

A Picture of the Kingdom

Neil Girrard

The old adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” is certainly true. A photograph of a wanted criminal or of a visiting foreigner one is to meet for the first time at the airport is to be vastly preferred over numerous descriptions of the subject. So too the kingdom of God. But how does one provide a photograph or snapshot of the kingdom of God? We know “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will [people] say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” Jesus then even warns His followers, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And [people] will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.” (Lk. 17:20-23)

The Scriptures do, however, contain a “snapshot” of the kingdom of God, placed there, in part, to show (at least to those with eyes to see and ears to hear) the futility of looking and running here and there to find the kingdom of God embodied in one man – especially if this one man claims to be a special messenger (“apostle” or “prophet”) of the kingdom. (see Mt. 24:24) Let us, therefore, look at this “picture” God has given us of the kingdom of God.

Some Will See the Kingdom

Mark 9:1	Matthew 16:28	Luke 9:27
And [Jesus] said to [the people along with His disciples also – see Mk. 8:34], “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”	[Jesus said to His disciples – see Mt. 16:24], “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”	[Jesus said “to them all” – see Lk. 9:23], “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.”

Whatever the differences or similarities in these accounts, Jesus says clearly that *some* of those who were physically standing there listening to Him speak would *see* the kingdom of God before they died. As we explore this episode and its significance, what these eyewitnesses see and what is later said about what they saw was “the kingdom of God,” presented in such a way that those with eyes to see and ears to hear will have a clear picture of the kingdom of God that will expose the frauds and counterfeits for what they are.

We will discover that one of those of whom Jesus spoke was Peter, who later wrote, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” (2 Pet. 1:16) Peter gives testimony here that he saw the power, the coming, the majesty (kingliness) of Christ – in short, the kingdom of God. It is here that we begin to see the scope of the event of which Peter was an eyewitness. Jesus, who most likely did not speak Greek, is recorded as promising some to see (the Greek equivalent of Jesus’ Aramaic is *eido* [1492], in all three accounts) which expresses or emphasizes “merely mechanical, passive or casual vision.” (Strong’s) But Peter, in the only

usage of the word in the New Testament, says that he and the others who saw the kingdom of God were *epoptai* [2030], “onlookers.” It is the various parts of this word, however, that point to how significant this event was to Peter - *epoptai* is a combination of *epi* [1909], “upon, on, at,” and *optomai* [3700] which means “to gaze at as with wide-open eyes, as at something remarkable.” (Strong’s) Of this claim, A.T. Robertson writes, “Old word, used of those who attained the third or highest degree of initiates in the Eleusinian mysteries (common in the inscriptions)... Peter clearly felt that he and James and John were lifted to the highest stage of initiation at the Transfiguration of Christ.” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. VI, p. 156*)

It is highly significant that this event where Peter saw and witnessed and experienced a profound change in his life, comes almost directly after his declaration that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus had asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mk. 8:29, Mt. 16:15-16, Lk. 9:20) Jesus then tells everyone listening to Him to tell no one that He was the Christ (Mk. 8:30, Mt. 16:20, Lk. 9:21) – only Matthew records the parenthetical saying of Jesus regarding Peter, the ekklesia and the “keys of the kingdom” (Mt. 16:17-19), a passage we will touch upon frequently throughout this discussion. Jesus then prophesies of His coming death. (Mk. 8:31, Mt. 16:21, Lk. 9:22) Two of the accounts record Peter’s rebuke to Jesus and Jesus’ subsequent rebuke of Peter (Mk. 8:32-33, Mt. 16:22-23) – for whatever reason Luke leaves this exchange out of his account. Then Jesus speaks of what is *required* to be Christ’s disciple. (Mk. 8:34-38, Mt. 16:24-27, Lk. 9:23-26) Then comes Jesus’ pronouncement that some hearing Him that day would see the kingdom before they died and immediately after this pronouncement all three accounts record the transfiguration of Christ.

Let us review these items because the transfiguration of Christ is intrinsically linked to the revelation that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-promised Messiah of God.

- “Who do you say that I am?” – “You are the Christ.”
- “Don’t tell anyone this truth.”
- “The Christ must die – and soon.”
- “To be My disciple, you too must carry your own cross.”
- The transfiguration of Christ – a picture of the kingdom of God.

As we can see, the transfiguration is directly linked to the revelation of Christ, that same revelation Christ said would be the foundation for His ekklesia. (Mt. 16:18, 1 Cor. 3:11, Eph. 2:20)

Transfigured

Mark 9:2-3	Matthew 17:1-2	Luke 9:28-29
Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves, and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.	Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain by themselves, and was transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.	And it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.

As we examine these accounts, let us remember that neither Peter, James nor even John – the three participants – are writing these accounts. Mark’s gospel is considered to be heavily reliant on Peter’s views and preaching and is also the first account to be written (probably first published around 50 A.D.) As such, it is readily seen that Matthew’s account (published around 62 A.D.), which relies much on Mark’s gospel for structure and order, adds or takes away from Mark’s account based on what Matthew had observed or the source Matthew used. Similarly, Luke’s gospel (published around 67 A.D.) also draws heavily from Mark’s work (though it is by no means Luke’s only source – see Lk. 1:1-2) It is certain therefore, especially with the early death of James (around 44 A.D. - Acts 12:2), that these three accounts largely stem from Peter’s testimony. Perhaps Peter, in simply telling of this event, was perceived by some as boasting (as so many others did – 2 Cor. 11:18) and John, writing much later (perhaps as late as 90 A.D.) and very much interested in presenting Christ as both divine and human in order to counter Gnostic errors about the Christ, elects not to include this event in his gospel, at all, of which even he says it was by no means an exhaustive work. (Jn. 21:25) Yet even John gives the testimony, “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (Jn. 1:14) and there is no reason to believe that John’s brief testimony here does not include his experience on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured before his, James’ and Peter’s eyes.

The only significant variation in the three accounts comes in Mark and Matthew’s usage of the Greek word *metamorphothe* [3339] which English translators chose to use the Latin word *transfiguratos* (Vulgate) as the basis because of associations between pagan mythology, especially Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (published after 8 A.D.) Luke, instead of the Greek word *metamorphothe* instead writes, “the appearance of His face became different.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures, II*, p. 130)

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is “a collection of mythological and legendary stories in which metamorphosis (transformation) plays some part, however minor... The importance of metamorphosis is more apparent than real; the essential theme of the poem is passion... [Ovid’s] gods are nothing if not human.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 9, p. 19, 1990) Matthew and Mark provide here a confirmation of both the differences of character between themselves and Luke, as well as the earlier dates of Mark and Matthew’s gospels. Ovid was banished to the extreme frontier of the Roman empire in 8 A.D. by Augustus Caesar because of some undisclosed

charges of “immorality” (which Ovid called an indiscretion and not a crime) and “treason.” Ovid died in exile in 17 A.D., three years after Augustus’ stepson Tiberius became the next emperor of Rome in 14 A.D. Whatever crime or indiscretion Ovid committed, Augustus was entirely successful in stifling its exposure and even public comment as to its nature and it would seem that Tiberius was not inclined to rescind Augustus’ banishment of Ovid.

Ovid’s writings were removed from public libraries and his writings were politically dangerous to own or especially quote and had to be kept “underground” as it were and it is not unreasonable to assume this condition lasted until at least 37 A.D. when Tiberius passed from the scene and another emperor (Caligula), with other priorities and concerns, ascended to the throne. Mark and Matthew, being Jews closely associated with Jesus and writing about the time Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* would be starting to become known outside of academic circles, had no real problem using the word *metamorphothe* (though it should be noted that Matthew’s description of Christ’s face shining “like the sun” and His clothes “as the light” could be his attempt to guard against pagan associations – and it should also be noted that other New Testament authors use the word in other specific contexts as well.) Luke, almost certainly a Gentile and likely a Greek, a physician at the least trained in the Greek schools before coming to know and follow Christ, would be more likely to know (both by virtue of his connection to academia and because of writing later) of the use of metamorphosis as the apparent theme of Ovid’s poem. John, writing even later and overtly desirous of presenting Christ as fully God and fully man, could easily have seen this event, the transfiguration, as something that would cause his primarily Greek-speaking readers to place his Christ on the same level as Ovid’s all too human gods, a risk John was not at all willing to take. Peter, at a much earlier time and especially if he were visiting and preaching in Rome primarily to Romans, may have found it advantageous to show that Christ Himself had raised this lowly Jewish fisherman to the heights of initiation into the mysteries of Christ. Neither Luke nor John would have been as likely to have felt such a need in their efforts to cause men to believe that Jesus was the Christ, as both openly declared their motive to be. (Lk. 1:4, 1 Jn. 1:3)

Perhaps the main point we can glean from this aspect of the picture presented of the transfiguration is that all of the New Testament will stand up to historical scrutiny. The coming of the kingdom of God was – and is – an event that happened – and is happening – in real time to real people.

The brightness or whiteness of Christ here is, as seen particularly in John’s *Revelation*, always representative of the righteousness with which Christ’s kingdom is characterized. (see Rev. 19:11-14, etc.) Paul wrote, “The kingdom of God is not [physical] food and drink, but *righteousness* and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17) Jesus taught His disciples, “Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness...” (Mt. 6:33), a righteousness which must be of a character and quality completely different and superior to the righteousness of mere men, no matter how religious, in order to enter His kingdom. (Mt. 5:20) God’s way has always been about righteousness – from righteous Abel (Heb. 11:4) and throughout the prophets of the Old Testament. God said through Isaiah, “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isa. 1:18)

As we shall see, this seemingly simple event, the transfiguration, encompasses all the elements of the kingdom of Christ and God. When Christ was transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James and John, they literally saw the kingdom of God even though it would be some time before they began to understand all that they had seen.

The Law and the Prophets

Mark 9:4	Matthew 17:3	Luke 9:30-31
And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.	And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.	Then behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

As we have already touched upon, the kingdom of God, characterized first and most by righteousness, was attested to by the prophets like Isaiah. Elijah is generally recognized by the Jews as the chief representative of all the prophets. Similarly, Moses is the representative of the Law. Thus for a Jew to say “Moses and Elijah” is the equivalent of saying “the Law and the Prophets.”

On at least two different occasions, Jesus summed up “the Law and the Prophets.” He said:

- “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Mt. 7:12) And,
- “On these two commandments [to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself] hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Mt. 22:37-40)

Thus when the glorified Moses and Elijah appear to talk with Jesus, they bring all of “the Law and the Prophets,” all the writings and wisdom and insight from the Old Testament that are summed up in the word “love,” into the equation. What Peter, James and John literally saw before them was the Law and Prophets conversing with the Messiah, the Man who Himself had previously said to His followers, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Mt. 5:17) And in a short few months after the transfiguration, He would say, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” (Lk. 24:44)

The men who represent “the Law and the Prophets” speak with the Messiah regarding His soon-coming death – and this was more than some listing or review of all the hundreds of places where the Old Testament speaks of the coming Messiah. It is easy to suppose that Jesus’ human soul derived comfort from speaking with these two men who understood His mission – He certainly couldn’t get such understanding from any other human beings. Peter, His closest disciple, had just rebuked Him for His saying that the Christ must die at the hands of the Jewish leaders! (Mk. 8:31-32, Mt. 16:21-22) Not much comfort there. But surely Jesus, as a human, drew strength from “the Law and the Prophets” reinforcing His ingrained desire and intent to do the will of God. (see Heb. 10:7) And indeed, it is very shortly after the transfiguration that Jesus

“steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51) though it would be another ten chapters (in Luke’s account) before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem where if His disciples had not proclaimed Him the Messiah and King, the stones would have! (Lk. 19:37-40)

Moses, Elijah and Jesus spoke of His departure – the Greek word is *exodon* [1841] “exodus.” Moses led the exodus out of Egypt and brought the people to the Jordan River even though Moses himself was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. (Dt. 32:52) Many recognize this historical fact as being symbolic of the Law being unable to take anyone into the eternal, righteous promises of God, that is, the overcoming spiritual life in Christ. Elijah began an exodus of sorts, one of the first “come outers,” by leading the people out of idolatry. (1 Ki. 18:20-22, etc.) Both Moses and Elijah experienced their mortal exodus, their death, in unusual ways. Moses went up into a mountain, saw the Promised Land, died and was buried by the Lord. (Dt. 34:5-6) Elijah was caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire. (2 Ki. 2:11) Jesus’ exodus by way of the cross would fulfill all that these men had said, done and begun. These three men, when understood in their depths, that is, in the rightly divided, balanced precisely in the whole counsel of God, present the complete picture of what God has done to reconcile man back to Himself.

We see this same pattern perpetuated in the work of Paul. Three days after Paul arrived in Rome, where he was held under house arrest, he sent for the Jewish leaders. (Acts 28:16-17) These leaders desired to hear Paul and appointed a day to speak with him. Many came to him on that day at his lodging (being under house arrest, he was not permitted to leave the house) and Paul spoke from morning to evening “explaining and solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.” (Acts 28:22-23) But when Paul, seeing that most of the Jews had no ears to hear the Spirit of truth, declared that “the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (Acts 28:28) The Jews departed and went off to argue with themselves but Paul preached for the next two years in that house – “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 28:29-31)

Most scholars place these two years of Paul in Rome under house arrest as 60-62 A.D. Mark and Peter have been preaching in Rome even if Peter was only an occasional visitor (it is virtually certain that Rome was *not* his primary area of work), Mark’s gospel has been written and is circulating. And into Rome under arrest now comes a man whose preaching and testimony perfectly coincides with the lowly Jewish fisherman who had been “lifted to the highest stage of initiation” into the mysteries of Christ.

While Men Slept

Mark 9:5-6a	Matthew 17:4	Luke 9:32-33
Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – because he did not know what to say,	Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles; one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”	But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. And it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said.

In an indication of how far the Scriptures can be said to go in providing a well-developed picture of the kingdom of God, even the variations here can be seen to point to the necessary progression our perception of Christ’s place in our lives must take. The order in which the accounts were written coincides with the order we must mature in Christ: Rabbi [4461], Lord (*kurios* [2962]) and Master (*epistates* [1988]). Of this last word A.T. Robertson writes, “...one standing over another. This word recognizes Christ’s authority.” (*Word Pictures, II*, p. 70) We must first be taught by Him, then recognize His supreme authority as Lord and then personally embrace His right to command us as King. While one can raise the argument that Luke is just writing better (more Greek, less Aramaic) Greek, that this “coincidence” even exists in this very well orchestrated picture-event is at least worth noting.

Though God has given a complete picture of the kingdom of God to these three disciples, it is evident in Luke’s account (which many see as the most chronologically oriented) that they did not yet spiritually understand what they had seen. Directly after the transfiguration:

- The disciples, including Peter, James and John, were unable to cast a demon out of a boy. (Lk. 9:40)

- Jesus plainly says, in words that should have cued His disciples to use their spiritual ears which He had been training them to use, “Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand this saying. (Lk. 9:44-45)

- Then a dispute arose among the disciples, including Peter, James and John, as to who would be the greatest. (Lk. 9:46)

- The disciples, including Peter, James and John, stopped someone else from casting out demons in Jesus' name because he wasn't one of the disciples. (Lk. 9:49)
- James and John want to call fire down from heaven on a Samaritan village who would not receive Jesus. (Lk. 9:53-54)
- Three men volunteer to follow Jesus but aren't ready for the all-out commitment He required of them. (Lk. 9:57-62)

It is in the light of coming discouragements (as these surely must have been to Jesus' human soul) that we can see how the disciples being asleep on the mountain, coming on the heels of Peter's rebuke, was simply another item in a series of assaults against Jesus' human soul. When the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15), this may be some of the very things he has in mind! Is it any wonder He had to set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem! (Lk. 9:51)

And since God has provided the event of the transfiguration as a "snapshot" of the kingdom of God, the fact that the disciples were asleep takes on a deeper significance as it points to the role men will play in the coming of Christ's kingdom in the interim between His exodus and His return. Jesus said that "while men slept" the devil, the enemy of the kingdom of God, would sow his sons among the sons of the kingdom. (Mt. 13:25) Many have failed to see that the tares were able to be in such close proximity to the wheat because the "church," organized by bishops who rose up and subtly corrupted the gospel and drew followers after themselves – as Paul had prophesied they would (Acts 20:30) – and then drawn, in the third century, into temples that God would never live in (Acts 7:48, 17:24), temples patterned after the Roman basilica or judgment hall. In reality, the "church" was only another part of "the field," the world. (Mt. 13:38) Jesus also said that "while the bridegroom was delayed," *all* of the wedding maids slumbered and slept. (Mt. 25:5)

At another time when Jesus again had brought Peter, James and John apart from the other disciples and instructed them to pray, Jesus again faces what must surely have been disappointment. (Mt. 26:40, Lk. 22:45) On the night before going to the cross, a night that was probably more of a test than the next day would be – how easy it would have been to get up and walk away and be anywhere but where Judas Iscariot expected Him to be – and how necessary it was for Jesus to resist sin, violating God's will, to the point of sweating "like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk. 22:44, Heb. 12:3-4) – Jesus returns and "found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy." (Mt. 26:43)

Yet it is also true that "the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam" and God took one of his ribs and made a woman. (Gen. 2:21-22) Daniel, on two occasions when angels spoke to him, fell into deep sleep even as the angel spoke to him. (Dan. 8:18, 10:9) Apparently there is something overwhelming to the human soul or body in the realities of the spiritual realms. This may be one reason Jesus said to the disciples when He found them sleeping, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." (Mk. 14:38, Mt. 26:41, Lk. 22:46)

Peter, James and John

With the idea in view that the transfiguration is a picture of the kingdom of God, even the presence of the three disciples takes on a deeper significance. Each of these disciples can be seen here as the type or representative of the various kinds of Christ's followers who will attain to eternal life in the kingdom of God. And it is even significant that Peter, representative of those who follow Christ in the context of the visible "church," is the most visible in this event, whereas James, who would be martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2), and John, who would both endure persecution and produce the most consistent spiritual testimony of the Christ, are in the background.

Let us consider the depths to which Peter's actions, as recorded in the New Testament, parallel the actions of the followers of Christ who have also kept themselves under the visible, worldly authority structure men commonly call "the church."

- Because Jesus was talking to Peter, it is held that *Peter* must be the "Rock" upon which "the church" is built. (Mt. 16:18) The Catholic sect still claims this fallacy and error to this day. The "church" is built on error and deception – Christ's ekklesia is still built on the *revelation* that Jesus is the Messiah and King.

- Peter, as one of Jesus' "inner circle" of three, certainly felt the need to participate in the arguments about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. (Mk. 9:34, Lk. 9:46, 22:24) It is obvious that especially the Catholic "church" (in reality, sect) inherited or took upon itself Peter's propensity to strive for the position of "the greatest in the kingdom" – and in so doing, both Peter and the Catholic "church" have had to experience severe reality therapy!

- There are hints in the New Testament accounts that Peter even vied with James and John for superiority even in the inner circle. These hints can be seen in Peter's indignation against James and John for trying for the seats at the left and right hand of Christ in His kingdom (Mt. 20:20-21, 24) and in his questioning of Christ about John after being told that he, Peter, would die an undesirable death. (Jn. 21:20-21) Peter's hypocrisy also becomes evident here when we recall that at his first encounter with Jesus, he "fell on his knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.'" (Lk. 5:8) This sinful man was still a sinful man vying for leadership and preeminence (also see 3 Jn. 9) but apparently later grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:17-18) and kept himself under the Headship of Christ and refused to become a lord over the flock. (1 Pet. 5:2-3) Not everyone in "church" authority positions has been able to do this and maintain a proper balance, to say the least.

- The incident when Peter walks on the water but then sees the wind and the waves and begins to sink (Mt. 14:30) is comparable to the first and second century believers who had believed in Christ but saw the increasingly conflicting waves of teachings (Eph. 4:14) from the various bishops and the waves of persecution and, rather than trust for preservation from an invisible God, they placed themselves under a visible representative, the bishop," and the "church"

has been a sinking ship ever since because the “church,” quite content with its lesser heads, has no reason to call upon the true Lord to save them.

- Peter rebuked Jesus, telling Him, in effect, that He did not need to die. (Mk. 8:32, Mt. 16:22) The “church,” either by concocting “New Testament” laws, such as “church” membership and attendance, “tithes and offerings,” etc., that are required to be obeyed by one’s own ability, or by failing to teach the true way of Christ’s cross, routinely declares, by its words or actions, that Christ didn’t really need to die.

- The time when Peter cuts the ear off of the high priest’s servant (Mk. 14:47, Mt. 26:51, Lk. 22:50) gives the perfect picture of the “church’s” tendency to remove its victims’ ability to spiritually hear the things of God, a wound that only Christ can heal. (Lk. 22:51)

- When God gives Peter the vision of the sheet full of unclean animals and commands him to kill and eat, Peter responds, “Not so, Lord! I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” (Acts 10:14) The “church,” at almost every change of season wherein old doctrines were shown to be false and inappropriate for the next generation, has said, in effect, “Not so, Lord! We’re far too religious to do or believe something like that.”

- Even though God tells Peter three times not to call anything common or unclean that God had declared clean (Acts 10:15), Peter uses these very words to explain why he’s insulting the Gentile who sent for him and to whom God had sent him. (Acts 10:28) The “church,” especially its clergy, uses the gospel to stand over the people and have them sit at their feet. But, like Peter, most clergy won’t let the people go “too far” in actually worshiping the clergyman. (Acts 10:25-26) It should be noticed in this light that the Holy Spirit doesn’t even wait for Peter to get finished preaching before He fell upon the Gentiles! (Acts 10:44)

- Peter, after men of the circumcision group arrived, no longer mingled with the Gentiles but simultaneously displayed his buried fear of men (in this case, of James and the circumcision group), his bigotry, that ridiculous idea that one is somehow better than others because of one’s genetic ancestry, and his hypocrisy. (Gal. 2:11-13) These are characteristics of almost every “church” that has ever existed.

- Even in the Gospel accounts of the transfiguration where Peter was not knowing what he said, what Peter said has been echoed in “churches” ever since they began to be built in the second century! Have we not all heard “It is good to be here in the house of the Lord today!”? And “let us build tabernacles” is the prime directive of nearly every denomination that has come into existence! And Peter seems to have forgotten that only a few days before, Jesus had said, “**I** will build...” (Mt. 16:18)

None of this is to say that all who have done these kinds of things will not be a part of God's kingdom – in fact, Peter's presence here would seem to suggest that there are those who will be *in* the "church" but not *of* the "church."

James, as was already touched upon, in the picture of the kingdom which the transfiguration gives us, is representative of all those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel. We see "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9) – a number which is said to be incomplete. (Rev. 6:11) It is of this category in the end times that we are told "And they overcame him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and that they did not love their lives to the death." (Rev. 12:11) That we look upon these truly great heroes of the faith as being unsung, little known and virtually unrecognized shows how different our perspective here on earth is from that of eternity! There, their names and lives are well-known and much spoken of – here we rarely admit to their existence and importance, even those we do know of!

John presents a picture of those who have sought to walk in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24), the standard by which all men will be judged. John's life is characterized by endurance and holiness – his life is virtually unmatched in the number of tortures he survived and his refusal to be found in the same bathhouse with the Gnostic teacher Cerinthus is legendary. (see 1 Jn. 4:8, 11, Jn. 15:17, etc.) John is given the privilege of conveying the *Revelation* to the servants of God so that they may know the things he saw, "and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." (Rev. 1:1,19)

Jesus gave one parable that is never explained in either of the Gospels in which it was recorded. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." (Mt. 13:33, Lk. 13:21) Though there are those who refuse to recognize the leaven of the parable as wickedness or hypocrisy (in spite of the fact that *every* other passage in the New Testament that refers to leaven as a metaphor speaks of wickedness), and even though there are those who fail – or refuse – to see the deep-reaching effects of the great prostitute, Mystery Babylon, upon the people who follow Christ, it may well be that Jesus had in view the snapshot of the kingdom that would be orchestrated at the transfiguration. That is, He knew that each type of His followers in the kingdom – as represented by Peter, James and John – would be corrupted (or leavened) to one extent or another.

Thus Paul's teachings also regain something of their original significance: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor. 5:6-8)

One can dismiss the above insights about these three disciples as fanciful – indeed it is not critical that one agree with the conclusions these insights lead to – yet it is fascinating to what extent the Scriptures go to in providing us an accurate picture of the invisible kingdom of God.

Listen to the Son

Mark 9:6b-7	Matthew 17:5-6	Luke 9:34-35
for they were greatly afraid. And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"	While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.	While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

Each account says they were greatly afraid or fearful. This too is the common reaction of the human soul coming into contact with undiluted Deity. Moses experienced this (Ex. 3:6) as did Isaiah (Isa. 6:5) and the apostle John again at a later occasion. (Rev. 1:17) In the *Revelation* an angel is dispatched with the eternal gospel and his first instruction is "Fear God..." (Rev. 14:6-7) That many people who claim to believe in Christ have never experienced anything of this kind only shows how far they are from God and the true gospel. That many people seek and some later claim to have had "Shekinah" or "glory cloud" experiences but subsequently fail to live in any greater holiness or consecration to God's righteousness casts doubt on their entire grasp on the life of Christ! Those whose entire religious bent is a pursuit of this "glory cloud" experience, should recognize that this was a one-time event involving three disciples – a scripted and designed "photo shoot" if you will – an orchestration to set up for all time a picture of the kingdom of God, an event that included two men from eternity, one Messiah and three men not yet glorified. And we should note well that the voice from the cloud, the voice of the Father, did not say, "Pursue the glory." Rather, He did say, "This One is My Son - *hear* Him!"

One can also note with amusement how Peter is interrupted here – just as his preaching at Cornelius' house will later be interrupted. (Acts 10:44) One has to wonder if, while the Holy Spirit filled the Gentiles, Peter did not think back on his preaching to see if he had mentioned something about tabernacles!

But the need to hear the Messiah was prophesied as long ago as Moses. God said, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him." (Dt. 18:18-19) Peter uses this very passage when he preaches to the crowd that gathered after the lame man who had lain daily at the Gate Beautiful had been healed. (Acts 3:22-23)

The only way in which hundreds, or thousands, or millions of followers of Christ can hear what God is saying is through His Spirit who dwells within and is with those who believe. (Jn. 14:16-17) This is why, after Christ redeemed men back to Himself (1 Jn. 2:2) and the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:16-17), that

John could write, “The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone continually teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” (1 Jn. 2:27)

Similarly the writer of Hebrews, quoting prophecies of Jeremiah, wrote, “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” (Heb. 8:10-11)

Jesus Himself said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (Jn. 10:27)

And the writer of Hebrews also wrote, “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son... See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven...” (Heb. 1:1, 12:25)

As God told Moses, “It shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23)

The kingdom of God is based entirely on the premise that God speaks to every man, woman and child who places their faith in Jesus Christ. Thus it is a kingdom of kings and priests (Rev. 1:6) and the ekklesia, the people called out of darkness to become light (Col. 1:13, Eph. 5:8), is built upon the revelation that God gives – that Jesus is the Messiah. (Mk. 8:29, Mt. 16:16, Lk. 9:20, Jn. 6:69) Without the ear that hears what God is saying we cannot be a functional, beneficial part of God’s kingdom. (Mk. 4:12, Mt. 13:14-15, Lk. 8:10)

Tell No One

Mark 9:8-10	Matthew 17:7-9	Luke 9:36
<p>Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.</p>	<p>But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”</p>	<p>And when the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.</p>

There were at least two reasons that Jesus should instruct His disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen – obviously, they did not yet realize exactly what it was they had seen, and equally obviously, their own lives were not yet the proper context or platform from which to speak such things. Jesus tells them to not speak of this event until after He is risen from the dead – the disciples are still so confused that they’re stuck trying to decipher the “hidden spiritual meaning” (which this time there was no hidden spiritual meaning!) in what “rising from the dead” meant!

In this instruction, however, we can also see the need to wait before we begin to tell others. The disciples’ knowledge was inaccurate, incomplete and, most importantly, they lacked the indwelling Spirit within. With these two huge inadequacies (which the latter will make up for most deficiencies in the former), it is not surprising that Jesus would instruct His disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen. As it is, this picture of the kingdom is not explained in the New Testament, certainly not in the depths to which it can be examined. It has been left for the “scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of God” to bring new treasure out of the storehouse (Mt. 13:52) at a time when the people of God need again to see what a simple picture of the kingdom of God can teach them.

When we see the kingdom of God as it is shown in the transfiguration, we can see where “the church” deviated from that simple picture. The “church” claims Christ as their King but then tries to build “tabernacles” for Him as if He needed their help. The “church” utilizes the top-down authority structure of the world and does not recognize that Jesus intends to personally be the King of all His subjects, every man, woman and child. Where the individual believer has submitted to the Headship of Christ, His right to rule and reign over all aspects of life, the imprisoning gates of death and darkness (which the schemes of the devil, particularly that one called “church” are designed to bring believers under the power of) cannot overcome the true follower of Christ.

The kingdom of God, then, can be seen to be:

- The Messiah who died as the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for the sons of the world so that men could be reconciled to God and brought back into obedience to His kingdom. (1 Jn. 2:2, Eph. 2:4-7, etc.) He is the slain Lamb who *alone* is able to be King.

- Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, all point to the Messiah and have something to teach us regarding the kingdoms of God. The Old Testament is not to be rejected and discarded but rather, it's true place and function in the kingdom must be found.

- The followers of Christ are those who submit to Him. Whether they attend "church," die a martyr's death or live in spirit and truth, it is the personal Headship of Christ which places one in the kingdom of Christ – and it is this fact that makes "church" so dangerous as "church" systematically and progressively blinds its victims to the subtle occasions when one chooses to obey the "church" and not Christ. Doing what is right in one's own eyes (lawlessness), even when done by the "leadership" in "the church," only proves that one is *not* in Christ's kingdom.

- It is in our ability to hear God – and not men ("milk" – Heb. 5:13) – that we find the life of God. (Mt. 4:4, Dt. 8:3) and participate in His kingdom.

- It is only after we have spiritually experienced Christ's resurrection that we are able to tell others about Him. When we know only that the Lamb of God died to take away our sins but we do not individually and personally know Him as the living and resurrected Lord, Master and King, we have not yet come into the fullness of His kingdom.

If we can keep this simple picture before our eyes, we will not be deceived when the fiefdoms and ambitions of men rise up claiming to be the kingdom of God. And we will be enabled to follow after Christ and truly be the ekklesia He is building us to be (Mt. 16:18), "as living stones, being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5) Though it took some time, it would seem quite clear that Peter got the picture. If he can get it, so can we.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girrard/gospking/apotk.html>