

# TAUNTING THE ENEMY

Luke 9:27-36; Eph. 1:4-6; Heb. 2:14-15

The Strongest Statement Ever Made

By

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## Opening.

**I want you to consider a scenario.** It's a hypothetical, sure, but in a world as evil as ours, a nation as rebellious against the will and Word of its Creator as ours is at present, it might not be too far out of bounds.

I saw a 'warrior' T-shirt on Facebook the other day which read, "I will do terrible things for those I love." Most of us would say, "I hope I don't ever *have* to; but if I do, I *will*." I want you to consider the lengths to which you would go for their safe return if kidnappers had your son or your daughter. Think about what you would be willing to do if sex traffickers had your wife or your girlfriend, your daughter or grand-daughter. Imagine how far your love would reach if your husband or your grandchildren were in the hands of Islamic terrorists.

**Got the picture?** Now, what if the requirement to secure their release, the condition to their freedom from captivity, was *your death* in a violent conflict? **I.e., you had to die, violently, at someone else's hand.** Would you sit around and wait on it ...would you wonder and worry about when and where ...or would you walk right into your enemy's stronghold and provoke him to kill you? I want you to keep this in mind as we walk through this passage, because this is, in my professional opinion, *precisely* what Jesus is doing here.

## The Kingdom Is Coming.

Let's begin in Luke 9:27, with Jesus' final statement in His critical call to discipleship. **"I tell you the Truth, *some* who are standing here will not taste death before they *see* the Kingdom of God."** **"Before they see"** it with their own eyes and hear it with their own ears. Some thirty-five years after this Event, Peter writing to mixed Communities of Christians, Jew and Gentile, who were facing imminent danger from false teaching {possibly the same five provinces of NW Asia Minor: 3:1}, said, **"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the *power* and *coming* [Our old friend *parousia*, the '*personal* presence,' the '*royal* presence'] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of His Majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the Voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.' We ourselves *heard* this Voice that came from Heaven [And when did this happen?] when we were with Him on the sacred mountain"** {1:16-18}. This is what we have in this section.

Jesus has just announced to them in v. 22 His rejection by the religious leaders, His Crucifixion at the hands of earthly powers, and His Resurrection in the hands of His *own* power. Matthew tells us, immediately following Peter's declaration that, **"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God"** in 16:16 and Jesus' own declaration that

upon this kind of living faith He would **“build”** His **“Church”** {*future* tense, by the way} and **“the Gates of Hades will *not* overcome it,”** the Gates of Hell itself **“will not prevail against it!”** {18c RSV}, **“from *that time on* Jesus began to explain to His Disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the Law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to Life,”** v. 21. This was a prophecy concerning the Messiah’s primary Mission for which Peter is going to rebuke Jesus, and in return receive one himself! **“Get *behind* Me, Satan! ...You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”** {Mk. 8:33}. I.e., “Peter, you see in this situation only what *you* want and not what *God* wills!” **And don’t we often do the same?** We could so easily say, “Poor, pathetic Peter,” if we weren’t exactly like him.

Now, keep the ideas of offensive warfare against the Gates of Hell and the Messiah’s ultimate Mission in front of your minds. It’s going to be important to our understanding in just a moment. This divine event, what we know theologically as ‘the Transfiguration,’ is going to do three things: *confirm* Peter’s confession {9:20}; *fulfill* Jesus’ prediction {v. 27}; and be the *prelude* to Jesus’ Passion {v. 22}.

### **Taunting His Enemies.**

Luke say’s, **“About eight days after Jesus said this,”** about a week later. Matthew and Mark both have **“after six days,”** but Luke is taking into account the time Jesus spent teaching in this region, and the day on which the Transfiguration took place. **“He took Peter, John, and James with Him.”** You have the Brotherhood of the Twelve; this is what we might call the Circle of the Three. This is a smaller, tighter, more intimate group which Jesus takes with Him into some crucial situations, of which this is *right up* there at the top. **“And went up onto a mountain to pray.”** Only Luke includes the initial *why*, but he doesn’t give us a lot of detail as to *where*. Only that the feeding of the **“five thousand men”** {9:4} — the only miracle of Jesus’ to be recorded in all four of the Gospels — took place near a town called **“Bethsaida”** to which He and the Disciples had withdrawn to be **“by themselves”** {v. 10}. So, we turn to the other Gospels to fill in the details. Matthew has, **“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi...”** {16:13a}; Mark say’s, **“Jesus and His Disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi....”** {8:27a}.

Now, Bethsaida is on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, on the NE corner. From here they traveled due N for quite some distance to arrive at Caesarea Philippi. Tourist guides in Israel today will tell you Mt. Tabor, SW of the Sea of Galilee, is the traditional site of the Transfiguration. But Mt. Tabor is a hill, around 1900 ft., and Mark tells us, **“Jesus led them up a *high* mountain, where they were all alone; there He was transfigured before them”** {9:2}. The aorist passive indicative of *metamorphoo* means ‘be *transformed*, in a moment of Time, so that what is hidden and *inward* becomes

*visible* and undeniable.’ Mt. Tabor is also a *long* ways in the opposite direction. But in Caesarea Philippi there *is* a high mountain — called Mt. Hermon — about 9000 ft. high, in fact. This region is where He chooses to ask them the most critical question of all Time: **“Who do *you* say I am?”** And it’s here He chooses to announce the suffering of the Messiah, His death on behalf of fallen humanity, and His Resurrection to Life which He will share freely with any who believe in Him. **But why here?** Of all the places where Jesus had wandered and worked for the Kingdom of His Father, *why here?* Let me give you a couple of things from History and geography and see if we can’t paint the picture.

- I. In the first ten chs. of the Book of Genesis you have three satanic attempts to destroy the human Race and prevent the **“Seed of the woman”** {Gen. 3:15} from being born: **the temptation and Fall of Man in Genesis 3; the Angelic Infiltration in Genesis 6; and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11** {which chronologically precedes the Table of Nations in Genesis 10}. We’ve studied Genesis 6 in the past, so we know what took place there. Here’s something you may not know. It comes from the Book of Enoch {ironically, *ch. 6* (vv. 1-2 and 5-6)}. Enoch writes,

It came to pass in those days that the Children of Men multiplied and beautiful and fair daughters were born to them. The angels, the Sons of the Heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another, ‘Come, let us choose wives from among the Children of Men and beget children.’ ...So all together they bound themselves by an oath. There were two hundred, total, that descended in the days of Jared [the father of Enoch] upon *Ardis*, the *summit* of Mt. *Hermon*. They called it Mt. Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by oath upon it.

- II. Mt. Hermon was the northernmost boundary of what was known to the people of Israel as the region of *Bashan*. Bashan was part of the land east of the Jordan River assigned to the half-tribe of Manasseh, which included the Golan Heights, the **“whole region of Argob, Og’s kingdom,”** which kingdom included sixty cities and numerous **“unwalled villages”** {Deut. 3:4-5}.

There are two important things to know about Bashan. [i] Bashan is where the Rephaim dwelt, a race of giants of whom Og was the last remnant. As Moses said in Deuteronomy 3:3b of Og and his army, **“We struck them down, leaving *no* survivors.... We *completely* destroyed them, as we had done with Sihon king of Heshbon [another Amorite king, possibly a giant], destroying *every* city— men, women, and children,”** v. 6. And for good reason.

And [ii] Bashan was the seat of Baal worship in the northern kingdom of Israel. There is a phenomenal level of degeneracy which existed in the worship of Baal as the fertility god: accompanying the din of sexual frenzy in the rites of Baal and Asherah / Astarte in which lesbianism, homosexuality, bestiality and pedophilia

were commonplace, was human sacrifice, especially *child* sacrifice.

This cult, in some form or fashion, spread from one end of the Mediterranean world to the other. At the eastern end you have the Canaanite tribes, from whom came the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon; at the western end you have the Carthaginians, a powerful Phoenician people who worshipped Molech and rivaled Rome for mastery of the Mediterranean at one point in History. In Babylonia and Assyria were Ishtar and Tammuz {Dumuzi}; in Egypt, Isis and Osiris; in Greece it is Eros and Aphrodite; in Rome, Cupid and Venus.

The Phallic Cult was celebrated as the Cult of Dionysus, the Greek god of the vine, the god of ritual madness and religious ecstasy. He was known to the Romans as *Bacchus*, thus the term 'Bacchanalian' for a party of unrestrained excess and licentiousness. The women of Greece used to celebrate Dionysus, like the Egyptian women in their version, by dragging through the streets a cart upon which rode a giant wooden phallus. They would then retreat to the hills and wooded areas above the cities and practice a frenzied form of worship {known as *bakcheia*- 'Bacchic frenzy, revelry'} which culminated in demon possession and the tearing and eating of a live animal raw, usually a goat.

In Greek Mythology, Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, Semele {and thus a demi-god}; he's also a god who dies and rises again. I.e., he is a god of 'resurrection,' and like Baal, who is often seen riding a bull, Dionysus is linked mythologically with the *bull*, the *phallus*, and the *serpent*.

III At the base of Mt. Hermon, in the city of *Paneas*, was a grotto dedicated to the Greek god Pan. You can still see it today: the mouth of a watery cave which the ancients believed had no bottom. A bottomless pit, if you will. **They called it the Gates of Hell.** Jesus walks right up to the Gate, knocks on the door and say's, "Here I am. Take your best shot." In Paneas there was also a massive temple dedicated to none other than our old friend Bacchus {in whose procession Pan was often seen}.

IV. The city of Caesarea Philippi {Caesarea *Paneas*} — in the exact same bend in the river which forms the headwaters of the Jordan — was known to the ancient Israelites as the city of "**Dan.**" When Jeroboam set up the "**two golden calves**" as "**gods**" of the northern kingdom for Israel to worship, he put one in "**Bethel, and the other**" where? You got it {1 Kgs. 12:28-30}.

There is a sense in which Jesus is standing upon the very seat of Satan's Throne and saying, "The Kingdom is coming, and there is *nothing* you can do to stop it! You tried to subvert the prophecy of a Redeemer by corrupting the human race, defiling their DNA. But you didn't, and here I am. You tried to twist the souls of men into

*dependence* on you through Nimrod at the Tower, but I tore it down and scattered the nations. You tried to *deceive* the nations into worship of you, by falsehoods and fables, sorcery and astrology, the *distortion* of their true History into a garbled mass of mythology, idol after idol after idol, one false god after another, all of them fashioned in your image. And yet *here* I stand, the one true God in human flesh, the Creator Incarnate, the Warrior come to slay the Dragon. Come and get Me... if you dare."

**Jesus is taunting the enemy to kill Him, knowing *full well* His Death is the only way the Eternal Exodus can ever occur.** The Lord of All Life is daring the one who "holds the power of death" {Heb. 2:14} to kill Him because He *knows* His Death is the only way the Eternal Exodus can ever come to fruition. The author of Hebrews declares, Jesus "shared in" our "humanity, so that *by His death* He might destroy him who holds the power of death— that is, the devil— and *free* those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" {2:14-15}.

### **An Eternal Exodus.**

Now, v. 29, "As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning [Mark say's in 9:3 as the metamorphosis was happening, 'His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than *anyone* in the world could bleach them.']. [Then] **Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus** [According to Jewish tradition, "*both* these figures were expected to return in some sense *before* the time of the End"1. ]."

Any Jew reading this text in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century, any Gentile familiar with the *Septuagint*, would immediately see the parallels in this passage with those of Moses and the Exodus. **Let me give you three.** [i] Moses ascends Mt. Sinai to see the glory of the Lord; Jesus ascends Mt. Hermon to reveal His glory *as* the Lord. [ii] Moses' face shone so brightly the People could not look upon him when he returned from *Yahweh's* presence {Ex. 34:29-35}; Jesus' face shone "**as bright as a flash of lightning,**" so "**dazzling white**" the Disciples could not look at His divine presence for long. **Moses' face reflected God's glory; Jesus' face revealed God's glory.** One, a reflection; the other, a revelation. [iii] Moses ascends Sinai to meet with the Lord and receive the Word of the *Law*; the Lord ascends Hermon to meet with Moses and Elijah before His glorious Work of *Grace*! I want you to see this through the eyes and ears of a 1<sup>st</sup> century reader familiar with the Torah. **The parallels are unmistakable.**

Notice what Luke say's in the second half of v. 31, "**They spoke** [Imperfect indicative = 'were speaking to Him'] **about His departure....**" The Greek word is *exodos*, literally- 'a going *out*' or 'going *away*,' i.e., His exit from Earth and return to the Father, His resumption of the "**glory**" He "**had with**" *Abba* "**before the world began**" {Jn. 17:5b}. *Exodos* was a term sometimes used of the '*close* of one's *career*,' their '*final fate*.' I believe

by using this term Luke shows us the Holy Spirit linking together God's deliverance of His People out of slavery in Egypt with the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension of His Son, by which deliverance from the slave market of sin, redemption from our tyranny to death and the devil, would be achieved for all Mankind. In the same way Moses, who **"was faithful in *all* God's House"** {Heb. 3:2b}, led the Israelites out of 400 years of bondage and oppression, so Christ who is the **"Son *over* God's House"** {3:6a} would soon lead all those who live by faith, who choose to stake their lives in faith on the faithfulness of God, to freedom from darkness and death forevermore. **And if that's not Hallelujah-worthy, I don't know what is!**

### **Jesus Fulfills the Law and the Prophets.**

**"They were speaking to Him about His *Exodus* ...which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem,"** v. 31c. There are a couple of things we can learn here.

- I. **This theme, of the culmination of Messiah's Mission and Ministry coming at Jerusalem, appears over and over from this point on — Luke 9:51 and 53; 13:33; 17:11; and 18:31.**

It's interesting to see the two key figures from Israel's history who appear alongside our Lord are Moses, whose body God personally took care of {Deut. 34:6}, and Elijah, who was taken into Heaven by a whirlwind and chariots of fire {2 Kgs. 2:11}. **No one ever saw either of these men die.**

- II. **Moses was a type of the divine Deliverer {*tupos*}; Jesus would *be* the divine Deliverer, the Redeemer of all Mankind {*antitupos*}.**

Moses was the human author and giver of the Law; Elijah stands as the greatest prophet of Old Testament times, the representative of all those who spoke to the People on behalf of the Lord.

- III **In Moses and Elijah, you have both the Law and the Prophets, the entirety of Old Testament revelation, all the sacred Scriptures of the Hebrew people represented. And what did Jesus say in Matthew 5:17? "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law *or* the Prophets; I have not come to *abolish* them but to *fulfill* them. ...Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until *everything* is accomplished,"** v. 18. And when the Son of God threw back His head and cried out on the Cross, **"It is finished!"** {Jn. 19:30}, everything *was* accomplished.

Paul in Romans 10 said, **"Christ is the *end* of the Law [Why?] so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes,"** v. 4. You can live by the Law if you want, but it's a death sentence. As Paul told the Galatians, **"All who rely on**

observing the Law [for their righteousness before God] are under a *curse*, for it is written [Deut. 27:26]: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do *everything* written in the Book of the Law’ {3:10}.

IV. Jesus is the Reality the Law could only hint at {Heb. 8-10}; He is the fulfillment of every Messianic hope, prophecy, and expectation. He alone has fulfilled the promises of God to the OT Saints. As the author of Hebrews said, “The Law is only a *shadow* of the good things that are coming— not the *realities* themselves. For this reason it can *never*, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship” {10:1}. *It* can’t, but *Jesus* can. The Law can’t make us perfect, but Jesus can; the Law can’t lead us to a place of deeper intimacy with *Abba*, but Jesus can.

V. The Old Covenant of Law was lived out perfectly *by* Him; the New Covenant of Grace came into being *through* Him. There is no other member of the human Race about whom this could be said. John 1:17, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and Truth”— and these in perfect balance, impeccable equilibrium— “came through Jesus Christ.”

#### *Abba’s Chosen Son.*

Luke, in v. 32, say’s, “Peter and his companions were very sleepy [Which seems to be the case anytime Jesus enters into serious prayer, intimate communion with His *Abba* {Lk. 22:45}.], but when they became fully awake, they *saw* [in this moment in Time] His glory and the two men standing with Him.” The 3<sup>rd</sup> pl., aorist active indicative of *eidon* means- ‘to *perceive* with the eyes,’ and to see implies to *experience*. I.e., “They perceived the ‘glory’ of His Deity shining *through* His humanity {*metamorphoo*}!”

“As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to Him, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters— one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,’” vv. 28-33a. Perhaps Peter is thinking in his mind of how the embryonic Hebrew nation dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness as the Presence of the Lord lead them in the cloud and dwelt in their midst. Luke’s commentary at the end of v. 33 is, “He did *not* know what he was saying.” Well, what he didn’t know he was about to find out!

V. 34 tells us, “While he was still speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them,” that is, Jesus and Moses and Elijah. We know clouds in Scripture are often a symbol of the divine Presence: the Lord led His People through the wilderness by a “pillar of cloud” during the day {Ex. 13:21-22}; it was a cloud which came down on Mt. Sinai to deliver the Law to Moses {19:9 and 16}; and a cloud of divine glory which rested over the Holiest Place of the Tabernacle {40:38}. “And they were *afraid* as they entered



the cloud. A Voice came from the cloud saying, “This is *My* Son; whom I have chosen....” Matthew and Mark have, “whom I *love*.” One way you could translate this last phrase in Luke is, ‘the Chosen One,’ echoing the prophet Isaiah who said in 42:1, “Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My *Chosen* One in whom I delight....”

I want you to get this little point of theology. **Jesus is the Chosen One, Jesus is the Elect One, and *all* election relates to Him.** I.e., *we* are chosen *in* the Chosen One, elect in *His* election {Eph. 1:4-6}. What did Paul say to the Ephesians about the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”? “For He *chose* us in Him before the Creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In *love* He predestined us to be adopted as His Sons [Notice:] *through* Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us *in the One* He loves” {1:4-6}. Do you see it? Four times in three vv.: “in Him... in love... through Christ... in the One He loves.”

*Abba* boldly declares for the Three to know then, and the rest of us to hear in the pages of His Word, “**This is My Son, whom I love... My Chosen One, in whom I delight; listen to Him!**,” v. 35. Again, immediately the minds of most 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews would return to Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses promises the People One greater than he would arise. This was a well-known Messianic prophecy among the Hebrews. “**The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to Him.**” Did they? Not the majority, not the whole of His nation, for as John declared in His Gospel, “**He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him**” {1:11}.

“When the Voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone.” Then Luke closes by saying, “The Disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one *at that time* what they had seen,” v. 36. They “told no one” because in Mark’s words, “Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead” {9:9}.

### The Strongest Statement Ever Made.

Immediately following Peter’s *Abba*-inspired answer, “**You are the *Christ*, the Son of the Living God,**” Jesus takes the Three up a very high mountain and reveals to them the glory of the King and His Kingdom. In a very specific place, and on a very specific mountain, Jesus confirms His ‘eternal identity’ and reveals His ‘eternal divinity.’ Why this glimpse of the glorious Kingdom of God on Mt. Hermon? Because, as Enoch tells us and the ancients believed, “the summit of Mt. Hermon” is the place where the fallen angels of Genesis 6 {200 of them} descended in the days of Jared. Mt. Hermon was also the northernmost boundary of the region of Bashan, and Bashan was the centre of Baal worship among Israel and her Canaanite neighbors. Where the Jews failed

to fully destroy the Canaanite nations and their abominable worship of Baal, it came back to haunt them. **Every time.**

**Once again, Jesus is making a statement, the strongest one ever made.** He is standing on the very seat of Satan's Throne and saying, "The *Kingdom* is coming and there is nothing you can do to stop it!" If there was *any* doubt among the human or angelic realms about His divine identity, there is *none* now! He is telling the enemy, "Nothing you've done has prevented Me from coming— not the Fall of Man, not a hybrid-Humanity, not an Empire of arrogance {Gen. 3; 6; and 11}. *Nothing*. And here I stand, the Creator Incarnate. Come and get Me ...if you dare."

### **Finale.**

So, what can we learn from this phenomenal passage and the demonic encounter which follows on its heels {vv. 37-45}?

**Sooner or later— and usually the former— no matter how glorious the experience or how powerful the time of prayer, we *all* have to come down from the Mountain.** And waiting for us in the Valley is darkness and despair, suffering and sorrow, the evils and the arrogance of an enemy who does not sleep, who needs no rest, desires no food, thirsts for no water, and is determined to destroy. **This is the Battle raging behind the scenes, this is Life in a world at War.**

But the beauty behind even this is: we *had* this 'mountaintop experience,' we dove into the depths of *Abba's* love, we caught a glimpse of Jesus' glory, we tasted of His grace, were overcome by His power, for *one* purpose. **This singular purpose is to prepare our hearts for the Valley— the Valley of the Shadow of Death and disillusionment, the Shadow of Secrecy and shame our enemy loves to labor in.** Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2b said, "we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use *deception*, nor do we *distort* the Word of God...." We have seen the "Light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of" Jesus "Christ" {4:6b} so we might dispel the darkness and blind the eyes of the unbelieving, so we might "resist the devil" {Jms. 4:7a} and send him scurrying into the night!

Whatever these great gifts are, and however many we've been given over the course of a lifetime, whether we recognized them at the time or not, they were given us for a *reason*. That we put them to *use* in the service of our souls and for the healing of our friends and family. You can't live on the mountaintop, though long for it we may, and you dare not dwell in the Valley. Between the two is a Garden, a place where we can remain, abide, dwell indefinitely, a place in the "shadow of His wings" where mercy and grace abounds. It is the "secret place" of the Most High, where He will "shelter" us in "His Tent" and "keep" us "safe ...in the Day of Trouble" {Pss. 27:5 and 31:20}.

<sup>1</sup> : Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p.