

May 16

Lesson 11

## Jesus Transformed

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**Focal Passage:** Luke 9:28-36

**Background Text:** Luke 9:18-36

**Purpose Statement:** To explore what the Transfiguration teaches us about God and Jesus Christ

**Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup>About eight days after Jesus said these things, he took Peter, John, and James, and went up on a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes flashed white like lightning. <sup>30</sup>Two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him. <sup>31</sup>They were clothed with heavenly splendor and spoke about Jesus' departure, which he would achieve in Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Peter and those with him were almost overcome by sleep, but they managed to stay awake and saw his glory as well as the two men with him.

<sup>33</sup>As the two men were about to leave Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it's good that we're here. We should construct three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—but he didn't know what he was saying. <sup>34</sup>Peter was still speaking when a cloud overshadowed them. As they entered the cloud, they were overcome with awe.

<sup>35</sup>Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>Even as the voice spoke, Jesus was found alone. They were speechless and at the time told no one what they had seen.

**Key Verse:** "Then a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!' " (Luke 9:35).

Do you recall a time when you experienced the holy in the ordinary, a time when you felt an overwhelming sense of the presence of God? Perhaps it was in the bread and the cup of Holy Communion, or the face of a child, or the gift of wisdom and peace in a time of crisis.

I have felt God's mighty power when standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon and on the shore of the ocean. I have experienced God's grace in the fellowship of family and friends and

the gift of answered prayer. When have you exclaimed, "Surely, the presence of the Lord is in this place"?

This lesson continues our exploration into the ways God has been revealed to humankind in Scripture. Jesus' disciples Peter, John, and James experienced the holy break into the ordinary in a glorious way when they went with Jesus "up on a mountain to pray" (Luke 9:28). As we look at this experience of Jesus' Transfiguration, we will consider what it teaches us about God and Jesus Christ.

### Alert

When you read this Scripture passage, did you pause when you read that "Peter and those with him were almost overcome by sleep" (Luke 9:32)? Other translations read, "Peter and his companions were very sleepy" (NIV) and "Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep" (NRSV). Did you wonder, *Seriously? Did these disciples really almost sleep through the whole thing?*

It is interesting to note that only Luke's Gospel includes this information that the disciples "were almost overcome by sleep." The Gospels of Matthew and Mark do not mention this in their accounts of this event. We wonder, then, why did Luke include this detail? One suggestion is that the event occurred at night. If so, we could expect that the disciples would be ready for sleep. But, fortunately, "they managed to stay awake" (verse 32).

Another idea presented is that "drowsiness is a way of talking about how people allow concern for ordinary things to distract them from expecting Jesus' return."<sup>1</sup> Luke records Jesus' story of a master who returned home from a wedding and found his servants waiting up for him. Jesus said, "Happy are those servants whom the master finds waiting up when he arrives" (12:37).

Luke also records Jesus' warning: "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drinking parties, drunkenness, and the anxieties of day-to-day life. . . . Stay alert at all times" (21:34, 36). Both of these accounts relate to being ready for Jesus' return in the end times.

Perhaps one of the teachings Luke wants us to gain from the disciples' experience of the Transfiguration is that we do not know when we will experience God's glory. So we live each day mindful and alert to God's presence so we do not miss opportunities to experience the holy in the ordinary.

***How do you remain alert to God's presence in your daily life? What distractions might cause you to miss an experience of the holy in the ordinary?***

### Convinced

The Background Text for this lesson includes a conversation Jesus had with his disciples several days before his transfiguration. At that time, he asked his closest followers two questions: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (Luke 9:18). The disciples shared the speculation that had been going around among the people: "John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others that one of the ancient prophets has come back to life" (verse 19).

How would you respond to this question today? What do members of your family, your friends, and your coworkers say about Jesus? Who do they believe Jesus is?

Jesus then asked his closest followers the more important question: "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" (verse 20). This is a question we each must answer for ourselves as we grow in faith.

Peter seems to have replied with no hesitation: "The Christ sent from God" (verse 20). The Gospels of Mark and Luke do not tell us how Peter came to know this. The Gospel of Matthew reports that Jesus said to Peter, "Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you" (Mathew 16:17).

***How do you respond to Jesus' question, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?"***

### **In the Presence of the Holy**

Notice that Jesus was praying before he engaged his disciples in the conversation about who he is (Luke 9:18). His reason for being on the mountain when the disciples experienced his transfiguration was to spend time with God in prayer (verse 28). Jesus showed by example that prayer is vital in our lives of faith.

I doubt that our imaginations are able to grasp fully the glory and wonder of that moment when "the appearance of his face changed and his clothes flashed white like lightning" (verse 29). The experience was all the more glorious because they also witnessed "Moses and Elijah . . . talking with him . . . clothed with heavenly splendor" (verses 30-31).

Moses and Elijah are two of the greats in the history of the Israelites. In the previous two lessons, we studied Scripture passages that told of the close relationship these two men had with God. They also have in common the fact that there is a sense of mystery in the way they left this earth.

Deuteronomy 34:5-6 says, "Then Moses, the LORD's servant, died—right there in the land of Moab, according to the LORD's command. The Lord buried him in a valley in Moabite country across from Beth-peor. Even now, no one knows where Moses' grave is."

Second Kings 2:11 describes Elijah's departure from earth. He and his successor prophet Elisha "were walking along, talking, when suddenly a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went to heaven in a windstorm."

Later in Jesus' ministry when he was responding to the Pharisees, he said, "Until John, there

was only the Law and the Prophets. Since then, the good news of God's kingdom is preached, and everyone is urged to enter it" (Luke 16:16).

Moses represents the Law. He was God's spokesperson during the time the Israelites escaped bondage in Egypt and sojourned across the wilderness to the Land of Promise. God chose Moses to receive the Law on Mount Sinai and then teach the Law to the Israelites. Until John, the Mosaic law was the primary source of instruction for the Israelites about what it meant to live in relationship with God.

After Moses' death, God spoke to the Israelites through various prophets. As we noted in the lesson last week, Elijah was sent to proclaim God's word to the people of Israel during a time when the worship of pagan gods was rampant. He reminded them of their call to give their devoted worship to the Lord and only the Lord. Until John, these prophets were the only ones proclaiming God's word, calling the people to repentance and renewed obedience to God's will.

The prophet Malachi proclaimed the Lord's word concerning Moses as the receiver and teacher of the Law and Elijah as the prophet who would return: "Remember the Instruction from Moses, my servant, to whom I gave instruction and rules for all Israel at Horeb. Look, I am sending Elijah the prophet to you, before the great and terrifying day of the LORD arrives" (Malachi 4:4-5).

After Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ (Luke 9:20), Jesus shared with his disciples what it meant for him to be the Christ, saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (verse 22, NRSV). The disciples did not realize the full impact of these words until after the Resurrection.

When Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah on the mountain, the topic of their conversation was "Jesus' departure, which he would achieve in Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The NRSV translates, "His departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." The NIV says, "Which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." The words *achieve*, *accomplish*, and *bring to fulfillment* indicate that there is a special purpose for Jesus' life.

The "law and the prophets" were not enough to bring the people into a right relationship with God. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus "carried out the cleansing of people from their sins. . . . The Son became so much greater than the other messengers" (Hebrews 1:3-4). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus achieved "the cleansing of people from their sins" (Hebrews 1:3). He fulfilled God's purpose for his life "so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life" (John 3:16).

***When have you experienced God's glory?***

### **Overcome**

On one summer vacation, my family hiked along a narrow trail on the side of a mountain in Glacier National Park. We were surrounded by majestic beauty: an amazing blue sky, a turquoise blue lake below, and tall mountains spotted with snow. I knew we could not stay on that mountain. I remember purposely taking it all in so that I would be able to recall that day and go back to that glorious place in my memory after we returned home to our daily lives.

We do not want the good times in our lives to end. We want to linger at the mountain overlook. We want to hold our children close a little longer. We want to sit at the table sharing dinner with loved ones for a few more minutes. When have you wanted to preserve an awesome or glorious experience?

Peter, John, and James “were almost overcome by sleep” (Luke 9:32). Almost, but not quite! We imagine that, after they witnessed the splendor of Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah, they were completely overcome by God’s glory. Nothing had prepared them for this experience.

Peter suggested they build shrines for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, perhaps to show them honor, perhaps to preserve the moment. But it was not God’s intent that this glorious experience be preserved in shrines or that Jesus and his disciples remain on the mountain.

They suddenly found themselves inside a cloud, and “they were overcome with awe” (verse 34). They heard God’s voice proclaiming, “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!” (verse 35). In this moment of revelation, God gave the disciples what they needed to move on.

Jesus knew he could not remain on the mountain. He needed to set his sight on Jerusalem, even though a painful death awaited him there. God called the disciples to accompany Jesus on this journey.

The disciples could not perceive the challenges that lay ahead of them, but they had experienced God’s presence in a real way. God confirmed what Peter had declared, that Jesus was “the Christ sent from God” (verse 20). He and the other disciples received specific instructions from God: “Listen to him!” (verse 35).

When have you felt overshadowed by a cloud? We may experience different “clouds” in our lives. Peter may have felt he was overshadowed by a cloud of confusion or uncertainty as he tried to discern the meaning of the glory he had just witnessed. There may be times when we feel we are enveloped in a cloud of fear, heavy burdens, or sorrow. This event reminds us that we are not alone. God is always with us. God’s words remain true. “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!” (verse 35).

***When have you heard God calling you to listen? How has Christ been present with you within clouds of confusion, fear, sorrow, or other challenging circumstances?***

### **Praise, Thanksgiving, and Song**

As you prepare to practice the spiritual disciplines of praise, thanksgiving, and song this week, think about the times in your life when you experienced the holy in the ordinary. Where were you? What were you doing? How did you feel during and after the experience? Did you share the experience with others?

Then respond by offering your praise, thanksgiving, and songs to God. You may want to write a poem that expresses your feelings about the experience. You may want to pray silently or out loud. You may want to sing a song of thanks and praise.

**Holy and gracious God, thank you for your Son, Jesus. Thank you for your gifts of salvation and eternal life. Help us to remain alert so we do not miss opportunities to see the holy in the ordinary. Help us to listen for your voice. Thank you for your faithful presence with us every day; in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

<sup>1</sup>From *The CEB Study Bible*, New Testament; page 129.