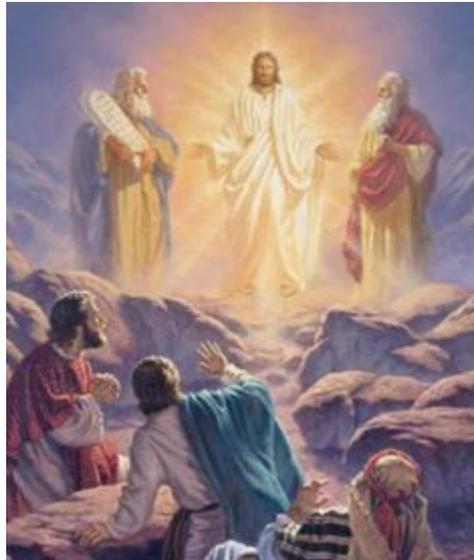


THE TRANSFIGURATION: BEHOLD OUR GOD?

Greg Deuble: www.thebiblejesus.org



Recently I listened to a sermon with this very title. ¹ No rewards for guessing what the preacher's topic was. Also no prizes for guessing the preacher's lesson: To demonstrate Jesus' glory as "God" on the Mount of Transfiguration..

The large church audience was obviously in total agreement with our preacher, for judging by the chorus of "amens" and "praise Gods", they too believed that when Jesus was transformed on top of that "very high mountain" so that "his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as the light", that the three disciples witnessing this breath-taking sight were beholding their God (Matthew 17: 2).

Our preacher explained that when he was "transformed", Jesus was "taking off his mask and revealing to the disciples who he really is ... Almighty God"!

He continued that the word "transfiguration" is not a word we use much, if at all, in our everyday communications. But it's the same word as "transformation" and signifies "a major change in appearance". Why, it's just like the caterpillar that is transformed into a butterfly ... it does not change its internal workings, just its outside form, which is what Jesus did, he stated.

He went on to also explain that "before he became a man, Jesus was a spirit, and still is a spirit, still is God, for from all time he has existed as God with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit ... but he was not always a man". However, once born as a man, once he "took on flesh", once he became the incarnate God, his Deity was temporarily veiled for those 33 years beneath his humanity. Until that is, these few brief moments of transformation when the three disciples caught a temporary glimpse of the "real Jesus"!

Consequently, "for most of his time as he walked on this earth, Jesus looked a lot like you and me. He had no halo around his head. He had no outstanding physical features. He was not tall or muscle-bound. He was not handsome either. But here on this Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is pulling back his humanity, that outward form and is showing who he really is, how awesome, powerful, and how 'God' he truly is".

Yes, the preacher illustrated, it was just like when the ordinary Clark Kent went into the phone booth (anybody still remember those?) and as he took off his suit, the real Superman burst forth for supernatural exploit. Just so, on that Mount of Transfiguration, "Jesus is peeling back his outer facade and he is revealing just for a few moments to

¹ I have changed the original exclamation mark for the question mark.

his disciples and to us today, that he is truly God, truly the God of the Universe --- powerful, awesome, majestic, the greatest Being, the greatest Person that has ever and that will ever exist”.

Continuing, the minister stated, “Jesus is not reflecting glory. He is projecting glory”. Again using an illustration to drive home his point, he averred that Jesus is not like the moon, but like the sun. In other words, Jesus’ glory is not extrinsic but intrinsic. “He is displaying overwhelming, undeniable evidence that he is God. He peels back the outer layer of human flesh.”

I have endeavoured to faithfully summarise our preacher’s premise. I am absolutely sure that he would agree I have honestly represented his sermon. The only bit I have left out is his application which we will get to later. But first, let’s examine his thesis in the light of Scripture. Does the Transfiguration of Jesus prove that Jesus was peeling back the layer of human flesh that was veiling his inner Deity, that is, the glory which he had possessed as God from all eternity?

CORROBORATION FROM THE AUTHORITIES?

To be fair to our preacher, he not only has the endorsement of his doctrine from his audience. He could have appealed to various commentators to strengthen his case that the transfigured Jesus was revealing his true Identity, which is to say, his Deity. For example, BDAG Greek-English Lexicon says Jesus was “manifesting his own preexistent glory” on that mountain.²

M.R. Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament* also tries to build the case that the Transfiguration “was a revelation of Deity breaking out in that glorified face and form ...”³ Vincent’s argument is based on an alleged difference between two Greek words that are translated by the one English word, “form” ... *morphe* and *schema*.

He alleges that *morphe* “denotes the *form* regarded as the distinctive nature and character of the object and is distinguished from *schema*, the changeable, outward *fashion*: in a man, for instance, his gestures, clothes, words, acts”. Vincent then says “*morphe* partakes of the *essence* of a thing” whereas the word *schema* (you will recognize our English word ‘scheme’), “leaves the *form* unaffected”.⁴

Vincent is making the case that when Jesus was transformed on the Mount his outward glorious appearance was reflecting the inner essence of his Deity. “God the Son” was pulling back the veil of his humanity displaying his essential eternal glory.

However, Vincent’s rationale is very tenuous. A lot of new linguistic information has come to light since he first wrote his *Word Studies* in 1886! Unfortunately, some commentators still have not moved with the times either, because they are still trying to make Vincent’s case which is over a century behind the latest linguistic studies.

On the other hand, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* recognizes that the meaning of *morphe* evolved from classical Greek times, through the period of the translation of the Septuagint and the period of nascent Gnosticism and the Hellenic mystery religions, up to and including, New Testament times.

These language developments must be recognised. They determine whether we should understand Jesus was in “the form of God” as to his inner, essential (ontological) nature of Deity (as per classical Greek usage of *morphe*?), or whether it means his outward appearance conformed to “the image of God” (as per later NT usage). We note;

Much of the discussion has focused on whether *morphe* should be understood against its classical or its Hellenistic background [does *morphe* allude to inner, essential characteristics *vis a vis* the word *schema* referring to changeable attributes?] ... Others argue that neither of these approaches is satisfactory and that

² BDAG --- Bauer, W., Danker, F.W., Arndt, W.F., and Gingrich, F.W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed. Chicago/London: Uni of Chicago Press, 2000. This editorial opinion which is found under *metamorphoo* ... be transfigured... as we shall shortly see, has no textual basis whatsoever.

³ Vincent, M.R., *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Mac Donald Publishing co., Fl. USA, 1888, Vol. 1, p 61

⁴ Ibid, p 61

attention must be paid to the Jewish background [Jesus was like God because he was in “the image of God”]
...⁵

Kenneth Wuest also notes that in NT Koine Greek *morphe* had come to refer to an outward “station in life, a position one holds, one’s rank.”⁶

Whether you have followed this argumentation or not, the salient point is that modern linguists recognise that we cannot place too fine a point, nor too much weight, on alleged differences between *morphe* and *schema* when it comes to proving whether or not Jesus is God in his essential and eternal nature.

Even if we only had the NT uses to go by, we would see *morphe* points to outward appearances.⁷

Note that when Jesus was “transformed” on the Mount that Luke uses this meaning when he says that, “while he was praying, *the appearance of his face became different*” (Luke 9: 29).⁸ Thus, what Matthew and Mark describe as “transformation”, Luke explains as the change of the outward appearance of Jesus. So, instead of using the word “form” (*morphe*), Luke uses the word for shape, appearance, image, figure (*eidos*), proving once and for all that Matthew and Mark are not discussing Jesus’ inner nature! We shall now go on to further prove this.

A FAILED SAYING?

All three synoptic Gospels record the episode of the Transfiguration. It must be a very significant event in Jesus’ ministry, and of course, for the three disciples Peter, James and John, who were chosen to witness it. And all three synoptic Gospels introduce it with a rather puzzling public statement that Jesus announced to his disciples and a large crowd. And it is to this all-important context that we now turn,

“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until whenever they should see the kingdom of God arriving with power” (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9: 27).⁹

Not a few commentators have suggested that because the Kingdom of God did not arrive in Jesus’ lifetime as he had hoped, then he got his prophecy wrong. Since it is obvious that God’s visible reign over all the earth under Jesus’ kingship was not set up before that generation had passed, they jump to the conclusion that Jesus incorrectly prophesied something that just did not happen.

However, as we shall prove, Jesus spoke the absolute truth and his prophecy did come to pass just a few days later on the Mount of Transfiguration. There were indeed some standing there who did not die until they had seen the Kingdom of God ... in a breath-taking prophetic vision.

As noted already, all three synoptic writers place this enigmatic saying of Jesus directly before the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew says, “*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 ...*” (Matthew 17:1).

The artificial chapter break tends to separate in our minds the obvious connection between Jesus’ prediction and its fulfilment. At least Mark’s Gospel, and Luke’s, assist us by having no artificial chapter breaks between Jesus’ prophecy and the Transfiguration.

⁵ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second ed., Moises Silva, Revision Editor, Zondervan, 2014, Vol. 3, pp 336

⁶ *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament*, Moody, 1982, p 84

⁷ E.g. 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of men who have “a form of godliness” but who are inwardly vile and treacherous. Certainly their outward “godly form” did not agree with their vile inward natures! For further discussion see *They Never Told Me This in Church!* pp 233, which also shows that “form” in Phil.2: 6-7 is no exception.

⁸ *To eidos prosopou autou eteron ... the image of his face became different.*

⁹ The Greek conveys a conditional aspect to Jesus’ prophecy, with the subjunctive mood expressing a possible future action. Jesus’ statement contains the untranslatable word *an*, which along with Matthew’s subjunctive verb, “shall not taste death”, is better rendered “who may taste death” from *geusovtai ...* an aorist subjunctive middle third person plural, with the nuance “may or may not”.

Matthew and Mark inform us that there were “six days” separating the two events, while Luke is more general with, “And it came to pass *after these words, about eight days*, it came about that he took along Peter and John and James, and went up to the mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28).¹⁰

We should note Jesus’ prophecy (that some of those standing there would not “experience death until they had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom”), and the events on the Mount of Transfiguration a few days later are vitally connected. What happened on the Mount of Transfiguration fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy spoken a few days earlier. They are the same fabric as we shall shortly show.

WHY MOSES AND ELIJAH?

And behold, two men were talking with him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who appearing in glory, were speaking of his departure (literally, his *exodus*) which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9: 30 -31).

How did the disciples recognize Moses and Elijah? Some think Moses was holding a stone tablet of the Law. Elijah, well, he was sitting in the fiery chariot that had borne him heavenwards! But the truth is, we do not know how they recognized these great OT prophets. On this Scripture is silent, so we must not speculate.

More importantly though, is that many are of the opinion that this appearance of Moses and Elijah conversing with Jesus on the mountain demonstrates that dead people really aren’t dead! The “souls” of Moses and Elijah were conscious. The text reads, “And behold, two men were talking with him; and they were Moses and Elijah” (Luke 9: 30)?

So, either God had brought up from the dead their “spirits” or they appeared in “spiritual bodies”. Either way, according to this popular view, Moses and Elijah were permitted to leave Heaven for this important chat with Jesus.

One difficulty with this however, is that according to popular myth, Elijah had not died, but had been transported alive up into heaven. So did he appear in his physical earthly body of flesh and blood now glorified? This is highly problematic and goes against Jesus who said, “No man has ascended into heaven” (John 3:13)! Well, perhaps Elijah shed his physical body and it just dropped off as the fiery chariot escorted him into the heavenlies? Hmm.¹¹

THE TRANSFIGURATION WAS A VISION

But let’s not ignore the critical key to understanding the whole event as given us by Jesus himself. As they were descending the mountain after the event, Jesus instructs the three to, “Tell the vision (Greek: *to orama*) to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead” (Matthew 17: 9).

This explanation by Jesus is the key to the whole Transfiguration experience. Jesus explains exactly what they had just witnessed **a vision**. And we don’t have to speculate what a vision in the Bible is. In the Bible, a vision is something seen in a dream, a trance, or an ecstasy. A vision is a supernatural revelation that conveys a thought, a concept, a prophecy to the mind, imagination and senses of the beholder.

This vision more than likely occurred at night on the snowy slopes of Mount Hermon. We are told that as Jesus was praying, “Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep.” However, “when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him” (Luke 9:32). So what probably started as a dream to their minds while they slept, ended as something like a full-blown 3-D virtual-reality experience, once they were fully awake.¹²

The point however, is that in the Bible when somebody sees a vision, they are not seeing things actually and physically present, though of course, their dream-like experience represents real people and real events. For instance, when later the apostle Peter had his vision of the animals on the sheet in Acts 10, it is obvious Peter was not seeing a physical bunch of animals floating up in the sky directly above the house where he was praying!

¹⁰ *Osei emerai okto ...* “about eight days”.

¹¹ For a full discussion on this topic see, *They Never Told Me This in Church!* under the heading “Where Are Elijah and Enoch Now?” on pp 304.

¹² Anybody who has put 3-D goggles or glasses on knows how real the experience is. You know what you are seeing is not physically real, but you still argue with your mind that the experience is real!? This is why it’s called virtual reality.

And in the same fashion, when Jesus explains to the three disciples the significance of “the vision” they had just participated in, we are not meant to understand Moses and Elijah were actually, physically or even consciously present on the Mountain.

There is another reason why this could not have actually been the dead Moses and Elijah literally talking with Jesus. If Jesus was actually talking with dead people then he was breaking the commandment that forbids communicating with the dead. That is, Jesus would have been committing the sin of necromancy, which would have disqualified him from being the Messiah!

There is only one conclusion. This was a vision, as Jesus explained. Moses and Elijah appearing in vision-form was designed to communicate something very important and very real to the disciples about Jesus and his mission. It definitely does not prove that Moses and Elijah had been conscious in heaven hundreds of years previously and were now summoned to re-appear!

Moses was the great founder of Israel’s religion, the one to whom God gave the Law. Elijah was considered the greatest of the OT prophets and it was the common expectation that he would appear again to herald the arrival of God’s final agent of salvation to bring in the kingdom of God. Thus, the appearance of these two great OT prophets in this vision is meant to convey their endorsement of Jesus as God’s promised Messiah.

Moses had promised another, but far greater prophet, would arise after he was gone,

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen (literally, *brothers*), you shall listen to him (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Through Moses God’s promise continued,

This critically important prophecy about who Messiah would be describes this “greater than Moses” as “a prophet like me from among your brothers”. Moses would have been incredulous to learn that the prophet to come was not really a human being like himself, but was already existing as God from all eternity! ¹³

Yes, great and esteemed as they were, Moses and Elijah had failed to bring the nation of Israel into the full and final enjoyment of the Kingdom promise, and the fact they are now talking with Jesus about “the *exodus* that he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem”, points to Christ being chosen to achieve what they only could in part. Thus the purpose of the Transfiguration is to signify Christ’s superior authority and place as God’s ultimate fulfillment of all prophetic hope.

In passing, we also note that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God, that his face shone so that the people could not bear to look at him. The veil placed over his face was enough to conceal his glow (Exodus 34: 29-35). However, there was a greater display of glory that took place when Jesus was transfigured, for “his face shone like the sun”, so that even his clothes radiated the brilliance of his body (Matthew 17: 2).

And speaking of clothes, all three synoptic writers mention that Jesus’ clothes were “white”, but each uses a different adjective or description to convey the brilliant whiteness of his garments. Matthew says Jesus’ clothes became “white as light”; Mark says his garments “became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them”; and Luke uses a word only used here in the entire NT, to say “his clothing became white and gleaming”. ¹⁴

¹³ Again, the careful reader of Deuteronomy 18: 15f will note the context concerns Israel’s fear of hearing from God directly, without human mediation. They had said, “Let us not hear again the voice of the LORD our God, let us not see this great fire any more, lest we die” (v. 16). So, Moses’ prophecy announced the Messiah would be a human being “like me” descended from Israel, and actually states God’s promised agent would expressly **not be the LORD God**, but His human spokesman and human mediator!

¹⁴ Luke’s description is a present participle, active (*exastrapton*) meaning gleaming from flashing, perhaps like lightning.

LET'S ASK PETER WHAT HE SAW

So let's ask one of the eyewitnesses who saw the transfiguration the obvious question. Peter, what did you see, and what did you learn, when you saw "the vision" on that mountain top? Peter, as usual, will not only answer for himself, but he will speak for the other two disciples there too!

For we did not follow cleverly devised fables 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 honour and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" --- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1: 16-18).



PETER SAYS THAT ON THAT MOUNTAIN THEY SAW THE POWER AND THE GLORY OF THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS!

Peter's commentary on the vision of Jesus' transfiguration is that they saw a vision of the future "power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". That word translated as "coming" [*Parousia*] is used a total of 24 times in the NT to refer to the future arrival of Jesus Christ to usher in God's promised Kingdom. The Transfiguration says Peter, was a foretaste of the Second Coming of "the Son of Man" when he arrives on the clouds of the sky with great power and the glory.

So the vision was a prediction that in spite of his "exodus that he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem", God's promised Kingdom-plan would not be thwarted, for Jesus was going to be raised from the dead. Which is to say, the Transfiguration of Jesus was a glimpse of Yahweh's glory prophetically shining through a resurrected king Jesus.

Remember how just days before this mountaintop experience Jesus himself had predicted this very truth,

THE SON OF MAN IS GOING TO COME DOWN IN HIS FATHER'S GLORY WITH HIS ANGELS ... AND TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THERE ARE SOME OF THOSE WHO ARE STANDING HERE WHO SHALL NOT EXPERIENCE DEATH UNTIL THEY SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING IN HIS KINGDOM (MATTHEW 16:27-28).

Furthermore, (and this must be well noted), Peter says that Jesus' glory at the Transfiguration came from God the Father "**he received honour and glory from God the Father**". Jesus' glory was received, so it was given to him. It was not intrinsic to him because he was God. Therefore his was a reflected glory.

Jesus says the significance of "the vision" is that he "is going to come down in His Father's glory ... when the Son of Man comes in his Kingdom". Peter agrees and says the significance of "the vision", is that "we" saw the power and the glory of the Coming of Jesus to inaugurate God's future Kingdom.

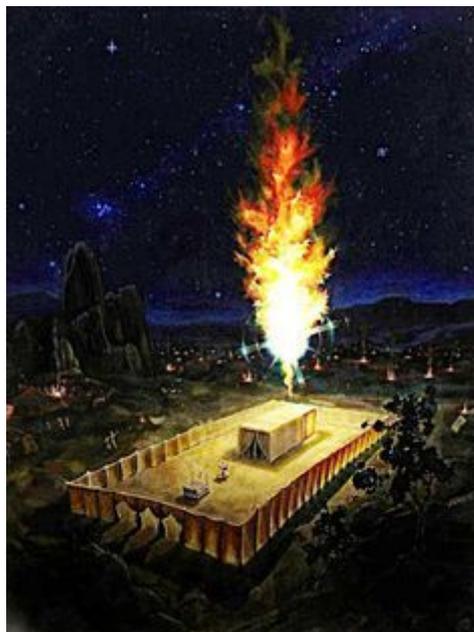
Thus, this united commentary directly contradicts our preacher (and the commentators) who would have us believe Jesus was peeling back the mantle of human flesh and displaying his inner essence as the pre-existent God at the transfiguration. Where can you see *that* teaching anywhere here? So, who are you going to believe? ¹⁵

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GOD'S GLORY

Alfred Edersheim suggests the Transfiguration, "is like the vision of the bush burning, in which was the Presence of God." ¹⁶ He makes a good point, for how utterly ridiculous it would be to imagine the burning bush proves the inner essence of the bush was peeled back to reveal the nature of a shrub as inherent fire! No, no, no. What makes all the difference is that God's Presence transformed an ordinary desert bush into something extraordinary. It could burn without being consumed!

Following this line of thinking, we also note that when "the bright cloud overshadowed" the disciples and Jesus, that the word for "overshadowed" is the same word used of the tabernacle (the Tent of Meeting) during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Matthew 17: 5). We read of God's Shekinah glory "overshadowing" the tent in the desert.

Now the interesting thing is that Tabernacle was covered with the skins of rams and badgers (Ex. 25:5; 26:14; Numbers 4:6, etc.). But when the glory of God overshadowed that humble tent, nobody thought for a moment, "Hey, look at that would you! The inner nature of the rams and badgers is at last shining through! At last we get to see the intrinsic nature of rams and badgers is really Divine!" Perish the thought.



**GOD'S PRESENCE
OVERSHADOWED THAT HUMBLE TENT AND TRANSFORMED IT WITH HIS GLORY!**

Peter himself even calls Mount Hermon "the holy mountain". For him, the Voice coming out of the luminous cloud "from heaven", changed an ordinary mountain into sacred ground. It goes without saying, that the outer nature of the mountain had not been peeled back to reveal an inner holy essence. It is always the glory of God that transforms the ordinary into the sacred.

Paul says that when we believe the Gospel that light shines into our hearts and brings, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:6-7). Our "earthen vessels" carry about

¹⁵ In John 17:5 Jesus prays to the Father and speaks of "the glory which I had with You before the world began." Anthony Buzzard translates Jesus' words as, "Now Father, glorify me at Your side with the glory I had as a promise with You before the world existed." His reason for so translating is because "to have with God" (*para Theo*) is a common Hebrew idiom for having something as promised and stored up for the future as a reward (see Mt. 6:1-2). Cp. Isa. 49:4: "the justice due to me is with the LORD, and my reward with my God", etc. *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*, Restoration Fellowship, 2014. Footnote p292

¹⁶ Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Mac Donald Publishing Co., p 368

priceless treasure! In the process we ourselves are transformed to bear His glory. Common desert bushes can still burn in extraordinary ways to attract the attention of the passers by!

LET'S ASK JOHN WHAT HE SAW

OK. Now let's ask John who also saw Jesus transfigured before his very eyes on that mountain the same question:- John, when you saw the glory of Jesus, did you recognize his Deity shining through his fleshly veil? John's inspired answer is,

No man has seen God at any time ... (John 1: 14,18; 1 John 4:12).

Preachers and commentators who insist, that when Jesus was transformed on the Mount he was peeling back his humanity so the disciples could see Jesus as God, make John's eyewitness confession incoherent. They make John a confused babler, "No man has seen God at any time, but we all saw Jesus as God on that mountain when he took off his mask"! Apparently John suffered from PVSD --- post-vision stress disorder when he wrote that!

I do not doubt the disciples felt overwhelmed at the sight. Are we surprised Peter blurted out, "Lord it's good for us to be here; if you wish, I will build three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17: 4). Did Peter think the kingdom was so real that it was about to arrive any minute? Ah, not so fast Peter! You are not yet comprehending that your Messiah must first "take up his cross"!

Whatever the reasoning, when they heard God the Father's majestic announcement through the luminous cloud, "This is My Son, listen to him!" they were in no doubt as to who Jesus was. He was the one of whom Moses had long ago said, "You will listen to that prophet. God will put His words in his mouth. He will speak in My Name, in My full authority. He will speak all I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:15f). Yes, if God had spoken these prophetic words through Moses, now the disciples have the Voice of the Majestic Glory Himself, confirming, "This is my Son, hear him!"

SO WHO IS 'MY SON'?

When "the Majestic Voice" spoke from the luminous cloud overshadowing the disciples testifying, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; Hear him!", we should ask ourselves, where else did God say this?

Most will answer, why this is identical to the Father's words at the baptism of Jesus. True, but that only pushes the question back one stage further. Why did God the Father announce, "This is My Son" at Jesus' baptism?

Scripture is very clear that Jesus was the Messiah from his birth (e.g. Lk.1:32,35; 2:11, 26 etc.) And it seems that very early on Jesus himself was conscious of his special identity and destiny. He already knew he was God's uniquely begotten Son (Lk. 2:49).

I am sure this heavenly announcement at his baptism brought immense encouragement and joy to Jesus' own heart. But I am equally convinced the announcement, "This is My Son" was not a new revelation for Jesus.

God was announcing His Son for the benefit of others ... and to fulfill His prophetic words concerning Messiah.

Up till his baptism, Jesus had been only a private citizen in Israel. As John the Baptist --- the one Jesus later said was the greatest of all the prophets --- stood by in the Jordan River, he saw God Himself anoint Jesus with the power of the holy Spirit. John had no symbolic oil as when the prophets anointed kings in the past for their office. God was Personally and directly anointing His Son for his Messianic office!

From this moment on then, Jesus went forth, in the fulness of the power of God to fulfill his Messianic destiny.

But even this does not answer our question fully. Who *is* God's Son? The answer certainly, is found in God's prophetic word already foretold generations previously, especially in Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is headed, "The Reign of the LORD'S Anointed" and speaks of the futility of the governments of the world conspiring against God and "against His Anointed".

That word 'Anointed' in the Hebrew is the word 'Messiah', and in the Greek, 'Christ'. The careful reader will observe the interchangeability of three titles this psalm ascribes to God's Messiah ...

V.2 "His Anointed" (Messiah, Christ).

V. 6 "My King upon Zion, My holy mountain".

V. 7 "My Son" whom "Today I have begotten".

The formula is: The Messiah = God's King = My Son. This interchangeable formula is carried over with consistent regularity into the NT.¹⁷

The significance of God the Father's announcement on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is My Son ... hear him!", is that although he will die and be rejected, God will own him. The Roman and Jewish nations might conspire against the LORD and against His Christ all they like. Yet God's decree has gone forth. He has declared He will install His Son as His King upon Zion in the future Messianic Kingdom. Against the tide of the unbelieving world, and even perhaps their own inner doubts, the disciples hear God's own testimony; Jesus is already the glorified King of Israel and the world by Divine decree. The crucified man is God's Son. Better listen up!

JESUS APPEARS AGAIN IN GLORY AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

After Jesus had accomplished his "exodus" and after he had been raised to the position of being the Lord Messiah at God's Right Hand, John again saw Jesus in a vision of glory. John sees the face of the risen Jesus shining brilliantly like the sun, with his hair "white like the snow", and his eyes were "like a flame of fire", and his feet like fine brass "as in a furnace burning with fire", so that "his appearance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev. 1: 12f).

According to many this proves Jesus has returned to heaven to bask in the glory he had always had with God the Father (and with God the Spirit). He's back! Now we are surely seeing the "real Jesus" who had always pre-existed as God!

Well, not so fast. If we consistently follow this line of reasoning, what are we to make of a later vision where John sees a similar manifestation of a mighty angel whose face also shone with the brilliant intensity of the sun and whose feet also looked like molten brass?

And I saw a strong angel coming down from out of heaven, wrapped with a cloud, with a rainbow on his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as columns of fire" (Revelation 10:1).

I have never yet come across one preacher or commentator who thinks this angel is God just because "his face was like the sun and his feet as columns of fire". **Honest exegesis demands there is no basis for making Jesus God because of his transformed appearance!**

THE PREACHER'S CONCLUSION

So, we've come full circle. It's only fitting we should let our preacher conclude his sermon. We definitely cannot agree with him that on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was "taking off his mask and peeling back his humanity to show us that he was God!"

In fact, that is pure Gnosticism, the doctrine that Jesus only appeared as a man. It's the doctrine the apostles warned us against. And I'll be frank, it's the doctrine the apostles said is inspired by the spirit of antichrist! It shows how Christianity today has become the biggest carrier of Hellenistic heresy and yet is totally unaware of it (I John 4:2-3).

Dr. Geoffrey Lampe at Cambridge complained that,

The Christological concept of the pre-existent divine Son ... reduces the real, socially and culturally conditioned personality of Jesus to the metaphysical abstraction 'human nature' ... according to this

¹⁷ Cp. John 1:30,34,41,45, 49,51 where "the man" Jesus = the Son of God = the Messiah = Jesus of Nazareth = the King of Israel = the Son of man.

Christology, 'the eternal Son' assumes a timeless human nature, or makes it timeless by making it its own; it is human nature which owes nothing essential to geographical circumstances, it corresponds to nothing in the actual concrete world; Jesus Christ has not after all, really 'come in the flesh'. ¹⁸

The purpose of the Transfiguration was not that we are to "Behold Jesus as our God". The purpose was that we might see **the future glory God has given to His Son**. That's what Jesus predicted it would mean for the disciples. That's what Peter said it meant for the disciples. That's what it should mean for us if we are obedient to the Voice of His Father from heaven, "This is My Beloved Son, listen to him!" Definitely not, "Behold Your God!"

We should remember the context of the Transfiguration. Peter had six days earlier given his inspired confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God". Jesus had then revealed that as their Messiah he was going to be betrayed and die a horrible death on a Roman cross. Peter then took Jesus aside to argue the point, "God forbid!" But Jesus then made his enigmatic prophetic announcement: Some listening to him would not die until they had seen the Kingdom of God come in power.

Six days later, the three disciples, Peter, John and James, did see the glory of God descend on that mountain. In a vision they saw Jesus transformed before them. They saw a powerful glimpse of Jesus' future glory as the king of God's kingdom before they themselves had experienced death.

We have a certain advantage over the disciples, for sure. For with hindsight we know God's plan was first for Messiah Jesus to be crucified. We understand clearly that the salvation Jesus accomplished by his "exodus ... at Jerusalem" was integral to his glory; No death on Calvary's cross, then no resurrection power; No suffering and humiliation at Golgotha, then no coming kingdom of God.

This was the one thing our preacher got right. For he concluded that the resurrection of Jesus is also a picture of our coming share in the glory of Christ when he arrives again. We too will be transfigured, knowing that "when he shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3: 2).

Our preacher rightly concluded that we shall spend eternity shining just like Jesus did on the Mount! His words were, "Jesus' transfiguration is a picture of our [future] glory in Christ. We will be transfigured and spend eternity shining like the sun in the Son!" He then quoted Jesus' own prophetic words from Matthew 13:43,

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear!"

What a day that will be. We shall see him and be like him, for when Jesus arrives on that day in the power and glory of His Father, he "will transform the body of our humiliation to be conformed with the body of his glory ..." (Philippians 3:21). Yes, our preacher got so much wrong and muddled. But at least he understood this much. God will share the glory He has given His Son with us too in that Kingdom!

¹⁸ As quoted by Anthony Buzzard in *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*, footnote 27, p 593