

# Transfiguration

## JESUS TRANSFIGURES US BY HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Matthew 17:1-9

### The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

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## DIAGNOSIS: THREE OF A KIND

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *One Is Like the Two*

Peter was not frightened by the sudden appearance of Moses and Elijah. They were with Jesus, and Jesus was with them-three of a kind. Moses was the person through whom God gave the Israelites God's law. Elijah was also a spokesperson for God, telling people to obey the law or face consequences ("Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.' Then they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi of Kishon, and killed them there [450 of them]," 1 Kings 18.40.) Peter can only think of God's presence in terms of the law, and so he thinks Jesus is like Moses and Elijah. When the voice from the bright cloud demands that Peter, James, and John listen to Jesus, they are overcome by fear. When others make demands of us, there is always a threat accompanying the demand that scares us into fulfilling the demands.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Two Responses to One*

The fear that overcame Peter and company is a fear of God's power and greatness and the ability of God's power and greatness to judge and condemn (law/wrath). But Peter was oblivious to God's power to judge and condemn. He wanted to welcome those who spoke God's law, as if God's law was only something good to welcome and live with. On our own, we cannot think that the law will condemn us. Either we think we will be judged favorably by the law (a delusion) or we think we will fail the law's judgment and so have reason to despair. Delusion or despair are the only two possible reactions we have to the law's judgment. When there is judgment, there can be no love and no trust. "It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all people who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin [under the law's judgment]. That is, all people...are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God" (Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, Article 2, 29.1).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Three for Three*

Peter wants to build three dwellings. The three dwellings are to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. But to honor those three as if they were three of a kind in the law is to end up with three dwellings for Peter, James, and John, which we know as caskets. To trust the law is to die under it. For “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15.56). This is the hardest message and the most difficult to preach. The lack of love and trust in God is “truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death” or “condemn to the eternal wrath of God” (Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, Article 2, 29.2). Such judgment from God is denied. But when the voice from the bright cloud spoke, the disciples were overcome with fear.

## **PROGNOSIS: ONE OF A KIND**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *One between Two*  
Jesus was overcome by death. On a cross he was one between two criminals, another three of a kind—the condemned. Everyone judged against Jesus. His disciples judged him as a lost cause. The religious leaders judged him as false. Even one of the criminals judged him. But now, when Jesus is on the cross, when all judge against him, then the voice from the transfiguration cloud reminds us to “listen to him.” For on the cross Jesus ends God’s judgment and all judgment, all death, and all law. For God raised him from the dead! It is the resurrection that convinces us that Jesus is to be listened to because he speaks with the resurrection message of forgiveness. Which explains why Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone about the transfiguration until after his resurrection, because only then would his transfiguration be understood, not as Jesus making three of a kind, but of Jesus being the only one who gives life with God.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution)** : *One with Three*  
“Listen to Jesus,” is a Gospel imperative. The imperative itself, an invitation, gives the hearer the thing it invites the

hearer to do. The Spirit works through the invitation and moves us to listen. "Do not be afraid," is another Gospel imperative. And the Spirit works through the invitation and takes away our fear. That's because Jesus is the one who takes away our fear of the voice from the bright cloud, our fear of God's judgment, our fear of God's power and greatness to condemn. He is the one who makes God to be our loving parent, who acts, not with judgment, but with forgiveness and mercy. Jesus is the one who tells the three to be at peace. That is his Gospel power.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *All Are One in Christ*

Jesus' Gospel power transfigures all of life. Our life with God, once a life of fear, judgment, law, sin, death, is transfigured into faith, forgiveness, mercy, and life. A life concerned with judging others is transfigured into a life concerned with mercy for others. A life concerned with doing what is right is transfigured into a life desiring forgiveness and to forgive. It is the life transfigured from fear to love, and by that love uses the law to protect others and to preserve their lives with safety, shelter, food, medicine, and more. We, who could only think in terms of the law, now think with the mind of Christ. We are transfigured from children of the law into brothers and sisters in Christ.