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THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

Matt. xvii. 1-9; Mark ix. 2-10; Luke ix. 28-36

I

"THE Transfiguration is one of the most wonderful incidents in the life of our Saviour, and one so instructive that we can never exhaust its lessons."¹ Though unique and outstanding among the many wonders of Jesus this sublime manifestation is yet intimately related both to what precedes and what succeeds its occurrence. The three Synoptists are careful to let this be known. For this reason its significance has to be read in its given setting.

Primarily, it is a revelation of the glory of the Lord which takes place after the disciples by the mouth of Peter confess their settled conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and hear in consequence from Him, (1) "how He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day"; (2) that "there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 21-28). The two intimations are mutually complementary. His sufferings, glorious in their purpose, will lead to His glory and exaltation. Previous to the confession these intimations would have been out of place. Not until the Twelve arrive at this measure of faith by an intimate acquaintance with the life and word of their Lord, and the revelation of the Father, concerning the Person and dignity of Jesus could their import have become intelligible to them. Naturally the self-disclosure of Jesus has to be gradual as they are able to bear it.

At this period of their tuition He is purposely directing His instruction towards their enlightenment on the fundamental necessity of His coming sacrificial death. It was through sacrifice that Jehovah revealed His will: that truth stood central in

¹*Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature.*

the Scriptures. It behoves them now after accompanying with Him for so long to recollect and consider that the Divine salvation, as declared of old by law, symbol, and type, depends on a Supreme Enactment of righteous judgment which reveals to fallen man the mercy and truth of a just God and a Saviour. The death of Jesus the Son of God and Son of man at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, they are increasingly to learn, is to be this Supreme Enactment. So is it foreordained by the love, counsel, and power of God; and equally is it His own good pleasure to fulfil thus the Divine will. Thereby shall the Kingdom of Heaven be established.

The hearts of the disciples are filled with dismay at what they hear from the lips of Jesus. To be told that their beloved and Divinely honoured Master is to die, and be subjected to such shame and suffering, shocks their sense of the fitness of things. It is entirely unseemly. Alike for Himself and the hope of Israel, they assume, this should not be. But the stern rebuke He administers to Peter, who acts as their spokesman, lets them know that the impending passion of their Lord rests upon a great Divine imperative. To question its necessity is to savour of the things of men and not of the things of God. Nevertheless they remain sadly perplexed. The further announcement of His future glory and that some of them present, before they taste of death, should see Him coming in His Kingdom, though it lets in a ray of hope, adds rather to the obscurity of what is predicted. Wherein lies the connection between suffering and glory? Also between His death and coming in His kingdom? Hitherto their thoughts have dwelt upon a reigning and not upon a suffering Messiah. They cannot but surmise He has some new and important truth to teach them; they must wait His time to make all plain. During the six succeeding days they are allowed to ponder over His "dark sayings", in order to test out their faith, and ensure that afterwards they will the better appreciate and understand their heaven-given solution on the Mount.

They require to learn that He came to earth to die as well as reign. His first great work is to die. A vicarious death will be the consummation of His mission of love and mercy. Against surprise at His voluntary submission to such suffering, and against doubt about His dying being foreordained of God, the Transfiguration will serve to prepare their minds. His giving

up of Himself, and His obedience unto death, will accomplish the redemption of mankind. For their immediate assurance of this, and, moreover, that He and the Father are one in all He does, He now proposes to afford them abundant proof.

“After six days” follows the transporting experience. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John as representatives of the Twelve up into a high mountain by themselves alone, and “is transfigured before them”. To their wondering eyes He unveils to them His Divine majesty and glory. Here is undreamt of confirmation that, transcendently, He is the Son of God. He refused the official request of the Pharisees for a sign from heaven of His Messiahship because they saw not that He came in the appointed way of meekness, holiness, and righteousness; now, unasked, He gives this to His own since they have seen what the worldly-wise and prudent could not see. The whole scene, first and last, reveals that verily He must needs go to Jerusalem and die and rise again. His mission is in perfect agreement with the predetermined will of God. What is so soon to come upon Him they should not deem irrelevant; for instead of thwarting the national hope of Israel His suffering will bring that hope to pass. He has come not to abrogate but to fulfil the Law. None of its predictions shall fail to be realised; He is indeed the Saviour of mankind.

The confirmation comes as Jesus is praying. “Alone” on the mountain He is not alone: “He who sent Him is with Him” (John viii. 16, 29). Conversing with His Father He is seen in the glory He had with Him before the world was. His countenance becomes of another fashion; it assumes a heavenly aspect. Previously they had seen Him in the grandeur of His moral glory, that of grace and truth; now they see Him in the splendour of His ethereal glory. His face shines as the sun in its noonday strength. His raiment, white as light, glistens with a dazzling purity utterly beyond the power of man to achieve. The face of Moses once shone but it was with a reflected glory; this glory of the Son of man is native with Him. Clad in light He wears the appropriate garment of Deity (Ps. civ. 2). Mystery of mysteries also, in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii. 9).

The manifestation indeed is of His Godhead. Its forth-shining on this occasion advises of His claim to be the Light

of the World. With Him is the fountain of life; only in His light shall men see light.

The confirmation comes again by the appearance in glory of Moses and Elijah holding counsel with Jesus respecting His decease which He is to accomplish at Jerusalem. Representing the Law and the Prophets they at once attract attention. What witness have they to convey? The burden of their conversation is not of glory; it is of Christ's sufferings prior to glory, the same theme which Jesus of late has been expounding to His followers. How befitting then appears the rebuke He administered to Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" The presence of the heavenly visitants gives cause for the three disciples to reflect that the coming atonement for sin dominates the thought of saints and angels. The Cross figures as the grand, central, constructive event of history wherein the Son glorifies the Father and is glorified of Him.

Confirmation comes finally through the descent of a bright cloud which overshadows all. Out of the cloud they hear a voice saying, "This is my well-beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt. xvii. 5). Moses and Elijah vanish to return whence they came. Jesus only remains. The Law and the Prophets having prepared the way of the Lord, Jesus gathers up their testimonies and purposes unto Himself. Consequently, it behoves men to listen to Him. He is the Fulfiller and the Interpreter of the Scriptures. Such is the meaning of this sure word of heavenly direction. No lingering doubt may be left in men's minds regarding His identity. Jesus is the Incarnate Word, who makes known the will of God. Can mercy and truth meet together to prepare righteousness and peace for men? The Son of God and Son of man provides the answer. Look unto Him. His word is spirit and life.

The manner of the revelation, obviously, is after that of the Sanctuary. The Cloud betokens the impenetrable darkness of the Holy of holies; its inner brightness the Shekinah of glory above the mercy seat; the Voice accords with the Oracles deposited in the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus, as High Priest and Sacrifice in one, is He through whom men find access into the Presence of God.

The voice is that which their fathers heard at Sinai, and which the disciples themselves heard at the Jordan when Jesus is baptised to fulfil all righteousness; and are yet to hear on

the eve of His passion. At present there is the added injunction, "Hear ye Him". His is the Voice of the Father speaking to a lost world. His Name is Immanuel.

II

"In the words themselves of this majestic installation there is a remarkable honouring of the Old Testament, and of it in all its parts which can scarcely be regarded as accidental; for the three several clauses of that salutation are drawn severally from the Psalms (ii. 7), the Prophets (Isa. xlii. 1, 21), and the Law (Deut. xviii. 15). Together they proclaim Him, concerning whom they are spoken, to be the King, the Priest, and the Prophet of the New Covenant."¹

"Hear ye Him", makes the repetition and annunciation of the fulfilment of Deut. xviii. 18, 19: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and He shall speak unto them all that I command Him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which He shall speak in my Name, I will require it of him" (cf. Acts iii. 21-26). He who once delivered in the ears of all Israel the Ten Words of the Old Covenant now charges all, as it were, to listen to the Son in the establishment of the New Covenant. Greater endorsement of the historicity of the Old, and of it as the Divine preparation of the New, could not be given. Likewise greater authority for the acceptance of the New as the perfecting or fulfilment of the word and power of the Old who could wish? Never at any time has the Most High left His offspring without a knowledge of His saving truth (cf. Acts iii. 21; xv. 18; Isa. xlv. 21). Revelation, first and last, is one continuous whole (Isa. xli. 4; Rev. i. 8; xxii. 13). From the beginning shines the light of life, ever rising higher in its strength till it appears in its meridian glory in the Son of man.

The Son of man is the Son of God. That He is none other, God Himself certifies. The identification carries a mighty implication. His advent, foretold by all the Prophets and the Law until John, is now for the second time Divinely attested to have taken place. The Lamb of God's own providing, the Divine Isaac, the Son of promise, the Hope of Israel has at

¹ Trench, *Studies In The New Testament*, p. 207.

length come. The disciples have already confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, but did not perceive the full signification of their words. The higher content of the assertion they made they are now to learn. It behoves them, accordingly, to give earnest heed to Christ's sayings with reference to the import of His sacrificial death. For He is the Lamb of God since He is the Son of God. In the moral and spiritual design of their Law as contained in the Temple ordinances they may read this import. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live. So "the Son of man must suffer". It is "the must of a moral necessity, the must of a surrendered life; the must of a shouldered burden, not to be laid down till every step has been taken of the appointed way".¹ Messiah must be cut off but not for Himself; as God's righteous Servant He shall justify many by bearing their iniquities (Isa. liii. 10).

The three disciples on hearing the Voice fall on their faces and are sore afraid. It is the inevitable terror of fallen man at the Presence of an all-holy God. (Cf. Heb. xii. 21, Ps. cxix. 120); a terror expressive of that which at the day of judgment shall overtake those who now refuse to listen to the Son of man. To His own, however, those who obediently listen, Jesus in His mercy shall touch even as He now touches them, saying, "Arise, be not afraid". They need not be afraid since He has borne away in judgment their sin.

On the way down from the Mount Jesus charges the disciples to tell the vision to no man until the Son of man is risen from the dead. It is to be told but not yet. Before His return from the conquest of the tomb its telling would excite mere wonder, perhaps also personal danger (cf. Acts vii. 55-8), and convey no spiritual instruction because isolated from its doctrinal basis. But after His resurrection and ascension men will have the required data to read aright why He suffered and entered into His glory. The rising from the dead "would complete the proof of His Divine mission and then this must be produced with the rest of the evidence".²

Meanwhile the three question one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. The matter to all is as yet incomprehensible. The real point is that it has been announced

¹ Rev. J. M. E. Ross, M.A., *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, vol. 1, p. 251.

² Matthew Henry.

to them, and is being made a subject of earnest thought which is as Christ intended. The seed sown in their minds is designed to bear rich fruit.

General opinion is that not even the nine were to be told of the vision. This scarcely seems credible. Would this have been in keeping with Christ's manner of training the Twelve? Would David's greater Son alter the statute and ordinance in Israel that as his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike? Again, if the vision on the mount and the miracle parallel each other in their doctrinal instruction how were the nine to understand the real significance of the miracle? The only acceptable supposition is that the nine were left below by the Lord for a definite end in relation to His ascent so that afterwards a comparison of experiences between the three and the nine would enhance the spiritual profit of both.

The day chosen for the vision on the Mount will in due course lead the disciples to see how minutely everything Jesus does conforms to that foretold of Him. St. John in His Gospel makes it plain that the three great signs wrought at Jerusalem of His Messiahship follow the exact order of the three great annual Feasts celebrated there. The cleansing of the Temple occurs at the Passover season, the impotent man is raised up at Pentecost; and sight is given to the man born blind at the Feast of Tabernacles.¹ The Synoptists by their careful statements also make it plain that it is on the eighth day the vision is given. "Matthew and Mark mention the six days that intervene between the day of the conversation and the Transfiguration. Luke includes both these days."² The ascent is made "after six days". A day is spent in prayer. On the eighth day Jesus reveals His glory, and, since the vision refers to the resurrection, the inference is that it occurs, like the resurrection, "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" (Matt. xxviii. 1). The day is that set of old for the revelation of the glory of the Lord (Lev. ix. 1, 23). It is the celebrated Octave which, springing out of Israel's Festivals, like a new shoot from the old stock, prophesies of a new creation in Christ, and known as "The Morrow after the Sabbath", a day also of holy convocation. The Sabbath, the sign of the Old Covenant with its

¹ Cf. *Studies In St. John's Miracles*, James Clarke & Co.

² Barnes on St. Matthew's Gospel.

provisional sacrifices, is to pass away and give place to the New Sabbath, the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection, and of His appearing to His own.

Meanwhile, the full apprehension of this truth is concealed from the disciples. It is concealed from them as much as the full reason of their Lord's declared death is concealed (Luke ix. 45). Revelation—the unfolding of Scripture—is that of a constant process rising into periodic bursts of intense illumination which follow a certain elevation of spiritual desire, and strong exercise of soul, comparable to the ascent of the Mount. There, alone with God, as some great moral decision is taken, or response given to a Divine call for further consecration and service, comes a transport of joy and peace, when, simultaneously, the Scriptures glow with a clarity and brightness not hitherto seen. The experience is transfiguring. This experience is that which awaits the disciples after the resurrection. Then will they be able to tell of the vision as it should be told. The Lord in preparation now stores their hearts with His word so that the Spirit of truth, whom He will send, may bring it to their remembrance, and guide them into all truth. Even thus shall they, as He promised, receive the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and be able to open up the word of His grace to perishing men.

After the resurrection Jesus at His appearances continued the process of imparting His word to them, reaffirming and explaining what He had said before the crucifixion. "O ye unperceiving and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken," the two on the way to Emmaus hear Him say: "Ought not Christ to have suffered and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and the Prophets He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." The eleven and the assembled company listen raptly while He says to all, "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you. Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His Name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem". "And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke xxiv. 25-7, 44-8).

At length, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the light, which has been increasingly dawning on them, bursts into full illumination. Possessed and shown by Him the way of truth

and holiness, they discern, as never before, that the presence of sin in the world is the root cause of all the ills of humanity. No kingdom founded on force, however outwardly glorious, can endure, for that ostensibly involves injustice and oppression. Only by the reign of righteousness in the hearts of men can the kingdom of God take shape on earth. To this end, sin, man's mortal enemy, with the great adversary himself, has to be truthfully met and overthrown. This, the King of truth and righteousness did by His mission to earth. The proclamation of His salvation in the full glory of its grace and power is, therefore, the ordained means to make operative in men's lives what He accomplished for them on the Cross.

III

Under the influence of this new vision the whole teaching of the Law and the Prophets consummated in Christ shines up in its true perspective. To their astonishment, the ancient Scriptures become transfigured before them. Their beauty unveiled, they glisten everywhere with the glory of the Lord. The Lamb is the light thereof, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. They behold Jesus, who has been made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour, because, by the sufferings of death, He tasted death for every man that, through death, He might bring to nought him who had the power of death, that is the Devil; and deliver all who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. ii. 9, 15).

The great "Must" of Christ's passion is finally intelligible; if deliverance was to be secured from the guilt, defilement, and oppression of sin it could not be by evading but by honouring the demands of holiness. On every form of iniquity Divine retribution perforce descends. As God is eternal so is His word for ever settled in heaven. The faithfulness of the Lord is unto all generations. Truth and justice inexorably take their prescribed course. There can be no half-way house between good and evil. To imagine that God can overlook wrongdoing is to change His glory into the similitude of Satan. He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Evil cannot dwell with Him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. How can He sanc-

tion what is foreign to His nature, opposes His goodness, and threatens His sovereignty? If the moral order of the universe be not upheld nothing remains but chaos and death. "Shall he who hateth right govern?" The question is as old as man. The answer is equally as old. It is: "By no means; the evil doer shall surely be cast out." "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Yes, surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." "God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness" (Ps. xlvii. 8). "All His works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness" (Ps. xxxiii. 4, 5). "He hath prepared His throne for judgment, and He shall judge the world in righteousness. The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee" (Ps. ix. 7-10).

The question at issue, therefore, demands an answer: does the sinner crying for pardon desire merely to escape the penalty of sin? Then he cannot be saved since justice and judgment remain the foundation of God's throne. But if he seeks that his sin be put away, and justly put away for ever, he justifies God when He speaks. It is a sign of repentance, for the crier has come to abhor sin, and knows that an unconditioned pardon would neither vindicate the eternal law of righteousness nor appease the misgivings of conscience. He seeks a real not a superficial salvation. To cry to God for mercy apart from the honouring of truth would be asking the Deity to undeify Himself. What could be more unseemly? If absolute truth and certainty are required anywhere they are required in what concerns the glory of God and the welfare of the soul. Only by a legal and a veritable acquittal at the Bar of Divine justice can man be saved and restored to his lost estate. For this a radical redemption is imperative. Nothing less will suffice to preserve the immaculate honour of God, and secure for the sinner absolute peace and safety.

This redemption is witnessed at Calvary. There God sets Jesus forth a Propitiatory Sacrifice for the declaration of His righteousness so that He Himself might be seen to be a just God and a Saviour. In other words, Christ is made manifest as man's Heaven-Sent Substitute, the Divine Passover Lamb, taking upon Himself the wrath and curse of sin to avert judgment falling on the sinner. Through faith in His blood whoso-

ever calls on His Name shall be saved, Jesus becomes the believer's Mercy-Seat.

The dark and august spectacle of Christ lifted up, a spectacle rendered unspeakably terrifying by momentous signs in heaven and on earth, placards unmistakably to all the Sentence of Eternal Justice on the world's iniquity and transgression. The fact cannot be denied. Before His Passion He interprets its character plainly when the Greeks come saying, "We would see Jesus". "The Hour is come", He says, "that the Son of man should be glorified. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this Hour? But for this cause came I unto this Hour. Father glorify Thy name." A voice from Heaven replies, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again". Then Jesus says to those with Him, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. This He said signifying what death He should die" (John xii. 20-33). So heinous and abhorrent was sin in the sight of God that even His own Son could not escape its desert when He assumes the sinner's place. Yet so great was the love of God for the world that He sent Him to die for its redemption. To see Jesus is to see Him in the fearfulness of His sufferings for men, and in the glory of His grace and mercy to all who receive Him as their Redeemer.

Though the Atonement is an act of God, and, for this reason, unfathomable in the depths of its wisdom and power, yet, as revealed, its saving benefits are perfectly intelligible. Such can be easily tested by faith. So accordant are these to human need that a more glorious salvation could not be conceived. "It solves the problem how to justify the sinner without justifying his sin, and how to save him from legal penalty and yet save God from compromise and complicity with his guilt."¹ For mercy and judgment, naturally regarded as utterly irreconcilable, work indivisibly together at Christ's Cross without loss or injury to either and with the same holy purpose of bringing glory to God and righteousness to the believer. It is the wonder of eternity. So the saved can sing equally of judgment and of mercy. "What is judgment itself but mercy with a sterner aspect?" And what is mercy but judgment speaking peace to

¹ A. T. Pierson, D.D.

the offender? The righteousness they unitedly offer through the magnifying of the Law and making it honourable is that of the obedience of Christ unto the death that He died, the doing nothing of Himself but always the things pleasing to the Father, because of His burning inextinguishable love for Him. It is the righteousness of God in Christ. Its designation as given is, "The righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 1).

To say that His righteousness is imputed, or reckoned, to Christ's followers is but part of the truth: the righteousness also becomes verily their own by mystical union with Him through the indwelling of the Spirit. Since He died their death they die with Him, and rise together with Him to newness of life. He lives in them; they live by Him. He Himself is their life. How otherwise could His righteousness be theirs? "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). Even thus He "redeems the soul of His servants, and none of them that trust in Him shall be held guilty" (Ps. xxxiv. 22, R.V. margin). "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. . . . Where sin abounded grace did much more abound: that as sin reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. v. 19-21). The enmity of fallen man is slain. The sinner is reconciled to God. The once dead in trespasses and sins now sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, clad in His glory, complete in Him.

The sole conditions of this salvation are repentance and faith. The former implies sorrow for sin and confession of guilt with a turning to God for mercy through the saving work of Christ. The latter presupposes the renunciation of all self-merit with entire dependence on Christ to be saved by grace and grace alone. Immediately these conditions are sincerely met comes the tender voice of Divine comfort, saying, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thine help. Where is any other that may save thee?" (Hosea xiii. 9, 10). "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. x. 13). "I have blotted out thy transgressions, and as a thick cloud thy sins; return unto Me for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. xlv. 22). "I am Jehovah who exercise mercy, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight,

saith Jehovah ” (Jer. ix. 24). “ Therefore will Jehovah wait that He may be gracious unto thee, and, therefore, will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you: for Jehovah is a God of judgment: blessed are all they who wait for Him ” (Isa. xxx. 18). “ This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord ” (Isa. liv. 17). “ This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life ” (1 John v. 11, 12). “ Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life ” (John v. 24).

IV

The vision on the Mount of the honour and majesty of Jesus served in after days as a great determinative influence in the lives of the apostles. How much it interpreted for them! And how many of Christ’s sayings, dark and strange at the time of utterance, become plain by it afterwards! For instance, the assertion, “ I have power to lay down my life and power to take it again ”, presented no difficulty to the mind after remembering His Divine effulgence. And in connection with the saying to Thomas, “ If ye had known me ye should have known my Father also ”, how evident it was after the resurrection that having taken up His life again He was the fountain of life and none other than Jehovah and God as this apostle first confessed! They saw the King in His beauty high and lifted up and the whole earth was full of His glory. Just as Sinai left its indelible impress on Israel’s religious life, moulding thought, creating aspiration, and colouring all the writings of the prophets, so did this sublime manifestation, after the Cross and ascension, mightily affect the doctrine, the faith and lend expressive colour to the language of the Twelve. No longer could the contradiction of sinners, official antagonism, or the enticements of the world move them, for, like the prophets, they, having seen the Lord, “ came out from His Presence with an awe upon them which never left them, and a strength of conviction which never deserted them, and a sense of God’s Presence with them, and a feeling of power no opposition could overcome ”.¹

¹ A. B. Davidson, D.D., *Waiting Upon God*, p. 167.

Their entire outlook is changed. The spiritual mind now entirely replaces the natural mind. The things of heaven take precedence over the things of earth. Henceforth the other world becomes very real and near; only a thin veil separates the seen from the unseen. The spell of earthly glory that once bound them is dispelled for ever in the realisation of the superior glory just beyond. Their conversation is of glory. Its subject is uppermost. When they preach the cross and resurrection it is to lead men to glory. If Jesus has visibly left them, invisibly He is ever at hand. His Spirit lives in them. His power continues theirs. The certainty of His imperishable love and of the hope of sharing His glory carries them forward over every obstacle until they see Him again face to face.

And so it is with every follower of Jesus. They are transformed as they see Him—as they stand before the Cross. After the baptism at the Jordan Satan took Jesus up into an exceeding high mountain and showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said to Him, “ All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me ”. But this was a phantom glory of mere pomp and passing show, destitute of holiness and truth, empty, therefore, of everything pure and noble and of good report, which could only be won by way of the Cross, and the Son of man replies, “ Get thee behind me, Satan; thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only thou shalt serve ” (Matt. iv. 8-10). Face to face with the Cross, though its acceptance means pain and soul-travail untold, the world offers no attraction comparable to glorifying God and enjoying His good-pleasure. On the holy mount to which He is not led but of Himself ascends, He again stands in full view of the Cross, and, conversing with the Father concerning His holy will therein, He becomes transfigured by it. The lesson all need to learn. It is the acceptance of the Cross as seen in its bearing for the glory of God, and joyful obedience to His will that transfigures human life. It is the beholding of Jesus in His transcendent beauty as Saviour crucified and risen which transforms sinners into saints, and kills for ever the carnal worldly mind. The utmost that Satan can give fails to draw the Christian aside. “ The doctrine of the Cross and resurrection understood and believed is the wondrous talisman which breaks all the spells of that most powerful enchantress ‘ the present evil world ’, making what appears real and important

vanish into empty air, and what is unseen and unfelt assume a distinct visibility and a palpable reality; making God and eternity burst on the soul in a resistless but delightful effulgence which overpowers the false lights of present and sensible things, and opens up a new and happier region in which the mind may exert all its faculties, and the heart find enough to fill all its capacities of hope and enjoyment though continually enlarging for ever."¹

At Pentecost comes the time for the disciples to tell the vision of their Lord's glory. Now they can tell it intelligently. Being His witnesses the Comforter, or spirit of truth, bears witness with them of the glory of Christ's atoning death, of His justifying righteousness and of His ascent to the Father. By means of this telling, or witness, the Spirit convicts the world in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The three convictions parallel the three aspects of the Redeemer's work, and the three corresponding steps of salvation. When He is presented to men in His glory, will they hasten to Him for grace and mercy? Will they accept His proffered gift of righteousness? Will they receive the bestowal of the Holy Spirit? The inquiries sift the hearers. So the preaching of the Gospel acts as the moral touchstone of mankind, examining the hearts and reins of all to disclose whether the inclination is for or against salvation. According as the great decision is made so do men pass judgment on themselves. The verdict at the Day of Judgment shall simply be that which each one has already of himself decreed. They who come to Christ now and suffer with Him shall enter into His glory; they who now prefer the pleasures of an evil world and do not receive Him shall be shut out from His glory.

Judgment, like salvation, has its past, present and future tenses. The world at the Cross has been judged, is being now judged by the Gospel, and shall be judged by The Man Christ Jesus. The Saviour and the Judge are one. He is Saviour through the redemption He wrought for man; He is Judge by virtue of having removed all excuse for continuing in sin. Whether past, present, or future each has its distinctive manifestation of glory. The present glory is that of a display of grace and truth in the saving of sinners; the future glory, like the past, will be a visible revelation of the Presence of the

¹ *The Epistle To The Romans*, John Brown, D.D.

Saviour and Judge accompanied by the redeemed. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. xiii. 43).

Writers on the Transfiguration usually dwell more on the contrast between the brightness of the glory on the mountain top and the darkness of the gloom on the plain beneath than on the close connection between the two scenes. A strong contrast there certainly is, yet it should not be forgotten that the one is not without the other. If Jesus is seen above in His sacrificial glory as He confronts the Cross He is seen below in His saving glory as He delivers the oppressed from the thralldom of sin and Satan. The glory of the Transfiguration and the glory of the miracle essentially are one and the same.

Which of the two scenes is the more attractive? Who are the more privileged, the three or the nine? Let theologians answer. What a fine opportunity presents itself for the display of their dialectic powers! Is it better to speak of the glorious honour of the majesty of Christ or of His wondrous works? To talk of the glory of His kingdom or of His power? (cf. Ps. cxlv. 5, 11). Do not mercy and truth unite to flow as one indivisible stream? This much is plain: there is not a more comprehensive deed of mercy in the New Testament than the one which immediately follows the Transfiguration, nor one where Christ's power is more marvellously exercised in the calling forth of faith from the obdurate human heart, and the casting out of Satan from his usurped dominion over the lives of men. It opens up a vista of the Lord's whole work on earth. Its consideration, for lack of space, must be left meantime.

T. TORRANCE.

Edinburgh.