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# Knowing Jesus

## **The Transfiguration of Christ**

**Luke 9:28-43**

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**2/17/2019**

**Main Idea: Through the transfiguration, Jesus' identity and mission were revealed in a special way.**

**Lesson Objective: Believe in Jesus and listen to Him.**

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## Introduction

*As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

In the Winter of 1966, a voter registration card arrived in the mail at the home of Vernon Dahmer. On the surface, something like this is no big deal; it happens every day. But this was different, for a number of reasons. It was different because Vernon Dahmer was an African-American in Mississippi, and this was the first year he could vote just like any other person, without the encumbrance of oppressive poll taxes or backhanded laws of discrimination. It was different because Vernon had worked hard to make this a reality. It was different, tragically, because Vernon Dahmer had died only weeks before. He died on January 11 of horrible burns to his lungs. The night before, several members of the White Knights of the KKK carried out a plan to punish Dahmer for his efforts to bring equal voting rights to the black community. In the middle of the night, several KKK members began firing guns at the house, while others threw firebombs through the windows. Vernon grabbed a shotgun and ran to the front of the house to provide cover fire while the rest of his family escaped out a back window. They all lived, but Vernon was overcome by smoke and flames. Hours later, he was dead.

It's so heartbreaking that he never got to see all of his efforts come to fruition with his own eyes, but so many others benefitted from his sacrifice, bravery, and leadership.

When we read the story of the transfiguration, we will see that through the mountain-top experience when Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in His divine glory, they got a better sense of clarity about Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the

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Son of God. As we discuss the events in Luke 9, we'll look for ways this passage brings us greater clarity about who Jesus is and our relationship with Him. We are also reading the story of our own redemption, forgiveness and the new life that Christ won for us with His blood.

It's a beautiful thing! But the truth is that your transfigured life has already begun. It matters for your future, but it also matters right now; it matters today. You have the hope of God's plan for you alive in you today. This leads us to live differently today, to share the love of Christ in our lives today.

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## Seeing Jesus

### Luke 9:28-31

*<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#).*

There are a couple of items that may cause us to lose the focus of the passage above by seeking emphasis where it should not be placed. The first is Luke's reference of the amount of days after the confession of Peter. Some people try to interpret numbers (in the Bible there are places in which numbers are important to understand), but in this situation there is not enough Biblical evidence for such an interpretation. It all falls apart when we compare Luke's presentation to Mark's wording, because Mark's gospel recorded it after six days. This is not a discrepancy in the gospels; the number of days is not the focus of the passage. Notice how Luke said "about eight days" and Mark said that after six days Jesus took the disciples to the mountain. They are not trying to get us to focus on the amount of days after the confession, but on the confession itself.

Another detour that could be taken is trying to figure out on which mountain this event occurred. There are countless arguments on which site it could have been, but the best arguments are Mount Tabor and Mount Hebron. None of the gospels tell us which one. It could be because our first response would be much like the three disciples, where we would try to make the place a point of focus rather than the One who was on the mountain. If we look to the

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Gospels, we can decree that Peter’s confession took place in the region known in the Old Testament as Bashan (The northernmost region of Israel. Historically Israel seldom controlled this region, even though it was allotted to half of the tribe of Manasseh.) A study of Bashan reveals that it carried a lot of theological baggage in the Biblical times. It was considered to be a place of demonic activity. Around the time of the New Testament, at the base of Mount Hebron (where Peter made his proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah) is the location of the “Gates of Hell”.<sup>1</sup> This was the location where the pagans worshipped the god Pan. It was considered to be a gateway to the underworld realm of the dead. It was also known as “The place of the Serpent” outside of the Bible. Mount Hermon is also the place where Jews believed the rebellious sons of God from Genesis 6:1-4 descended. (Simply put, if you wanted to conjure up images of the demonic and death you’d refer to Bashan. Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of the Living God was in this horrific place of demonic worship. Jesus was in a sense declaring war against the army of darkness (Matthew 16:16-19).

Jesus knew that the hours of His death were fast approaching, so prayerfully He led Peter, James and John up a mountain (tradition holds that it was Mount Tabor approx. 60 miles from Mount Hebron) to pray. While Jesus was on the mountain praying, something miraculous happened to Him. Within the gospel accounts of the event, both Luke and Matthew speak of the change in Jesus’ face. Matthew revealed that it was bright like the sun. Luke, being a doctor noted that the Jesus’ outward appearance became different—a colorless

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<sup>1</sup> to learn more about this area check out this website: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/standing-at-the-gates-of-hell.html>

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description, which is later described as glory in verse 32. Luke calls for us to be amazed that Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared with Him.<sup>2</sup>

This appearing of Moses and Elijah reaffirms the fulfilling of the prophecies of God's coming Messiah. These Old Testament prophets were considered to be a prototype of the coming True Prophet and Messiah (Deut 18:18). We know that both of these OT prophets had mountaintop experiences (Moses on Sinai and Elijah on Carmel). Interestingly, after spending time with God, Moses' face shone (Exod 34:30; 2 Cor 3:7). Moses was not only a lawgiver but also a prophet—indeed the prototype of Jesus. Elijah was not only a prophet, but was also related to the law of Moses, symbolizing the one who would one day turn people's hearts back to the covenant (Mal 4:4–6). Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah (see Mal 4:5-6) to return before the arrival of the kingdom of God. Like Jesus, their appearances were almost blinding in this special appearance. In Jewish thought, Elijah was an eschatological figure, that is, one associated with the end times. So one may say that in the transfiguration scene Moses is a typological figure who reminds us of the past (the Exodus), Moses being a predecessor of the Messiah, while Elijah is an eschatological figure pointing to the future as a precursor of the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> The beautiful picture of grace shows us Moses, who was refused entrance, now standing in the Promised Land as the real Messiah/Deliverer had come to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and provide them entrance into the Kingdom of God that would extend throughout the whole world.

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, [\*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 383.

<sup>3</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 926–927.

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What Moses and Elijah began and had waited hundreds of years to see was about to happen. The Transfiguration revealed the identity of Jesus as the True Prophet and Messiah. It contained a divine proclamation to further reinforce the Great Confession of Peter. It also was a major turning point in the Ministry of Jesus as he set His eyes on His departure. The word “**departure**” could also be translated exodus. Thus, Moses led God’s people on the exodus out of physical slavery. Elijah experienced a personal exodus out of this world on a flaming chariot. Jesus’ exodus was better than both of theirs. He died, was resurrected, and then ascended to heaven, and through this work He provides all of us with a way out of spiritual slavery. Jesus’ “exodus” is our means to salvation and eternal life with Him.

**What do you imagine the transfiguration looked like?**

**How do you think you would have felt waking up to the scene the disciples saw before them?**

**Based on what you know about Moses and Elijah, what is the significance of their appearing with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration?**

**What was Moses’ exodus experience? What was Elijah’s (see 2 Kings 2:11)?**

**What would Jesus’ exodus entail? How did it compare to what Moses and Elijah accomplished? Why was Jesus’ exodus better?**

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## Knowing Jesus

### Luke 9:32-33

*32 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. 33 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. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)*

It is not clear whether Peter, James, and John were in a deep sleep because it was in the middle of the night, or if they were caused to fall asleep as Daniel was when angels came (Dan 8:18; 10:9). Luke mentioned that as the men were parting from Jesus, Peter spoke in an attempt to prolong the glorious scene. But his idea was shortsighted for two reasons. (1) to make three equal tabernacles. These would have been temporary shelters, such as were used at Sukkoth, the Feast of Tabernacles. Peter’s proposal of three, presumably equal, would place Moses and Elijah on a level with Jesus, and not to worship Him exclusively; and (2) Jesus’ discussion of His coming “exodus” in Jerusalem meant there was no room for delay in God’s plan of redemption.<sup>4</sup>

Peter, James and John had spent close to three years alongside Jesus and His ministry, and they still did not fully know Jesus. He was more than just a healer, prophet, teacher, and deliverer. They had seen him turn the water into wine, multiply food in order to feed the masses, and calm a raging storm with His words. However, in this moment, they were able to catch a glimpse of His divine nature without it being hidden from them. They saw Him in His glory! Paul wrote of an similar experience in which he lacked the words to describe (2

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<sup>4</sup> Liefeld, 927.

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Corinthians 12:1-7). The men were blessed beyond measure just to be able to glimpse into the glorious nature of Jesus Christ. Through this moment they were able to know more about Him. Peter, being at a loss for what to do, made a suggestion that would seek to keep things as they were. Many times we will do the same. We have experienced a special moment in our life that has revealed the truth of Jesus into our broken lives. We want to abide in those moments and not leave. We seek to keep everything the same so that we can continue to be blessed by the Lord. We develop plans and programs to stay where we are most comfortable, but God hasn't called us into comfortable. He has called us into obedience. Peter was not called to stay on the mountain. By doing so he would have abandoned the ministry to which God had called him.

**What was Peter suggesting?**

**What was wrong with his statement?**

**Think about the roles Peter, James, and John had in starting the church and contributing to Scripture. How would history have changed if the disciples had refused to come down from the mountain?**

**Why is it so tempting to want to stay with God on a mountain-top experience, rather than coming back down to serve?**

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## Hearing Jesus

### Luke 9:34-36

*34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" 36 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. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)*

Peter was interrupted by another bright cloud of God's glory and the voice of God the Father. When God spoke in that moment, it confirmed Jesus' identity and gave authority to His words. The cloud, like other elements in this narrative, can symbolize more than one thing, among them the cloud in the wilderness after the Exodus (Exod 13:21–22; 16:10; 24:16; 40:34–38). Isaiah 4:5 describes a cloud, reminiscent of that which showed God's "shekinah" glory in the wilderness, which will appear during a future time of rest under the Messiah. The word "shekinah" is from the Hebrew *šākan*, which is translated by the Greek *episkiazō* ("overshadow") in Exodus 40:35 LXX. The same Greek verb is used here in v. 34 ("overshadowed"). But above all the cloud symbolizes the glorious presence of God (cf. Exod 19:16).

The voice from the cloud combines an echo of Jesus' baptism, and an allusion to Dt 18:15, which predicts the coming of the prophet God would raise up and commands, "You must listen to him." Jesus alone is the True Prophet, the Chosen Servant, and the Son of God. The Voice speaking from the cloud is that of God the Father himself. The awesome voice of God himself must be heard. The message expressed by the Voice is so clear that any uncertainty

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about the meaning of some of the other aspects of this great scene become comparatively unimportant. The focus throughout the Transfiguration is on the supreme person and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And now he is expressly declared to be God's Son. In Mark, the Voice addresses Jesus directly, here it addresses the three disciples. In John 12:28–30, just preceding Jesus' passion, the Voice from heaven speaks for the "benefit" (v. 30) of a whole crowd. In each case the Voice from heaven affirms that Jesus is the One who is sent by God and who has God's authority. These words spoken by the Voice on these three occasions affirm that Jesus is the Son of God, is obedient to him, and possesses divine authority for his mission. "Listen to him" is not only a command; it is a correction of the human tendency to substitute human opinion for divine revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Luke did not state why the three apostles were silent about what they had experienced, though Matt. 17:9 states that Jesus commanded them to tell no one until after His resurrection. In 2 Peter 1:16-18, Peter recalled his experience at the transfiguration.

**What did God confirm about Jesus when He spoke through the cloud?**

**Why do you think He felt it necessary to speak?**

**What are some practical implications of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God?**

**How can these affect the way you live as a son or daughter of God?**

**How does your study of Scripture help you understand who Jesus is and His work in your life? What role does our church play in aiding your understanding? Our group?**

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<sup>5</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 927–928.