
Transfiguration

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Lazy Mountain Bible Church

Mark 9:2–8 (ESV)

² 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, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ 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.” ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

Introduction

Many of us grew up in the star trek generation, we grew up with the words, “beam me up Scotty,” as part of our cultural vocabulary. So when we read a story like this it might be tempting to say, “Yup.” Christ was transfigured. We expected that was possible for him, and now we see it was. Next.” And we move onto the next thing in the text.

But, whenever we come upon a text in Scripture we must always come with this question before us: What is it there for.

We have very, very few ancient accounts of Jesus. Just four gospels. So every story, every word recorded of Jesus is important and valuable.

Many, many ancient texts have disappeared. Most of what we know about Roman history, and Greek history is from just a few ancient documents. When Ancient cultures attacked and conquered another country or culture, they often tried to wipe out the culture by destroying its libraries and written histories, and taking their antiquities. We saw this just as recently in the last ten years, when Bagdad fell, the museum was robbed before it could even be secured by the troops, and much Iraq antiquity was lost.

So with this in mind, and with the knowledge that:

2 Timothy 3:16 (NAS)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

And before we dismiss this account and move on, let's try and discover together why God deemed this account so important that he made sure that ethnic war between Christian and Arab in the 10th and 11th century, could not erase this account from history.

The first clue will come as we look at what happens in the text before and after the account. Prior to his transfiguration he has warned them not to have the thinking, he called it leaven, of the Pharisees—who refused to believe unless they saw a sign. He warned them not to have a demanding spirit like they exhibited, where we try and tell God what we want, and how we think things out to go.

Then Jesus heal a blind man, then he asks the big question of the disciples: Who do you say that I am. They tell him what the people are calling him, "Elijah, or John the Baptist."

But then he asks them who they believe he is. And Peter answers directly and correctly: You are the messiah, the one prophesied to come, the son of God.

This is a signal to God, a signal to Jesus, that they are ready to have the next part of the purpose of Christ revealed to them:

He tells them why he came, why he has been doing and teaching all that he has, he tells them what his purpose is:

Mark 8:31 (NAS)

³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

You can imagine the silence in the room. These disciples feel like they have really given a lot. Given up their careers, their friends and family think they have lost it. And now, the man they have devoted themselves to tells them that this is the plan? That he be arrested, killed and rise from the dead.

Peter takes him aside as his publicist: And tells him that he, Peter, has a much better plan. That Jesus doesn't need to go to that extreme."

To which Jesus gives him what can only be described as a severe dressing down, a tongue lashing. He tells Peter he is thinking like Satan, planning like Satan, and scheming like Satan. Satan's plan is self preservation and exaltation.

But that is not the road for a Christian. The way you will tell if what you believe has dropped 18" down, from, your head down to your heart is one thing: You will be carrying a cross.

A cross is a metaphor that when you become a Christ follower, your old self is crucified, and you renounce a life of self focus and self interest and pursue a life of God focus and God interest.

We have such a short time. And most people waste an entire life just pursuing their own stuff and their own agenda—and it is a prescription for a meaningless life, and an even more meaningless death. So he tells them there is just one prescription to cure this: Pick up your cross and follow Jesus. Renounce a

life that is all wrapped up in what is best for me and mine, self and selfish. And instead, embrace of life of discipleship and service. If you do, Jesus assures you will have treasure stored up in heaven, where moth cannot corrupt and thieves cannot break in and steal.

So having taught and rebuked and corrected them. He chooses three. Three who will see what all of us wish to see—a glimpse here on earth of Jesus Christ in his heavenly glory.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (NAS)

¹⁵ “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

Perhaps you remember when Jesus was on trial, the chief priest accused him of self aggrandizement because, he claimed Jesus had not witnesses to corroborate his claims.

This was a big, big deal in Hebrew jurisprudence, literally truth hung in the balance on the lips of two or three witnesses. There were no security cameras or photos in those days. Veracity was established by the testimony of people: two at the least and preferably three eyewitnesses. Who themselves knew their own lives were forfeit if it was found they had fabricated or exaggerated what they gave testimony to. In fact it was the 9th commandment—you shall not bear false witness.

So Jesus takes with him three witnesses. I have no doubt He knew what was going to transpire, even if the disciples did not.

Mark 9:2–4 (NAS)

² Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; ³ and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.

There are Three Striking appearances on this mountain top which command our attention

The appearance of Christ

Christ is transfigured, in the Greek, metamorphosis, or a word closer to our present English idiom would be transformed.

One of the current favorite toys of boys are: transformers, which appear first as trucks, or planes or cars, and transformed, by a series of metamorphisms, which boys understand instinctively, but which allude parents entirely—which makes them even more attractive to boys—having a toy that mom (or dad) can’t readily figure out.

Jesus is transformed before them. And in doing so what is accomplished. Why didn’t Jesus just go off away on the mountaintop and meet with Elijah or Moses or whoever he wanted to be with. Why take his disciples?

Remember the rebuke of Peter, very severed, who wants to be accused of having the thinking of Satan? Now Jesus wants to show Peter, James and John, they have nothing to fear in the plan of God for Jesus to be arrested, tried, and die and rise to pay for the sins of the world—so Jesus first allows him to see him in his glorious heavenly state—how he will look when he comes in his glory at the end of time to gather all things unto himself, to establish his kingdom on earth and vanquish all who oppose him.

But he also allows them to see that when he comes into his glory they will STILL recognize him. That he will have a form, a heavenly body, suitable and immortal, invincible body.

This is our hope also, he said if he goes he prepares a place for us. A spirit doesn't need a place, but a person does. So we have the assurance in the vision that we also, who will be resurrected, will have a recognizable body suitable for living in heaven.

How do we know that, where do we see this in the text?

The next appearance Moses and Elijah stand with Jesus.

These men have been dead, well Elijah was taken straight up to heaven without “dying.” But now they are confiring with Jesus and they are recognizable. They are not just spirits. Peter and the rest know who they are. This is the big three.

So Peter wants to take some action. He knows from his synagogue school days that Elijah only shows again when the end is near—when it is time again for God to reassert his control over all of earth. Both of them were associated with eschatological (end time) expectations. Moses prophesied in Deut 18:15 that God would raise up a prophet like himself. And Mal 4:5–6 predicted the return of Elijah. The experience certainly reminded the disciples of the Malachi passage, for they brought up the return of Elijah prophecy on the way down the mountain (9:11).¹

So we see two reasons Jesus took them up the mountain:

1. To show them, have no fear, the plan for my death and resurrection is sound.
2. To show them the end is near

And to give them a glimpse of what Jesus will look like (and they) in the resurrection.

Question: Do you fear death? All of us do to some extent. The unknown. The finality. The worry of saying good bye to our loved ones, our children.

But our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. We have the sure and certain hope of heaven and our own resurrection from the dead and receiving our own body suitable for heaven when we put our trust in Jesus death on the cross and resurrection.

¹ Black, A. (1995). *Mark*. The College Press NIV commentary (Mk 9:4). Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NLT)

¹ For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

Do you believe that? That is the promise for everyone who has put their faith and trust in Jesus who we read today is transformed in the presence of his disciples. We will be transformed also the Scripture promises.

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 (NLT)

⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.

The account of the transfiguration is the first proof Jesus offers his disciples of what the future for those who follow Christ have in store for them.

But there is more.

There is a direct instruction from God the Father himself in this account. Did you catch it?

Mark 9:5–8 (NLT)

⁵ Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”⁶ He said this because he didn’t really know what else to say, for they were all terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him.”⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them.

God the Father wants there to be no doubt. In effect he is affirming what Peter has declared is true: This Jesus is the Christ. This Jesus is the Messiah. This Jesus is the one prophesied to come. This Jesus is my Son God the father declares.

Those who witnessed the baptism of Jesus heard these same words from the Father, this is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.

Now God the Father gives the same affirmation so there can be no doubt.

But also, he says, “Now embrace the life he has spoken to you about. Embrace the instructions of my son. In a word listen to him.”

Application:

How are we doing in this?

Those who love me, Jesus says, will keep my commands. Now, God the father says, “get after it.” It is in imperative language. Urgent, again, like the coach on the sideline in the last moments of a game that is on the line.

God the father does not use imperative language very much. But here he does.

Conclusion

So I hope you have seen this is not a Scripture to simply brush by. This is a Scripture to embrace.

Embrace the truth—you need to trust Christ so you will have a future with Christ. You need to trust Christ so you will have a resurrection like Christ. You need to trust Christ so you will have a resurrection body like Christ. And you need to do it now and demonstrate you are doing it by embracing his words: by listening to Jesus.

Again it is interesting where this comes. It comes just six days, six days they have had to mull over his instructions to give up self focused and self centered living in pick up your cross and follow him. No human does this naturally. It is only supernaturally by the power of the indwelling holy spirit, that this can be done.

But it must be done. The choice must be made. Continue on your own self made, self aggrandizing plans, which Christ likens to having the mind of satan, or pick up your cross, embrace the teachings and promises of Jesus and begin living like a person that has a future—a future with Jesus in heaven.

The choice is yours—what will it be?