

✓  
Pickard, 1910

"THE TRANSFIGURED AND TRANSFIGURING CHRIST"

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, in the Lyric Theater, Baltimore, Maryland, evening session, May 11, 1910, by W. L. Pickard, D.D.; LL.D., Central Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"And He was transfigured before them" Matt. 17:2

The object of this discourse is a simple exegesis of the scenes and lessons of the transfiguration of Jesus. We approach this scene in humility, because of all human unworthiness; but with joy because of the glorious lessons in it for all those who love the Lord.

The mount of the transfiguration is not certainly known. It was, most probably, one of the mountain peaks of the Herman range, situated not far from Caesarea Phillippi. This is the conclusion of the large majority of those devout scholars who have given much time and study to this question.

Human history is full of strange surprises. This is especially true of the unfolding of God's will and works in history. Measured by Jehovah's age-long dealings with Israel one would naturally suppose that Jesus would have selected Jerusalem as the scene of his transfiguration. Mount Zoin had long been the scene of God's revelations and glorious manifestations. But this one scene of our Lords' earthy glorification was on a wild mountain in a land of strangers. When Israel was in Egyptian bondage who expected such a deliverer as Moses from the wilderness about Horeb and Sinai? God himself has taught us to look for him in strange places and in ways different from the ways and works of man.

Even the Son of God needs congenial atmosphere for his most glorious manifestations. At times he must withdraw from the misconstruing Throngs and go apart where he and the Father may meet in undisturbed fellowship. Blessed is the man who so lives for Christ, and loves Christ, that the Master will take him apart from the throng into the inner circle of his love!

As Jesus started away from the throngs and the lowlands for this mountain-peak goal, he took with him Peter, James and John. As he did this, what do you suppose these three disciples thought? And what did those think whom he had left? These three had been apart with him before. Yonder in the house of Jairus these had seen him raise the dead to life. But now, on this lonely mountain peak apart, what? They should have been expectant of some rich revelation, and keyed in soul for the moment of power and glory. But, alas! Their flesh was weak --- they fell asleep!

# I.

## INCIDENTS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Here we are now on the Mountain. Here are Peter, James, and John. They are heavy with sleep. Yonder, a little apart from them, is Jesus. He was praying. Luke says: "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was changed, and his raiment was white and glistening."

For some reason, God loves the mountains. Ages before this he had called Moses into his presence on Mount Sinai, and given to him "The Law." The basis of all true civilization, and the school-master to lead the world to Christ. On the Mountain of the Beatitudes Jesus had given that wonderful exposition of The Law, and his relation to it. Now he is on a mountain to be transfigured. A little later he is to

be led forth to Mount Calvary. Later still he is to ascend from Mount Olivet.

The idol worship at Sinai's base was in a valley. Jesus had his Gethsemane in a valley. This may mean nothing, still we are told to "look to the hills whence cometh our help." "O weary souls, shall we, by faith, look to the mountain where God's majesty, power and glory are displayed? From of old, God's servants have done wonderful things after dwelling on the Mountains with him.

Let us note, in passing the great privilege bestowed on Peter, James, and John. There was some special reason for this. To all Eternity these three will not get through talking of what they saw that night. How much the others missed!

Christ needed select souls and true witnesses for such disclosures as were soon to be made. Even those selected were not fully prepared for the wonderful revelation. But he selected the most sympathetic one he had. Any of us might have far more wonderful conceptions of God's truth if we were in greater sympathy with his thoughts and plans. It has sometimes staggered me to see that man worships a theological God of his own speculations, rather than the Holy God of Revelation and the glorified Christ of redemption.

## II.

### THE TRANSFIGURED CHRIST

The transfiguration was at night. Luke says: "But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they were awake they saw his glory." Again the return of Jesus and these disciples from the scene was "The next day." The glory of the Lord would be

more resplendent when seen by night. Then, too, the contrast was meaningful. Night is a picture of blackness of sin and evil. He was to be transfigured in the midst of the blackness of sin. This was every way befitting and prophetic. He was the light that shineth in darkness, and in him is no darkness.

"His face did shine as the sun." Every portion of this glory-scene is full of significance. God was doing great photographic work on that spur of Hermon that night. Let us try to see him as he was then; for, if we may do so, it will help us to see him as he is now. Imagine an eclipse of the sun at high noon, everything perfectly dark, then suddenly let the sun burst forth in all of his glory, and you have a world transfigured. That is the contrast between darkness and light. That is glorious, but it does not quite measure up to what we are trying to show in the glory of this transfigured face of Christ.

Peter, James and John, and the other disciples, had thus far seen the face of Jesus only in its human expression, and ere long they shall see their Master suffer such agony that he will be to their eyes the reproduction of Isaiah's picture of "The man of sorrow and acquainted with grief."

On the Mount of transfiguration Jesus' face appeared as it was in glory before his incarnation, and as it was to be after it should be marred by thorns and death. Later we shall hear Jesus pray: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified, and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

A little later, the darkest hour shall come to our Lord. Marred beyond all the sons of men, he shall go down in the midst of darkness. But, after the eclipse his disciples shall see him ascend in glory-

clouds into the heavens of glory. Then, later, Stephen shall "see the heavens open and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Years later, John from Patmos shall see him again, and what a picture of transcendent glory! Remember, John saw him in every phase of his earthly life -- say him on the transfigured mount, in Gethsemane, on Calvary, and saw him ascend. What a witness he was, and is! Let us see John's picture of him as set forth in the Rev. 1:13-18. "I saw 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; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And he said unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Between the scene of the Mount of transfiguration and this vision of Christ which John gives us in The Revelation are Gethsemane, Calvary and the grave. The scenes on the Mount and in Heaven present him in contrast with the view of him as the Man of Galilee, who was also "The man of Sorrows."

"And his raiment was white as the light." Mark says his garments "were glittering, exceeding white." Luke says they "were white and dazzling." Do you see the contrast here between his raiment and that robe which yonder in Jerusalem a little later shall be crimson with

his own blood? Do you not see here, too, a mystic replica of that robe of spotless white with which he shall clothe the blood-washed when he shall present them at the Court of God?

### III.

#### THE THREE GLORIFIED ONES-

In this glory -scene were Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Let it be remembered that Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New Testament. Jehovah-Jesus, the Covenant God.

Nearly fifteen hundred years before the scenes of this study Moses and Christ had met on Mount Sinai. For that meeting long ago the Lord had made special preparation. He had purified some crag of Sinai by fire from his holy presence, and amid thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount he had prepared for the meeting. "Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole Mount quaked greatly."

On Mount Sinai then he was preparing to give the holy law for sinful man. The law with its accompanying types and shadows, rites and ceremonies, all taken together were to prepare the world for Christ who in man's stead should fulfil the law and open the way for man to come back into fellowship with God. Back there Jehovah was veiled in cloud and smoke, and amid thunders and lightening, the mountain quaked greatly. But here is the picture to which all that pointed. A wonderful glory-light, no lightening, no thunder, no quakings, all calm, peaceful, a light outshining that of the sun, shining thus brilliantly in the night, and in the midst of this glory Moses, Elijah, and Christ, and Christ as the Center of it all.

When Moses and Christ met on Sinai centuries before, Christ went down to strengthen Moses for a mighty task -- that of giving the law to Israel and training Israel in the wonderful things pertaining to salvation. But now Moses and Elijah come down to strengthen Jesus that he may finish his work under the law and present to man the glories of Grace.

Again, back yonder, when Moses had finished the Tabernacle, "Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud above thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." But on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah were glorified with Christ in the heavenly shining. Grace had done its work, sin had been wholly purged from these men, they were now at their ease in the presence of their sinless God -- cleansed, perfected, transfigured.

And Elijah had lived a life of strenuous conflict for Jehovahs' sake. He had been a selected scourge of God against Israels' sins. By the word of the Lord, through him, Israel had been storm-swept. Furthermore, Elijah himself had lived a storm-swept life in his conflict with the sinful leaders of Israel. But at last Elijah's life was fire-swept, swept off the earth, up to glory, purified, glorified. So now, on the Mount of transfiguration these two met with Jesus. What a meeting! What a meeting that was!

And what was the object of this meeting? Listen to the conversation and you shall know. Luke tells the theme as the Spirit of God had presented it in the report of Peter, James and John. Was it a talk of heaven and its bliss? No. Was it a talk of the wonderous glory which then enveloped them? No. But it was a wonderful talk. Remember, it was the theme of conversation in the one and only glorified hour which Jesus had on the earth.

It must have been the most important theme in the mind of God for heaven and earth.

Here it is. "And behold there talked with him two men, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory, and spake of his death which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

Ah, that was it, his death which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. I suspect that Moses and Elijah and all heaven are talking of it yet -- because by that death a lone believing sinner shall be saved from sin and transfigured by his blood to shine in his glory, clothed in robes of his righteousness.

"Which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." Please notice this carefully. They were not talking of that which should happen to him at Jerusalem, not what might occur to him somewhere, somehow, if he were not watchful against his enemies, but of that which he, the lamb of God, should accomplish at Jerusalem. He was to be the sacrifice, Jerusalem the place, and the Cross the world's great altar. The Cross was the theme of the transfiguration hour.

The glory-scene of the transfiguration was a photograph of heavenly glory let down to earth to strengthen Jesus for his final supreme grapple with sin. The light of that hour was the light of "The Lamb" which shall light the heaven of the Saints when the sun and moon and stars shall no more be needed. It was the glory to which Christ was used before he became incarnate, and which shall radiate from him after he shall have fulfilled all the Scriptures written of him in "The Law and the Prophets." Yet, he would go to Mount Calvary voluntarily to accomplish the work of redemption. In the light of this we shall read John 3:16 with a new and thrilling interest.



It was glorious for Christ to have with him in that rapturously holy hour Moses and Elijah. They were specimens of his redeeming, saving, transforming, transfiguring and glorifying power.

Can you not almost hear Moses saying: "Ah, Master, that hour which awaits you is indeed a bitter one. I know not its cost of pangs and shame to you. But Master, it will pay you to finish your work. Look at me, Master, I was a miserable sinner. I sinned while Thou wast giving me direct revelation and guidance every day, and at last because of my sinning, I had to die and be buried. But, behold me, Master, I am no more stained by sin, nor subject to sin. I am alive from the dead, and glorified with thy glory. Master, thy death has been pictured by all the sacrifices from Abel's lamb to the Passover lamb. It will be bitter. But it will pay. Master, if you shall go forth to Galvary and finish the work accepted of you in the council of the triune God, the day will come when all the faithful dead shall be raised from the dead, and those who shall be living in faith shall be changed, and all shall be glorified with such glory as this which now we behold."

And can you not hear Elijah say: "Master, yes, it will be terrible for one so free from sin to have to suffer for sinners. But, Master, I was a wretched undone sinner under the curse and condemnation of the righteous law which you gave to me through Moses. But, Master, you saved me by giving me faith in what you are going to suffer yonder at Jerusalem. And, dear Lord, you even translated me that I should not see death. Yet, Master, if that was done because I believed in the Lamb that was to be slain, what shall be thy power when thou shalt have fulfilled ~~the~~ law and conquered sin and death? Why, Master by and by,

when you are ready to close up the work you have come to do, there shall be millions living on the earth who believe on you, and they shall be changed and translated even as you translated me. Oh Master, yes, the suffering must be great that awaits you, but behold the unspeakable glory which shall follow."

Later the Father will send an angel to strengthen him, but at this juncture he needs those who were saved by his Grace. Moses suggests to us the glory of all those who shall be raised from the dead and glorified with him; and Elijah those who shall be living who love him, and shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

The great theme was finished. The cloud of glory was ready to receive back Moses and Elijah. The astonished witnesses in the flesh were looking on -- Peter, James and John. James and John were silent witnesses. Peter said something about building three tabernacles -- one for Moses, one for Elijah and one for Christ. Just then the voice of God was heard from out the cloud, saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." The scene was ended. The glory was gone. But the work was yet to be finished. So Jesus set his face anew towards Jerusalem to bear his cross that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

#### IV.

#### THE WHILE BETWEEN

There are certain things in the center of this scene of the transfiguration, and also on the fringe of it, which we should study in conclusion.

Just apart from the glory-scene we observe Peter, James and John. They were frightened. The glory was too great for them. In their human

nature they could not fully enter into it. We often pray for visions of glory, but if they were granted to us we should be affrighted. God gives to us as we are prepared to receive the gifts.

However, Moses and Elijah were not afraid. The heavenly atmosphere was suited to them, and they to it. They were finished products of his grace. Peter, James and John were in the process of the work of grace. What Moses and Elijah were on the Mount of transfiguration we shall all be when Christ shall have finished his work in us. John brings that out years later after he has reflected long and deeply on this scene. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

It is glorious to be sons of God here, but the half is not conceived of that glory which awaits us. What we shall be when wholly lifted out of sin, and its blighting environments should be an inspiration moving our souls and wills to the utmost fidelity to Christ.

"We shall be like him." Listen: "For our conversation is of heavenly things, from whence also we look for the Saviour, The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto his self."

We notice also that Peter, James and John knew Moses and Elijah when these saints appeared in glory with Christ. These witnesses from Galilee had never seen Moses and Elijah before, yet they knew them instantly. Christ's light revealed them. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Yet it preserves its identity. This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him taken up; We shall see him as he is;

we shall be like him; we shall know as we are known; and by the logic of all God's revelations we shall know each other. The transfiguration was a selection of Heaven let down to earth as an inspirational view of that glory which awaits all those who love his appearing. And in the added light of our Lord's resurrection, as we contemplate the future, we, too, can shout: Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly!

These thoughts, however, were on the fringe of this scene. Let us close this study with the very heart of that wonderful hour.

"This is my beloved son, hear ye him." This was the voice of God the Father. This scene was perfectly natural to the deity of Christ. It was in honor of his deity. Nothing else can account for it. Nor can the glorified presence and appearance there of Moses and Elijah be accounted for on any theory less than that they were products of the work of the deity. Flesh and blood did not inherit such glory; nor was it obtained by the will and works of the flesh. It was Christ who had transfigured them."

Christ's Deity shone in the transfiguration scene, likewise God affirms that Christ is the Son of God with authority -- "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him."

Under several different theories in Europe, the Old Testament has been savagely attacked in the past few years. The fight is beginning to be more on the New Testament now, especially in Germany. The high sounding beneficent catch words are "Let us sift the wheat from the chaff," "let us find out what is true and what is false." You will see, my brethren, that all this is nothing but coldblooded Rationalism driving its engines of destruction at the very heart of Revelation and the supernatural. The logic of the position of Rationalism is no inspiration, no authoritative word of God, no miracles, alas -- and alas, no deity

in Christ, therefore, no Saviour, except as a sort of fine human model by whose example we shall save ourselves. Our next great fight is for the deity of Christ.

Furthermore, my brethren, if Christ be not Deity his wonderful sayings which are now so lauded by Rationalistic Germany, will come to have no weight. Destruction of souls and bodies of men is the inevitable logic of Rationalism. If Christ be not God, why follow his teachings? Why not might, the right of lust, instead of the right of love? May God have mercy on the world when the world shall toss aside its divine Saviour! In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Christ's deity shines from the annunciation of his birth by the ages through his works, his transfiguration, his sufferings, his death and resurrection. You can't account for him at all except by Deity.

Again, as this Son of God shone in his Deity on the Mount of transfiguration, so the central work which he had to do as Deity incarnate was that of dying for a lost world. The central theme of his one transfigured hour on earth was that of his death which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. So, we have it all in the transfiguration - cause and effect --death the path to life, suffering the path to glory, the saints glorified, by his death. Everywhere his atoning death is the sinner's only hope of becoming a glorified saint!

For his sake, brethren in Christ, many of us shall have to suffer the contradiction of sinners. The very foundations of Christian civilization are being attacked. Many of us shall live to see that critics who are now crying. "Back from the speculation of John and Paul to the words of Christ in the synoptic gospels." will wholly reject the deity and

and authority of Christ. They will be preaching Christ on the plane of Socrates, Plato, or any other sage who suits your fancy as a type of man to follow, or not, as you like.

But God who spake from the clouds of glory on the Mount also spake through Isaiah hundreds of years before, and said of this Son of man and Son of God: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." Also, by the pen of another inspired one he gave a song of final victory accorded to this one who was once "the man of sorrows". Though earth and Hell oppose, the word of God can not fail.

Hear ye the shout of his Lordship at last: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory."

Again, voices out of heaven spake to John saying: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

And Paul: "He shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood

Shall never lose its power;

Till all the ransomed Church of God

Be saved to sin no more."