

Topic 3: Transfiguration

Verses: Mark 9:2-10, Matt 17:1-9, Luke 9:28-36, John 12:28-30

Chong Ho Yu

Differences between four accounts

- Mark and Matthew said the transfiguration happened six days after another event; Luke said eight days.
- Luke said that they went to the mountain to pray, but Mark and Matthew didn't state the purpose.
- Mark and Luke said Jesus took Peter, James, and John. Matthew said the same thing but added that John was the brother of James.
- Mark and Matthew said that was a high mountain but Luke said it was only a mountain.
- Mark and Luke described Jesus's clothes only. But Matthew described both His face and clothes.
- Mark and Matthew used the word "transfigured," but Luke didn't use this word. He simply said Jesus changed His face.
- Matthew compared Jesus's clothes to white light. Mark wrote that the clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. Luke wrote that they became as bright as a flash of lightning.
- Mark and Matthew wrote that Elijah and Moses talked to Jesus, but didn't say what they talked about. Luke wrote down what they talked about.
- Mark and Matthew didn't say the disciples fell asleep, but Luke did.
- Jesus was called by Peter differently in the three Gospels. Mark: Rabbi, Matthew: Lord, Luke: Master.
- Mark and Luke said that Peter didn't know what he said. But Matthew omitted this.
- In the three Gospels the voice from the cloud said slightly different things. Mark: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Matthew: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Luke: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."
- All three gospels said that the disciples were frightened. In Mark this happened before the appearance of the cloud and the voice. Matthew and Luke wrote that the disciples were afraid after the cloud and the voice appeared.
- In Mark and Matthew Jesus commanded His disciples not to tell anyone about what they saw. But in Luke the disciples kept it to themselves; there was no instruction from Jesus.

Event:

Matt 17:9 refers to the event as a vision. Mark and Matthew didn't say the disciples fell asleep, but Luke did. According to Strauss (2007), Jesus revealed his identity to His disciples three times, but they still didn't get it. In the Gospel Mark, Jesus revealed and concealed Himself at the same time (**Secret motif**). Luke added that the disciples fell asleep to highlight the **unawareness of Jesus's disciples**.

Moreover, the wording of the voice from the cloud varies from Mark to Luke. In Mark it is: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Matthew changed it to: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am **well pleased**. Listen to him!" Not only did the Father love him, but also He is well-pleased with Jesus. Luke wrote, "This is my Son, whom I have **chosen**; listen to him." Luke's account is more obvious. For Luke Jesus was the chosen one. This is an allusion to Isa 42:1, the Servant of God.

Transfigured:

Mount Sinai was where God revealed his glory to Moses. In Mark 9: 2-10 Jesus went to a mountain to echo what happened to Moses (Ex 24:16). Theophany, transformation or transfiguration is found

in both Greek myth and **Jewish apocalyptic literature**, but Jesus' transfiguration in the Markan account might mirror **Moses' glorification** on Mount Sinai (Keener, 1993).

Besides the synoptic Gospels, in the New Testament a description of transfiguration is also found in 2 Peter 1:16–18. The author of 2 Peter used transfiguration to confirm his notion about the “power and coming” of Christ. This passage focuses on the voice with the majestic glory. The reality of transfiguration is taken for granted. By using the word “eyewitnesses” and the phrase “we heard his voice”, the author asserted that the event was real, not a myth. This helps us to understand that the early church took transfiguration as evidence for Jesus as the Messiah endorsed by the Heavenly father.

Elijah and Moses:

Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets pointing to the coming of Messiah. Both Moses and Elijah had a vision of the glory of God on a mountain. **Moses went to Sinai** (Ex. 24:15) whereas **Elijah went to Horeb** (1 Ki. 19:8), and perhaps that's why Jesus took his disciples to a high mountain. In addition, the Mosaic Law and the coming of Elijah are mentioned in tandem in the last book of the Old Testament (Mal. 4:4–6). Some commentaries speculate that the two men at the empty tomb (Lk. 24:4; Jn. 20:12) and at the ascension (Acts 1:10) and also the “two witnesses” (Rev. 11:3) might be Moses and Elijah. Their appearance with Jesus in the mountain affirms that Jesus is the Messiah supported by the legal and the prophetic traditions (Nixon, 1996).

Booth:

Booth is a structure commonly used in the annual Feast of tabernacles (Lv. 23:34; Dt. 16:13) (Mitchell, 1996). The feast began on the 15th of Tishri and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:34). It is also known as “**the season of Rejoicing**” (Charles 2004). In the context of Mark 9:2-10, making booths might mean celebration. Another explanation of raising booths on the mountain may be related to Israel's tabernacles in the wilderness, showing **God's companionship** with the Israelites in Moses' day (Keener, 1993).

Cloud:

In the Old Testament the cloud is often referred to as the **entire circle of the sky** (“the bow in the clouds”) (Gn. 9:14). It symbolizes the sphere of partial knowledge and hidden glory where God has a mysterious purpose in His motions (Jb. 36:29; 37:16; 38:37; Ps. 78:23) (Houston, 1996). Sometimes the cloud signifies the concealment of the divine presence (Ex. 24:15–18; Ps. 97:2). In the New Testament cloud is also a heavenly symbol. Christ ascended to the cloud while going to Heaven (Acts 1:9). When he returns, he will be with the clouds, too (Rev. 1:7) (Nixon, 1996).

The portrait of Jesus and the Markan themes

The setting for the early church may be related to preaching Jesus as the Servant Messiah and the suffering Son of Man. The Jewish concept of Messiah was very different from Mark. Israelites had been under the control of oppressive alien regimes for a long time, and thus they expected the Messiah to be a liberator leading them to fight the ungodly Romans. One of the themes of Mark is to clarify the identity of Jesus. Some people might be confused about who Jesus was. Mark set the stage by showing that **even His disciples were confused**. The passage in Mark 9:2-10, which disclosed the endorsement of Jesus by Moses, Elijah, and the Heavenly Father, affirms that Jesus is the Messiah prophesized in the Old Testament. His suffering, death, and resurrection were not humiliation at all. Rather, they were all willed by God.

Implications: Do we really know who Jesus is? Do we know how to glorify Him?

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