**The glory of Christ briefly unveiled**

Text: Mark 9:2-13

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**Scriptures:** Exodus 33:17-23; Mark 9:2-13; 2 Peter 1:16-18

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 359, 171, 264, 32

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#27)

**Occasion:** Lord’s Supper

**Theme:** Briefly, the divine glory of Jesus was revealed to the disciples Peter, James, and John as He spoke with Elijah and Moses and was then commended by God the Father as His beloved Son.

**Proposition:**  Behold the glory of Christ now and look forward to your glorious future with Him.

**Introduction**

Our text today stands out as a unique divine revelation because it shows us the glory of Christ in ways that we do not see elsewhere in the Scripture. We always need to carefully ‘handle’ the Scriptures with reverence and awe, but especially here where we see the glory of Christ briefly unveiled before five men in the presence of God the Father.

As we’ve been working through Mark’s account of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, we’ve already seen some unusual, extraordinary, supernatural, events; for example: Jesus healing a paralysed man (2:1-12), Jesus commanding a storm to cease on the sea of Galilee (4:35-41), Jesus feeding 5,000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish (6:30-44).

Now we come to a supernatural historical event in the ministry of Jesus Christ, which is even more unusual, even more extraordinary, even more amazing than any we have seen so far. This event is recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36). Mark and Matthew use the Greek word from which we get our English word ‘metamorphosis’ to describe a radical change in the appearance of Jesus. This word is translated in our English Bibles ‘transfigured’. That is why this very well-known passage of Scripture is usually referred to as ‘The Transfiguration’.

Six days (cf. Ex 24:16) after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the ‘Christ’, Jesus took the three ‘inner circle’ disciples Peter, John and James up a mountain. Luke records that he went up there to pray (9:28). Traditionally this mountain was thought to be Mt Tabor, but the much higher and closer peak of Mt Hermon is more likely. Then the appearance of Jesus changed, and his clothes became intensely bright. Then two men who had lived almost 1500 and 800 years before, appeared, speaking with Jesus. These highly significant individuals were recognisable as being Moses and Elijah

It may well have been night-time, certainly the three disciples were very sleepy (as Luke records – 9:32), however when they did wake up, they saw the glory of Jesus as he stood with Moses and Elijah. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke saying “*This is my beloved Son, listen to him*”. Our three points today are:

1. Jesus is transfigured
2. Elijah and Moses appear
3. God honours His Son
4. **Jesus is transfigured (v2-3)**

Today we use a variety of products to clean our clothes including chemical detergents and, to remove persistent stains from white garments, we may apply bleach products like Janola. In Bible times, soap was made by mixing animal fat and ashes. Mark writes about Jesus: “*He was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them*”. The Greek word translated ‘bleach’ here literally means ‘*to make white*’.

By far the brightest object in the sky is the sun, a huge burning mass of hydrogen and helium held together by its own gravity. Matthewwrites about Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration that ‘*his face shone like the sun*’ (Matt 17:2). Lightning is the brightest natural source of light on earth. It has a luminosity equivalent to 100 million light bulbs. Luke records ‘*the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white*’ (Luke 9:29). The word ‘dazzling’ comes from the Greek word meaning to flash, ‘to shine as lightning’. The gospel writers are all reaching for superlative descriptions to convey the intensity, the brilliance, the purity, the luminosity of the face and garments of the transfigured Christ.

What happened to Jesus on that mountain? What does it mean? Whilst this is similar in some ways to the transformation of Moses when he went up Mt Sinai to meet with God, it is also very different. “*When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD*” (Ex 34:29). Moses would put a veil on his face when he went down to communicate God’s words to the people (Ex 34:35). The radiant face of Moses reflected the glory of God like the moon does the light of the sun. This divine glory is literally the ‘weightiness’ of his being, His power, majesty, holiness, truthfulness, righteousness.

Here on the Mount of Transfiguration, the radiant intensity Christ shining out through His clothing was **not** reflected light. It was the brilliance of His own glory. John would later recall this extraordinary event in his gospel, writing “*we have seen is glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). Peter, likewise, would write ‘*we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*’ (2 Pet 1:16). Notice that Jesus was not permanently transformed/ transfigured/ metamorphosed at that time. It was not that Jesus suddenly became glorious, but that for a short time the veil of his humanity was lifted so that the brilliance of his underlying glory could be seen on that mountain

What then is the glory of Christ, which was temporarily/briefly seen at his transfiguration? It is nothing less than the glory of God Himself. “*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*” (Heb 1:3). “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*” (Col 1:15). “*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known*” (John 1:18). The Transfiguration further confirmed and confirms the identity of Christ as (in the words of the Nicene Creed): “*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*”.

The Transfiguration also ‘previews’ the future glory of Christ, which was then, and is yet now, to be fully revealed in the future. Looking forward to the New Jerusalem, to the New Heavens and New Earth, we read in Revelation 21:23 that “*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp*”.

Congregation as we look through the ‘lens’ of the Word of God at the brilliant radiance of the glory of God in Christ, the divine Son: *Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, bow down before him, his glory proclaim* (Hymn 359). “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). These three privileged disciples had seen the glory of Christ briefly unveiled, they had also seen Elijah and Moses, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Elijah and Moses appear (v4-6)**

The temporary unveiling of Christ’s humanity to reveal his glory is unique, extraordinary, and calls for our deepest praise, adoration and wonder. Amazing also is the appearance of men who had not lived on the earth for many hundreds of years: Moses and Elijah. They were clearly recognisable. Peter has no difficulty in knowing who they were when he, being terrified together with James and John, blurts out the suggestion of making tents for them and for Jesus. Perhaps Peter was hoping to prolong the experience of seeing the glory of Christ unveiled and being in the presence of Elijah and Moses. James later wisely wrote: “*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak*” (James 1:19).

Both these hugely significant Old Testament figures had unusual exits from this earth**.** Mosesdied a fit and well man at 120 years old, never having entered the promised land into which he was to lead God’s people. He was buried in the land of Moab, but nobody knew exactly where (Deut 34:6). Elijahwas taken up by a whirlwind into heaven when a chariot and horses of fire appeared and separated him from Elisha (2 Kings 2:11-12). Moses represents the Law, Elijah the Prophets. Together they personify the entire Old Testament revelation of God.

Notice that Moses and Elijah were ‘*talking with Jesus*’ (Mark 9:4). They are in fellowship, in communion, in relationship with Christ. Remember that Jesus had said to them during his sermon on the Mount: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them*”(Matt 5:17). Jesus is the Lawgiver who explains the meaning of the law. He shows us how to fulfil it perfectly and then dies so that we can be delivered from the deadly consequence of not obeying that Law. Jesus is the last prophet of God (Heb 1:2) who speaks the gospel and reveals the person of God most clearly to all who will listen and turn to Him. He said "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him*" (John 14:6-7).

Luke records that Moses and Elijah ‘*appeared in glory*’ (Luke 9:31). They were not transfigured like Jesus, instead they both reflected the brilliant glory of Christ, as the face of Moses did the glory of God on Mt Sinai. Moses and Elijah were like two moons shining with the reflected light of the sun. Here is the truth that is dramatically revealed here: Jesus is greater, far more glorious, than both Moses and Elijah. Christ Jesus is the greater Law Giver. Christ Jesus is the greater Prophet. Do you believe this? It is true.

Luke records the topic of the conversation which Moses and Elijah were having with Jesus. It was about **“***his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:31)*.* The Greek word translated ‘departure’ here is literally ‘exodus’. Moses and Elijah were taking about the ‘exodus’ which Jesus was about to bring about in Jerusalem. He would exit this life through his death that would be an accomplishment. That is strange language indeed – that death would be an accomplishment. The Greek word translated ‘accomplish’ literally means ‘fulfil’, ‘*bring to full measure*’. Jesus used the same word after his resurrection: “*Everything must be* ***fulfilled*** *that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms*” (Luke 24:44).

Today we celebrate together the sacrament of Lord’s Supper. We remember a death like none other. A death that accomplished what no other sacrifice or act of radical obedience could achieve. The death of the brilliantly glorious Jesus, the beloved Son of God, which brings us to our third point:

1. **God honours His Son (v7-8)**

We are all familiar with clouds in the sky. They are visible masses of condensed watery vapour generally floating above ground level. Mark records that ‘*a cloud overshadowed them*’ (9:7). This was no ordinary cloud. It indicated the presence of God the Father, recalling the pillar of cloud in the Exodus from Egypt (Ex 24:15-18), the cloud that covered the Tent of Meeting (Ex 40:34-35), and the cloud that later filled the Temple (1 Kings 8:11). From this cloud came the voice of God, audibly confirming the identity of Jesus “*This is my beloved Son*” (9:7). Then the Divine instruction “*Listen to him*”.

It is clear from Mark’s account that what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration was for the benefit of the three disciples. Notice the language in this gospel: Jesus the Son of God was ‘*transfigured before* ***them***’ (v2). He ‘*appeared to* ***them***’ (v4). Now the Word of God is directed to them ‘*listen to him*’ (v7). The revelation of Jesus’ mysterious, glorious dignity and divine status serves to confirm Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), and also Christ’s own prophecy of his impending passion and resurrection (8:31). The Transfiguration was certainly for the benefit of the disciples: to strengthen them in their commitment and to prepare them for the sufferings which they must share. For them it came before Christ’s death and resurrection. For us today, it comes before Christ’s return in glory.

Brothers and sisters, may you and I be strengthened in our commitment to Christ and prepared for whatever is in store for us in the future on this earth as we behold the glory of Christ today. The Transfiguration would also have been an encouragement and a confirmation for Jesus as He spoke about His death with Moses and Elijah and heard the loving words of His Heavenly Father. After God spoke, the disciples saw Jesus alone. Jesus charged Peter, James and John to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead (Mark 9:9). His glory was to remain veiled until His resurrection. John would later write, in the book of Revelation, about his vision of the risen, ascended Christ that ‘*the hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow*’ and that ‘*his face was like the sun shining in full strength*’ (Rev 1:14,16).

As they came down the mountain the three disciples did not understand what ‘*rising from the dead might mean*’ (v10). So they asked Jesus “*why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?*” (v11). It’s not entirely clear what is behind this question, but it is evident that the disciples were struggling to see why Jesus must die and be raised from the dead if Elijah has already come, they presumed as the first of the general resurrection expected by some Jews. In reply, Jesus confirmed the prophesy in Malachi 4:5 that Elijah will be sent by God ‘*before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*’ and that he had already effectively come in the person of John the Baptist, who had been killed. Jesus also alluded to the Old Testament prophesy in Isaiah 53:3 that the promised Servant of the Lord would be ‘*despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows*’. Peter, James and John would not understand this until after Jesus had suffered, died and rose again.

Peter would then write with absolute confidence, assurance and authority as he looked back to the time when he had seen the glory of Christ briefly unveiled: ‘*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 honour 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 Pet 1:16).

Both Moses and Elijah (who lived on this earth at two different stages of history (1400BC and 870BC) were there together alive with Jesus on the holy mountain of transfiguration. This was a foretaste of the general resurrection yet to come. Neither had seen the face of God on this earth before. In Exodus 33:12-23 we read that Moses sees ‘the back’ of God; an anthropomorphism (here describing God in terms of human anatomy). In 1 Kings 19:9b-13 The Lord appears to Elijah as a gentle whisper after a powerful wind, and earthquake and a fire. During their previous lives on this earth, Moses and Elijah had seen something of God before, but they had never seen his face, they had never seen the radiance of God’s glory in Jesus, the image of the invisible God. Now they were able to stand in the presence of the brilliantly bright glory of God in Christ and not perish. They were able to approach the majesty of the Living God who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16).

Likewise, Peter, James and John saw the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of his being in His Son and they did not die there on that mountain either. They were not blinded by the radiant, intensely white light. They were not slain by the intensity of the holiness of God. How was this possible? Because Christ’s departure, his exodus, through his death on the cross opens up access to the glory of God for sinners like you and me. This is the Christ’s accomplishment on the cross that we remember today at Lord’s Supper.

The transfiguration was a ‘preview’ of the finished work of salvation and confirms that salvation, not only of those who have believed in the promises of God after the resurrection of Christ in the New Testament, but all those who believed in the Old Testament also! The transfiguration not only shows us the glory of Christ, but also the amazing access which we have to God through Jesus. “*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:16).* Because, in the light of God’s Word we too*“have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).* AMEN.