

JESUS TRANSFIGURED ON THE MOUNTAIN

Matthew 17:1-13

Key Verse: 17:2

"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."

Thus far Jesus has taught his disciples who he really is. Finally, Peter made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Yet it was nothing but his head knowledge. When Jesus predicted his death and resurrection, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him, saying, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you." By rebuking Jesus for talking about his death, Peter revealed that he did not believe Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God from his heart and soul. Jesus wanted his disciples to learn the true meaning of his death and resurrection to fulfill God's will for his world salvation purpose. Of course, Jesus had done his best to teach them indirectly and through their common life together. But they were still earthbound, and their hope was not placed in the [kingdom of God](#), but on earth. On the Transfiguration Mountain, Jesus wanted to impress upon them his glorious original image as God. Through transfigured Jesus we see the [true image](#) of Jesus. Most importantly, we must take Jesus' image on the Transfiguration Mountain into our hearts and live in this world with courageous faith and with the attitude of pilgrims. Not only so, but also we must know what kind of image we have. May God help us see that Jesus is originally God and keep his image as the holy God in our hearts. Then surely God will give us victory as we live in this world. God also will enable us to live for the glory of God. At the same time, we also must have Jesus' image before God and man.

First, Jesus' transfiguration (1-2). Look at verse 1. "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves." Jesus took only his top three disciples, Peter, James and John, to the Transfiguration Mountain, hoping that they would grasp the true meaning of Jesus' transfiguration.

Look at verse 2. "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Verse 2 describes Jesus' transfigured appearance. Briefly speaking, his transfigured appearance is summarized with the word "white." In Biblical theology, "white" symbolizes holiness. Also, "his face shone like the sun." This phrase explains Jesus' glory and majesty. His transfiguration mainly teaches us about his image, which was holy and majestic, and reflected the glory of God. As we studied in chapter 16, even ordinary people saw Jesus as one of the prophets. At that time, a prophet was known as a man from God. When Jesus asked, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" his disciples replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (16:13-14). Jesus was known to ordinary people as one from God. During the time of his earthly messianic ministry, he was despised and rejected and mistreated. Despite this, even the ordinary people recognized Jesus as one of the prophets^in other words, that Jesus is from God. Jesus' image is well summarized by Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." As Peter did, people saw that Jesus

is the Son of God.

Everybody has his or her own image. Image is spiritual character or spiritual integrity. Therefore, what kind of image a person has is very important. If it is said of anyone that he is a man of no image, then it means he is nothing but an animal man. Peter's image was that of the teacher of mankind. His image became that of the teacher of mankind because he learned of Jesus most closely. These days, image doesn't matter. Money matters, and political position or business position gravely matter. However, if a high position could make a man a man of good image, then Emperor Nero would have been a man of great image. But Emperor Nero was not at all a man of good image. Even though he was an Emperor and had a high estimate of himself, saying he was a poet, history says he was a fourth-degree mental patient.

Pope John Paul II usually wears white robes, and on his head, he places a white skullcap. He is known to the world as a holy man[^]not because he wears a white robe and a white skullcap, nor because he is the Pope; his image as a holy man comes from his love of God and his love of people. He loves the people of the world, so he travels to many countries. When he visited Africa, he was very happy and the people felt most honored to be visited by Pope John Paul II. They appreciated his compassion toward them. African people loved him as a true servant of God, and to Pope John Paul II his visit to Africa might have been the most happy event of his travels.

In order to better understand image-making, we can think about Missionary David Livingstone. In his time, England ruled the world. African people were not properly honored as they ought to have been. Livingstone knew that his going to Africa was a very dangerous matter. Firstly, he was politically misunderstood. Secondly, he was in danger because of many kinds of vicious animals. One day he was traveling in the jungle. A lion came and ate up his left hand. But the lion stopped there and did not eat more of him. Probably, at first the lion did not know recognize Missionary Livingstone. But soon, after eating his left hand, he learned that he was a good man. Anyway, it is a lion's habit that after catching prey, first the father lion eats, and then the mother lion eats, and then the lion cubs finish eating up the prey until nothing is left over. For the lion to eat only Livingstone's left hand was very unusual. Perhaps even the lion thought that Livingstone was the father of Africa. English people generally respected him. But many people hated him, because he acted as if he were a father of African people. His visible achievement in Africa was not much. But until now, all people of the world see his image as the father of African people.

Albert Schweitzer had a clear goal and direction of life in God. His goal was to study for thirty years and then for another thirty years serve in Lambarene, Congo as a medical missionary. In order to be a medical missionary, he gave up his scholarship, social position and his love of art. He was a very popular pipe organist. While living in Africa, in order to provide necessary funds, he sometimes went back to England or to other countries to have pipe organ concerts. But he gave up the love of art because the pipe organ was too big to take to his workplace in Africa. Nevertheless, he said, "I am free, as free as a bird, even though I am in Africa. I lost all my friends and relatives

and am always surrounded by needy people. But I can think of Jesus freely, as much as I want to." When he died, people of the whole world paid him deep condolence and many cried with the thought that they lost the most precious person, one who should be with them always. During his lifetime, his image and influence helped many young people. His image as a noble and sacrificial man moved many crooked young men of the time. At the same time, his image raised so many young people who wanted to be like him. Even among women there were innumerable people who wanted to be like Albert Schweitzer. When he died, even the rulers of the Soviet Union honored him by saying that he was the light of the 20th century. It is amazing that the people of the Soviet Union, who did not know how to honor people of other countries, honored Dr. Schweitzer so highly.

Image-making, or the formation of image, is very important for all human beings. There was an ambitious young man who engaged in campus evangelism. He was successful in his ministry. But a woman said to him, "You look like a prosecutor." Then the young evangelist was very unhappy. At the same time his co-worker, an American lady missionary, was exalted as an angel[^]not because she was a young and beautiful American[^]but because of her definite calling from God and sacrificial life of faith. At that time all the American missionaries lived in a compound. But she got out of the American compound and lived with Korean people, suffering from lice bites and bathing difficulty because there was no shower system. She was known as an angel. Many people were impressed by her angelic image. Then the young and ambitious evangelist firmly decided to learn of Jesus and have a better image to other people. In the course of image-making, he had to struggle most about his spiritual character and his spiritual integrity. Recently a critical American evaluated him as the most influential person, and also said he has the image of a mother-like shepherd.

Money can't form a man's image. Business can't form a man's image. Political position can't make a man's image. Only when we learn of Jesus can we have a better and better image before God and before man.

We learn from Jesus how to ameliorate our image. Jesus obeyed God's will for world salvation unto death, death on the cross. Hebrews 5:8 says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered...." In order to obey God's will for world salvation, he gave up everything, and even gave his life. Thus people recognized him as one of the prophets. And Peter confessed to him, "You are [the Christ](#), the Son of the living God."

Image-making is one thing of importance to learn on the Transfiguration Mountain. There is another: It is to remember Jesus' image in our hearts. St. John was very wise and ambitious. He wanted to put aside St. Peter and rise to power as the Prime Minister when Jesus established his earthly messianic kingdom. At that time, he was a political figure who could sacrifice others' lives in order to come to power. But he was influenced and changed by Jesus. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, he became a political criminal and was imprisoned on the island of Patmos. But Jesus' image was engraved in his soul. As a result, he did not see any people of evil image in the world; he only thought of Jesus' image as the Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords and Savior of the world. He spoke about Jesus'

image in Revelation 1:14-16 as follows: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." Even though John was in exile and did not know when he would be executed, he thought of Jesus' image which was majestic, glorious, holy, and the image of the compassionate God. He was full of Jesus' image. So he was indeed happy, even in exile on the island of Patmos.

Peter saw the transfigured Jesus, yet failed to express anything about him because of his worldly dream. But later, when he became chief shepherd of the early Christians, he confessed his experience on the Transfiguration Mountain. He said in 2 Peter 1:16-18: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

Second, Jesus' counseling from two suffering servants, Moses and Elijah (3). Jesus showed his disciples his glorious original image as God. Another reason for Jesus' going up the Transfiguration Mountain was to talk with suffering servants Moses and Elijah, who were called with specific missions for which they had to suffer much.

We know well about Moses. Even world history recognizes him as a great leader. Moses was born of Hebrew parents. But he became a prince of the Egyptian Empire when Pharaoh's daughter discovered him^a little baby who was in danger of drowning. The Egyptian princess drew him out of the water. So his name became "Drew him out of the water" in Hebrew, "Moses." His destiny was so pitiful from the time of his birth. But God had a specific purpose for him. God wanted to raise him in the palace so that he might receive a palace education. And later, he would become a shepherd for his people Israel. Moses was born when the 430 years of captivity for the Israelites was almost over. Since he was raised by a nurse who was his own mother, he had an identity as one of the Israelites. At the age of 40, he killed an Egyptian by siding with one of his own people, a Hebrew. Then he became a political fugitive for 40 years in the Midianite desert. His 40 years of desert seminary training was harder than anything else. Then God called him from within a bush, "Moses, Moses. You are to go to Egypt and free my people from the hand of King Pharaoh and bring them out." It was the story of Exodus. From then on, his suffering began. He had to shepherd 600,000 Israelite sheep. His suffering was harder than anyone else's in the world. But Numbers 12:3 says, "(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)" Because of his humbleness, God could use him as a shepherd for his flock of 600,000 sheep. Sometimes we take care of several of God's sheep. Even shepherding several or just one of God's sheep is not easy. Sometimes we feel like dying. But Moses suffered enough in order to shepherd God's flock of 600,000 sheep. We can say Moses was a suffering servant, together with Elijah.

Elijah lived during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. In his time,

Baal worship was so widespread and God-worshiping almost disappeared. But Elijah had to fight against the king and queen's idol worship of the god Baal. Once Elijah challenged Baal priests by saying, "Let us prove who is the servant of the true God." Elijah asked them to bring a sacrifice, dig a huge trench around it and fill it with water. He said, "Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire^he is God" (1Ki 18:24). Around 450 Baal priests prayed all day long. When nothing happened, they cut their bodies and chanted around the trench. But no fire appeared. Then Elijah prayed to God, and suddenly fire came down from heaven, consumed the sacrifice and licked up the water in the trench. Then, with the Spirit of God, Elijah took the 450 Baal priests to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered them one by one until all were slaughtered. As a result, all the Baal priests under Queen Jezebel were killed. Then he began to run away to the top of a mountain. In order to fulfill God's calling and specific mission, Elijah risked his life until he felt like dying. So he prayed to God, "I have had enough, Lord..." (1Ki 19:4).

Here we learn why Jesus met these suffering servants, Moses and Elijah. Jesus knew that he was about to suffer much and die on the cross to obey God's world salvation purpose. So it was necessary for Jesus to have counseling from them. Here, we are tearfully moved by Jesus, who received counseling from two distinctive suffering servants in the Bible.

Third, Peter's imaginative poem (4). Peter was not a man who could write a poem. But when he came up to the Transfiguration Mountain and saw Jesus talking with outstanding servants of God Moses and Elijah, he experienced mysterious fantasy. Immediately he felt ease and glory. So he said to Jesus in verse 4: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters^one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." What he said was not matching with the meaning of why Jesus was on the Transfiguration Mountain. What he said was excellent in poetic rhythm, and the fact that he didn't talk about his own shelter is very impressive. But Jesus didn't bring him to the Transfiguration Mountain to think about ease and glory. Jesus brought him to the Transfiguration Mountain so that he might be enlightened by the original image of Jesus and his talking with the outstanding prophets, Moses and Elijah. But in his illusion, Peter's sinful nature was revealed by the words from his mouth. Peter wanted to live there with Jesus and Moses and Elijah in ease and glory. He never wanted to go back to the mundane world and continue to suffer much to survive and to follow Jesus' footsteps. His desire for an easy and glorious life, together with Jesus and Moses and Elijah, was fantastic. So he unintentionally told Jesus what he was thinking about on the Transfiguration Mountain.

Not only Peter, but all human beings have this same desire. Sinful human beings want to live easily. But those who want to live in this world easily are all causes of trouble in the world. Paul said, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2Th 3:10). But Peter wanted to live easily on the Transfiguration Mountain with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Like Peter, most people want to live easily in the world. They don't want to work hard until they hear their bones crack. But God made man to work hard. If men don't work hard, they remain as babies even when they become seventy years old. They are useless people in the

world. Most criminals who stay in government hotels are those who wanted to live easily in the world. Some robbed banks. Some murdered others to get money. Some cheated and were cheated. An article reported that 93% of all prisoners are those who want to be rich without working at all. Such people are finally locked up in prison. The United States has more prisoners than the number of soldiers. So the prisons are too crowded.

There is another kind of people: Those who seek their own glory in this cursed world. All the people of the world are sick with sin. Those who want to be glorious before other people, who themselves are sick physically and spiritually, are indeed foolish people. Self-glory-seeking desire might be the master passion of all mankind, even in elementary school. Any boy or girl who becomes a class leader is very happy, together with their parents. Those who become a kind of group leader are very happy. But man is made to live for the glory of God, not for his own glory. Self-glory-seeking people are very dangerous people.

Fourth, "no one except Jesus" (5-8). In the last part of verse 5 God says, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" Peter had to listen to Jesus and understand the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. Through his suffering and crucifixion, Jesus glorified God's name and became the source of eternal salvation. This is the reason we must study the Bible, learn how to listen to Jesus, and learn the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. When we understand Jesus' death and resurrection, we have a living hope, life direction, and the meaning of life.

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified (6). It was because Peter's imaginative poem and the motive of Jesus on the Transfiguration Mountain were not matching. The disciples' idea was still very mundane, and they were still under the power of death. Look at verses 7-8. "But Jesus came and touched them. ^Get up,' he said. ^Don't be afraid.' When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus." A human being's master passion might be to live together with loved ones in ease and glory. A fifteen-year-old only son of a medical professor died of cancer. His father wanted to keep him alive with tears and constant prayer. His mother did the same. His mother spent many years with much tears and prayers only for the survival of her dying son. But he died. To human beings, the happiest time might be when their children are in junior and senior high school. After that, all family members scatter. Soon they all marry and leave home. Only old parents are left at home. In the course of time the husband dies first. Sometimes the wife dies first. Anyway, they all separate. In this way, human desire to live together in the world permanently, in ease and glory, turns out to be in vain. The disciples experienced this when they looked up and saw no one except Jesus. Their prospect to live in ease and glory with Moses and Elijah and Jesus was gone, and only Jesus was left. This is the reason we must believe in Jesus. We can be together and live in ease and glory at God's house, the kingdom of God.

Fifth, Elijah and John the Baptist (9-13). Look at verse 9. "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, ^Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from

the dead.'" Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead. Here, Jesus is emphasizing his resurrection, so as to reduce the fear of his disciples concerning his death. Look at verse 10. "The disciples asked him, ^Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" At that time, a rumor had spread that before the Messiah, Elijah would come to restore all things. In their question, the disciples' rejection of Jesus' death is revealed. They hoped that Jesus would not die, and that according to the saying, Elijah would come and restore everything. But the disciples' Bible understanding was very poor. Elijah's coming was an allegorical expression of John the Baptist's coming. John the Baptist came to this world as the forerunner of Jesus with the spirit of Elijah. Here, Elijah's coming does not at all mean that his resurrected body would come and restore this troubled world. It means John the Baptist would come with the spirit of Elijah and carry out his mission as the forerunner of Christ.

So Jesus said to them in verse 12, "But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Jesus did not mention John the Baptist; he talked only about his death. But John the Baptist is also included in this verse. Then the disciples understood what Jesus was talking about.

Today we learned why Jesus went up the mountain and was transfigured. We also learned why Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah. Through Peter and the other disciples who went up the Transfiguration Mountain, we learned man's sinful desire and master passion. We must deeply understand the grace of Jesus who revealed his original image as God to his top three disciples so that they might not be earthbound but have hope in God. Especially, we mainly thought about image-making, or the formation of one's image. Each of us must clearly know what kind of image we have. If your image is not noble and glorious, but rather like a tiger, eagle or grasshopper, you have to really be serious about your life, and make a new and noble image by the grace of God.