

Luke 9 (Part 3): 27-36 • A Preview of the Kingdom of God

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Verse 27 begins this way,

“But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” ²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.

³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.” (ESV)

Stop there, please. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word and allow us, Lord God, graciously to consume today, of this Your Scripture that we might be learn, grow and be nourished.

We ask you to unlock for us insights and understanding to teach our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

The very first verse that we're looking at here this morning has frankly been a rather perplexing one for some people because in it Jesus says, *“truly, I say*

there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

And you can look at that verse, and at first glance it seems to suggest that at least some of the disciples would still be alive when Jesus would return in glory to the earth. And frankly, this has led some people to conclude that Jesus returned during the lifespan of the apostles. In fact, I had a guy leave a comment on our YouTube channel just this last week. He was chastising me severely for believing otherwise. He was one of the individuals who had been convinced.

Hey, it says right here, Jesus said to His disciples, some of you won't die before you see the kingdom of God come in glory and so forth. And frankly, the way Matthew renders this passage even seems to lend more credence to that idea. Let me put it up on the screen for you. From Matthew chapter 16 it says,

Mathew 16:28 (ESV)

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

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

And so, you read those words, and you're almost left with the idea that that's what He meant, that some of these guys were going to still be alive when Jesus returned. And you're going, wait a minute that doesn't make sense. It's a little bit confusing.

We're told that after saying those words, that Jesus actually took three of His disciples up onto a mountain, we're not really sure which one it was. And there we're told He was transfigured before them, the stuff that we just read here this morning.

We're wondering, I guess we're left to wonder, is that what Jesus was talking about when He said some who are here, da, da, da. Well, thankfully we don't have to really wonder because one of the men who Jesus took up on that mountain and who was an eyewitness to all these events actually wrote about it. He talked about it, and it's recorded for us in Peter's second letter, let me put it up on the screen. It says,

2 Peter 1:16-17

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

It's interesting, as Peter describes it you'll notice the language that he uses in that description when he talks about the fact that we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet Peter's not talking about His second coming. He's talking about this coming of glory that he and the other two men witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration. And Peter is telling us here that the transfiguration was a small foretaste of the coming glory of the Kingdom of God.

Let's take a look at what happened here. We're told that, according to Luke, about eight days after Jesus had made His statement, that He took Peter and John, and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

These guys probably thought this was just going to be another prayer session. And it seems to be that whenever Jesus started praying these guys decided it was nap time, because pretty much every time we find Jesus praying at any significant time, they're napping.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He's praying and needs them to be awake and supportive at that time, they're napping again. But anyway, we're told in verse 29 that, "as He was praying," it says, "the appearance of his face was altered." Now that's Luke's description. Matthew and Mark literally say Jesus was transfigured.

Now, transfigured is an English word. The Greek word is actually very different and it's where we get our word metamorphosis. It describes like a caterpillar becoming, a butterfly, so, it's an interesting thing.

Luke, the doctor, simply uses a Greek word that means altered or different. His face became different, and then he describes His clothing as becoming dazzlingly white, and it's not as if there was a light shining on Jesus.

It's more a description of the brightness emanating from within. In other words, what the disciples witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration was the very glory of Jesus that has always been there but was shielded from their eyes during the majority of His time during His earthly ministry.

But now on the Mount of Transfiguration, it's almost like God is removing the blinders and allowing the glory of Jesus to be seen. And so, this is what an amazing sort of a thing.

And if that isn't crazy enough, verse 30 says that “...*behold, two men were talking with...*,” Jesus standing there talking. Just suddenly two men standing there discussing things with Jesus, and we're told that it was “*Moses and Elijah who (also) appeared in glory...*” And Luke writes that they were speaking of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now, I want to talk about just what's going on here. But then I want to talk more about the implications of what's going on here, because there's so much. As the men here are watching, it says that Jesus begins to change in His appearance, and suddenly two men are speaking with Him, identified as Moses and Elijah, appearing with Him in glory. So, we have this little picture, just a snapshot if you will, of the glory of Jesus, which of course will attend Him when He returns to this earth.

And then in verse 31, we learn that they were discussing His departure. This is actually the Greek word for, exodus. They were discussing His exodus. If you have an old King James Bible on your lap, or maybe you grew up studying the King James, you have an interesting word there.

The old King James says they were talking about His decease, which is an interesting word in light of the fact that it's really the Greek word for exodus. And so, what you find in the King James Bible is really more of an interpretation rather than a translation.

Not that it's wrong. I think the King James translators were essentially correct in what they're saying because the idea of His exodus referred to the fact that these men were talking to Jesus about His upcoming final trip to Jerusalem where, in fact, He would be arrested and abused, and ultimately crucified.

And then in verse 32, Peter speaks up. It says that they'd been heavy with sleep but after they became fully awake, and they saw this glory that was emanating from Jesus in these two men talking with Him.

It says in verse 33 that as the men were parting, that Peter spoke up and began to say what he did, saying, "*Master, it's good that we're here. Let us put up some tents or some tabernacles for each of you,...*" And it ends that verse by saying, "*not knowing what he said.*" I think the NIV says, because he couldn't think of anything else to say or something like that. But I guess Peter felt like he needed to say something. He offers to set up some temporary shelters for these guys. You have to wonder why he said that. I mean, other than the fact that Peter tended to just talk off the top of his head anyway.

But you have to wonder if he didn't want it to end, because did you notice here that it said that as they were departing, as they were leaving, Peter spoke up and he said, Master, it's good that we're here, now, let me make some tabernacles, some shelters, and you guys get so forth. And if he was wanting that moment to last longer, I guess I can understand why he said that. I mean, just to be there.

Can you imagine, can you imagine what it was like to be there that day on the mountain with Jesus, seeing the glory of the Lord, seeing these men, Moses and Elijah, standing there talking to Jesus?

Good grief, it must have been breathtaking. But to be in this place of recognizing glory, this miniature picture of the Kingdom of God manifest. You and I live in the world of men. We live in a world of limitation. We live in a world of pain, and difficulty, and challenge every single day, fear, struggle.

Suddenly Peter, James and John are in this picture this vision. And I believe, and it was obviously more than a vision, but this they're in this I'm struggling to find the right word. This preview of the Kingdom of God and all that it will be, and I have absolutely no trouble understanding why Peter wanted to keep going.

I have no trouble understanding why he wanted this to last longer. Lord let me put up some shelters for you guys and we can just keep talking and you can just, let's just, let's keep this going. There's so much to grasp a hold of here, but the implications of this passage are so many. The first is the appearance of Elijah and Moses. There's a lot of biblical characters that you and I read about and have studied about in the Old Testament. Why Moses and Elijah? Why these two?

I mean, why not Daniel? Why not Ezekiel? Why not Amos? Why not David? I can think of a lot of, how, why not Abraham? Why these men? Why these two men standing and talking to Jesus? Well, actually, their presence here, and for you and I to understand what their presence signifies, is critical for us because you see, they represent something that God wanted you and I to lay hold of. First of all, Moses, of all people, as a biblical character, represents for us the Law. Moses is the Law giver. He's the one through whom the Law was given to the nation of Israel.

And so that is the representative, representation that Moses embodies, if you will. He is the Law. And then Elijah, the prophet of prophets, who wasn't just a prophet in the Old Testament, but Elijah himself was a prophetic sign of the last days. Do you understand that? It was about Elijah that Malachi prophesied and said that there will be the coming of Elijah again before the great and terrible day of the Lord. So, Elijah is not just a prophet, he's a prophetic sign. So, he represents, if you will, the prophecies, the declarations of prophecy given throughout the Old Testament.

So here you have that in mind. You have a man standing there, two men standing there talking to Jesus, one who represents the Law and one who represents all of the prophets.

Do you know what the Jews called their Scriptures, the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures? They called them the Law and the Prophets. That's what they called their Bible, right? So, keeping all that in mind, here we have on the Mount of Transfiguration these two men who embody the Law and the Prophets. The revelation of God to mankind.

And what does God say in the presence of these two men? This is my Son, listen to Him. This is my Chosen One. Listen to Him. Now that's a huge statement, and the implications of it are crazy important. But what is God saying here? What is He telling us when He says, in the midst of these men who embody the Law and the Prophets, what to say, listen to Jesus. What is He saying that the Old Testament is unimportant? Is He saying, okay, the Law and the Prophets, yeah, okay, but ignore all that and listen to My Son.

Is He telling us the Old Testament is outdated? Is He telling us it's unnecessary? Actually, none of all those things. I want you to connect what God said here at the Mount of Transfiguration with something Jesus said about His mission related to the Word of God, which is found for us in Matthew chapter 5 on the screen, which says, this is Jesus talking,

Mathew 5:17-18 (ESV)

“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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; (referring, again to the Hebrew Scriptures) I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

That is such a key for you and I to understand, what God the Father said on the Mount of Transfiguration when, in the midst of the man who represents the Law, in the midst of the man who represents the prophets, God said, here is my Son listen to Him. God is saying here that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment Of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus, in other words, is the final word. He is not a contradictory word to the Law and the Prophets.

Understand that, because I think some people think there's this chasm between the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus does not contradict the Law. Jesus does not contradict the prophecies of God. He fulfills them. He completes them, and that is important to remember. He is from God the final word. God spoke through the Law; God spoke through the Prophets; then God spoke through His Son. It's just, it was an ongoing conversation, but it was just the final word, and it was the completed word. And that is why the writer of Hebrews wrote what he did is he started that letter when he said,

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by his Son...

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by his Son...

So, you see, Jesus is the final word. He's the final revelation. He's the final declaration of the heart of God to the people of mankind.

Now, the other thing I wanted to call your attention to is what these men were doing, because if you look again with me in verse 31, we're told there that they were speaking with Him, again of His departure or His exodus, which He was

about to accomplish in Jerusalem, and that's significant in light of the fact that both these men had been taken away from the earth many years before.

Now you'll remember that Moses had died some 1,500 years earlier. 1,500 years? That's a long time. And we know that he died because God spoke to, Joshua and said, Moses, my servant is dead, now you go on and lead the people into the land and so forth. So, Moses has been dead physically, for a long time. Elijah never experienced death, but he was taken up to be with the Lord in a demonstration of God's power while his servant, Elisha, looked on. You guys, no doubt, remember the story, but they've both been gone for a long time.

I want you to notice that here on the Mount of Transfiguration they're not only aware of current events, they're talking about them with Jesus. They're speaking about the things that are going to soon transpire, right? What does that mean?

Well, the significant fact about that is that there is a belief among, frankly some Christians, that when we die, we enter into a time of soul sleep. If you're unfamiliar with that term, soul sleep basically teaches, when our physical bodies expire, we enter into a period of unconsciousness and we remain in that condition until the return of the Lord, when we are awakened, and our bodies are resurrected.

The only problem is, soul sleep is a misunderstanding of God's Word because the term, sleep, is a euphemism that is used to describe the body at death, not the soul or the spirit. Your soul or your spirit can't sleep. They don't sleep. Your body can sleep. Your soul and your spirit can't sleep.

I've mentioned many times, when you go, when your body even goes to sleep at night, does your soul and spirit sleep too? Good grief, they're very active, very active, particularly your soul, which is part of your mind, your intellect.

I don't know about you, but man, I tell you, if you could put my dreams into a movie, first of all, nobody would want to come see it. Second of all, I wouldn't want anyone to come and see it. Thirdly, it wouldn't make any sense to anyone. It would be a jumbled mash of weirdness, but it's going on in the theater of my mind. I'm really glad that they dissipate about ten minutes after I wake up, the memory of them, because I wouldn't want to hang on to that sort of stuff but boy, I tell you, it's moving.

Anyway, the point is, the Bible doesn't teach soul sleep. Yes, it uses the word sleep to describe the physical body at death, but it's used as a euphemism. You understand that word? And we have several different references. The apostle

Paul wrote saying that when we are absent from the body, we're present with the Lord. He promised the thief on the cross, "*this day you will be with me in paradise.*"

And when He told the story, not a parable, a story of two men who passed from this life, one an unnamed rich man and another man named Lazarus, who was not the same man he raised from the dead, by the way.

When He told a story about their passing, He described them as being very conscious, very aware of their surroundings and their condition after death. He did not describe these men as entering into a period of slumber or unconsciousness.

And so, we shouldn't be surprised at the idea that Moses and Elijah are standing here talking to Jesus of current events. They're talking about things going on. Of course they are. You think in heaven they're cut off from the lives of men and the purpose and the plan of God.

You think they're just sitting around playing checkers? I wonder when this whole thing's going to wrap up man, I'm getting tired of waiting. First of all, there's no waiting in eternity. Second of all, the fact that they're talking with Jesus about what's going on lets me know that they are connected. And then finally, did you ever wonder how Peter knew that the two men talking were Moses and Elijah? Jesus didn't introduce them.

There's no point in this conversation where Jesus stops talking and says, oh, by the way Mo, Eli, let me introduce you here to three of my closest guys, right? Pete, Jimmy, John, Mo, and Eli, these guys, yeah, just wanted you to know who I was talking to here. That doesn't, that's not happening. It says that as they woke up out of their slumber, they're seeing Jesus standing there in His glory and suddenly as their eyes clear, they see Moses and Elijah standing there talking with Jesus.

And you might say, well maybe Jesus told them later on as the, we were, they were going down the hill, that it was Moses and Elijah. Peter speaks up and says, he calls them by name when he says, let me make a tent for each one of you guys. How did Peter know that it was Moses and Elijah standing there?

Well, do you remember that we started off this study in verse 27 by reading a statement by Jesus where He told His disciples that some of them would experience the kingdom of God before they died, right?

And that is exactly what happened. These men got a preview of the Kingdom of God. Some of you are wondering, now what does that have to do with Peter knowing the identity of Moses and Elijah? Well, let me answer it this way. Stay with me.

Occasionally people will ask me the question, how are we going to recognize our loved ones in heaven? And I always have to chuckle a little bit when, and I'm not laughing at them, but I'm chuckling a little bit when people ask me the question because it makes me wonder what people think life is going to be like when the Kingdom of God is manifest finally and completely.

Here's the question that I want to ask them back when they say, Pastor Paul, how are we going to recognize our loved ones in heaven? I want to ask them this question. Do you think heaven will be lesser or greater than life on earth? In other words, do you think you're going to have less than you have here on earth, or do you think you're going to have more? And I love to have them just think about that for a minute before they restate their question, because when the Kingdom of God is finally manifest for all of us to see an experience in unbroken fellowship with God, we are not going to have less than we have right now, we're going to have so much more.

And I mean so much more of our abilities, so much more of our senses, so much more of our understanding. So much more. And you see, that's how Peter knew that he was in the presence of Moses and Elijah. Because when God's Kingdom is manifest, knowledge increases. It doesn't decrease. It increases. Understanding increases. It doesn't decrease.

How did he know that it was Moses and Elijah? He just knew, because he was in this bubble, this preview of the Kingdom of God, where knowledge is complete. Where understanding is complete.

You guys remember, I'm not going to put this passage up on the screen, but you guys remember in First Corinthians 13, Paul talks about the fact that when perfection comes, he says, we will know as we are known fully. Did you ever read that? *"We will know then as we are now known."*

In other words, knowledge will be complete, understanding will be complete. How are you going to know your loved ones? Instantly, perfectly, without, with perfect clarity. there will be no question because you're going to have so much more knowledge than you have now. You're going to have so much more understanding than you have now.

You will be, in fact, complete. In knowledge and understanding. And I think that's a nice thought, as you and I look toward the fulfillment, the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is an incredible study. It's worth doing if you've never done a Bible study about the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God was something that was greatly misunderstood in Jesus' time. They believed the Kingdom of God. In fact, it's been misunderstood greatly since that time as well. The Kingdom of God by the Jews was considered to be something that the Messiah would usher in through military force.

We've talked about that in the past, and the Kingdom of God would then be established on the earth, and it would be established through the Messiah's military rule over the enemies of Israel. Well, that didn't happen, and Jesus even told His disciples. He said, the Kingdom of God comes not as you would expect. Right? Well, we didn't seem to learn from that.

Then you get into, about 300 A.D. and you start with the beginning of Rome embracing Christianity, and then pretty soon you have Roman Catholicism that comes onto the scene, and Roman Catholicism made the exact same error that the Jews made related to the Kingdom of God.

They thought it was going to be an earthly kingdom. Why do you think the Crusades went on? We look back in history about the Crusades. You know what the Crusades were all about? It was bringing the Kingdom of God, it was advancing the Kingdom of God on earth, because the Roman Catholics, back at that time, believed that they were the warriors of the Kingdom of God, and they were out to convert people to Roman Catholicism. And we are the Kingdom of God, so if you don't want to convert to Roman Catholicism, we're going to kill you because you're obviously an enemy.

And that's the way they just, they perceived the Kingdom of God to be this earthly sort of a deal. It's a mistake that mankind has made repeatedly, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God but what He said about it was, the Kingdom of God is within you. It's within you. It begins now within you. Isn't that cool? The Kingdom of God is literally established in you from the standpoint of you becoming a believer in Jesus Christ and putting Him on the throne of your life. That's where the Kingdom begins. In you, and it grows outward from there.

So, what I see here is I'm looking here across this auditorium are a bunch of little carriers of the Kingdom of God. But people, there's coming a time when the kingdom of man will be set aside and the Kingdom of God will advance, and it will be everywhere. It will be everywhere you see, everywhere you go, everything.

The Kingdom of God will take over, and the kingdom of man will become the Kingdom of our God, and it will all be encompassed in His Kingdom, and perfection, completeness will become the rule of the day.

And we will be complete in knowledge at that time. Jesus does usher in the Kingdom. The Jews thought it was on His first coming. No, it's at His second coming. When He comes a second time, He will usher in the Kingdom in its completeness. He has already began to usher in the Kingdom in you, but it will come in completeness one day and it will be amazing, and I'm looking forward to it. Peter, James, and John got this little glimpse on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Just this little quick glimpse of the Kingdom. I have no problem understanding why Peter said, let's make this last. Let's build some tabernacles. Let's just sit down and enjoy this. Sorry Pete, for right now, following Jesus is not about making a tent and sitting still. Following Jesus means following Him down the hill and back into the pain and challenges and difficulties of everyday life while we serve Him and wait for the consummation of the Kingdom, amen?