

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF JESUS CHRIST

Μεταμορφωω - Metamorphoo

1 – To change in a manner visible to others

2 - To change inwardly in fundamental character or condition

"But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:27)

Our Lord Jesus uttered the above prophecy before one of the most glorious occurrences of His incarnation - His transfiguration, or metamorphosis, before three of His disciples, Peter, James and John. This incident is laden with mystery and I am convinced has many layers of meaning that have certainly not all been revealed to me yet, but I wish to examine this beautiful manifestation in the light of the Spirit and see what might be gleaned concerning the person of Jesus Christ, His kingdom, and the chosen remnant.

Now this incident appears to have occurred six days after the original prophecy spoken by Jesus, according to Matthew and Mark. Luke indeed has "about eight days" which may account for some of the time Jesus was speaking before the prophecy, and some of the time on the mountain, but Matthew and Mark say six days with exactitude.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son,[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. (Matthew 17:1-8)

Now this 'six days' is interesting, because it pertains to the six thousand years of man, even as Peter, James and John pertain to a remnant of the people of God, the manchild. If I might be permitted to draw a parallel between the passage in question and the end of the present age, it might be said that "after six thousand years, Jesus took a remnant of his people up to a higher place in the Spirit, where they no longer saw Him according to the flesh, but saw the unveiled glory of who He is". For indeed, brethren, all of us must eventually ascend from the lowlands of the flesh to the mount of God, that we might behold Christ fully unveiled.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.[b] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

As Jesus was manifest to His disciples by the Spirit, He revealed both who He truly is, and who we truly are in Him. Paul, by the Spirit, writes concerning this very thing to the believers at Corinth:

Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³ unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:12-18)

In this transcendently majestic passage, we see the reality of Jesus Christ's revelation to us, in us, and through us, and how we are indeed changed – the Greek word is again metamorphoo - from glory to glory by that revelation. John also writes concerning this, saying:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 1:2-3)

As we are transformed from one state of glory to another by the revelation of the Lord, we do not yet see the end of this metamorphosis, but we know that when Jesus Christ is fully manifest, we shall appear with Him, and resemble Him, being His glorified body.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your[a] life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4)

So then, this metamorphosis of Christ before His disciples was also a foreshadowing of the end of the age, and the end of our faith, being brought to perfection in Him, in the fullness of His revelation.

**Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)**

MOSES AND ELIJAH

Now then, both Moses and Elijah are very interesting and symbolic characters to be present at this event. These men speak to us of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah), which testify to the coming of the Blessed One.

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure,[b] which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

So we see them bearing witness, speaking of His departure - or, in Greek, His exodus. Not only this, but Moses and Elijah are two men that had mountaintop experiences of God's glory that would foreshadow this event.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 20 The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:16-20)

This Moses, as we see echoed in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians above, spoke with the Lord face to face, so that His face shone from the glory.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.[d] 30 Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, 35 the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (Exodus 34:29-35)

This is surely a wonderful picture of our interaction with Christ and His manifold revelation that changes us "into the same image." And even as Moses had a veil over his face when interacting with the Israelites, so it is that the reality of our intimacy with Jesus and who we are in Christ is hidden to those around us, buried in our flesh and awaiting full manifestation.

Now Elijah also ascended the mount of God to converse with the glory.

And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.[a] 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:11-14)

This visitation also speaks to us of the remnant of God, as Elijah declares that He is the last prophet left, only for God to later tell him that He has reserved for Himself a remnant that have not "bowed the knee to Baal".

So then, these experiences of Moses and Elijah both speak to us of ascension in the Spirit, and an unveiling of Jesus Christ in heavenly places.

THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS AND A FITTING TENT

This word, metamorphoo, besides being used in the passages concerning the transfiguration, occurs in two other places. One we have already examined:

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

In addition to this passage, we find the same word in the epistle to the Romans, once more translated as ‘transformed’:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.^[b] 2 Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

So it becomes apparent from both of these passages that our metamorphosis into the image of Jesus Christ occurs by the renewing of our minds, and that the renewing of our minds is accomplished by us beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. To quote one of our original definitions, we are ‘changed inwardly in fundamental character or condition’ as we behold the true character of the Lord as He is revealed within His temple. For this revelation is “as in a mirror”, so that we are seeing the reflection of His glory within ourselves, by the might of His indwelling Spirit.

Brethren, this metamorphosis is a beautiful mystery that is being revealed from one degree of glory to another, and we sense the changes in ourselves as we are conformed to the perfection of Jesus Christ who already lives in us. Our spirits cry out for the process to be complete, that we might provide a fitting, refined dwelling place for that most Holy Spirit.

For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Indeed I believe there was also a reflection of this in the transfiguration scene, as Peter responded to the glorious manifestation:

And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (Matthew 17:4)

Now Peter himself did not know why he said what he said, but I am convinced it has in part to do with the desire to provide a dwelling place, a tent, for the glory to reside. This is again a symbol of the true temple, not built with hands, which the Lord Himself is establishing as we near the end of the age, and has indeed been establishing throughout all the ages, in the boundless wisdom of His marvelous plan.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”^[g]

⁵⁵ “O Death, where *is* your sting?^[h]
O Hades, where *is* your victory?”^[i]

⁵⁶ The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:50-57)

Amen!