

A Glimpse of Glory: The Transfiguration of Jesus

Mark 9:1-13

Introduction: **1)** They are popular sayings that are also true. “Looks can be deceiving.”

“Things are not always as they appear.” “Things are not always what they seem to be.” Never was this more true than when the Son of God left heaven and came to earth, when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), when the fullness of deity came and dwelt in a body (Col. 2:9), when the very essence of God “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the essence of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7).

2) The transfiguration of Jesus, what we can rightly call “a glimpse of glory,” makes this abundant clear. Found in all 3 synoptic gospels (Matt 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36), this remarkable event points to the fact that despite having the outward appearance of a mere mortal man, Jesus of Nazareth is in His very nature and essence God, deity dressed in a body.

3) And, in spite of the fact He is not the kind of Messiah-Savior the nation of Israel was expecting, He is exactly the Messiah-Savior they needed, that the whole world needs.

- He looks defeated, but He is actually victorious.

- He dies and is buried by men, but He will be raised and exalted by God.

- He looks like a regular dude, but in actuality He is deity!

4) The transfiguration is something of “a preview of coming attractions.” That it follows immediately after Peter’s great confession (8:27-30), Jesus’ prediction of His death (8:31-33), His call to radical discipleship (8:34-38), and His promise in 9:1 that some standing with Him will see the kingdom of God coming in power before they die (9:1) is not accidental. It all hangs together as we will see.

5) There are some remarkable parallels in this account of our Lord's transfiguration and a visit to a mountain made by Moses recorded in Exodus 24 and 34. What happened to Moses in the early stages of redemptive history prefigured and anticipated a greater Moses, a greater Exodus and a greater salvation. Note the following:

Moses	Jesus
Moses goes with three named persons plus seventy of the elders up the mountain (Ex. 24:1, 9).	Jesus takes three disciples up the mountain (Mark 9:2).
Moses' skin shines when he descends from the mountain after talking with God (Ex. 34:29).	Jesus is transfigured and his clothes become radiantly white (Mark 9:2-3).
God appears in veiled form in an overshadowing cloud (Ex. 23:15-16, 18).	God appears in veiled form in an overshadowing cloud (Mark 9:7).
A voice speaks from the cloud (Ex. 24:16).	A voice speaks from the cloud (Mark 9:7).
The people are afraid to come near Moses after he descends from the mountain (Ex. 35:30).	The people are astonished when they see Jesus after he descends from the mountain (Mark 9:15).

(adapted from Garland, NIVAC, 342).

A new and greater Moses has arrived, the long awaited prophet he had promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Yes, He is God's eschatological prophet. He is also God's much loved Son.

I. Look at the glory of the Son of God.

9:1-4

- 1) The call to follow Jesus in discipleship is not easy. It requires self denial and death to self (8:34). It calls us to lose our life for Christ and His gospel (8:35).
- 2) Such a calling is a costly calling. It is also a calling filled with encouragement and confirmation.
- 3) Jesus provides just that when He says "Truly (Gr. *amen*), ...there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." Interesting Jesus' use of *amen* which gives personal authority to His words has no parallel in ancient literature. It is utterly unique to Him!
 - Jesus was not talking about the arrival of the kingdom and was not in error.

- He was not talking, at least exclusively, about the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2).
- He was not talking about the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).
- He was talking about the transfiguration which immediately follows and His glorious resurrection of which the transfiguration is something of a preview of that coming attraction.
- Again, His use of *amen* is without parallel! This announcement is rooted in His authority and no one else! He says it. That settles it!

1) He was God incognito.

9:1-3

- Six days following Jesus' radical teaching on discipleship (Luke 9:28 says 8, being inclusive of the day of teaching and transfiguration), Jesus takes the inner circle of Peter, James and John (cf. 1:16-20; 3:16-17; 5:37-43) up to a high mountain by themselves (v. 2). Tradition says it was Mt. Tabor, a small mountain separating Galilee from Samaria. However, Mt. Hermon (9,000 ft) in the far north of Galilee is more likely. Interestingly Hermon has as its root meaning the idea of holy or sacred. In 2 Peter 1:18, Peter talks of his experience at the transfiguration and writes, "For we were with him on the holy mountain."
- With typical Markan simplicity he says "and he was transfigured before them." The word is *metamorphothe*. We get our word metamorphosis from it. The word means to change and here, it speaks of a radical transformation, not in Jesus' nature, but of an inward transformation that reveals His true self and essence in an outward visible manifestation. The verb only occurs 4 times in the New Testament (Mark 9:2; Matt

17:2; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). In each instance a radical change or transformation is in view.

- Verse 3 amplifies the change that took place noting that even “his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.”
 - Matt. 17:2 says, “his face shone like the sun.”
 - Luke 9:29 says, “as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.”
 - Psalm 104:1 says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty.”
- For a brief moment our Lord’s true identity is allowed to shine forth in all its glory. Here is the Christ they will see when He triumphantly comes the 2nd time riding on a white horse to establish his public and universal kingdom (Rev. 19:11-16).

2) He is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. 9:4

- While his glory is being displayed in brilliant light, Elijah and Moses appear talking to Jesus. Mark is silent on the nature of their conversation, but Dr. Luke helps us out when he says in Luke 9:31 they “spoke of His departure.” The word for “departure” in the Greek text is “Exodus!” Jesus would lead the people of God out of the bondage and captivity of sin in a new Exodus through His death (a new Passover) and resurrection and constitute a new people called the Church.
- Why Elijah and Moses? 1) They represent the Law and Prophets. 2) They were both great deliverers. 3) Together they represent the prophetic tradition that points to the Messiah as the fulfillment. 4) Their appearance draws from Malachi 4:4-6 and the promise of the coming of the Day of the Lord. That text reads, “Remember the law of

my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” With their appearing the Law and Prophets are signaled as being fulfilled in the coming of Messiah who has brought the kingdom of God near (cf. Mark 1:15).

- This is not Mt. Sinai déjà vu all over again. No, this is a gospel mountain not a law mountain. Here the Law of God and the grace of God converge in the One who is God incarnate and the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament scriptures promised. Look at Him and His gospel. There has never been one like Him and there never will be one like Him.

II. Listen to the voice of God the Father.

9:5-8

- 1) There is a proverbial saying that goes something like this: “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.” In other words it is better not to say anything, especially if you don’t know what to say, than to say something foolish.
- 2) In these verses only two persons speak: 1) Peter and 2) God the Father. It is noteworthy that Jesus does not say a word. He doesn’t need to! Peter’s words we can set aside and even excuse in light of his fear (v. 6) and foggy mind due to being suddenly awakened from a nap (Luke 9:32). The Father’s words we must hear and heed with the greatest possible attention and obedience. Our very spiritual lives depend upon it.

- 1) Our human perspectives are often foolish.

9:5-6

- The disciples understandably are amazed at the revelation of the glorified Christ.
Verse 6 says “they were terrified.”
- Peter (v. 5), not surprisingly, speaks up (cf. 8:29, 33) and says “it is good we are here.”
You think?! He then suggests that this mountain summit should be continued and he, James and John will gladly construct 3 tents, one for Jesus and two for the honored guest from the past.
- I can’t help wondering: 1) was he now placing Jesus on equal standing with Elijah and Moses? 2) Does he think that staying up on a mountain in isolation is where God wants His workers?
- Any attempt to find merit in Peter’s words is quickly dismissed in v. 6 where we read Mark’s commentary, no doubt passed on to him by Peter himself, “he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.”
- Peter was so excited and scared he just had to say something. His mind would only catch up with his words at a later date following the cross and resurrection.
- We will never understand the person and work of Christ apart from the cross and resurrection.
 - Leave them out and He is at best a moralist.
 - Leave them out and He is more accurately a fool.
 - Leave out the cross and there is no atonement.
 - Leave out the resurrection and there is no victory over sin.
- No, our human perspective on God’s grand redemptive plan is often short-sighted and unclear. In sinful weakness, we would avoid the cross, stay on the mountain and make

ourselves comfortable. In contrast Jesus will embrace the cross, ascend Calvary's hill, and drink the cup of suffering filled with the wrath of God.

2) The divine perspective is what we need. 9:7-8

- Suddenly a cloud, God's *shekinah* glory cloud, overshadows or envelopes them (v. 7). The word for "overshadows" in the Greek translation of the Old Testament appears in Exodus 40:35 when the glory of God came upon and filled the tabernacle and in 1 Kings 8:10-11 when the glory cloud filled the temple (cf. also Luke 1:35).
- We do not need man made tents (v. 5). Rather we need the presence of the living God who now speaks words that thunder with authority and are pregnant with meaning: "a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, listen (pre. imp) to him (v. 7).
 - The statement recalls the words from heaven at Jesus' baptism (1:11).
 - The statement calls to mind Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses says God will send His prophet and "it is to him you shall listen."
 - This is God's beloved Son, His unique, one of a kind Son.
 - And because it is God's Son, we are to listen (pre. imp) to Him and only Him. Are you in doubt? Then let v. 8 clear up the matter!
 - (v. 8) The cloud disappears, Elijah and Moses vanish, and "Jesus only" remains. Moses and Elijah were great revealers of truth along with all the other prophets, but the voice of God commands us to listen to His Son, to listen to Jesus. He is the greatest of them all with no rival. Give Him your ears. Have eyes only for Him (cf. Heb 12:2). He can give you what neither Moses or Elijah could ever give. This is God's perspective on the matter!

III. Learn From the Suffering of God's Servants.

9:9-13

- The summit on the mountain has concluded. The three disciples have learned that despite his earthly, outward appearance, Jesus is God. The transfiguration has proven that beyond any reasonable question.
- But, might the transfiguration not be an evidence of the soon triumph of the Messiah without the cross? Might the Christ enter into His glory and establish His kingdom in power now given the breath-taking display they had just witnessed?
- Who says the cross must come before the crown? Jesus does. What He has just experienced has not weakened His resolve to go to Calvary. It has emboldened Him to go and drink the very last drop of the cup of divine wrath in the place of unworthy and helpless sinners.

1) God's Son Jesus was crucified but rose from the dead. 9:9-10

- As they descend from the mountain they receive a command (“He charged them”) to tell no one what they had seen... “until the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (cf. 8:31). This is our Lord’s last command to silence in Mark’s gospel, and the only one that receives a time limitation. After the resurrection, proclamation is the order of the day! The “Son of Man” title appear only twice in the first half of Mark (2:10, 28). Now it will occur with great regularity especially in the context of His suffering (8:31; 9:9, 12; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41). The title harkens back to the heavenly man of Daniel 7:13-14 which reads, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

- Jesus is the coming Lord of glory who will inherit a universal and everlasting kingdom. But first He will suffer and die. Then, and only then, would He rise from the dead and be glorified.
- Also, on hearing this the three disciples did two things: 1) they kept the matter to themselves as Jesus commanded them, and 2) they kept questioning each other about what “rising from the dead” meant. They certainly had a place in their theology for such a doctrine. But that was expected to take place at the end of the age. That, I believe explains their question in v. 11.

2) God’s servant was mistreated but completed his assignment. 9:11-13

- In Malachi 4:4-6 again we read, “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” The presence of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration, references to resurrection from the dead, and the recognition that Jesus is the Messiah would constitute a compelling argument that the end of the age is near. Therefore that prompts a question in the disciples mind recorded in v. 11.
- “And they asked him, why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” That is a perfectly logical question in light of Scripture and their experience on the mountain.
- Jesus responds in v. 12 with a surprising connection. Yes, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how it is written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” Wow! They did not see that one coming! The

same divine Scriptures that predicted the coming of Elijah prior to the Day of the Lord also predicted a suffering Messiah. How did they miss Psalm 16; 22; 110; Isaiah 52:13-53:12? Read the whole of the Old Testament in light of Gen. 3:15 and all that unfolds from there. The Son of Man will suffer, be treated with contempt, be killed and then He will rise from the dead.

- As for Elijah, he has come in the person of John the Baptist (cf. Matt 17:12-13). Further, they did what they pleased with him. He suffered a ruthless, arbitrary death at the hands of evil men. They rejected his message and killed him. They will do the same with Jesus. But, John fulfilled the assignment given to him by God and so would our Lord.
- I agree with John Grassmick that “John the Baptist fulfilled the Elijah prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6) typically at Christ’s First Advent. Yet, Malachi’s prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6) indicates that Elijah himself [or one in the spirit of Elijah like John the Baptist] will also appear just before Christ’s Second Advent (cf. Rev. 11). (*BKC*, 144).
- So both God’s prophet and God’s Son would experience very similar fates (rejection and execution). However, God faithfully saw them thru their suffering and greatest hours of trial! Might we not be able to trust him to do the same for us?!

Conclusion: Why was Jesus gloriously transfigured? Why did the God who came incognito, just for a moment, reveal His true identity and nature in an unmistakable fashion? Let me close with a summation:

- 1) It was to reveal the true nature of Jesus as God incarnate.
- 2) It was to strengthen Christ as He began His march to the cross.
- 3) It was to fortify the disciples in obeying the call to radical discipleship.

- 4) It was to demonstrate that Messiah Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and Prophets (Elijah) as God's final, complete and climatic revelation.
- 5) It was a confirmation of Peter's confession (8:29).
- 6) It was to teach that the Messiah who was crucified is the same Messiah who will reign over His kingdom in glory.
- 7) It was to encourage the disciples in light of Jesus' prediction of His passion (8:31-32).
- 8) It fulfilled, at least in part, the promise of Mark 9:1.
- 9) It reaffirmed the Father's love and delight in His Son (cf. 1:11).
- 10) It calls us to trust and follow the One and only One who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15) and the very "radiance of the glory of God" (Heb. 1:3). In Jesus and Jesus alone we can see the glory and greatness of God and live!

The wonderful British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it so well, "The Son of God became man that the children of men might become children of God" (*God the Father, God the Son*, 265). Jesus Christ: 1) He is the hero of the Bible, 2) God in a body, 3) The Savior of sinners, 4) The final sacrifice, 5) The glory of God made flesh. He took the 3 disciples up a mountain for a glimpse of glory. He wants to take you and me up to heaven to glory forever. Will you follow Him? Will you trust Him? You become what you behold! May we all behold Jesus now and forever.