

Where Do You Find The Real Jesus?

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight I'd like us to turn together to the passage that we read in the Gospel of Luke where we were reading about the great event known as the Transfiguration of Jesus.

We can read again at verse 28. Now, about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up to the mountain to pray.

And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. Now, over the years, a lot of people have asked the question, where do you find the real Jesus?

And that question arises very often out of the view that not everything that the Bible says about Jesus is true. So some people might say, well, the real Jesus was just a good teacher.

Or the real Jesus didn't work miracles. He was just a good example of excellent moral conduct.

Other people might say the real Jesus didn't actually die on the cross and he certainly didn't rise again.

[1 : 09] And so as a result of all these kind of thoughts, people have sometimes argued that the historical Jesus is not the same as the Jesus who's recorded for us in the Bible.

And these kind of views have worked their way into popular culture. It's nothing new. It's something that stretches back across all the ages of history. And even today in books and in films, you get this kind of thing being emphasized.

We have to be ready to respond to that because it's obviously not something that we believe ourselves. And there's lots of reasons why the suggestion that the Jesus of the Bible is not the real Jesus.

There's lots of reasons why that kind of suggestion is unsound. But perhaps most important of all is to recognize the fact that the New Testament constantly refers to eyewitness testimony.

When you look at the Bible, you see that the people who record these things are making it clear that they were there. If you look at the big events of the Bible, have you ever noticed that these incidents all have multiple witnesses?

[2 : 16] So whether it's Jesus' baptism, his miracles, the transfigurations we're reading here, the healings, the betrayal, the trial, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, these were all done in front of witnesses.

That means that it's all open and it's all publicly verifiable. It's not a record of secret activities behind closed doors. The Bible is not asking you to believe unverifiable secrets.

The Bible is actually asking you to simply listen to eyewitness testimony. And that's a really important thing because sometimes you'll hear people say, if I saw a miracle, then I would believe.

And so they doubt the existence of God, they doubt the truth of the Bible, and they say, well, if I could just see a miracle, that would change everything. Why won't God do a miracle like that?

Because then I would believe. Well, just imagine that God did that, okay?

So imagine that tonight something absolutely extraordinary happened here in front of us. And we all saw it and it was undeniable. It would be amazing. And we'd be all thinking, wow, no doubt whatsoever, God has proved himself.

[3 : 27] Imagine that happened. Now imagine it's 50 years from now and your grandchildren come to you and say, I don't believe that a God, and you would say, are you crazy?

50 years ago, I saw something amazing happen that proved that it was the case. And you would expect your grandchildren to believe your eyewitness testimony, wouldn't you?

You would think, surely they'll believe what I'm saying. Well, the truth is, God has done the miracle.

It's called the resurrection, and the New Testament is a record of the eyewitness testimony of that miracle and of the many other remarkable events that led up to it and which followed on afterwards.

And that is recorded for us so that we will know that it's true as well. And all of that's reinforced by the fact that even Jesus' enemies acknowledged that he performed miracles and that he claimed to be the Son of God, because that's the whole reason why they killed him.

So don't ever be intimidated by the argument that says the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the Bible are not the same. The New Testament is a thoroughly reliable collection of multiple eyewitness testimonies.

[4 : 44] So I want to just make that clear at the start, but we're still left with a question, where do you find the real Jesus? In other words, if you want to know who Jesus really is, where do you go?

And there's maybe many answers to that question that we could give, but tonight I want to suggest that if you want to find out who Jesus really is, then you need to go to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now that might seem a bit strange, because when we read through this passage in Luke chapter 9 about what happened on top of that mountain, it all seems a bit unreal.

Jesus' appearance changes. Moses and Elijah seem to appear out of nowhere. A cloud descends and a voice speaks from heaven. None of that is normal. But the astonishing truth is that all of this is giving us a glimpse into what is really true about Jesus, what is really true about the Bible, what is really true about humanity, and what is really true about salvation.

In other words, here we are going to see the real truth about life. And so I want us to think about that a wee bit together, and we're going to look at six things very briefly.

[6 : 11] So I'll keep an eye on the clock. Six things very briefly. So first of all, we see on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, here we see who Jesus really is.

Now whenever you're reading the Bible, it's always important just to notice the little phrases that are thrown in there that seem insignificant. And there's one here, if you look at that verse, you can see at the start there's a very almost innocent looking phrase at the start that's really important.

It says, about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter, and James, and John. That we phrase there eight days after is referring us back to something.

It's referring us back to that great confession that Peter made in verse 20, which Derek read. Jesus had asked the question, who do you say that I am? And Peter had given a marvellous response.

And we've got this eight day gap. And we don't really know what happened in those eight days.

There's no additional details given. But just imagine that you could have bumped into Jesus and his disciples during those eight days.

[7 : 16] What would you have seen? Well you'd have seen a normal looking man named Jesus. And he would have had a group of pretty normal looking people around him.

The Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 53 tells us that there was nothing particularly remarkable about Jesus' appearance. And as for his followers, if anything, they probably looked quite weak and maybe a little bit perplexed.

And you get a walk past that group as they walked along and you wouldn't necessarily have noticed anything different or significant about them.

And that's part of what's involved in Jesus becoming human because his body was a normal human body like yours and like mine. And his appearance was a normal human experience. There was nothing that made him stand out in that way.

And for most of his time here on earth, he lived a pretty normal life. But the truth is that although Jesus looked normal in that sense, the reality is that he is absolutely unique.

[8 : 16] And in taking that human body, there's a sense in which Jesus has come down to a lower level and he has not held on to the status that he truly has.

And all of that means that if you walked past Jesus during these eight days and thought, well, there's a normal man, then you are not seeing the whole truth.

In other words, you're not seeing who Jesus really is. But if you had followed Jesus up this mountain, then you would see the real truth.

Because as we read in these verses, at the top of that mountain, Jesus' face changes. His clothing becomes dazzling white. The imagery here is of extraordinary brightness and whiteness.

In other words, it's a description of stunning glory. And for this moment, the astounding glory of God is seen in the Persian of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 16] And that, of course, should make perfect sense to us for two reasons. Firstly, because Jesus is truly God. He is the Word made flesh. He is God himself dwelling among us.

And secondly, Jesus is truly human. He's the perfect human. And what's the great goal and purpose of humanity?

It's to bear the image of God. And so here on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see who Jesus really is. He is God himself. Within this normal looking man is the astounding glory of God.

And he is the perfect man. He bears the image of God. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature as it's described so brilliantly in Hebrews chapter one.

So this phrase here, after eight days, it's pointing us back to the confession that Peter made in verse 20. Peter had said, you are the Christ of God.

[10:16] Now that's an easy thing to say. It's here on the Mount of Transfiguration that Peter, James and John are seeing what that really means.

Jesus is God himself. Within him is this dazzling glory, this spotless purity, this astonishing splendor. That's who Jesus really is. And I am sure that that's part of the reason why John could say in the beginning of his Gospel, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.

He must have been thinking at least in part about the Mount of Transfiguration when he wrote that. So when you think of Jesus, yes, at one level, remember him walking and talking among normal people in a normal way, but at the same time, we must always think of the Mount of Transfiguration because that is where we see who Jesus really is.

Another thing we see is that here we learn what the Old Testament was really saying. Alongside the dazzling transformation of Jesus' appearance, one of the other really remarkable things about this event is the appearance of two people, Moses and Elijah.

There we have it in verse 30. Two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now, why would these two men appear?

[11:49] What is this telling us? What are we learning? Well, there's a lot we could say, but I just want to highlight really just a simple point that Moses and Elijah are two of the key figures from the Old Testament era.

So you have the whole Bible. We can divide it into two great eras, if you like, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Moses and Elijah are two key figures from that Old Testament era.

Moses was the great leader of God's people at the time of the Exodus when they came out of slavery in Egypt, and he was the means through which God gave his law to his people.

So often we think of Moses, we think of law. Elijah was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, God sent several prophets.

These are basically messengers, spokesmen who communicate God's message to his people.

Elijah was a great prophet who called the people of God back to God's ways and back to God's law.

[12:50] In Elijah's time, Elijah came quite a bit after Moses, in Elijah's time the people had turned away from God. They'd abandoned the law that Moses had given them, and Elijah was calling them back.

So looking back at the Old Testament, these are two of the biggest figures. This is the lawgiver, Elijah the prophet, and yet here we find them talking to Jesus.

And I would simply like to say that that is telling us that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus are friends. Now what is that, what do I mean by that?

Well, what I mean is this. Jesus has not come to abandon what Moses and Elijah fought for in the Old Testament. Moses has not come to replace or correct or contradict the Old Testament.

He has come to fulfill it. And the fact that Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus is showing us that the great words and actions of the key figures in the Old Testament are pointing forward to the coming of Jesus Christ himself.

[13:52] You could almost imagine Peter going up to Moses and Elijah saying, do you know Jesus? And they'd say, of course we do. He's the one that we've been waiting for this whole time.

And these three standing at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration is a powerful demonstration of the fact that the whole Bible fits together. The Old Testament is pointing forward to the coming of Jesus.

It's in him that the law and the prophets find their fulfillment. But there's a really interesting point that's shown to us in the way that Luke records this because it's a clear emphasis in the fact that Jesus is superior to the other two.

You can see that in verse 32. Peter and those who are with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. It's Jesus who has the glory. And Luke makes it very, very clear that he stands out. Peter suggested building a shelter for all three of them.

[15 : 01] And that maybe implies that he saw them as equals, but his request is clearly inappropriate. And when the voice speaks from heaven, there's no mention of Elijah, no mention of Moses.

The focus is entirely on Jesus. And it's all highlighted in the fact that the Old Testament is pointing towards its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. That's what the Old Testament is really all about. And that's something that we always want to remember when we read or when we sing the words of the Old Testament.

The third thing we see is that here at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, we learn what Jesus has really come to do. So in verse 31, we read that Moses and Elijah and Jesus were speaking about a particular topic.

It says there that two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah. Sorry, I missed that one out. We'll go to the next one. I've missed a slide.

Never mind. If I go back, I should have found it. The one I want. There we go. That's the one I want. Okay. Behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who peered in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

[16 : 16] Now that word, departure, is really, really interesting. Does anyone know what that word is in Greek? Don't worry, I'm not testing you. But it's a really interesting word because in Greek, the word that's used is Exodus.

So it says Moses and Elijah were speaking to Jesus about his Exodus. That's a fascinating word because it immediately points us way back to the Old Testament and to the great act of salvation that was performed by God in rescuing his people out of slavery.

But at the same time, it's pointing us forwards because Jesus's Exodus is about to be accomplished at Jerusalem. So Moses, Elijah and Jesus are talking about the fact that in the coming days, Jesus is going to go to Jerusalem and there he is going to accomplish a great Exodus.

And at one level, that speaks about the death of Jesus because he is going to leave this world, but at the same time, and I think even more so, it speaks of the rescue of God's people because that's what the cross is going to achieve.

The Exodus from Egypt is in fact just a shadow. It's not the main event. It's the shadow pointing towards the real rescue that God is going to provide for us through the salvation that Jesus accomplished on the cross.

[17 : 41] And the reason that Elijah and Moses and Jesus are talking about this is because this is what Jesus has really come to do. And again here, we see a really interesting connection between the amount of transfiguration and what Peter said eight days earlier because when Peter had made that confession eight days earlier, immediately afterwards in verse 22, Jesus had started to explain to his disciples that he was going to go to Jerusalem.

He was going to suffer and he was going to be killed, and Peter was horrified at the thought of that. Luke doesn't record that, but Matthew does, tells us Peter took Jesus aside and said, this is not going to happen.

This will never happen to you. You're not going to go to Jerusalem. You're not going to die. And Peter was rebuked by Jesus because Jesus did not entertain for one moment the thought that the cross could be avoided.

And all of that is emphasized and reinforced by the fact that when we get to the amount of transfiguration, when Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, they don't try to tell Jesus that his death won't happen.

They do the very opposite. They openly talk about his departure because they know that that is the real reason why Jesus came. So he did not come just to be a good teacher.

[18 : 55] He didn't come just to be a good example. He did not come just to point people to God. He came for an exodus. He came to rescue us from sin by dying on the cross and rising again.

So we see who Jesus really is. We see what the Old Testament was really saying. We see what Jesus has really come to do. Fourthly, here we see what heaven and earth really need.

Because this passage is really interesting because the fact that Moses and Elijah appear because it's raising the whole question as to how heaven and earth are connected because Moses and Elijah died a long, long, long, long, long time before the amount of transfiguration and yet here they are.

And that raises the question, well, where did they come from? Why are they here? What happened to people in the Old Testament when they died?

And that's a big question. How does heaven and earth, how do they relate particularly in regard to the Old Testament?

[20 : 09] Well, there's different views about it. And some people out of the view that when people in the Old Testament died, they went into a realm of the dead, which they would call she-all.

You sometimes see that word in your ESV Bible or in some of the other translation. And it's like a realm of the dead, possibly even a realm of hell. So people are the view that even someone like Abraham when he died, he went there.

And it was only when Jesus died in the cross that Jesus then descended into hell and rescued them. Some people love that view. Some people are in here out of that view and there's probably various reasons why people do come to that conclusion.

I wouldn't agree with that myself. And I don't think that that's what Scripture reveals to us. And I think that this incident here is a key reason why it's difficult to hold that view.

Because yes, when Old Testament saints died, their bodies went to the grave. I think that's what she-all refers to, just the grave. That their souls went to heaven. And that's where Moses and Elijah have come from just now.

[21 : 23] But I think that there is a sense in which in this period before the coming of Jesus, there is a sense in which the souls in heaven are still looking forward to the day when Jesus is going to die on the cross.

Now we're kind of stepping into the realms of mystery here because there's obviously we can't be definitive on this. But I think that that's what the Bible reveals to us. Here you have Moses and Elijah who have been taken to heaven, but they are still looking forward to what Jesus is going to accomplish on the cross.

Because they know that their full salvation, remember full salvation is for body and soul, is dependent on Jesus fulfilling his work on the cross.

In other words, it's not just the people on earth who are looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. It is also the souls in heaven. Both heaven and earth were longing for the day when the power of sin would be broken, when victory over death would be won, and when the kingdom of God would be established with Jesus on the throne of the universe.

That is what heaven and earth both need. And I think that's part of the reason why when Jesus was born, the host of heaven sang for joy because that day has finally come.

[22 : 44] And that's why Moses and Elijah are looking forward to the cross because it's through the cross that both heaven and earth shall be renewed and restored and their full salvation is accomplished.

We can maybe easily think that God's priority in salvation is just maybe earthly, but the real truth that's been shown to us in the Mount of Transfiguration is that heaven and earth are waiting in anticipation for the saving work of Jesus on the cross.

And the great point that that's teaching you and me is that every single person, whether it's from the era of the Old Testament or from the days of the new right up until today, every single person needs Jesus.

And that's why Jesus came down from this mountain. Now just think about that for a moment. Here we are getting a glimpse of who Jesus really is, a glimpse of the glory that he really has.

This is the realm where Jesus really belongs in dazzling light and in glorious splendor. That's where Jesus really belongs, and yet he came down from it again.

[24 : 02] And the reason he came down is because humanity desperately needs him to go to the cross. And that's why later in this chapter you'll read that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Here we see what heaven and earth really need. Chapter five, here we see what humanity is really like.

So on this mountain you see the dazzling splendor of Jesus. We have this remarkable appearance of Moses and Elijah. We see the whole of the Bible coming together. We see heaven and earth

jointly looking forward to the cross.

And at the same time we see three weak disciples who don't know what to do and who don't know what to say. There we are.

I'm going too far. Now Peter and those who are with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

[25 : 10] And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it's good for us to be here. Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah, not knowing what he said.

And again there's a lot we could say here, but I just want to highlight the fact that I think that's a very, very clear demonstration of what humanity is like. Here you have Peter, James and John and they don't know what to do and they don't know what to say.

So along on the mount of transfiguration you see the glory of Jesus alongside the weakness of humanity.

And we may very well feel like criticizing Peter, but I think we all know that we would have done no better if we were there. Standing there these men must have felt utterly overwhelmed.

Standing before the presence of God they must have looked and felt like dust. Isaiah, one of the other prophets in the Old Testament, had exactly the same experience.

[26 : 09] He saw the throne of God and he said, Woe is me for I am lost. And we have been reminded very powerfully that before God we are nothing.

We've got no words, no worthiness, no strength, there's no comparison. We've got no right to come anywhere near Him.

We seem like nothing before Him. And when you think of Peter and James and John on this mountain it must have been the most humbling experience of their lives.

And this is showing us what humanity is really like. We are nothing before God. We've got no words, no strength, there's no comparison. We are totally, totally unworthy and totally, totally helpless.

And yet when Jesus spoke about His exodus and when He came back down from this mountain and when He set His face to Jerusalem to die, who was He doing that for?

[27 : 10] He was doing it for these three helpless men. And He was doing it for you. And this is why on the one hand Christianity will humble you more than anything else.

Because Christianity shows you that you're nothing before God. And that's what a lot of people hate about Christianity because the human race is a proud race.

But the truth is every claim of greatness that we find in humanity is nothing before God. It's laughable. Even the greatest men and women of history, if you had placed them on the top of this mount of transfiguration they would have been just as humbled and just as pathetic as Peter and James and John.

Through Christianity will humble you like nothing else because it shows you that you are nothing in comparison to the God of all glory. But at the very same time as it humbles you, Christianity shows you that you are more precious.

Than you could ever imagine. Because the God who shone in dazzling splendor at the top of this mountain, he came down again and he went all the way to the cross to give his life as a ransom for you.

[28 : 36] Jesus set his face on the path to death because you are so precious and because he loves you so much.

So yes Christianity should humble you but it also tells you that you are astonishingly precious to God. That he loves you so much that he gave his very own son for you.

And that raises a really, really important point, well really two really important points and I really, really want to emphasize these. It's never possible to be too pathetic for God.

It's never, ever possible to be too pathetic for God. Often we feel so pathetic before Him. We think we are such failures that we have fallen so far short that there's so much wrong with us that God would never want us.

But that is not true because in all your weakness, all your frailness, all your uselessness, all your failings Jesus says come to me. It is impossible, absolutely impossible to be too pathetic for God.

[29 : 49] But it is possible to be too proud for God. And you can think I don't need Him or I don't want Him.

And that kind of pride is incredibly dangerous because that's the pride that could take us to hell. So if you feel useless and pathetic before God then that's a good thing.

Just run straight to Him. But if you're proud before God and you think that you don't need Him then please, please pray that you would change and that your perspective would become more accurate.

On the Mount of Transfiguration we see what humanity is really like. And then last of all, number six, here we see what God really wants from us.

The climax of the Mount of Transfiguration comes in verse 34 and 35 which we have there. We see, as He was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

[30 : 52] And a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is my son, my chosen one. There's so much we could see here. That cloud coming points us back to the glory presence of God in the Old Testament.

If you read about the temple in the Old Testament or the tabernacle, in say you could read Exodus, maybe the last 10 chapters of Exodus you'll read all about God's presence in a cloud.

The voice of God speaks through this cloud. Jesus identified as the Son of God, the chosen one.

There's so many things we could look at here. It highlights how unique and special Jesus is and that is all absolutely amazing.

But I want us to focus on the fact that here we see what God really wants from us. And that's a really, really important question because it's something that countless people get wrong.

People think that God wants us to try hard to be good enough for him, not true. People think that God wants us to wait for some remarkable, stunning experience in our lives, not true.

[31 : 55] People think that God expects us to have enough knowledge, not true. People think that God doesn't really mind what we do or think he'll save us anyway. That's not true.

So what does God really want from you? Well the answer is at the end of verse 35, listen to him.

God wants us to listen to Jesus. And that makes perfect sense because he is God.

We need to learn from him. We need him to tell us what's true. We need him to show us the way.

And that's exactly what Jesus has done.

Jesus wants us to listen to him. That's why he's left us with words in the Bible. That's why the church proclaims a message, the good news of salvation.

[32 : 56] That's why faith comes by hearing. And that's why the Christian life is lived by obeying God's instruction. God wants us to listen, which is exactly what Derek was reminding us of this morning, the fact that we need to take the time to read God's word, to listen to God's word, and to apply it to our lives because God wants us to listen to everything that he's saying to us.

And that's why it doesn't matter if you never have a remarkable experience like Peter, James and John. So often that can be a stumbling block to us. We think we need some kind of crash of lightning in our lives to prove that we are saved.

That is not true. When I was looking at all this, I read a quote from G. Campbell Morgan, who don't know if you've never heard of him.

He was a minister in the early 20th century in London. And there's a great quote from him there. He says, To many there is no amount of transfiguration, but there is for all the speech of the Son.

That was true of the disciples. Only three of them were on the mountain. The rest weren't. And it's true of us. Some of us may be able to speak about remarkable experience that we've had. Most of us probably won't.

[34 : 17] But that is why if somebody wants to be baptized or if somebody wants to profess faith, if they've been brought up in the church, we are not looking for you to come to us and say that you've had this remarkable stunning experience in your life.

We are looking for people to come and who are saying, I have heard the voice of Jesus say, come to me and rest.

We need to listen to him. So where do you find the real Jesus? It's on the Mount of Transfiguration. And do you know the amazing thing? Is that if you are trusting in him, one day you are going to see him in all of this glory for yourself.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word and for all that it reveals to us.

[35 : 22] We would not know you in the way that we do, were it not for the fact that you have revealed yourself to us through your word. We thank you for everything that teaches us about you

as our Father and about Jesus as our Savior and as about the Holy Spirit as our Comforter.

And we pray, oh God, that your word would just be written on our hearts, that it would overflow through our minds, that it would shape the way we live our lives so that in everything that we do, we would do it with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Thank you for your mercy, for your love, for your goodness. Thank you for the great work that Jesus has done for us on the cross. We pray, oh God, that you would lead us all into a closer walk with you, that each one of us would have our trust in him.

Amen. Thank you.