



Luke 9:28-36
 The Story
 Jesus: Son of Godⁱ

Rev. Brian North
 March 18th, 2018

Today we continue our chronological journey through the Bible, called the Story. Many in the church are reading through the book, called The Story, which is the Bible, but it focuses in on the main thread of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, presenting the Biblical narrative in a streamlined, chronological format. And our messages each Sunday are coming out of a part of the chapter for each week. So this week was chapter 25, and today's passage is part of that chapter that many of us read this week.

And in today's text we encounter an event that is truly fascinating: the transfiguration. It kind of echoes Moses' encounters with God on Mt. Sinai when he was given the Ten Commandments they were to follow; now it's Jesus, God's Son, whom they are to listen to, with the implication being: follow *him*. So this is not the only time we see something along these lines, though the idea that two people who had lived hundreds of years before being a part of this brings a whole new level of mystery to it.

Perhaps, because of the nature of this event, we wonder if this really happened: Did Luke make this up? Well, Matthew and Mark both include it in their gospel accounts, as well, so that perhaps adds some veracity if you're skeptical. And the book of 2 Peter recounts this event, and specifically the voice of God that they heard, where we read, **"We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:18)**. And we should remember that Luke states right at the beginning of his gospel account that he's writing this biography for his friend Theophilus, and that what he's written is the result of *careful investigation to confirm* what's been told to them by *firsthand witnesses* of the life of Jesus. That's how Luke puts it.

And as you've heard me say countless times: most of the New Testament – including 3 of the 4 gospels – was written within the lifetimes of people who would have seen Jesus and been with him. Not all... certainly some died beforehand. But many would've still been alive and able to corroborate the gospels recording of Jesus' life, and the claims about Jesus made by Paul and

others who wrote the letters of the NT.

So we may read this and wonder, “Really? Did that happen?” It’s a fair question, because it’s an unusual occurrence. But, there are four authors who each record the event and treat it as real and historical, and Luke explicitly states that his biography is based on careful research. So the gospels’ biographical accounts of the life of Jesus are trustworthy, including in this event, as unusual as it is. I think the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth put it well when he said that when we open the Bible and read it, we enter into “a strange new world.” It’s not all immediately explainable from our earthly perspective.

That being said, we’re not the only ones who aren’t quite sure what to do with Jesus’ transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Even in the moment Peter has kind of an odd response. “Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” As if Elijah and Moses are there to stay for a while! Peter is often criticized for this – even Luke gives us the comment that Peter didn’t know what he was saying. And so this often gets added to the pile of Peter quotes that illustrate his tendency to speak or act before thinking. And there is an element of that here. But I don’t think we should throw Peter under the bus completely.

What seems to be at the heart of his comment is a desire to continue this moment; to keep it going. Peter recognizes this as a special holy event, and he wants to keep it going. Who doesn’t want to keep good things going, right? No sports team wants to stop winning games. In fact, if they win the championship for their sport one year, they don’t then decide the next year that they’d rather not win it. Even the Mariners, as pathetic as they’ve been the last 16-17 years, would like to win and keep winning, even though all they actually do is keep losing. When we have a great dinner with friends, or a great vacation, a worship experience, or some kind of encounter with God where the Lord really touched us and made his presence known to us...we want those kinds of things to continue, if at all possible. That seems to be what’s at the heart of Peter’s comment, even if what he says is kind of odd.

And notice here that: **Jesus does not rebuke Peter for what he says.** If Peter

were out of line, Jesus probably would have rebuked him. Just shortly before this, Jesus had told the disciples that he would be rejected, killed, and three days later be raised to new life. Mark and Matthew tell us that Peter then took Jesus aside and rebuked him...but Jesus then rebukes Peter saying, “Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of humankind!” Also, soon *after* the transfiguration, James and John – the other two up here with Peter – make some comments that are out of line, and Jesus rebukes them, too. Jesus gives many other corrections that are perhaps less stern than a rebuke. So this happens with some frequency, and if Peter were way off here in his desire to keep this holy moment going, Jesus almost certainly would have let him know. So let’s not be too critical of Peter.

And so it is in this transfiguration that: **They see Jesus in a whole new light – literally – and have a greater understanding of who he is.** In fact, in Luke’s account, he notes for us that after they had first gotten to this place, Jesus started praying, and then Peter and the other two became very sleepy, “but when they saw his glory, they became fully awake.”

Anything like this ever happened to you...where you’re really drowsy...maybe even you doze off a bit...but then something happens that completely gets your attention and you’re wide awake?

I think I’ve confessed this to you all before, but I remember a few years ago after Gwen and I had gotten back from a trip to Uganda, I found myself at a Finance committee meeting the next day or so at a church member’s home in Redmond. I had some serious jetlag going on and I felt like it was about 3 in the morning and like I’d been awake for 30 hours straight. At the end of the meeting we closed in prayer – and I fell asleep. Your pastor fell asleep in a prayer! Don’t judge. It was a finance meeting, for crying out loud. Many of you probably would’ve slept through more than just the prayer – even without jetlag. 😊 And I’m in pretty good company with Peter, James, and John. So I woke up to them talking and giggling about the fact that the pastor fell asleep. I was so embarrassed, even with serious jetlag as a good excuse. I had no problem staying awake driving home from that meeting.

So they dozed off, at least partly, as Jesus was praying, but then they started

to wake up when Moses and Elijah showed up, they were enveloped in a cloud, and Jesus was transfigured before them. **When they were awakened fully they saw his glory, and they heard God speak to them in some way from within the cloud, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him’ (Luke 9:35).** What we see here is that there is something radically and extraordinarily different about Jesus. He is the Son of God.

People have tried to understand and explain what it means that Jesus is the Son of God, especially in light of the Bible’s claims that he was God come to us in the flesh. How can he be God and be God’s son? What does that mean? Why does Jesus pray to God, if he his God? These kinds of questions go through our minds. We think of God as one...though in the Christian faith we speak of this one God expressing himself in three different ways: The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit. So they’re all one, but somehow three, and in relationship with one another. The voice here wasn’t Jesus saying, “I am God, listen to me.” It was the voice of the Father saying “this is my son.” Clearly, there’s a differentiation between the two. And yet we believe, as I said a moment ago, that Jesus was God come to us in the flesh. Why do Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and what does that mean?

There will always be an element of mystery with the Christian Trinitarian understanding of God. Anyone who says they have it completely figured out, doesn’t. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, “now we know in part, but then we will know in full.”

Now, I have always found Philippians 2 to be especially helpful when considering this:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

**Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:5-7).**

So maybe a way of thinking of this is that Jesus is God come to us in the flesh, and in his flesh, he is the Son, and while he was in the flesh, and because he was in the flesh, he was dependent upon God the Father for everything he did. I don't know if that helps at all or not. But there can be no denying that both Jesus and his followers believed that Jesus was and is God, come to us as a man, but maintained a relationship with God that was best expressed as a Father and Son.

And this is not the only place where we see this, as probably many of you know. There are a number of times that Jesus explicitly or implicitly reveals his deeper nature. **For instance, on many occasions, Scripture tells us that the disciples and even demons worshipped Jesus.** For instance, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:9, Mark 5:6 are all places where we see Jesus being worshipped. The key, then, is Jesus' response. Any rabbi in their time who was a mere mortal like you and me, would have rebuked their disciples for worshipping him, because only God was to be worshipped. But Jesus never does. He accepts the worship as rightfully placed.

In fact, another time, 10 lepers came to Jesus to be healed. He said, "Go show yourselves to the priest" and the text tells us that as they went, they were healed. Nine of them kept going to the priest. One, however, came back to thank Jesus. And Jesus responds, **"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"** Then he said to him, **"Rise and go; your faith has made you well"** (Luke 17:18-19). The one guy came back to thank Jesus, falling at his feet, and Jesus says that in thanking Jesus, he is actually thanking God. So we see the worship of Jesus as rightfully directed toward him, because He is God's son.

We also see Jesus doing things that only God had the authority to do. For instance, calming the wind and the waves. That is God's prerogative. Jesus' claim that following His words gives a foundation that is firm and certain is another claim to divinity, because only God's word was foundational for life. Lastly, and most blasphemously, Jesus forgave sins. He does it on at least a couple occasions – once when a paralyzed man is brought to him on a mat by his friends to be healed. And Jesus says to the guy that his sins are forgiven.

This is like being a professional baseball team that has a solid offense, defense, and relief pitchers, but really needs another starting pitcher – and going out during the off-season and getting more fielders and hitters and completely ignoring the need of starting pitching. It's not even asking for a miracle...just sign one of the myriad free agents who were available. But no, that's not what they do.

So this guy wants to walk, but Jesus says to him that his sins are forgiven. **And all the religious experts who are there are thinking, “Who is this guy that forgives sins? He’s blaspheming! Only God can forgive sins” (Mark 2:7)** And to demonstrate that he does in fact have the authority to forgive sins...and that Jesus knows what they're thinking, Jesus tells the guy to stand, take up his mat, and walk on home. And he does! Jesus is demonstrating that he's got the authority to do what God alone can do, in forgiving sins. And that's not the only time he does it.

He did the same thing in Luke 7, in the home of a Simon, who was a Pharisee, when a gal – who the passage tells us “was living a sinful life” – showed up, having heard that Jesus would be there for a dinner party, and she anoints his feet with her tears and with oil (remember, they “sat” at tables more laying on their side, with their feet sort of behind them, not under the table as we think of it). And as the Pharisee sits in judgment that Jesus would let her even touch his feet, Jesus' response is to offer her forgiveness for her sins. And again, the response is one of astonishment that Jesus would forgive sins. So we see this kind of thing all the time where Jesus simply does what God alone does. And he does it unapologetically, without even a hint of doubt that he can't or shouldn't. Why? Because he really was the Son of God.

Jesus makes claims to divinity in so many other ways: He says that he is Lord of the Sabbath day, which is God's prerogative; All the “I am” statements where Jesus quite clearly lays out his divinity; On more than one occasion Jesus says, “If you knew me...or if you see me...you know/have seen the Father.” In John 10 he says very explicitly, “I and the Father are one...the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” In John 17 he speaks of the glory that he had before the world was made. There are many others, too. And that's not even counting the times that other people say that Jesus is the Son of God.

These are just some of the times when Jesus himself says so.

And as I think about that, in light of Peter, James, and John's mountaintop experience where they became fully awake at the glory of Jesus and heard the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him"...I wonder: **Are we fully awake and fully seeing Jesus for all that He is: the Son of God?** I think if we're honest, we'll realize that the answer is "no." We may acknowledge this truth and believe it, but we don't fully see it, and we definitely don't fully live it out. There are a lot of things in life that can put us to sleep or hide our eyes and prevent us from seeing his glory: Busyness, laziness, apathy, pride, distractions, sin of all kinds, and so forth.

You probably heard and read that Stephen Hawking died this past week. Here's a man who was clearly brilliant. And he once said, "**My goal is simple. It is complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all**" (Stephen Hawking).ⁱⁱ And after studying the vast expanse of the cosmos which reveal the glory of God...mathematics and physics and more...he never believed that God was behind it all. He believed that the laws of physics were enough to create the universe, to create life as we know it. He wasn't really awake enough to see Jesus the Son of God, God the Father, or God's Spirit.

But Jesus makes the claim all over the Gospels – in what he says and by what he does – that He is the Son of God; That he is God come to us in the flesh. I hope and pray we're awake enough to see that. At least awake enough to consider it and find out more, rather than dismissing it as wishful thinking. There's too much at stake to dismiss it out of hand. There's too much at stake even just to say "I believe" it, but not really be fully awakened by this truth, and fully awake to this truth. Are we fully awake to the radiant presence of Jesus, the Son of God in our lives? I hope so.

And I hope you'll follow Peter's intuition and seek to spend more time with Jesus...seek to let him dwell with you. You don't have to build a shelter for him. He's already built it: and that's you. You're not an accident of the cosmos and a result of the laws of physics. You were created by God to be relationship with Him through faith. To live by faith in Him. And by his

Spirit, Jesus will come and dwell in you, when we are fully awake to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

ⁱ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 25 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.

ⁱⁱ From the Seattle Times, published on line on March 13. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/stephen-hawking-physicist-who-came-to-symbolize-the-power-of-the-human-mind-dies-at-76/>