

## Luke 31 – The Transfiguration

If a man appeared in Minnesota claiming to be God, how would he go about proving who he was? Certainly if he did miracles, that would prove that he was supernatural. Some, however, might say that it was slight-of-hand. If the man seemed to control the weather, that would prove that he was divine. Some, however, might claim coincidence. If the man healed a physically disabled person, or cast out a demon, many would believe that the man was God in flesh. But again, some would claim that this man was merely setting up false situations. However, if the man suddenly showed a glory that only belonged to God, that would be proof that would satisfy almost any sceptic.

I would like this week to resume our study through the book of the Gospel of Luke. Luke is all about Jesus as a man, but he still emphasizes the fact that Jesus was God in human flesh. Let me briefly offer just a few reasons why it is right to believe that Jesus was God. Many people do not believe that Jesus was God, but that His followers made this assertion later as Christianity developed. I offer some reasons we can believe that Jesus was God here. First, the Old Testament claimed that Jesus would be God. It says in Isaiah 9:6-7: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” Those verses call Jesus “the mighty God” and “the everlasting Father.”

The second reason we ought to believe that Jesus was God, and that early Christians believed this, was that Jesus Himself claimed to be God. He said in John 10:30 “I and my Father are one.” He said in John 8:58 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” John 5:17-18 says “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” Many people claim that Jesus was a good person, or a good teacher. They assert that He was honest and righteous, but not that He was God in flesh. Yet if Jesus were not God, though He claimed to be, He would have been wicked to say that He was. You cannot have it both ways.

Third, the New Testament writers believed that Jesus was God. This was not a belief that came later with the perversion of the church or the influence of paganism. It was believed by the early church, and quoted in the Bible. 1 Timothy 3:16 says “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” John 1:1 says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Titus 2:13 says “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” These verses prove that many New Testament writers believed that Jesus was not just a good teacher, but God. These are three ways to show that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God, but how does Luke emphasize this in His Gospel?

Luke 9 says that Jesus multiplied five loaves of bread and two fishes, so that He was able to feed an entire multitude of at least five thousand people. This miracle is something only God could have done, and it was impossible to be slight of hand. Luke 8 says that as Jesus was in a boat, a storm came up. When the boat almost sank, Jesus stood and rebuked the storm, and it stopped. To those who would say that this is a coincidence, I would say that if it were expected that a storm could or would stop as suddenly as it did, these experienced fishermen would not have expressed such amazement. Luke 8 also talks about Jesus casting out a host of demons from a man, so much so that the townspeople who knew this man were afraid at what Jesus had done. This could not have been something set up beforehand. Also in Luke 8 is the story of a woman who was healed of an infirmity that she had dealt with for twelve years. After touching Jesus’ garment, of which He was humanly unaware, she was healed. This, again, could not have been a parlor trick or something that was set up beforehand, since if that were true, he would have made a presentation out of the healing.

But in addition to all these proofs, the one more offered is here in Luke 9. Jesus says this in Luke 9:27: “But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.” We have talked about what the Kingdom of God is before, but let me briefly summarize what that means here. The Kingdom of God is talked about throughout the Bible as a time when God Himself will rule on the earth. In Daniel, it is pictured as a rock from heaven that strikes the earth and grows into a mountain, smashing to pieces the Gentile ruling nations. Throughout the book of Isaiah, it was promised that God would send the Messiah, who would eventually rule over not only Israel, but the whole world. This is alluded to in Isaiah 9:6, which we read earlier, and which says, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” This expectation was very much alive during Jesus’ day, and the people expected Jesus to throw off the rule of the Roman Empire. John 6:15 even says that the people wanted to take and make Jesus king instead of Herod.

The kingdom would eventually be a physical kingdom, that is clear enough, but there are spiritual requirements that Jesus and John the Baptist laid out for this kingdom. John said in Matthew 3:2 “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus said in Matthew 5:20 “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” This was to be a kingdom that was yet coming, yet Jesus said that there were some standing with him that would not taste death until they saw the Kingdom of God. What does this mean? This phrase has puzzled scholars for years, and no one has a definite answer, but let me put forth three possibilities.

Jesus says this just one verse before where we are looking, in Luke 9:26: “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.” This seems to imply that it referring to when Jesus comes back to the Earth. However, by the time that Peter wrote His second epistle in AD 66, this hadn’t yet happened. He says in 2 Peter 3:3-4 “there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Jesus had not yet come by his understanding some 33 years after Jesus ascended back to heaven. This, therefore, cannot mean the return of Jesus Christ, which is yet future.

The second explanation is the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70. This was predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24, where Jesus says, “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Just a few chapters later in Matthew 26:64 he says, “I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Jesus was telling the people of His day that they would see the son of man both “sitting on the right hand of power” and also “coming in the clouds.” This cannot obviously mean His second coming, since this has not yet taken place. Some look at that phrase, “coming in the clouds” and say it means God’s destruction and punishment on Jerusalem.

That phrase “coming in the clouds” in the Old Testament often refers to God’s swift destruction. He says in Isaiah 19:1 “Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.” It says in Psalms 18:11-14: “He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.” This picture of coming in the clouds was one of God’s judgment and destruction. This certainly happened when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem in AD 70. There would be some of Jesus’ disciples who would have been alive at that time, since it was a mere 37 years after these words were spoken.

The third option is what happens immediately after this passage. The disciples see Jesus’ glory on the mountaintop, and part of that glory is what will be revealed in His kingdom. The reason that this is feasible is that this is spoken immediately before the story we are about to read in three Gospels. If it referred to something

else, it probably would have been in another part of the Gospel, in a passage about the destruction of Jerusalem. Since what happens next immediately follows this comment, it is most probable to assume this is about what He is speaking. Let us look at the next few verses in detail. This story is also found in Matthew 17:1-8 and Mark 9:2-8. Luke 9:28-31 says:

“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Eight days after Jesus says that there are some standing there who would not taste death, Jesus goes into a mountain to pray. First, notice that Jesus goes into a mountain. This is not unusual; Jesus did this often. Matthew 14:23 says “When he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.” Luke 6:12 says “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” The Bible does not say which mountain this was, into which Jesus went. Traditionally, this has been Mt. Tabor, which is in Galilee, less than five miles from Nazareth. A church has been built on top of the mountain, and church history establishes this as the place in which this story takes place. However, some scholars think that this is Mt. Hermon, which is located some fifty miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Scholars believe that this is the place because of what Matthew 17:13 says about being near Caesarea-Philippi. Mark and Matthew quantify that this is a “high mountain.”

Second, notice that the reason Jesus went was to pray. This, again He did often. Jesus, though God in human flesh, depended on God the Father for his life on Earth, and spent much time in prayer. Usually His praying was done alone, but notice, thirdly, that this time Jesus takes three of His disciples with him. He takes Peter, James, and John. James and John were brothers, and Peter was partners with both of them in their fishing business. This is not the only instance where Jesus takes Peter, James, and John exclusively with Him. Mark 5:37-38 says “And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue.” Mark 14:32-33 says “And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy.” Once again, Jesus takes only these three of His disciples. He wanted them to be special witnesses to what was about to happen.

Luke says that as Jesus prayed, “the fashion of His countenance was altered.” Matthew and Mark use the word “transfigured.” What does this mean? The Greek word translated “transfigured” is the word *metamorphoo*. This is the same word that we think of when we think of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Jesus was “transformed” and changed. His essence did not change, but His appearance did. How did it change? First, Luke says that his raiment was white and glistering. Probably Jesus wore white clothing, as many men and rabbis did at this time, but this was a change into white that was astonishing. Matthew says that his garment turned as white as light. Mark says that his garments became white as snow, like no clothing dyer can make it. Mark uses the word “shining.” When one thinks of shining, it is not reflecting light, but possessing a light in and of itself. Luke says that not only was Jesus’ clothing shining, but “glistering,” which means it shined and sparkled. Second, Luke says that Jesus’ skin shown. He says “his face did shine as the sun.”

The Bible pictures Jesus this way in several other passages other than the Gospels. Daniel 7:9 says “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.” Earlier in this same passage, it describes the Ancient of Days as coming with the clouds of heaven. This is a reference to Jesus. Revelation 1:13-14 says “In the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.” Most of the time when you find angels, they are wearing white, which is the color of purity, but only Jesus’ skin shines.

There is one other time when the Bible says someone's skin shines. Turn with me to Exodus 34, and we will come back to Luke in a little while. Exodus 34 takes place after God has given the commandments to Moses. Moses comes down from the mountain to find that Israel is worshipping idols, and he breaks the stone tablets God gave him. God calls Moses back into the mountain, and Moses makes a strange request in Exodus 33:18 "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." God answers this way in the following verses: "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

God shows Moses His glory, but not His face, lest Moses die. God then says to him in verse 1 of Exodus 34: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest." Moses obeyed and went into the mountain, and verse 5 says: "And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD." Moses spent time with God there in the mountain, and Exodus 34:28-29 says this: "And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him."

God's glory is a major theme in the Old Testament. It was manifest over the tabernacle while Israel wandered in the wilderness. It appeared as a pillar of smoke during the day, and as a pillar of fire at night. It was a sign of God's presence, and it often appeared as a cloud on top of the mountain. God said in Exodus 19:9: "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee." Its appearance was so frightening that Exodus 20:18 says "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off." When Isaiah saw God's throne room in Isaiah 6, he says "the house was filled with smoke." In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet watches as the cloud representing God's glory leaves the Temple and goes to the Mount of Olives, where it ascends back to heaven. The idea is that God's glory is not like anything on the world, and that it must be shielded. It was in the person of Jesus Christ, but here He lets it show for a brief moment. This is a proof that Jesus really is God.

John 1:14 says this: "And the Word [or, Jesus] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." 2 Corinthians 4:6 says "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is a perfect representative of who God is because He is God. He is the One who represents God on the earth. Obviously, Jesus did not appear as a cloud while on the earth. He was trying to accomplish something that required Him to be a man in human flesh. But that flesh was wrapped around the glory of God, seen in the Old Testament and later at the end of time. For a brief time, Jesus displayed that glory here on the mountain.

At the moment that Jesus displayed his glory, the Bible says that Moses and Elijah appeared to and with Jesus. These were two men we read about in the Old Testament, and were two of the most revered figures there. Moses was the Great Lawgiver, the one who God had used to give them their freedom and had gone into the mountain to retrieve God's laws. He was the one that had made them their tabernacle and set up the priesthood for them. Elijah was a man who had tried to set the kingdom straight in a time when sinful men ruled. He was a fiery prophet who God used to bring revival to a nation that had turned its back on God Almighty. He was the one promised to come back, and one of only two people in the Bible who never experienced death. These two men represented the Law and the Prophets, which was a way that Jews talked about the Bible.

These men, say Luke, appeared in glory with Jesus, and spoke to him. Of what did they speak? Matthew and Mark do not tell us, but Luke says this: “[they] spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Moses and Elijah did not come to worship Jesus, but to talk to him of the fact that He would die in Jerusalem. This is something that Jesus was beginning to talk about at this point in his life, as evidenced by verse 22. But why did Moses and Elijah come to talk to Him about this? One reason is perhaps encouragement. Hebrews 11 talks about many people who went through hard trials and persecution while on the earth who died for believing in the Lord. Immediately after Hebrews 11 it says: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Those who died and had gone on before us are there to cheer and urge on for great things in God. This may be one reason that these two men appear.

Another reason may be to learn more about this. 1 Peter 1:9-12 says this: “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.” Those verses talk about the fact that the prophets wrote about Christ, not knowing fully what they were saying. The revelation would not come until later. Isaiah wrote in chapter 53 of his book about the suffering of the Messiah, but he could not understand everything about Jesus and why it had to happen. We, on the other side of the cross, do.

Another reason that Moses and Elijah appear is to be an encouragement to the disciples. This would help strengthen their faith in who Jesus was and what His mission on the earth was. Unfortunately, this strengthening did not come until much later. At the first, they didn’t really understand. Let us read the next few verses: “But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.”

One reason that the disciples did not receive the full benefit of this experience was that they were sleeping. Another reason is that they were still thinking about Jesus in terms of a human on the same par as the Old Testament prophets. This is evident in what Peter says. He exclaims that it is good for them to be there, and that they should build three tabernacles. The Tabernacle in the Old Testament was a place of worship, but the word literally means “tent” or “booth.” Peter was under the impression that Moses and Elijah were going to stay and need shelter. Some scholars have said that Peter was referring to the Feast of Sukkot, in which booths were built to commemorate the Israelites living in tents while in the wilderness. This would have been the Feast to remember, with Moses and Elijah there. Luke, however, said that Peter was not in the right frame of mind. He tells us that Peter didn’t know what he was saying. Perhaps he was still tired. Mark says that he was afraid.

At Peter’s exclamation, the Bible says that a cloud descended upon them all on top of the mountain. This again was a picture of God’s glory coming down to dwell with them on the mountain, as it had in Exodus 20 and 34. It was not a dark cloud, but Matthew says it was a bright cloud. Out of this cloud came a voice from heaven, God’s voice, that said this: “This is my beloved Son: hear him.” This voice came for two reasons. One, as at Jesus’ baptism, God Himself speaks from heaven, authenticating who Jesus is. Two, the voice came to single out Jesus as the most important. As important as Moses and Elijah were, the most important is Jesus. Peter, James, and John needed to be convinced both that Jesus was God and that He was doing all he did as being pleasing to the Father. This they would need to know when Jesus was crucified as a criminal.

Luke says that the cloud disappeared and Jesus was standing by Himself, in the form he had been in all the time before. Matthew says that when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, as you can well imagine. Jesus has to come and tell them to arise and not be afraid. From there, Jesus and his three disciples descended the mountain to go find the other nine. They were astonished by what they had seen, and told no one right away, though later did reveal it to others, which is why we have the story. John curiously did not write about it in his Gospel, but it is talked about in Peter's. Turn to 2 Peter 1.

Peter's second epistle was written, as we said before, in AD 66, which tradition says was one year before his death by crucifixion. He is writing to believers to encourage them in their faith and not to waver. He wants them to be strengthened in the things in which they have come to believe. As it is in these days, sometimes it is hard to maintain a belief in something that we have not seen for ourselves. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:15-17 "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able 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 Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." He says he will die soon and wants them to continue, and wants them to remember that he was an eyewitness of Jesus. But he was not an eyewitness simply of Jesus, but he says specifically "of his majesty." Of what is this speaking? He goes on to explain in the next few verses:

"For he received from God the Father honour 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." Peter refers to the story we have read this morning, of the mount of transfiguration. He says that not only did they see Jesus, but they heard the very voice of God Himself. Peter is saying that he did not hear it from someone else, but heard it directly. "But," someone may say, "that is fine for Peter, but what for me?" We began this broadcast talking about proofs for believing that Jesus is God. I said that if you had certain proofs, you might be compelled to believe in Jesus. If He showed up, you may. If He showed up and did a miracle, you may. If He showed up and raised the dead, you may. If He showed up in his glorified body, you may, as Paul did. But is this needed? No, it is not, and it is foolish to expect this. You can exercise faith in Jesus without a physical empirical proof. How do I know this? Keep reading what Peter has to say.

He says in verses 19-21: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Peter says that being in the mountain is not necessary in order to have stronger faith. He says that we have a more sure word. We have something that has more weight than God's own voice coming from heaven. We have the Word of God.

Friend, the Bible is the only thing you need in order to exercise faith in Jesus Christ. You can trust what God says because He said it in His Word. If you wait to see an angel or hear the voice of God, you will wait until you die, and you will die without Christ. Place your faith in Him now. Romans 10:11 says "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." The Bible says that you can be saved by believing that you are a sinner and that Jesus died for your sins. If you will this morning, place your trust in what Jesus did on the cross, you can be saved. Will you do that this morning? Christian, will you take strength in the fact that you have the tools you need in the Bible to strengthen your faith and live for God? If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at [church@fbcpr.org](mailto:church@fbcpr.org). That's CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is [www.fbcpr.org](http://www.fbcpr.org). If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. If you enjoy this program, let us know by contacting our church. Please join us this morning at 10:30 for our worship service. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, MN.