

The Transfiguration

There are four places the Greek word “metamorphosis” (metamorphoo) is used in Scripture. Twice it is translated “transfigured”; once the word is translated “transformed” and another time “changed.” Metamorphosis means a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means. The four places we find this word is: (1) Matthew 17:2, *“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”* (2) Mark 9:2, *“And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.”* (3) Romans 12:2, *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* (4) II Corinthians 3:18, *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

The Bible says, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (II Corinthians 5:17). The very essence of what it means to be a Christian is that we accept change by repenting and believing on Christ as Savior. Then we submit to change by accepting Christ as Lord. This is never meant to be a disconnected, two-part process; it is intended by our Lord to be a continuum.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is mentioned four times in Scripture. It is found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and II Peter. There are many places in history I would have loved to have been -- this is one of them. In this great revelation of our Lord to three of His closest disciples we learn much about what Christ wants in and from us. First, we learn:

1. Our Source for transfiguration.

When Christ was transfigured before His disciples, the Bible says, *“And (He) was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light”* (Matthew 17:2). This is the way Christ’s appearance was when He had the glory with the Father before the world was created. This is also the appearance He took at His resurrection and afterwards. When John saw Christ on the Isle of Patmos he said, *“...and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength”* (Revelation 1:16).

The sun is our light, power and life source on the earth. According to John Lennox (an Oxford professor), if God turned out our sun for just ten minutes, all life as we know it would perish from the earth. When Peter referred to this event many years later he said, *“...when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* (II Peter 1:16). God wants to give us power over all interference with His desire to make us like Christ. He is revealing through the transfiguration event, that Christ, like the sun, is our

Source; He alone is our Source. To prove that this is God's ultimate goal for us, please notice the wording of Matthew 13:43, "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" I suspect the transfiguration event came to Peter's mind when God gave him these words, "*...that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (I Peter 2:9b). Secondly, we learn:

2. Our means of transfiguration.

In Romans 12:2, it says, "*... be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind....*" This is one of those four places metamorphosis (transformed) is used in Scripture. The renewing of your mind comes from exposure and an adherence to the Bible. One of the most beautiful explanations of how this takes place is when the word metamorphosis is used in II Corinthians 3:18, "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" The glass (mirror) is the Word of God. For instance, in James 1:23 and 24, says, "*For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*" James went on to say if we see ourselves in the perfect law of liberty (the Bible), and adjust to the truth therein by being a doer, not hearer only we shall be blessed (James 1:25). The Scripture is the means to bring us step by step, line upon line into the place where we need to be. We are changed into Christ's likeness from one increasing glory to the next level of glory.

Thirdly, we learn:

3. The goal of transfiguration.

Mark's record of the transfiguration explained, "*And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them*" (Mark 9:3). In our modern era we are not familiar with this term. "Fulling" refers to is a step in woolen cloth-making which involves the cleansing of cloth (particularly wool) to eliminate oils, dirt and other impurities, and making it thicker. The fuller is the person who accomplishes this. Mark was telling us that Jesus' raiment was shining so brightly that it would be compared to new fallen snow and to emphasize the point, he says, there is no laundering on earth that can make anything so bright, so white, so pure!

God's goal for our transfiguration is to make us pure like Jesus! Fourthly we learn:

4. The process of transfiguration.

While Christ was transfigured, Moses, the representative of the law and Elijah, the representative of the prophets appeared. Luke was referencing them when he said, "*Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:31). The word "decease" is exodos (exodos), from where we get our English word "exodus." It is significant to note

that Moses had experienced an exodus from Egypt to the border of the Promised Land. Elijah also experienced an exodus when he was carried into heaven by a fiery chariot. The conversation, however, did not revolve around their exodus experience; it centered on Christ's up-coming exodus from the earth by means of the cross. It is important to remember everything in our belief system revolves around the cross. *"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17). *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (I Corinthians 2:2). We are given insight to the importance of the death of Christ by this glorious moment. We, too, will be changed and transfigured when we come to the cross. Allow me to give you the lines from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress when Christian came to the cross, "Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulcher. So I saw in my dream, that just as CHRISTIAN came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by his sorrow, And life by his death.'" And finally, we learn:

5. The preeminence of the transfiguration.

Peter anxiously wanted to build three tabernacles and revisit a feast celebration for several days in honor of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Our zealous disciple received a stern rebuke from the highest heaven with these words from the Heavenly Father, *"...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him"* (Matthew 17:5b). God was saying, "Peter, be quiet! Look and listen to my Son!" In other words, we don't want to focus on Moses and Elijah because the Bible records that after Jesus rose from the dead, He revealed Himself as the main message of the Bible: *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Luke 24:27). When we are transfigured, our message will be Jesus only, our hope and great love in this life and the next. *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18). *"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"* (II Corinthians 4:6).

-Pastor Pope-