

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The 'Why' of the Transfiguration.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:27**. We're beginning a new passage that's probably very familiar: the Transfiguration.

Please look with me at **verse 27**...

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

Jesus says, "**I tell you truly**," which is similar to Him saying, "Assuredly I say to you," or "Verily, verily."

It sounds a little odd for Jesus to say this since everything he said was true, but occasionally He said this when He was about to say something that was even more important; something He really wanted to make sure people – including us – didn't miss. So I would say it like this:

- Pay attention to everything Jesus says.
- But pay even more attention when He makes this statement.

And He said this b/c there were some standing with Jesus who were going to see the kingdom of God in their lifetimes. That's pretty amazing!

Now for this passage to make sense, we have to know what Jesus meant when He referred to the **kingdom of God**.

The **kingdom of God** is the realm of salvation where God rules over His people:

- We enter this kingdom through faith in Christ...then we pass from the devil's kingdom to God's Kingdom.
- Kingdoms have kings and Jesus He becomes our King and we become part of His kingdom.
- Jesus brought this kingdom with Him to physically establish on the earth, but He was rejected and killed.
- He will return and physically establish His kingdom on the earth, and we refer to this as the Millennium, b/c it lasts 1,000 years.

So when Jesus says, **some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God**, He means some of the disciples are going to get a glimpse, or foretaste, of this kingdom, or of the Millennium.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

**LESSON 1: "SOME WOULD SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD," REFERS TO THE TRANSFIGURATION.**

There are different opinions about what Jesus meant when He said **see the kingdom of God**. Instead of telling you all those different opinions, I'm simply going to tell you what I'm convinced He meant.

There are three reasons I'm convinced He's referring to the Transfiguration...

1. First, the Transfiguration is in all three Synoptic Gospels – Matt, Mark, and Luke – and each time it occurs immediately after Jesus made this statement to the disciples. And if you look at the beginning of **verse 28** it says **Now about eight days after these sayings**, referring to Jesus' words in **verse 27**. A number of commentators see this as a way to connect **verse 27** with the Transfiguration.
2. Second, the word for **kingdom** can be translated as *“royal splendor.”*
3. Third, Jesus said **some of the disciples would see the kingdom** and only some of the disciples – specifically Peter, James, and John – saw the Transfiguration.

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One reason the Transfiguration is confusing is Jesus said, **“see the kingdom,”** but it seems more like you're seeing a Person. It's easy to read these verses and say, *“This doesn't look like a kingdom. This looks like a Man?”*

If you'll follow me for a moment, there are a number of wonderful ways the Transfiguration is a great window into the kingdom – or Millennium – or thousand years that Jesus rules and reigns on the earth:

1. First, the Transfiguration occurred on the earth, like the kingdom of God will be brought to earth, or like the Millennial Kingdom takes place on the earth.
2. Second, Jesus was glorified, like He'll be glorified in His kingdom, or during the Millennium. Jesus won't be returning at His Second Coming to set up His Kingdom looking like He did in His First Coming.
3. Third, all the necessary kingdom people are present, or in other words, all the people who will be in the Millennial Kingdom are represented at the Transfiguration:
  - a. First, and most importantly, Jesus is present in His glorified form.
  - b. Second, Peter, James, and John are present in earthly, physical bodies, picturing the people during the Millennium who will be in earthly, physical bodies.
  - c. Third, Moses and Elijah are with Christ in glorified bodies, picturing the people during the Millennium who will be ruling and reigning with Christ in glorified bodies. And we can even go a little further than that, b/c there will be two types of glorified saints in the Millennium, and they're pictured by Moses and Elijah:
    - i. Moses pictures the saints who experience death, are buried, and resurrected in glorified in bodies...like Moses died, was buried, resurrected, and given a glorified body.
    - ii. Elijah pictures saints who don't experience death, but were raptured and given glorified bodies...like Elijah didn't experience death, was raptured, and given a glorified body.

So I hope this is convincing that the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of what Jesus referred to in **verse 27** when He said some would **see the kingdom of God**.

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Now I'd like us to appreciate the uniqueness of this account...

This was one of the most exceptional moments in all of the Gospels, or you could say in all of Jesus' earthly life. There is nothing else like it. For example...

- Jesus taught on numerous occasions, so there are different accounts of Him teaching.
- Jesus performed numerous miracles, and healed many people, so there are different accounts of Him performing miracles and healing people.
- Jesus prayed numerous times, so there are different accounts of Him praying.
- Jesus talked with many people, so there are different accounts of Him interacting with people.

But how many times did Jesus ever STOP looking like the Son of Man to look like the Son of God?

Jesus said He was the Son of God.

- We know He was the Son of God.
- We can tell by the things He did – specifically the miracles He performed – that He was the Son of God,

But during Jesus' earthly life did He ever PHYSICALLY look like the Son of God?

- No. Not at all. He looked like your average Middle Eastern man.
- He looked so average, Judas had to say, "I'll embrace Him so you know which one to arrest."
- He was so much the Son of Man He came into the world as a baby, born of a woman!

But there was one time in Jesus' earthly life when He PHYSICALLY looked like the Son of God:

- One time He revealed the glory of His Person.
- One time He put on His glory.

The Transfiguration is like the REVERSE of what we're celebrating next week....

- The Transfiguration is when Jesus goes from looking like the Son of Man to looking like the Son of God...
- Whereas the Incarnation, or Jesus' birth, is when He went from Son of God to Son of Man

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So here's the question:

- Why the Transfiguration?
- And why now?
- Why at this moment, as opposed to any other time?

So I guess it's more than one question.

There are three reasons for the Transfiguration...

The first reason is in **verse 22**. Look back at that verse with me:

**Luke 9:22** Jesus said He **must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.**"

This this was a VERY hard truth for the disciples to swallow. And when this happened to Jesus, would He look like the Son of God?

So Jesus had to offset this news. He needed to give them a memory they could hold on to when He was rejected, betrayed, and crucified, because:

- They might start to wonder if they were following the right Person.
- They might start to have doubts.

The Transfiguration would fortify Jesus' true identity in their minds.

Similarly, Jesus just told them not to be ashamed of Him...and He gave them a great reason not to be ashamed of Him:

- When Jesus was on the cross, He looked like Someone to be ashamed of.
- When Jesus was Transfigured, He looked like Someone you couldn't be ashamed of.

And did these three hold on to this memory? Did they remember it later?

We can tell they did, b/c years later two-out-of-three of them wrote about it:

- John 1:14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, GLORY AS OF THE ONLY SON FROM THE FATHER, full of grace and truth. John was referring to the Transfiguration.
- 2 Pet 1:7 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," 18 WE OURSELVES HEARD THIS VERY VOICE BORNE FROM HEAVEN, FOR WE WERE WITH HIM ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN.** So Peter wrote about this years later too.

These men saw Jesus perform tremendous miracles, but as far as I know – aside from the Resurrection – this is the only miracle they singled out and described.

So the point is, when Jesus was killed, they would've remembered this and it would've given them the encouragement they needed!

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The second reason for the Transfiguration is in **verses 23-26...**

After Jesus told them He would suffer, then He told them they would suffer. Jesus told them:

- Deny yourself...
- Take up your cross...
- Lose your life...

Jesus taught them some hard truths about discipleship, and this needed to be offset too:

- When they were suffering they needed something to remember, and that's what Jesus gave them.
- It's like Jesus calls them to all this, and then showed them, this is the glory of the One you're following. You're suffering is worth it!

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The third, and final reason for the Transfiguration relates to a practice that took place with prophets in the OT. We're going to talk about something, and I can tell you that it's going to sound like it doesn't relate to the Transfiguration, but if you stay with me you'll see the connection.

Here's the practice in the OT...

A prophet would make a prophecy that would be fulfilled in the future, but there was no way to know whether the prophecy would come true, unless you waited all that time. So to convince people that the prophecy would come true in the future, prophets would also perform a miracle.

- The miracle would be called a **sign**, b/c it was a **sign** that the prophecy would come true.
- It's kind of like a down payment, or earnest money.

There are a number of examples of this in the OT, but I only want to show you three of them...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

## LESSON 2: PROPHETS PERFORMED MIRACLES TO PROVE PROPHECIES (PART I) THE ALTAR CRACKING.

After the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, Jeroboam, the king of the northern kingdom, was afraid his people would make the trip down to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom and defect from his nation. So he set up two golden calves to prevent that from happening, telling the people they could worship these calves and not go to the temple. This was sinful, so God sent a prophet to rebuke him. Listen to this...

**1 Kin 13:2 [The prophet] cried against the altar...“O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold...Josiah...shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’”**

It's an interesting moment, b/c the prophet was speaking TO the altar, as opposed to speaking to the people, which is typically the case. This is what he said would happen to it...

Josiah was one of Judah's greatest reformers. When he became king he removed all the idolatry from the land, including even up into the northern kingdom of Israel. He executed the false prophets, and burned their bones on this altar.

This is an amazing prophecy, b/c Josiah wouldn't be born for another 300 years! But all the people who heard the prophecy would be dead by then, so to convince the people that the prophecy would be fulfilled, the prophet provided a miracle...

**1 Kin 13:3 He gave a sign the same day, saying, “This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: ‘Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.’”**

Then the altar cracked down the middle. The miracle is called a **sign** b/c it's a **sign** that the prophecy will come true 300 years in the future.

It's a very convincing **sign** b/c brand new altars don't just crack down the middle for no reason.

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The next two examples I chose are in Isaiah, so I'd like to have you turn there. Please turn to **Isa 38:4**. You can mark **Luke 9** as we will turn back to it...

## LESSON 2: PROPHETS PERFORMED MIRACLES TO PROVE PROPHECIES (PART II) THE SUN DIAL.

Hezekiah, King of Judah, became sick and was going to die. He prayed that God would allow him to live longer, God answered his prayer, and sent Isaiah the prophet to him. Listen to what happened. Look at **verse 4**...

**Isa 38:4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.**

Not only did God say He would extend Hezekiah's life, He also said He would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. Since the fulfillment of these prophecies was in the future, look at **verse 7** to see what God did...

**7 “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised (this is God's down payment, or earnest money): 8 Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.” So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.**

So God performed a sign for Hezekiah – turning back the sun dial – so he could be convinced the prophecies would come true in the future.

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The third example is appropriate considering the time of year...maybe before this you didn't even know the background to this sign!

## LESSON 2: PROPHETS PERFORMED MIRACLES TO PROVE PROPHECIES (PART III) IMMANUEL.

Please turn to the left to **Isaiah 7**. I chose this example, b/c it's also in Isaiah, but also b/c it's Christmas next week. Let me provide the context for these verses...

Ahaz is the king of Judah, and he's terrified b/c he's being attacked by two enemy kings. God told Ahaz that he would kill these kings in a few years, and He gave him a sign to convince him he would do this. Look at **verse 14** to see the sign...

**Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**

This is probably the most famous verse in the Bible regarding Jesus' birth, but Ahaz lived over 700 years before Jesus was born. So how could Jesus' birth be a sign to Ahaz?

Prophecy often has a near, partial fulfillment and a future, greater complete fulfillment...

The near fulfillment is that in Isaiah's day there was a young woman Ahaz would've known who was currently a virgin, and she would give birth to a child that would be named **Immanuel**.

- When Ahaz saw this young lady have a child named Immanuel, it would be clear to Ahaz that God would remove the two kings that threatened him.
- Plus, the name itself would've been encouragement to him: Immanuel means God With Us, which communicated to Ahaz that God was with him during this terrifying time.

To be clear, the woman wouldn't remain a virgin to have the child; there's nothing miraculous or supernatural about the birth of this child, other than the fact God predicted it.

We'll talk about the future, greater fulfillment in a moment. Look at **verse 15**...

**Isa 7:15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.**

God is saying before **Immanuel** is old enough to know the difference between good and evil, the two kings Ahaz is afraid of, will be dead. This chapter takes place in 735BC, and the two kings died in 732 BC, when **Immanuel** was probably 2ish...before he could choose between good and evil.

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Okay, now let me ask you a question that I hope we get right b/c we have talked about it a number of times...

Why do we believe Jesus is the Messiah?

- Not b/c that's what our parents told us...
- Not b/c that's what makes us feel good...

But b/c He fulfilled the OT prophecies.

So let's discuss the way Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, and to be clear, we're looking for the ways He fulfilled this prophecy in the true and greater sense:

1. First, there was nothing supernatural about the child's birth in Ahaz's day. But when Jesus was born, that's when a virgin really gave birth.
2. Second, the child in Isaiah's day was called **Immanuel**, but was he literally God With Us?
  - In Isaiah's day you could look at **Immanuel** and say, "Oh how cute, a little baby whose name means God With Us"
  - But with Jesus you'd say, "Whoa. God became a Man; He's really with us!"
3. Third, the child born in Isaiah's day pictured the deliverance God would give His people from two evil kings...and was that a great deliverance? Yeah, he spared Ahaz and the nation from two evil enemies:
  - But when the true and greater **Immanuel** came, how much truer and greater was that deliverance?
  - The two enemies Jesus spared us from are sin and death.

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Now to come back to the lesson, hopefully these three examples illustrate the way prophets often accompanied their prophecies with a miracle, or sign.

And when you read the Gospels, now you also understand why the Jews were regularly asking Jesus for a sign. He was delivering messages, and they wanted Him to prove His messages with signs. More than likely, they did this b/c that had been the pattern with their prophets throughout their history. Their prophets made a prophecy, and then performed a sign as evidence the prophecy would come true.

When Paul spoke of the Jews in **1 Cor 1:22** he said **For indeed JEWS ASK FOR SIGNS and Greeks search for wisdom;**

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And here's why I'm telling you all this...

This is exactly what Jesus did with the Transfiguration!

There was a famous prophecy in the OT that God would provide a prophet who was greater than Moses. That's in **Deut 18:15-22**. I won't read all the verses, but listen to this one verse...

**Deut 18:15** “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like [Moses] from among you, from your brothers—[listen to Him].”

This is referring to Jesus and can you guess the one time in the Gospels when God the Father most clearly identified Jesus as the Prophet Greater than Moses? Turn back to The Transfiguration and look at the end of **Luke 9:35**...

God said, “**This is my Son, my Chosen One; LISTEN TO HIM!**”

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

**LESSON 3: THE “PROPHET GREATER THAN MOSES” PERFORMED A SIGN TO PROVE HIS PROPHECY.**

We're talking about the WHY of the Transfiguration – or the reasons for the Transfiguration – and this is the last reason. Jesus made an UNBELIEVABLE prophecy, and that prophecy had to be legitimized. The prophecy is in **verse 26**...

Jesus said, “**The Son of Man [will come] in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**”

This is an incredible prophecy. We read last week in **Dan 7** what this will look like. Can you think of anything more amazing than seeing Jesus coming in glory with all the angels?



Since Jesus is a prophet, and since He made a prophecy that's far in the future, He chose to prove that prophecy would come to pass...and He chose the Transfiguration as that sign for them:

- Let me ask you this: do you think seeing Jesus Transfigured would convince them, that yes, He will return in glory with all the angels? Definitely!
- Briefly look at verse 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. This connects to verse 26 when Jesus said He would come in His glory.
- He gives them this mini-window into, or a mini-glimpse of the fulfillment of the prophecy that He made in **verse 26**.

And this is probably the greatest “WHY” of the Transfiguration: Jesus was proving that He was going to return in glory.

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There's one more thing I want to show you about the Transfiguration...

Two verses:

- Look back at Luke 9:18. Jesus asked, “**Who do the crowds say that I am?**”
- Then in verse 20 He asked, “**Who do you say that I am?**”

The Transfiguration is really the answer to these questions: “*Who is Jesus?*”

- But instead of answering the question verbally, He answered it visually!
- Instead of telling them who He is, He showed them who He is.

Then at the end of **verse 20** Peter said, “The Christ of God.”

So you've got Peter confessing who Jesus is, and then you've got Jesus revealing who is.

Now let me ask you something else...

Does the order seem odd...that Peter confessed who Jesus is, and then Jesus revealed who He is?

- Wouldn't you expect Jesus to reveal who He is AND then hear a confession from Peter?
- Why would Jesus reveal who He is AFTER Peter confessed who He is?

The answer brings us to our last lesson...

#### **LESSON 4: JESUS WANTS CONFESSION BEFORE SEEING THE GLORY.**

If you think about it, the order is everything! If the order was changed, Peter's confession would be completely meaningless.

- What if Peter confessed Jesus was the Christ AFTER the Transfiguration?
- Who wouldn't be able to make that confession AFTER seeing the Transfiguration?

The confession doesn't mean much the other way. How meaningful would Peter – or anyone's – confession be AFTER the Transfiguration?

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Think about Thomas...

In **John 20:25** Thomas said, “**Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.**”

Then Jesus showed up and said to Thomas, **27 “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”**

**28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”**

This is a great confession, isn't it!

- **“My Lord and my God!”**
- It's hard to get a confession that's much better than this.

But how meaningful was it? Who **WOULDN'T** believe after putting their hands in the wounds of the resurrected Christ?

It's not my opinion that the confession meant less. Listen to what Jesus said...

**John 20:29** Jesus said to him, “**You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”

Jesus wants the confession **BEFORE** seeing.

Consider these two verses...

**Heb 11:6** Without faith it is impossible to please [God].

God wants our faith. That's what pleases Him.

But a few verses earlier it says...

**Heb 11:1** Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things **NOT SEEN**.

This is why a confession **AFTER** you have seen is not that meaningful. Little faith involved.

And I think that's why Jesus asked the question He did in **verse 20**, and was transfigured after that.

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Let me close with this...

What Peter, James, and John saw – the Transfiguration – was pretty amazing, right? Almost seems a little unfair that only these three got it to see it.

What if I told you that everyone who has ever lived will actually see what they saw? It's true!

- **Rev 1:7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and **EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.**

- **Phil 2:10 at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

So...

- Everyone WILL see the glorified Christ, just like these three did on the mountaintop
- Everyone WILL confess Christ, just like Peter confessed Christ...

But the question is:

- How many people will willingly confess Christ BEFORE they see His glory?
- How many people will confess Christ and bow the knee because they saw His glory, but then it was too late?

If you have any questions about anything I've discussed this morning, or you feel like perhaps you've never confessed Christ as Lord, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we would consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you. Let's pray.