

# ELIJAH, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER

By

F. B. Meyer

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE TRANSFIGURATION

(Luke 9)

WORDSWORTH and all his followers were students in the school of Jesus Christ. Never breathed a more enthusiastic lover of Nature than He. Lilies could not grow at His feet, or birds wing their homeward flight over His head, without attracting His swift attention. His daily talk was of wandering sheep and whitening corn; of living wells and summer rain; of the changing hues of morn and eve. We cannot wonder, therefore, at His snatching brief opportunities for communion with the scenes of natural beauty; or that He often climbed the everlasting hills - the natural altars of the world - obviously intended not for habitation, but for worship.

Such an occasion is the one referred to here. Wearied with His toils, and requiring time for private intercourse with His friends, to prepare them for the approaching tragedy, of which they were strangely unconscious, He traveled northward with His disciples, avoiding the larger towns, until they reached one of the smaller villages nestling on the lower slopes of Mount Hermon, which towers into the clouds, and forms a majestic barrier on the northern frontier of Palestine. There they seem to have rested for about a week.

Think how they may have spent those days! Watching the snows on the upper peaks flush in the dawn, and glow in the sunset, as if aflame. Reveling in the fertility, which centuries before had been compared to the fragrant oil anointing the high priest. Visiting the ancient forest of cedars, from which Hiram's servants had hewn the beams of Solomon's temple; or the mountain springs, where the familiar Jordan had its source. A week would quickly pass amid engagements such as these, blended, as they must have been, with intercourse on the loftiest themes.

After eight days, Jesus took with Him His three mighties - Peter, James, and John; and as the evening shadows darkened over the world, He led them up to some neighboring summit, removed from the sight and sound of men.

He went to brace Himself for the coming conflict by prayer; and perhaps for the earlier part of the night the favored three bore Him fellowship. But they soon grew weary, and presently, as afterward in Gethsemane, were wrapt in heavy sleep - though dimly conscious of their Master's presence, as He poured out His soul with strong cryings and tears.

We know not how many hours elapsed ere they were suddenly startled from their slumbers - not by the gentle touch of morning light, but beneath the stroke of the unbearable glory which streamed from their Master's person.

- The fashion of His countenance was altered;
- The deep lines of care that had seamed it were obliterated;
- The look of pensive Sadness was gone.

"**His face did shine as the sun;**" not lit up as that of Moses was, by reflection from without, but illumined from within, as if the hidden glory of the Shekinah, too long concealed, were bursting through the frail veil of flesh, kindling it to radiance as it passed.

"**His raiment**" - the common homespun of the country - "**became white and dazzling;**" more resplendent than the glistening snow above, and as though angels had woven it of light. But perhaps the greatest marvel of all was the presence of the august pair; "**which were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease** [His exodus - out of death into new and resurrection life] **which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.**"

## **I. CONSIDER THE PROBABLE REASONS WHY THESE TWO, AND ESPECIALLY ELIJAH, WERE CHOSEN ON THIS SUBLIME OCCASION**

*The first reason might have been that they should attest the dignity of the Lord Jesus.*

He was approaching the darkest hour of His career, when His sun should set in an ocean of ignominy and shame; and it seemed as if Heaven itself were astir, by embassy, or delegation, or deputation, to assure His friends, and to convince the world, of His intrinsic worth. Should seraphs be commissioned? Nay; for men, unable to realize their rank, would be simply dazzled. Better far to send back some of the human family, who had passed into the unseen, but whose illustrious deeds still lived in the memory of mankind, giving weight to their witness. Yet who should be selected?

There might have been a fitness in sending the first Adam to attest the supreme dignity of the second; or Abraham, the father of them that believe. But their claims were waived in favor of these two, who might have more weight with the men of that time, as representing the two great departments of Jewish thought and Scripture: Moses, the founder of the Law; Elijah, the greatest of the Prophets.

It is impossible to exaggerate the prominence given to Elijah in the Jewish mind.

At the circumcision of a child, a seat was always placed for him; and at the annual celebration of the Passover in each home, wine was placed for him to drink the cup for which, among richer Jews, was made of gold, set with jewels. And it was universally believed that he was to come again to announce the advent of the Messiah. It would, therefore, have great weight with these disciples, and through them with after ages, to feel that he had stood beside Jesus of Nazareth, offering Him homage and help.

And it was partly the memory of the allegiance rendered by Elijah to his Master that led Peter to say, in after years, that he had been an eye-witness of His majesty.

Astronomers tell us that our sun, with its attendant worlds, is only a satellite of some other mightier star; and that these wondrous orbs are circling round some far-distant center, known as Alcyone. If this be so, and if our mighty sun is only a satellite, what must not be the glories of the central body, whose majestic progress it attends! And if Elijah were so illustrious, what must not be the glories of that wondrous Being, to whom he was only a servant amongst many!

*Another reason may be found in the peculiar circumstances under which they left the world.*

Moses died, not by disease or by natural decay, but beneath the kiss of God. His spirit passed painlessly and mysteriously to glory, whilst God buried his body. Elijah did not die. Disease and old age had nothing to do in taking down the fabric of his being. He did not sleep; but he was **"changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."**

We may not penetrate into the secrets of that mysterious border-land, which these two passed and repassed, in their holy ministry to the Saviour's spirit; but we feel that there was something in the method of their departure from our world, which made that passage easier.

*Yet another reason is suggested in the evident fulfillment of their ministry.*

They had been originally sent to prepare for Christ.

**"We have found Him,"** said Philip, **"of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write."** **"Moses,"** said Jesus, **"wrote of Me."** **"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."**

But the Jews were in danger of forgetting this, and of attaching more importance to the messengers than was justifiable. They clung to the stars even when the sun was steadily climbing up the sky. It was the death-warrant of Stephen, that he seemed to them to slight the Old Testament, by hinting that it would be abrogated and superseded by the New.

Peter himself was quite prepared to treat Moses and Elijah on an equality with his Master, by building three tabernacles - one for each. This could not be; and therefore Moses and Elijah were swept away by a cloud, and **"Jesus only"** was left; and the voice of God was heard insisting that Peter and the two other disciples should listen to Him alone.

It was as though God had said - uttering words that lifted a dispensation from its hinges:

**"As ye have listened to the Law and the Prophets, so now listen to My Son. Do not put yourselves again under the law, or rest content with the prophets, however lofty their ideals and burning their words; but give to Him all the veneration and attention that you have been hitherto wont to reserve for them. Pass from the anticipation to the reality; from the type to the perfect fulfillment. They are taken; but all that made them helpful is left."**

We too must sometimes climb transfiguration mounts, and see our beloved caught away from our gaze, and then return toward an unkindly and wrangling world; but let us remember that our hearts are bereft of their supports, to drive us to find all, and more than all, in Jesus. He is enough for any heart, however lonely and desolate. He suffices for Heaven, and surely He can for earth.

All that is good in anyone was first in Him, and remains in Him forever without alloy. And as one after another is caught away, we are still rich with unsearchable wealth; we are still able to cope with all the devils that await us in the vales beneath, though we have "**no man save Jesus only.**"

Such may have been some of the reasons that led to the appearance of these two men on the Transfiguration Mount: standing there for a moment, and then receding into the land of glory from which they came; attesting His dignity, and then withdrawing - that the interest excited by their presence might not be focused on themselves, but turned at once and more intensely on the person of Jesus Christ.

## **II. CONSIDER THE THEME ON WHICH THEY SPOKE**

They spoke not of the latest tidings of Heaven; nor of their own wondrous past; nor of the distant future: but of the decease (lit. the exodus) which He was to accomplish so soon at Jerusalem.

Great men love great thoughts. And where could there have been found greater subjects than this wondrous death, and His glorious resurrection? - which were to affect all worlds, and to involve the Son of God in shame and sorrow so unfathomable.

Herein Moses and Elijah precede the greatest thinkers of mankind - Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Milton, Faraday, who have sought in the Gospel of the Cross the sea-room needed by their leviathan intellects.

Heaven was full of this theme. Angels, forsaking all other interests, were absorbed in wonder, awe, and love, as they watched each step toward the destined goal. May we not imagine all the life of Heaven arrested and pausing before that stupendous tragedy? It was natural, then, that these latest comers from those shores should talk of the one all-engrossing topic in the land which they had left.

Their own salvation depended on the issue of that wondrous death. If ever there were men who might have stood a chance of being accepted on their own merits, surely these were such. But they would have been most particular in disclaiming any such distinction.

Looking back on their careers, they were deeply sensible of their imperfections and their sins.

Moses remembered the petulance of Massah. Elijah recalled the faithlessness and fretfulness of the desert. And, in the light of eternity, they saw evil in many things which had seemed passably good in the twilight of earth. They had no merits of their own. Their only hope of salvation lay where ours does - in His overcoming the sharpness of death, and opening the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

And surely our Lord would lead them to dwell on a theme so constantly present to His mind. He had always anticipated the hour of His death. It was for this that He had been born. But now it seemed very near. He stood within the shadow of the Cross. And it must have been grateful to Him to talk with these lofty spirits of the various aspects of the joy that was set before Him.

Moses might remind Him that if, as God's Lamb, He must die, yet as God's Lamb He would redeem countless myriads.

Elijah might dwell on the glory that would accrue to the Father.

These thoughts were familiar enough to the mind of our blessed Master; yet they must have gladdened and strengthened Him, as they fell from other lips. The more so, when they conversed together on the certain splendor of the resurrection morning that should follow His decease.

Let us learn how men view the work of Christ in the light of eternity.

They do not dwell primarily on the mystery of the holy incarnation; or on the philanthropy of His life; or on the insight of His teachings. All these things are dwarfed by comparison with His death. That is His masterpiece - the *Mont Blanc* of the glorious range of His achievements in our mortal flesh.

- Here the attributes of God find their most complete and most harmonious exemplification.
- Here the problems of human sin and salvation are met and solved.
- Here the travail of Creation meets with its answer and key.
- Here are sown the seeds of the new heavens and earth, in which shall dwell righteousness and peace.
- Here is the point of unity between all ages, all dispensations, all beings, all worlds.
- Here blend men and angels; departed spirits and the denizens of other spheres;

Peter, James, and John, with Moses and Elijah: and all with the great God Himself whose voice is heard falling in benediction from the opened Heaven.

The nearer we get to the Cross, and the more we meditate on the decease accomplished at Jerusalem, the closer we shall come into the center of things; the deeper will be our harmony with ourselves, and all other noble spirits, and God Himself. Climb that mountain often, in holy reverie; and remember that in all the universe there is no spirit more deeply interested in the mysteries and meaning of our Saviour's death than that noble prophet who now seeks no higher honor than to stand forever as near to the beloved Master as he did for one brief space on the Transfiguration Mount.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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