

A Vision of Glory -- Mark 9:1-13

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Lord, we are about to open Your Word. We ask for the same Spirit that moved Mark to record these stories to move our hearts this morning. May our experience here today be supernatural. May we leave here changed by Your power. In Jesus' name, amen.

The traditional location of today's story is Mount Tabor. This tradition goes all the way back to the third century AD, close to 1800 years ago. It is located about eleven miles west of the Sea of Galilee and a few miles east of Nazareth. It is one of the mountains mentioned by name in the Old Testament. A battle was fought there between the Canaanites and the Israelites in the book of Judges. Deborah, a woman prophetess and Barak, a general of the Israelite army (who's also mentioned in the "Faith Hall of Fame" in Hebrews 11) fought in this battle.

On the top of this mountain is a cave named after Melchizedek the King of Salem. According to Christian tradition, this cave was the place where Abraham met the king of Salem, recorded in Genesis chapter 14. So, it is possible that several Bible heroes had walked the summit of this mountain before Christ ever walked this earth.

Here is a picture from the top of Mount Tabor as it is today. The elevation of the Sea of Galilee is 696 feet below sea level, while that of Nazareth, is about 5 ½ miles west of Mount Tabor, is 1050 feet above sea level. Mount Tabor's summit is 1,886 feet above sea level, or 836 feet above Nazareth and 2582 feet above the Sea of Galilee. So, you can see that it was quite a drop from the top of the mountain down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Today there are two monasteries located at the summit. One was built by the Roman Catholic Church and is called the Church of the Transfiguration. The other was built by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Today you can drive to the top of the mountain. But for those who had to walk it would have required no less than 4,340 stairs to arrive at the peak.

Let's begin now with a summary of today's story:

After predicting an imminent display of the power of God's kingdom, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a high mountain. Here the disciples saw Him in shining whiteness, talking with Elijah and Moses. Peter, overcome with fear, suggested they pitch three tents for them to stay in. Then God appeared from heaven in a cloud, declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son. Afterwards, as they walked down the mountain, Jesus ordered the disciples to not tell anyone what they had seen. When they asked Him about the coming of Elijah, Jesus declared that he had already come and had been rejected.

Let now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. It is recorded in Mark 9:1-13. If you have a pew Bible in front of you, you are welcome to turn to page 891 and follow along. I will be reading from the New King James Version. First of all, Jesus experienced predicting a display of glory. Mark 9:1 is part of the previous discourse that we considered last week in Mark chapter 8. It is a prediction of what takes place in today's story and so we did not look at it last week. In this prediction Jesus declared that some who were standing there with Him would see the kingdom of God present (or "coming") with power. He is clearly not referring to His Second Coming, an event which everyone on earth will see. He highlights an event which only a select group would see. This event would be, as it were, a miniature demonstration of Jesus' Second Coming. He referred to His 2nd Coming in Mark 8:38, which immediately precedes Mark 9:1. Here He pictured Himself coming in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. So, Jesus predicted that a few of those with Him would soon see (before tasting death) the glory of His Second Coming.

Second, Jesus experienced being transformed. In Mark 9:2 it says that this took place "after six days". So, between the prediction and the fulfillment, there were only a few days. Jesus selected Peter, James, and John to go with Him up on this high mountain. The other nine disciples, along with everyone else, did not get to go.

You may remember a previous story in Mark where Jesus chose these three disciples to be the only ones to go with Him. In Mark 5:37 it records Jesus taking them with Him into the room of a house where a young girl has just passed away. It seems that Peter, James, and John had a closer connection to Christ, a clearer understanding of His ministry than the other nine did, at least at this time. Mark makes a point to identify this mountain as "a HIGH mountain". Mark has mentioned Jesus going up into a mountain to pray on previous occasions. But he distinguishes this mountain from those other ones by referring to it as a "high mountain". In Mark 9:2 he uses a couple words which mean about the same thing to get across the idea that no one else was with Jesus and the three disciples. First Mark mentions that they were "apart" or "in private". Then he adds that they were "by themselves" or "alone". At this place Jesus was "transfigured" or "transformed". The noun form of this word is "metamorphosis", a biological term in English. As you may recall a frog experiences metamorphosis as it changes from a tadpole into a mature frog. It's a process in which something physically develops. Jesus' outward, physical appearance changed. He went from looking like just another person to radiating and being filled with the very glory of God. Mark 9:3 says "His clothes became shining...." Mark seems enraptured with the whiteness of Jesus' clothes. He says they were "exceedingly white", so white, in fact, that no launderer could have gotten them that white. Not even Tide with bleach! The brightness and glory of Jesus at this time is certainly hard for us to grasp. Matthew adds the description that Jesus' face shone like the sun. And from Luke's account it appears that this took place after Jesus had spent some considerable amount of time in prayer at night. So, if you can imagine being a few feet from the sun in the middle of the night!

Third, Jesus experienced company from heaven. Mark 9:4 records that "Elijah appeared to them with Moses". You may wonder how Elijah and Moses got into heaven. Does anyone remember how Elijah got to heaven? Yes, he was translated in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 1:11). What about Moses? It is not so clearly described, but Jude 9 gives the indication that after God buried Moses on Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1-6), that Michael the Archangel came and raised Moses from the dead and took him to heaven. So why did Elijah and Moses come down to talk with Jesus? There are a couple possible reasons. First, Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets while Moses was the one who gave the law to Israel from Mount Sinai. So, in a sense, these two people represent "the Law and the Prophets", the foundation of the Jewish nation and all that the disciples believed in as Jews. Seeing Elijah and Moses with Jesus would have been a big sign to them of Christ's identity as the Messiah. Another possible significance to Elijah and Moses coming down from heaven is that they together with Jesus displayed a miniature of the Second Coming. At this event God's people who are alive will be translated (represented by Elijah) and those of God's people who have fallen asleep in death will be resurrected (represented by Moses). And so, these three (Jesus, Elijah and Moses) were a miniature representation of the Second Coming or as Jesus described it in Mark 9:1, "the kingdom of God present with power".

It is also interesting to note that according to Luke 9:31, Elijah and Moses spoke with Jesus about His "decease" or "departure" at Jerusalem, referring to His death there on the cross. While they talked about Jesus' sacrifice for the human race, Luke says in chapter 9 and verse 32 that "Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep". They must have been worn out by the mountain climb and the lateness of the night hour. But how sad that they missed out on such an important conversation. At some point, though, the brightness of the scene woke them up. Notice how Peter responded to what he saw in Mark 9:5 (Read). The word for tabernacles means "tents". The sanctuary (or tabernacle) that the Israelites had in the wilderness was actually like a tent. It was mobile. Why did Peter want three tents built for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses? Perhaps he simply wanted them to stay for a while, or at least stay by for the imminent Feast of Tabernacles, during which the Jewish people would dwell in tents. But Mark sums it up pretty well in Mark 9:6, when he says that the reason Peter said this was because he and the other two disciples were greatly afraid. He wasn't making a whole lot of sense. Plus, he had just woken up.

Mark 9:7 then mentions that "a cloud came (or "appeared"). It gives a similar picture to Moses' experience on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament, when he received the Ten Commandments. A voice came out of the cloud, which Matthew mentions as being a "bright cloud". This voice declared of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him (of "listen to Him!") This is none other than the voice of God the Father. His words are like those at Jesus' baptism. What an endearing expression - "My beloved Son". How little we understand of the love between God

the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Notice what God commanded, speaking primarily to Peter, James, and John... "Listen to Him! Listen to what He has been trying to tell you about His own sufferings and death!" This experience was truly meant to be an encouragement to the three disciples as well as a wake-up call.

Fourth, then, Jesus experienced ordering secrecy. Mark 9:8 says that after the voice from the cloud that there was a sudden, abrupt change. They were most likely covering their faces in their arms and in the ground upon hearing the voice of God. And Matt 17:7 records that Jesus came and touched them and told them to not be afraid. And when they looked up, all they see is the blackness of night and Jesus' human form. By this time it must have been early morning, so they started down the mountain. On their way down, Jesus, in Mark 9:9, "commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen...." What they had seen was for their eyes only. At this time, with the false conceptions of the Messiah's first coming, to share what had happened would have only caused an unhealthy excitement. Jesus did say, though, that they could tell what had happened after His resurrection. Mark gives us an idea of how little they understood in verse 10 of Mark chapter 9. They began to discuss what this could possibly mean. They still had not understood or excepted the fact that Jesus was going to die and rise again on the third day.

Well, last of all, Jesus experienced explaining the coming of Elijah. The disciples were impressed that Elijah had come down from heaven. And this incident recalled in their minds an idea that they had been taught by the scribes, who were the ones who explained and interpreted the Old Testament. They ask Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Perhaps the scribes used this teaching to convince people that it was not time yet for the Messiah to appear. They had to wait until Elijah came. Jesus responded to the disciples' question by affirming that "Yes, Elijah does, indeed, come first." But then He mentions another prophecy that the scribes seem to have overlooked – that of the Messiah's sufferings. Finally, in Mark 9:13 Jesus declared that, in fact, Elijah had already come. And according to Matthew 17:13, the disciples did understand that He was referring to John the Baptist. Jesus says that "they did to him (John the Baptist) whatever they wished." The gospel accounts make it clear that the scribes and Pharisees did not believe in John (Matthew 21:32). They had refused his call to repent and be baptized (Luke 7:29, 30). So, even though it was King Herod who had put John to death, they had certainly treated him with contempt.

So, now that we know what Jesus experienced in this story, let's consider how this story might affect our own experience today. How does this story reveal Jesus as our example? How do we know from this story what a healthy and dangerous Christian is? First of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in this story in that He gave another sign. In Mark chapter 8 Jesus had been rebuked by Peter for mentioning His impending sufferings and death. He had been misunderstood by all of His disciples. It is clear that they were not listening to His predictions. That's why God specifically told them in our story today to start listening to what He was saying. They hadn't been. And yet in spite of their refusal to accept His words, He still graciously gave them another sign. He, in fact, allowed them to see a miniature of the glory of His Second Coming!

And so He shows us that a healthy Christian is someone who encourages the weak in faith. Notice what this additional sign did for Peter's flawed faith. I invite you to turn with me to 2 Peter 1:16-18. This is a letter written by Peter himself many years later. (Read) Peter attests to the impact this experience and sign had on their faith. And so a healthy Christian gives all the appropriate evidence that is needed. Maybe someone is having a hard time believing that Jesus was a historical character who did indeed walk this earth. Perhaps they really want to believe and all they need is another sign. Sometimes showing them the evidence from modern archaeological discoveries, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, is all they need. Maybe someone else simply needs to be shown all the fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, that all of God's predictions have been 100% accurate. Or maybe they need to hear the testimonies of those whose lives have been changed by believing in Jesus Christ. A healthy Christian shows that the Christian's faith is not built on the shifting sands of time or human opinion. It is built on a rock-solid foundation that gives plenty of additional signs and evidence to a feeble and flawed faith.

Second of all, Jesus is revealed in this story as our example in that He was transformed. Throughout his 32 years of life He had appeared as someone completely human. You couldn't tell by looking at His physical appearance that He was more than that. But this changed on that high mountain. That night He took on the

appearance of divinity. When you looked at Him, He looked like someone divine. His face shone like the sun. He was revealed as the divine Son of God that He was. And He is our example in this. He shows us that a healthy Christian is someone who is transformed. It's someone who begins to take on the attributes of divinity. They become "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). Notice what Romans 12:2 says. (Read) It says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind". The word translated, "transformed", is the same word translated, "transfigured", in our story in Mark chapter 9. A healthy Christian is someone who is changed by the renewing of their mind. It's an inward transformation. It's on the inside. Christianity is not a religion that leaves you as you are. When you become a Christian, you become a different person. Peter was transformed from fear to boldness. The night when Jesus suffered at the hands of His enemies, Peter denied Him. He disowned Him and said he didn't know who Jesus was. But he was transformed! Later when surrounded by none other than the Sanhedrin, (the supreme judicial authority in Israel) he was asked by what power or by what name he had healed a lame man, he boldly declared to them and all Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And as if that wasn't enough, he kept going. He told them that they, the Sanhedrin, were responsible for His death, but God was responsible for His resurrection. He ended by stating that there was no other way to be saved than through Jesus Christ! (Acts 4:1-13)

And then there's Paul, who was transformed from a self-righteous Pharisee to an apostle of Jesus Christ. At one point in his life he considered himself a "Hebrew of the Hebrews". When it came to keeping the law, he was blameless (Philippians 3:5, 6). But then he was transformed. He declared that there was nothing he could boast about, except Jesus and Him crucified (Galatians 6:14). And he even saw himself, no longer as blameless, but as the greatest sinner (1 Tim 1:15). Many of you, if given the opportunity, could also testify of how being a Christian has transformed you, how you have been changed since you became a Christian.

I believe that question by the disciples directed to Jesus is very telling. They asked Him on the way down the mountain, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" This question reveals that the disciples' faith in the scribes was being replaced by faith in Jesus. As Jews, the scribes would have been their top authority on truth. Any question about God and His Word they would have directed to the scribes. They were the experts. And yet in our story we find the disciples asking Jesus to clarify the teachings of the scribes. In other words, "This is what they are saying, but what do You say, Jesus? We have come to realize that You are the expert!"

It has been my hope that going through the book of Mark would result in God's Word becoming your "new authority". It's easy to look to a certain preacher or evangelist to find out what I should believe. But I don't care if it's Billy Graham, Benny Hinn, Doug Batchelor, or even Kenneth Cox. They're all human and subject to error. But not so with God's Word. Often times we find a certain Christian channel and come to believe whatever is taught, whether it's Trinity Broadcasting, 3ABN, or Hope TV. But we need to go to the source of truth, God's Word. There are many popular Christian authors, such as Max Lucado, the authors of the "Left Behind Series" and on and on. One of my favorite authors is Jack Sequeira and certainly Ellen White. And yet all of these authors are human. The only book that is safe to build our faith on is the Word of God.

For, you see, the Bible is more than a book. It is living and powerful. The more I study it the more I see how infinite is its depth. The deeper you go, the more wisdom and truth you see, the more you realize that there is so much more than you ever imagined. It is not the words of a man or a woman. It is the Word of God.

It is my challenge to you to read the Bible like you've never read it before. According to the prophecies it contains we won't always have this privilege. The same power who took away people's Bibles in the Dark Ages will one day rule the earth again. So, what do you say? Let's make the time. Let's carve out time in our day to fill our minds with the Word of God. If you want to join me in this commitment, please stand with me and sing our closing song, "I Will Early Seek the Savior". We will find Him in God's Word.