

SERMON NOTES

Transfiguration

Synaxis Gospel
Matthew 16:13-17:13

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE SON OF MAN

INTRODUCTION

With this reading, Matthew recorded a new phase of the life of Christ: the last year before His crucifixion. Jesus has been rejected by the religious leaders and rulers. Our Lord used this last year to prepare the disciples for their future mission after His resurrection and ascension to the Father. Our reading today is quite long and covers two separate events. However, both events reveal the answer to the question, "Who is the Son of Man?"

SYNAXIS READING

Matthew 16:13-17:13

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

"I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.

"For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and WILL THEN RECOMPENSE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves.

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud,

saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!"

And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.

And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."

Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

NOTES

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

"Caesarea Philippi (Caesarea of Philip) was rebuilt and enlarged by this son of Herod the Great. Its name had been Panias in honor of the nature god Pan worshipped there . . . but was changed to Caesarea in honor of the then-reigning Caesar Tiberius."¹ It is located at the main source of the Jordan River near Mt. Harmon, and is not to be confused with Caesarea located on the coast.

The Son of Man is a term believed to be derived from the vision of Daniel 7:13-14. In the vision, Daniel saw "one like a Son of Man" Who came on the clouds of heaven (an expression of Deity), and received the sovereignty of the kingdom. The Son of Man is the Divine King, and all the peoples, nations, and men of every language will serve Him. His kingdom is everlasting.²

The disciples understood that Jesus used the title to refer to Himself. Indirectly, Jesus was asking, "Who do the people say that I am?"

¹ Merrill F. Unger *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967) p.503

² Some scholars believe that the Jews of Jesus' day had not yet connected this mysterious Personage of Daniel's vision, the Son of Man, with the Messiah (the Christ).

And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

John the Baptist was, from birth, the designated forerunner or herald of the Messiah (the Christ, the great foretold King in the prophecies). His role was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. The ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas, had executed John. Guilty and superstitious, Herod Antipas believed that Jesus was John, risen from the dead.³

Elijah who lived about 874-853 BC is a prophet of the Lord whose acts are recorded in 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 2. His most famous act was the confrontation with Jezebel’s prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, when Elijah’s sacrifice was consumed by fire from heaven. This event proved to the people that the LORD was the true God. It was followed by a torrential rainstorm that ended three years of punishing drought. Elijah never suffered death; he was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. It was prophesied that Elijah would return to prepare the way of the Lord, before the great day of His appearance at the Temple.⁴

Jeremiah was one of the writing prophets (the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations). His ministry was from 627 to 586 BC. He prophesied the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews, which lasted seventy years, and ended their flirtation with Baal and Queen of the Heavens idolatry. He foretold the coming of the Messiah.⁵

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Simon Peter, one of the three men in the inner circle of our Lord’s disciples, was born Simon Bar-jona (Simon son of Jona) but was nicknamed Peter by Jesus when Simon became a disciple. He was the most outspoken of the twelve, and was a natural leader.

The Christ is the English translation of Χριστός (Christos) that translates the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Messiah) or Anointed One. Every king of Israel was anointed with oil to signify God’s choice of him to rule. One could say, then, that *the Christ* means *the king selected by God*.

Son of the living God is an extension of *Son of God*, which is another way of saying *the Christ*. Kings of Israel were given the title *the Son of God* at their coronation, at which time Psalm 2 was recited. “Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten you.” It was a title of kingship as God’s vice regent. Other neighboring countries also called their kings *son of god*, but the gods of those countries were false gods. The living God is the true God. Peter made that distinction.

Because Adam and Eve were the first rulers of the earth, Adam was referred to as *son of God* in Luke 3:38. Angels have their own designated areas of rule and so they are called, *sons of God*.⁶

Peter, no doubt, realized that Jesus was more than a mere man. He had seen Jesus do things that only God can do—he had seen His exercise of authority over nature and over spirits. Later, after the Resurrection,

³ Mark 5:14-16 also cites what the people were saying about Jesus, that He was Elijah or one of the prophets. It was this same Herod Antipas who would conduct one of the trials of Jesus before the crucifixion (Luke 23:8-15)

⁴ Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6

⁵ Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-16.

⁶ Job 1:6. Because this title for rulers, *son of God*, is used of angels as well as human beings there has been confusion as to which is meant in certain passages of Scripture. For example: Unger (p.48) has interpreted *the sons of God* who married the daughters of men as angels in Genesis 6:1-4. However, Jesus revealed that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:30), so the term must refer to human rulers who, attracted by the beauty of the daughters of their subjects, became polygamists. In support of this interpretation (in contrast to Unger’s), the nearest antecedent to the phrase “they were mighty heroes, men of renown” refers to these rulers, not to their sons as is interpreted by those who believe *the sons of God* were angels in Genesis 6:1-4. It literally reads: “The sons of God went unto the daughters of men and they (f.) bore to them (m.). They (m.) were mighty heroes, who of old were men of renown.

Peter and all the disciples would realize that In Jesus' case, He is *Son of God* in a far deeper sense than the other kings of Israel, for He is actually God in human form. However, this statement went beyond Peter's natural observations.

And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Simon Barjona was Peter's proper name. *Bar* is the Aramaic form of *ben* which means *son*. Peter was the son of Jona. Jona was a derivative of the name John that is in Hebrew a form of the verb to be gracious, or to show favor. By using Peter's last name, perhaps Jesus was subtly underscoring the fact that God had shown Peter exceptional grace in the revelation.

Flesh and blood is a Hebraism for human nature. Peter did not get this revelation from men, but from God.

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

Πέτρος (Peter) means *stone* and is a masculine term. Πέτρα means *rock* and is a feminine term. Jesus is using a play on words here. He does not say that He will build His church on the stone (Peter) but on the rock. The truth of the statement that Peter (the stone) made was the unshakable rock that will support the church: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

“My church” is the congregation of His people. His church consists of those who belong to Him, and are sometimes referred to as His sheep. Hades is the place of the underworld, the place of the dead. They will not be overpowered by the gates of Hades. As death could not hold Him, it will not be able to hold His. Our resurrection is certain. Another view is that evil represented by the “gates of Hades” will not be able ultimately to overpower the true followers of Jesus Christ. Both are true.

“I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This may indicate the authority Peter was given to be the first to preach the Gospel—capsulated in his statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God—to the Jews, after the Holy Spirit descended upon the Church at Pentecost. He was the first to take the Gospel to the Gentiles as well, and he convinced the Jewish leaders of the Church in Jerusalem to accept the Gentile believers as equal recipients of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, Peter can be seen as opening the kingdom of heaven to those who accept the faith.

Bind on earth—bound in heaven, loose on earth—loosed in heaven are Jewish terms of legislative authority to forbid or to allow. Peter, along with the other Apostles, was given authority to make legislative decisions. An example of this is the rulings of the Council in Jerusalem [Acts 15].

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

The crowd had already attempted to make Him their political king by force, after He fed the five thousand.⁷ This was not the proper time to announce that He is the Christ.

From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Jesus began preparing them for His death at Jerusalem in the following year. But He also told them of the Resurrection.

⁷ John 6:15

However, just as the disciples refused to believe He would die, so the promise of the Resurrection was not one that remained in their memories, until after it happened.

Jerusalem was the capital city, the seat of the religious authorities, and the site of the Temple where sacrifices for sins were made. It was appropriate that Jerusalem should be the place of His sacrifice.

The elders were traditionally the heads of important families who acted as judges. The chief priests were members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body or court. They were former High Priests or those belonging to the family of the High Priest (who presided over the Sanhedrin). “The scribes were copyists of Holy Scripture, intimately conversant with Mosaic Law, hence called lawyers.”⁸

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

One does not rebuke one’s superior. Peter was totally out of line. But Peter and the disciples could not understand this talk of death. They, like their fellow countrymen, correctly believed that the Messiah would rule forever. What they did not understand was that the Messiah, the Christ, was also the Servant of the LORD prophesied in Isaiah 53. He would die for the sins of the people before He was exalted to the throne, upon which he will rule forever.⁹

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

“Get behind Me!” is another way of saying, “Get out of my sight!”

Satan means adversary, one who opposes. Jesus accused Peter of playing the part of Satan, the devil. Satan tried to cause Jesus to sin and had failed during Jesus’ forty days of fasting in the wilderness.

A stumbling block is something that causes one to sin. It would be a sin for Jesus to avoid the death that was His Father’s will for Him.

God’s interests vs. man’s interests refers to God’s plan for Jesus (His death for our sins), in contrast to the political interests of the nation that would like to see the Messiah come and exalt their nation over the other nations. Peter was hoping Jesus was going to ascend the political throne and do just that, and as His disciples, they would be exalted as well.

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Jesus came to give His life for others; His disciples (His students) must do likewise. The requirements to be His disciple are steep. If we want to “come after Him,” that is, if we want to be His student, His disciple, we must be willing to do three things. We must think of our own good last. We must be willing to sacrifice everything, even our own life, for His sake. We must be willing to be obedient to His commands.

“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.

If preserving our physical lives becomes more important to us than Christ, we will lose our souls. But the one willing to sacrifice even his physical life for our Lord will keep his soul. We must never value anything more than we value God. To do so is a form of idolatry.

⁸ Unger, p. 462.

⁹ Isaiah 52:13-53:12

**“For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?
Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**

Nothing in this world is worth the loss of one’s soul to eternal death.

**“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels;
and WILL THEN RECOMPENSE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.**

Here, Jesus connects the title *Son of Man* with the divine ruler of Daniel 7:13-14.

The quotation in caps is found in Psalm 28:4; 62:12 (there the LORD is the one recompensing); similarly, the idea is found in Job 34:11 where the statement refers to God; finally, the idea is found in Jeremiah 17:10 where it is quoting the LORD). Jesus takes these references from the Old Testament to refer to Himself. This is a statement of Deity on Jesus’ part; He is the LORD of the references.

Jesus will eventually be the exalted ruler, and then everyone will be given their just due, according to the works. For the worker of evil, it is loss of God’s Presence. For those who do ‘good’—receive Christ as their Savior and obediently follow Him—there will be eternal life with Him.

**“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not
taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”**

As we shall see, those men would be Peter, James and John, who would witness the transfiguration of our Lord and see the glory of the Divine King.

**And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and
brought them up to a high mountain by themselves.**

Caesarea Philippi was in the vicinity of Mt. Harmon; perhaps this was the high mountain.

This experience was recalled by Peter as he wrote his letter, 2 Peter 1:16-18.

**And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His
garments became as white as light.**

“Was transfigured” is the translation of μεταμορφώθη which means He was metamorphosed; His physical form changed. His form had changed also before, when He became a man. St. Paul speaks thus of our Lord: “although He existed in the form of God, . . . He emptied Himself and taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men, And being found in appearance as a man . . .”¹⁰

When St. John saw Him in a vision on the island of Patmos many years after our Lord’s Ascension, He looked different again, but the description has elements of the same form the disciples saw in the event of our reading. “His face was like the sun, shining in its strength.”¹¹ Later in the Patmos vision, John saw the angels and saints worshipping Him on the throne of God.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him¹².

Moses, the leader of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage and the receiver of the Law on Mt. Sinai, had suffered physical death; but Elijah (see above) had not, but had been transported to heaven in a chariot of

¹⁰ Philippians 2:6-8

¹¹ Revelation 1:16

¹² Luke (9:31) reports that they were speaking about the ἐξοδος (exodus) of our Lord which He would accomplish at Jerusalem in the near future. The use of this word, although it can refer to death, can also mean departure, and provides a subtle reference to the exodus of the Hebrew people, under the leadership of Moses, from Egypt, and their slavery there. That exodus has always provided a picture of our spiritual exodus from the bondage of sin, which was accomplished by Jesus for us on the Cross.

fire. Together they represented the Law and the Prophets, the Holy writings that had foretold our Lord's coming. Now, they talked with Him about His death that He would accomplish in Jerusalem.¹³ The disciples needed to see Jesus glorified, and hear that His death was necessary from these witnesses.

And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

As usual, it was Peter who spoke up, even though he was confused.¹⁴ The tabernacles were booths of foliage, which the people lived in once a year to remember the forty years that Moses led their forefathers through the desert.¹⁵ However, the Feast of Tabernacles was a feast that will also be celebrated in the Messianic Kingdom.¹⁶

Perhaps Peter thought the transfiguration was ushering in the kingdom. If so, he had, as usual, not listened to the discussion between Jesus and Moses and Elijah about the forthcoming death of Jesus. He has jumped immediately to the age of the kingdom. He needed to stop pushing his own ideas, and listen to Jesus. Moreover, Moses and Elijah were in no way equals with Jesus, but were His servants. Peter should not have put them, by his offer, on the same level as Jesus.

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!"

It was often the case, when God made His Presence known to the Hebrew people, that He used a glory filled cloud to veil Himself, so that the people would not die. During the forty-year trek through the desert with Moses, the Israelites were accompanied by the Presence of the LORD in a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.¹⁷ Sometimes He would speak to them from the cloud.¹⁸

No doubt, God spoke to the disciples in their own language, Aramaic, not in the Greek of the Gospels. Thus, when each writer recorded the statement, he chose to translate it in the way that, in his opinion, best expressed the thought. Therefore, when Luke recounted this event, He decided to put God's statement this way, "This is My Son, the One Who has been chosen, listen to Him."¹⁹

And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.

This is the typical reaction of persons who physically hear the Father, or see the glorified Christ.

And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.

Jesus, apparently, had resumed His familiar form and eased their fears. The vision was over.

¹³ Luke 9:31

¹⁴ Luke 9:33; Mark 9:6 records that Peter did not know what to say, because they were so afraid. So, this is what he came up with,

¹⁵ Leviticus 23:42-43

¹⁶ Zechariah 14:16-19

¹⁷ Exodus 13:21-22; 40:34-35; Leviticus 16:2

¹⁸ Ex. 24:15-16; Ex. 34:5

¹⁹ Luke 9:35. Although the English translates Luke's Greek in the same way that Mark and Matthew have the statement (as Peter does as well in 2 Peter 1:17), Luke does not use the word *ὁ αγαπητός* 'beloved,' he uses a participle *ὁ εκλελεγμένος* that means 'the one who has been chosen.' This may shed some light on how 'beloved' should be nuanced.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

Again, Jesus used the title, *Son of Man*, for Himself. Now, it should have been very clear why He used the term for Himself. The vision was conformation of Jesus’ identity as the divine Messiah/Christ/King. After the Resurrection, the disciples would be allowed to proclaim this fact.

And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

The scribes correctly interpreted the Scriptures on this point. But, since the disciples now see that Jesus is already the promised king, the fact that Elijah did not first appear and announce Him is a puzzle.

And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

The actual Elijah will come before the King ascends the throne of David, and the prophet will fulfill his mission of calling the people back to God, just as he did on Mt. Carmel. However, there has already been one like Elijah who has announced the Christ. He was not recognized as a type of Elijah, and King Herod Antipas had had him executed. Jesus will not be recognized either as the Christ, and will likewise be executed at the behest of the rulers of the people.

Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

APPLICATION

Today is the day the Armenians celebrate Vartavar. The name comes from an ancient pagan festival celebrated before the Armenians adopted Christianity as their national religion in AD 301. Originally, Vartavar honored either Astgheek, the goddess of love and beauty, or Anaheet, the goddess of purity. The celebration uses symbols of both—roses and doves (or pigeons) for Astgheek and water for Anaheet. Hoping to make conversion easier, it was part of the strategy of the early church fathers, in both the east and the west, to Christianize the more important pagan holidays with a reinterpretation of their meaning. Vartavar became the Feast of the Transfiguration at the direction of Gregory the Illuminator.

The customs of Vartavar are a lot of fun for kids of all ages. It’s a time in Armenia when people relax, forget dignity and enjoy throwing buckets of water on anyone and everyone.

However, as we scroll back in time to the days of our Lord on earth, while the Armenians were dousing each other with water in their own country in celebration of their pagan goddesses, Jesus, accompanied by three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, were climbing to the top of Mt. Harmon near the Jordan River. There, Jesus met with two Old Testament saints, Moses and Elijah, for an important conference concerning His approaching crucifixion for the sins of our people and of all mankind.

Peter, James, and John belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. A week earlier they had been with the other disciples, when Jesus had asked them two questions: "Who do the people say that 'the Son of Man' is?" And, "Who do you say that I am?" The first question was easy. Although Jesus used that mysterious title, *Son of Man*, they knew He meant Himself. They also knew what the crowds, who followed Jesus around to see the miracles and listen to His teaching, were saying. They had heard them say, "This must be John the Baptist raised from the dead." Even King Herod Antipas, who had had John executed, was saying that. Others disagreed, and claimed Jesus must be one of the other famous prophets of long ago, come to life again. So, that question was easy to answer.

However, the second question, the one asking for their opinion, "Who do you say that I am?" was more difficult. The disciples, at least the twelve closest to Him, had been with Jesus since immediately after His baptism by John. Two, at least, had been John's disciples, and had been directed to Jesus by the Baptist himself. "This is the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world," John had told them. So, they had left John, and followed Jesus. They had seen all His miracles—just lately they had witnessed the feeding of thousands of people from a few loaves of bread and five little fish. They had heard him teach with absolute authority, with His knowledge putting to shame the highly touted scribes and Pharisees, those proud teachers of the Law.

But what could they say? They hoped He was the great king all the prophets foretold would come some day to take back their kingdom and defeat all their enemies. That king would reign forever, unlike all those who had ruled them before the Babylonian captivity 500 years earlier, when God had punished them for their idolatry and wickedness. If Jesus were this great king—and all His miracles seemed to point to it—then they, as His closest followers, would be riding high as favorites of the court. But did they know this for sure?

Peter did, and he said so, "You are the Christ (the Anointed One) the Son of the living God." All the kings of the Jewish people had been given the title, *Son of God*, at their coronation ceremony. The title recognized that the newly crowned king was ruling as God's vice regent, because God was their true King. Jesus complimented Peter, and told him that only the Father in heaven could have revealed this truth to him. Moreover, that truth—"You are the Christ (the Anointed One) the Son of the living God,"—would become the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ. This spiritual and universal Church consists of only those who truly believe in Him, regardless of the physical church with which they may be affiliated.

Although the Father had revealed it, and Peter believed it, Peter did not yet understand the full extent of that great truth. Peter did not yet understand that, before the great king could ascend His throne, He would have to die for the sins of the world. Otherwise, there could be no people in the king's kingdom. No one laden with sin could enter the kingdom, because the kingdom, of which He is king, is God's kingdom of righteousness. Therefore, the perfectly righteous king would pay the penalty to release His subjects from their sins.

All this was beyond Peter. For when Jesus began to explain His coming death, Peter would have none of it, and rebuked Jesus for even saying such a thing. Peter did not realize that the Servant of God, who would die for the people's sins, spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, was none other

than the prophesied great king. Peter needed more insight, and Jesus planned that he should have it.

Meanwhile, Peter, and all the disciples, needed to know that the path Jesus was leading them up was a difficult one, a costly one. They had visions of empire dancing in their heads; Jesus told them plainly that the cost was His life, and theirs as well, if they chose to follow Him. How could they understand this? They needed to be shown something that they did not yet realize. They needed to know Who the *Son of Man* really is.

Six days later, in the privacy of that remote mountain summit, suddenly Jesus revealed what had been veiled to their eyes. Jesus' form changed. They beheld the brightest light, brighter than the noonday sun, streaming from His face and clothing. It was the light of the glory of God Himself. Moreover, Moses and Elijah were with Him, talking of His *exodus* that must soon be accomplished in Jerusalem. Exodus? That word is used three times in the New Testament: once, here in our reading, once, in the book of Hebrews, referring to the exodus of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, and once, when Peter used it as another way of speaking about his own death, in a letter he wrote years later.

In his confusion, Peter burst out with the only thing he could think of. He asked if he could build three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Who knows why Peter said that silly thing, possibly he thought the kingdom had arrived, and he knew that one of the ways the Exodus was remembered, and the kingdom would be celebrated, would be in booths of beautiful foliage. What was terribly wrong with that request was that it seemed to put Jesus on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah. No one is on an equal footing with our Lord.

Before Peter could say another word, the shining, white light-filled cloud of the glory of God overshadowed them, and the Father Himself spoke to them. "This is My beloved (chosen) Son, in whom I am well pleased. LISTEN TO HIM!" Terrified, the disciples fell down and covered their faces. Only after Jesus resumed His familiar form, touched them, and told them not to be afraid, did they recover from their fright. But now they knew, from the Father's own voice, that Jesus was indeed the great king, but they had seen something more. They had seen that the great king was not just another man, chosen to be king for God; this king possessed the glory that only belongs to God, the glory that the LORD said He would not share with another. He is the LORD Himself.

There are many things we can learn from this account of the transfiguration of our Lord and the preceding reading. Here are three. We can learn that our God bought the people of His kingdom with His own blood. We can learn that until that kingdom is finally established on this earth, those of us who follow Jesus, working for the kingdom, must be prepared to suffer, and even give our lives, for this sacred cause. Finally, we can learn what Peter learned. Our ideas are often mistaken, sometimes faulty; they can lead us away from truth. We must listen to our Lord Who has been revealed in all the glory of God. No man or woman, no saint, however holy, can be compared to Him Who is God. He has given us His written Word; if we would listen to Him, we must study it and obey it.

May we be found to be eager and apt students of our Lord, following wherever He leads, willing to sacrifice even our lives for His sake, and the sake of His kingdom. Then someday, we, too, will join Moses and Elijah in the light from the shining glory of our wonderful Lord and Savior, Who loves us and gave His own life for us.