

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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THE TRANSFIGURATION AND THE POWER OF FAITH

BIBLE READING. Please read carefully Matthew 17 verses 1 — 9

BACKGROUND. After the feeding of the 5,000 we have Matthew 16 where Jesus tries to teach those who would hear the message of salvation but the elders of the Jews wanted a sign. The disciples also were sure now that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God, but this meant that he must suffer before attaining the glory of the kingdom. Jesus' disciples did not understand this and so Jesus from time to time had to remind them that the cross must come before the crown.

The disciples were disillusioned to hear that he must suffer many things and that their high hopes of him redeeming Israel from the iron grip of Rome lay well in the future. However Jesus did give them some encouragement because in Matthew 16 verse 28 he said "*There be some standing here that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*"

With that background we go into Chapter 17

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that some of them would not die till they had seen the kingdom of God come with power. Well the next few verses explain it.

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him into a high mountain; they were privileged to be with Jesus on the occasion of his greatest miracle. We are now told the mountain to which Jesus and the disciples went. The district of Caesarea Phillippi is very mountainous, lying at the foot of the Lebanon range and nearby there were many solitary mountains suitable for the purpose in hand.

Once in the mountain Jesus began to pray to his Father, but his disciples tired with all the activity of the ministry soon fell asleep. As Jesus continued in prayer a remarkable thing happened. Mark tells us he was transfigured. The Greek word is "metamorphoo" meaning "a change of form". Three of the four gospels tell us of this incident so if we read them all we can get the full details. We are told Jesus' clothes became "exceeding white as snow" so as "no fuller on earth can white them" and Jesus' face also changed and shone as the sun.

These terms are used elsewhere in our Bibles to describe the glory of an immortal being. (Dan 12:3) (Matt 28:3) So in this change of Jesus we see a foretaste of that glory and power promised him beyond the cross.

Suddenly there appeared with Jesus, Moses and Elijah and talked with Jesus, they talked about his decease or death that he would accomplish at Jerusalem. The appearance of these two great servants of God, Moses representing the Law and Elijah the prophets, would have been a great encouragement to Jesus as the day of his crucifixion drew near.

While these three men were in deep conversation the disciples awoke and saw the three with the glory of God overshadowing them.... Truly the disciples had been privileged to see Jesus for a few moments as he will be in the future in the kingdom.

The scene was shortlived Moses and Elijah soon began to fade from view. Peter was so overwhelmed by what he saw, wanted to keep that moment for all time and he cried to Jesus "Master it is good for us to be

here, let us make three tabernacles one of you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”, but he did not fully realise what he said. Firstly he was putting Elijah and Moses on the same level as the Lord Jesus saying that three tabernacles would be made, and secondly Peter had not fully comprehended the scene. The kingdom of God WOULD come in GOD’S set time. For the present they had to appreciate that the glory had to be preceded by the sacrifice of God's son as the LAW and the PROPHETS CLEARLY SHOW...

As Peter was speaking a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice spoke to them from the cloud...

"THIS IS MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASSED HEAR YE HIM"

When the disciples heard the voice they fell on their faces greatly afraid. Then Jesus came and touched them telling them to get up and not to be afraid. As they did so they saw Jesus on his own, Moses and Elijah had gone.

We can only try to imagine the great effect this would have had on the disciples as they tried to reason in their minds what had gone on. On the following day Jesus told the three that they must tell no one about the vision until THE SON OF MAN BE RISEN FROM THE DEAD...

Notice Jesus has told us clearly what had happened IT WAS A VISION... A VISION of the Kingdom, they had seen the Lord Jesus as the great King he was to be in the future. But the statement "risen from the dead" puzzled them. The disciples seemed to share the common view that Jesus would always be with them. They could not fit death and resurrection into their understanding of Messiah. Others questions troubled them.

Why had Elijah been present on the mount as they knew from the prophets that Elijah would appear just before the "the great day of the Lord" as Mal 4:5-6 tells us.

The disciples must get things clear and they asked Jesus about the coming of Elijah. Jesus explained that so far as they were concerned Elijah's work had been done by John the Baptist who had come preaching in the "spirit and power of Elijah"... that is he came with the message of repentance before the coming of the Lord Jesus just as Elijah will go forth and preach before the second coming of the Lord Jesus when he will be proclaimed as the mighty KING. The disciples must have thought long and hard on all they had seen and heard.

As Jesus and the disciples came down the mountain they found the remaining nine disciples embarrassed because they could not cure a child who was dumb and suffered from violent fits... The disciples were in the midst of a crowd of people and the scribes were questioning them as to WHY THEY COULD NOT CURE HIM. When the people saw Jesus coming they ran to him hoping that he could heal him.

* Now if God had given the disciples power to perform miracles WHY were they not able to do this child any good at all... It was certainly not that the power was not strong enough, so what was the problem?

Jesus explained to the puzzled disciples that it was because of LACK OF FAITH that they had been unable to cure the child. THEY HAD TO BELIEVE FULLY FIRMLY AND COMPLETELY that God is all powerful and that HE WAS WORKING THROUGH THEM but the disciples had not yet developed that child like trust and confidence in the TRUE SOURCE OF THIS POWER in God himself. Jesus told the disciples that if they could only have faith as a grain of mustard seed, they would be able to do these things. This is a description of a DEVELOPING FAITH. The mustard seed is a tiny seed that grows into a great herb like a large tree so faith must continue to grow. This can only be done by reading God’s word and constantly

praying to him for strength, in so doing our faith grows and so the disciples had to realise that although God had given them power to do miracles they must develop full faith and trust in Him realising that they were only instruments of God's power and if they believed and trusted in God's power they **COULD DO ALL THINGS**.

We have learnt many things from our lesson today about the wonderful work that the Lord Jesus will soon accomplish. We are soon to see his reign as king, the disciples were only permitted to see a glimpse of the glory of the kingdom, but we pray that we might be permitted in God's mercy to be with them when that vision becomes a reality and the Lord will reign as the **GREAT KING**.

We must remember that the Transfiguration was a great source of strength to Jesus and the disciples. Jesus was soon to enter into the most difficult period of his life, and the reassurance that if only for a short time he must suffer, and then the kingdom, would have been a **GREAT COMFORT TO** him in the difficult days which lay ahead for him.

The disciples still at this time could not comprehend that they were to lose their Lord for a time. ... but when it did happen they could look back at the vision with joy knowing that it would not be long before he could return to reign, as **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**.