. [More Laughter] Now someone might say, well my goodness, if in heaven we know what’s happening down here on the earth with all of the sin and unhappiness and tragedy, how can we possibly be enblissed in heaven if we know what’s going down on going down here on the earth? Well, I reply with another question. Does not God know? Is he not resting in the leisure of his own

bliss? Of course he is. You see, he knows the end from the beginning, and then we shall have better perspective too.

Well, I don't want to spend too much time on that, after all, we have some counsel from the Pope here. [Laughter] Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus, Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you will, let us build here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah. Someone has said, if Peter was the first Pope he certainly differed from his modern successors. Peter had a mother-in-law and no gold. They have plenty of gold and no mothers-in-law. [Laughter]

There his advice is remarkable. Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you will, let us make three tabernacles, places to stay, one for Thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah. Now, this request of Peter's is really, I say, a remarkable thing, because not only is it senseless—remain on the Mount of Transfiguration—what about the cross, what about the redemption that he's to accomplish, what about the plan of God? Remain here on the mountain? That's senseless. But not only is it senseless, it's sinful. To suggest any kind of deterrent to suffering at on the cross at and the accomplishment of the redemption, is a sinful kind of counsel. But Peter would set up a cloister and forget the crowd, forget the redemption, forget everything else. How often do we think like human beings?

Now fortunately he was interrupted. I love this statement in chapter 5 verse 1. While he yet spoke—while he was still speaking. Because I'm just going to suggest to you that Peter had something else that he wanted to say. Now I have no proof for this whatsoever. This is just my feeling. I think that what he intended to say was, Lord, it's good for us to be here. If you will, let's make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and three more, one for James, one for John, and then a perhaps a little better one for me. [Laughter] But while he was still speaking. Now incidentally, that means while he was still speaking, it means that he had something else to say. He was interrupted by heaven.

Now I've done some translation in my time. Incidentally, I'm not satisfied with any biblical translation. Of course, the only biblical translation anyone is ever satisfied with who can translate is his own. Now I think that there would be some justification—I wouldn't want to do this, mind

you—but I think there would be some justification, since Peter is interrupted by the voice from heaven, in translating verse 5 something like this: while he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud which said, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased—Peter, shut up! [Laughter] That’s really what is meant by, “Hear ye him.”

Now the other texts in the other accounts make that very plain, because Peter is babbling on not knowing what he was even saying. He was so under the impression of this tremendous experience, over-awed by the supernatural glory of the Lord that he went on babbling, and his mind was far behind his tongue. Shut up Peter!

Incidentally, these words that the Father spoke from heaven are most startling and striking: this is my Son. Now those words point directly to the 2nd Psalm in which we have the messianic king. But when he says, this is my Son, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, he draws phrases and clauses from Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 1, the first of the great songs of the servant of Jehovah in which the sufferings of the Messiah are set forth. So he has combined a passage which has to do with the messianic king and with the path of life that he must follow in order to accomplish redemption: the suffering servant of Jehovah.

And then he adds here something that he did not have in the 3rd chapter at the baptism, when he says, “Hear ye him.” Those words are taken from Deuteronomy 18 and the passage on the great Prophet. So what the Father has done is to combine a kind of exposition of the whole purpose of the messianic ministry. He is the prophet who will tell us the truth about God, and the truth about life. He is the priest who will offer the once and for all sacrifice for his own. And he is the messianic king who will reign as a result of his suffering, establishing his kingdom upon the earth. This is my Son, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him. It was a mistake, of course, for Peter to put anyone on the level with our Lord, and to suggest that Moses and Elijah should have tabernacles like him is to suggest that which is an affront to the dignity of the incarnate Son of God.

Well now let me close by making a few comments about the purpose of this transfiguration account. The transfiguration is, first of all, the authentication of the Son as the Messiah of God by

the voice and the glory. He may be rejected of men, but he is not rejected by God. Death is the way to life and death is the way to the kingdom.

Mr. Moody used to like to say, “There are two ways to go to heaven, first class and second class. Second class, at what time I’m afraid, I will trust. First class, I will trust and not be afraid.” And when by the Holy Spirit we have been brought to the conviction that the Son of God is the Messiah, our Messiah, then relying upon him we can trust and not be afraid as we face the future. It is the anticipation of the kingdom to come. It is a kind of prelude and pledge of it.

Commentators have troubled over the statement in chapter 16 verse 28: “Verily I say unto you there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they[?ve] seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” It’s amusing to read the varying interpretations that have been placed upon this. Some have said the kingdom came in his life. Some have said the kingdom comes in the death of the believer. Some have said the kingdom comes at his resurrection. Some have said the kingdom comes at Pentecost. All of these explanations cannot account for one little word in that 28th verse, which incidentally is included in each of the other two accounts: “There be some standing here.” Some.

You see, the Lord Jesus speaks of the special privilege of some as over against all. All the apostles saw the resurrection. All the apostles were at Pentecost. All the apostles experienced these other things. But there are *some* standing here, he said. Well now the very next text says that he took Peter, James, and John and went up into the mountain . That seems like such an obvious interpretation that we wonder that men have not hit upon it. The early church fathers believed this. They believed that the transfiguration was an anticipation of the kingdom of God upon the earth, that in the glorification of the Son we have that which anticipates the messianic kingdom on the earth.

Now one of those apostles who was in the mount with him has written on this specifically. In 2 Peter chapter 1, the apostle has written, “Moreover,” verse 15, “I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease,” even uses the term exodus here, “after my decease to have these things

always in remembrance for we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus.” Notice, the power and coming, or, as we might render it, the powerful coming, or the coming in power. It’s a kind of [indistinct]. “Power in coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty, eyewitnesses of his coming in power. For he received in 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.” Now it seems evident that Peter there interprets the transfiguration as a time at which he saw in a foreshadowed sense the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Now I think I understand why Charles Hodge, why A. H. Strong, why Professor Louis Berkoff, and why so many other of our millennial and post-millennial, or amillennial commentators primarily, have said nothing about the transfiguration. Because it’s a striking testimony to the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament that the kingdom of God would indeed come upon the earth. And Peter and James and John were given a foreview of it.

Now there are many other interpretations of that 28th verse and of the remaining ones. We can say something very similar to that which Professor H. A. Kennedy used to say at the University of Edinburg when he wanted to ridicule fancy theories constructed upon insubstantial bases. He used to say, “I need hardly remind you gentlemen that for these fantastic conclusions there is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament. The most charitable judgment that can be passed on these on this preposterous book is that the author is slowly drifting towards imbecility.” [Laughter]

Now I wouldn’t want to call all of these men imbeciles, but it seems to me it’s very plain that what Peter has in mind in Second Peter is Mount of Transfiguration and he says, we saw the kingdom of our Lord in power at that time.

Now we can say a great deal more about this. You can get the study. I have some more things in there I’m not saying in the message. It’s an illustration of the inhabitants of the kingdom perhaps. It’s an illustration of the personal resurrection and what the resurrection body would entail.



It's the confirmation of Old Testament prophecy, for Peter says, on the basis of that we'd do well to take heed to the Word of God since we've already seen it fulfilled.

But it also is the proclamation of costliness of our Lord's sacrifice for sin. He appeared with the disciples in glory, but again, the second time in his experience, he left the glory, came down here on the earth and a few weeks later is heard crying out on the cross at Calvary, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

And finally, it is the evaluation of the strength of the Lord's passion for the souls of men. One step into heaven and on his own right he could have taken that, and it would have all been over for us. But instead, he turned from that glory, came back again and suffered that we might have redemption. How much he cares. “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride / Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demand my life, my soul, my all.” Surely the transfiguration account is not only an evaluation of the costliness of sin, but of our Lord's love for his saints. What a magnificent experience and what a comforting thing it is.

If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we remind you that he went to that cross and offered himself a sacrifice for sinners that you may have everlasting life as you turn to him, thanking him for what he has done by receiving him as your own personal Savior. May God speak to your heart. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Word of God, and we thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast spoken thy Word through holy men of old, and we praise Thee for the transfiguration account, and we Thank thee for all that it signifies, and we pray that our own thoughts concerning our redemption may be deepened when we reflect upon the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, what he has undergone for us, O God.

If there should be someone here who has not yet come to Christ, give them no rest nor peace until they rest in him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.