

THE DEPARTED SAINTS...WHO SPOKE WITH CHRIST

And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9.29-31)

This is one of the most fascinating stories in the Bible; it describes how two immortal saints from beyond the grave appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration to converse with the Savior. It was the only occurrence of its type, and it left many questions unanswered. How did the awakening disciples know the identity of the two messengers? Luke states they were Moses and Elias, but since the beloved physician was not present when this happened, he had to be informed by someone who was there. When Peter, James, and John listened, did they hear the Lord addressing His heavenly friends by their earthly names? Or, after the event had taken place, did Jesus state He had spoken with Moses and Elias? Maybe the patriarchs' appearance suggested their identity. It is safe to assume that if they knew the visitors so shall we, and if we shall recognize people whom we have never seen, it should be easy to know loved ones whom we have seen.

Luke stated that Moses and Elias "appeared in glory"; that is, they were like the Savior whose garments were "white and glistering." There was no problem regarding Moses, for he had died and was buried by God (see Deut. 34:5-6). His mortal body had put on immortality. Clothed with an incorruptible body, Moses stood with the Lord. The same could not be said of Elijah, for he had been caught up to heaven in a whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2:11). Furthermore, it is believed he will be one of two men who will witness to the Jews during their time of tribulation. They will be killed, raised to life, and caught up into the presence of God (see Rev. 11:3-12). If this be true, then Elijah will

162

have a mortal body, for otherwise, how could he die?

That presents an unanswerable question. When the prophet was taken into the presence of God, he went as a human being and for thousands of years apparently has remained unchanged. That would necessitate an unprecedented miracle that only God could perform.

The Illustrious Messengers ... Suggestive

Moses and Elijah were the two greatest men in Hebrew history. The one was the giver of the law; his companion was the prophet who expounded its message. Moses was the greatest teacher of all time; Elijah was the preacher whose messages stirred a nation. It was significant that God sent them to earth. He could have sent angels, as He did on other occasions. They came at Jesus' birth, during his suffering in Gethsemane, and at His resurrection. It was thought provoking that the representatives of the law and the prophets ministered to Christ, indicating their ministry reached fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth.

It would have been impossible to tell the Savior something He did not already know. Did these men come to encourage the Lord as He sought to bring redemption to multitudes of guilty sinners? It must be remembered that Christ was susceptible to all the emotions experienced by humans. Jesus said to His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). The writer to the Hebrews, when describing Christ's agony in Gethsemane, said, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and

THE DEPARTED SAINTS...WHO SPOKE WITH CHRIST

was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7).

The two messengers were evidently sent by God; such a mission would have been impossible unless it were sanctioned by the highest authority. Perhaps they reminded the Lord that through His glorious achievement eternal happiness would be assured for millions of redeemed people. The fact that Jesus would be obedient unto death would bring everlasting glory to the Father who planned every detail of the procedure. The Savior would not be alone, for constantly "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). That blessed fellowship would continue until the stone was rolled from the door of the sepulcher and the angel announced, "He is not here. He is risen."

The Important Message ... Sublime

When the disciples awakened from sleep, they beheld the resplendent scene and heard a conversation that could never be forgotten. Many

163

years later, Peter wrote, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16-18). It might be true to say the appearance of the Old Testament saints did as much for the watching disciples as it did for their Master. Simon Peter never forgot that hallowed experience, which became the inspiration of his ministry.

Another avenue of thought needs to be explored. Did Moses and Elijah appear to thank the Lord for what was being done? Words of sincere gratitude expressed on behalf of millions of righteous men and women would have brought great joy to the Savior. The patriarchs had spoken of the coming Messiah. It was as though the chancellors of two great universities were worshiping at the feet of Christ and encouraging students to emulate their example. The Bible teaches that saints of Old Testament times died and went to a temporary abode in Sheol or Hades to await their final homecall. After His death, the Lord preached deliverance to the captives and led a grand parade into the presence of God (see Luke 16:22 and Eph. 4:8). The curse of sin had finally been removed and nothing remained to prevent the homegoing of saints. That indeed would have been a cause for great rejoicing. It is at least possible the visitors from heaven expressed the gratitude of innumerable people when they conversed with the Son of God.

The Instructed Men... Startled

The Mount of Transfiguration was a place of communication. The patriarchs spoke with the Savior, God instructed the listening disciples, and Christ commanded His followers to refrain from mentioning what had been seen and heard on the mountain. Each of these suggestions deserves consideration, but the greatest utterance was the statement made by the Almighty: "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Luke 9:35). The disciples were instructed to consider the message given by Jesus, for it superseded anything ever heard, and it would never be surpassed.

Moses had been instrumental in giving the law: the message that had been dominant within the nation for thousands of years. Yet God did not say, "Hear Moses." The grandeur of the legal system had been

164

overshadowed by a greater message. At a later date, Paul wrote to the Galatians reminding them "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us

THE DEPARTED SAINTS...WHO SPOKE WITH CHRIST

unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). The legal headmaster had completed the God-given assignment; students had graduated and left the classroom. A new Teacher had arrived who supplied a new curriculum that emphasized the importance of faith. This was indicated when God bypassed Moses and said, "Listen to Jesus."

The same fact applied to Elijah, who was the greatest of all the prophets. He ministered to a decadent nation and challenged the authority of an arrogant king. Although he was a man of like passion as we are, he controlled the weather and brought a stubborn nation to its knees. His words were authoritative, for he was the only spokesman for Jehovah during his generation. It is not known what Moses and Elijah had seen and heard during their sojourn in heaven, but if either man had been permitted to continue his ministry, his words would have been sensational.

God was aware of the theological divisions in Israel. Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed about many subjects, but in the midst of the controversies, God said, "Listen to Jesus; Hear ye Him." Even the disciples who had lived with legal requirements all their lives realized their Master had become God's greatest spokesman. The law as interpreted by the scribes forbade people to work on the Sabbath, and critics drew attention to that fact when the disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath day. Jesus was charged with encouraging violations of the commandments, but He absolved the disciples from blame and taught that faith alone led to peace and happiness. He stressed that what men were was more important than anything they did. The dictates of the Mosaic creed had been distorted by the warped interpretations of men, and as a result, the doctrines did not express the mind of God. Jesus emphasized that purity was the only real evidence of righteousness. Words could never be a substitute for holiness. He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Christ never broke the law, but He did enhance its beauty and enlarge its effectiveness. One of the commandments forbade adultery, and when people refrained from such acts, they considered themselves to be without blame. The Savior said, "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). It became evident that "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). It was evident that the followers of Jesus would be criticized,

165

challenged, and condemned, but their allegiance to their Master would remain unshaken. Christ introduced ideas not expressed during the lifetime of Moses and Elijah. Enemies would oppose the new teaching, but a successful ministry would be assured if the disciples listened to Christ.

That advice is even more relevant in the modern world where strange groups of people substitute false doctrines for the teachings of the Bible. When the sacred writings were given to humankind, God had no intention of supplying a later book to include things unmentioned in the first volume. He believed His initial effort would be sufficient to meet the need of His children. He said, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

Preachers, teachers, and authors quote from the works of famous scholars, and that practice is commendable—no one knows everything! Yet it is a cause for regret that some people forget to mention what Jesus said. At one period of my ministry, I disturbed a large group of pastors when I said, "You often remind your listeners what the

THE DEPARTED SAINTS...WHO SPOKE WITH CHRIST
professors have said; why do you not tell them what Jesus said?" The
words of the Son of God are more trustworthy, more wonderful than
anything else in existence. God said, "Hear him." It is excellent advice.

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