

IT IS GOOD LORD TO BE HERE! TRANSFIGURATION

Mark 9:2–9

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN!

The glory of the LORD is a frightful thing. Few have seen it or even caught a brief glimpse of it. Moses saw it, or at least the tail of it, like a comet passing by. He had to be hidden in a cave to endure it. Elijah caught a glimpse of it, but he had to be hidden in the same cave as Moses. Isaiah saw it in a vision, but was convinced he was a dead man and confessed his sinfulness. The shepherds saw it over Bethlehem's fields the night of our savior's birth, and they were filled with fear. John saw it on the island of Patmos, and was struck down as though he were dead. It is truly a frightful glory.

No one may look on God and live, except when God in His mercy permits it. Three of the Twelve saw Jesus in His divine glory – Peter, James, and John. Three witnesses to this remarkable truth, that Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is true God and true man in one person. God of God, light of light, very God of very God, and at the same time, true Man, humanity of our humanity.

Jesus was changed in appearance before the three. He transfigured, "morphed." He glowed with an unearthly glow, shining with the radiance of heaven. His clothes were whiter than any white on earth. His face was like the sun, shining with the glory of His divinity as the eternal Son of God. No human being in the history of the world ever appeared like this. Yes, Moses glowed when he came down from Mt. Sinai, but his glow was like that of a glow in the dark toys that are charged by the sun. The glow faded, the glory didn't last. Jesus shines like the sun, the light of God emanates out of His humanity. God and Man are One in Jesus, and every cell of Jesus' humanity glows with His own divinity.

That's the importance of Jesus' transfiguration. It sets Him apart from all the others – from Moses and the prophets, from every religious teacher that comes along. No one ever appeared this way. We need to remember this mountain and the transfiguration when we think of Jesus. There is so much more to Jesus than meets the eye. The shepherds in Bethlehem saw a tiny baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. The disciples saw a rabbi, a roving carpenter from Nazareth. The healings and exorcisms He did were signs of something greater, but there were healers and exorcists before Jesus. His preaching and teaching were powerful and persuasive with an authority unheard of by any contemporary. But there had been other extraordinary preachers.

But what sets Jesus apart is His shining face and bright clothing, this unearthly brilliance that would blind you to look at Him. He is no ordinary man, more than an extraordinary man, more than a super holy man. He is more than Moses, more the Elijah, more than any holy man who ever left a footprint in history. He is greater than John and all who came before and all who would come after.

No one ever appeared in this world shining with divinity but this Jesus in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily.

It left a profound and steadfast impression on Peter who bore witness to it. He saw this with his own eyes. He wasn't making it up, and there were two others who saw the same thing, just to leave no doubt. Peter writes, ***“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain”*** (2 Peter 1:16-18).

He heard it, he saw it, he testifies to it. This isn't some cleverly fabricated story, some myth made up to make Jesus more than what He actually is. This is an eyewitness account, just as Jesus' resurrection is an eyewitness account. Remember that. The disciples knew they were reporting things never seen or heard before. They knew people would be skeptical. Who would believe them? And yet Peter insists that he and James and John were eyewitnesses to Jesus' majesty. They heard the voice from the cloud proclaim Jesus as the beloved Son, just as at His Baptism. They were there witnessing the events and now are reporting the fact, just the facts.

This wasn't some sort of “spiritual mountaintop experience.” This is the hard fact of history. Sometimes people will claim to be “spiritual but not religious.” I claim to be “religious but not spiritual,” meaning that I believe based on fact not subjective feelings or experiences, or emotions. No matter how “spiritual” they might seem at the time. Our faith is lived on the plain, not the mountaintop.

What we believe, teach and confess is not some clever myth, some abstract timeless truth, but an eyewitness fact attested to by three sane, rational men who had nothing to gain by making this up. They saw Jesus glorified. They heard the Father speak. They saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus, talking with Him. Moses and Elijah, men who had been dead for centuries, show up alive and well in the presence of Jesus.

The disciples were terrified; they didn't know what to do. Peter wanted to savor the moment and build three structures. What else could they have done? What would you have done? Of course, you want to keep the moment alive. Enshrine it. Make it a holy site so pilgrims could come to the spot years later and recall the event. Why not? Yet the voice of the Father from the cloud intervened. This moment was to be witnessed, not preserved. It was a preparation and pointing to a far greater glory – Jesus death on a cross and His resurrection.

That's what Jesus was conversing about with Moses and Elijah. His departure, His “exodus” His death and resurrection that would bring to fulfillment all the Moses and the prophets had written. You see sin isn't dealt with in visions of glory. Death wasn't defeated by an inspiring view of God's glory on a mountain. Luther calls it a “theology of glory,” this hankering we have for the bright and shiny and glorious. But that show of glory doesn't save anyone – not Peter, James, and John, not you and me. Oh, it's nice to think about, and must have been awesome to see, and wouldn't you have wanted to be in on that epiphany as well? But if all Jesus did was come to earth to do a “shine Jesus shine” number, there would be no forgiveness, no life, no salvation, and all of us, including Moses and Elijah, would be lost forever.

That's why the cloud has to cover things and hide the glory. That's why Jesus told the disciples not to say a thing about what they saw until ***“the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*** Before

glory comes first comes Jesus bloody sweat and agony. Before Jesus can be understood rightly in His glory, He needs to be seen hanging dead on a cross bearing your sin and my sin and the sin of the world. Before Jesus can be seen in His glory, we need to see Him stricken, smitten and afflicted, broken, bleeding, dying, and buried because that's where and how He saves us. Not on a mountain, but on a cross, in the hidden glory of His sacrificial death and His resurrection from the dead.

The Father's voice from heaven declared, ***"This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."*** The same voice that was heard at Jesus' baptism as He was getting out of the water. ***"This is my beloved Son, my chosen One, my Servant who will suffer for the world to save it."*** He is the One you are to hear; He alone has the words of eternal life. Not Moses. Not Elijah. They pointed to Jesus; they prepared the way for Him. But only Jesus has the words that save us from sin and death. Only Jesus has the words that deliver us from the death sentence of the Law and bring us to life everlasting. Whether Jesus is shining on a mountain or on a cross or speaking through His office, hear Him. Take His words to heart.

Again, this is the utter uniqueness of Jesus. No one else has this testimony from the Father. No one else is called the beloved Son of God. No one else has this endorsement of His words. They saw no one but Jesus only. Only Jesus was all they needed to see and hear; only Jesus is all we need too.

Jesus was preparing His disciples for the road ahead, when His glory would be obscured by a cloud of rejection, betrayal, and crucifixion, when His ministry would be anything but glorious. They would remember this day and connect it to Good Friday and realize that this was the same Jesus – the glorious Jesus, the crucified Jesus. And they would understand the theology of the cross – that the glory of God is hidden in this life, hidden behind weakness and persecution and hardship and suffering and death. This is the way of Jesus, and the way of all who follow Jesus as His disciples.

It is your way too. Being a Christian is anything but glorious. The mountaintop experiences are rare to non-existent these days. Our lives of faith are lived not on the mountain, but on the plain. There are doubts, there are times of testing, there are difficulties that defy our explanation and test our faith, prayers that seem to go unanswered. You may have nothing but a Word of promise, a splash of water, a bit of bread and a sip of wine to go against devil, the world, and the flesh, and you may wonder "is this enough to save me?"

The glory may be hidden, but it is there as sure as Jesus, who is risen from the dead is there. One day you will see that shining face with newly resurrected eyes. The transfiguration of Jesus, shining in His glory, is simply a sneak preview of your glory in the resurrection, where with Moses and Elijah and the whole company of heaven you will see with your eyes that glorious, shining face of the One who is your Savior. But not yet be patient. For today we live by faith, but then we will know by sight. Today hidden, then revealed. Today we endure in weakness, but then we will strive in glory.

But regardless it's always the same Jesus, there to save you, here to save you. It is Good Lord To Be Here! For here is where our Lord says to you, all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and of the (✠) Holy Spirit for Jesus sake and in Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN!