

Mark 9:2-13 | Clarity and Clouds

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So for those of you who don't know, I am a huge Tennessee Titans fan. Which used to mean something, but now it means nearly nothing. But there was a time, back in the glory days, where the Titans were good.

At the helm of that team of destiny was a coach named Jeff Fisher. I loved Jeff. And I had the pleasure of going to a Titans game in Tennessee back when Fisher was coaching, and as I was down there, I cyberstalked him and found out he had a daughter around the same age. This rocked my aspirations. If I could marry this girl. I could be Jeff Fisher's son.

After the game I went and was standing at the gate the players were coming out of and all of a sudden, I see her, Tara Fisher. And she came over and started talking to my mom about Montana. I just stood there. Like an idiot. In my Titans hardhat...I froze. I didn't know how to respond. And then she left.

The next week I got on Facebook, and asked her to be my friend. She accepted. But she also asked how I knew her. This sparked the debate of the century between me and my roommates, do I tell her the truth, do I make a long appeal, do I keep it short and to the point...regardless of how I responded, it was only a few minutes after I sent her the message that she was no longer my friend on Facebook.

Not only was I an idiot in the moment of meeting her, but I had no way of making it sustainable in the long run. What this illustrates is really something all of us experience. We all encounter things through our lives which excite, stir and motivate us in powerful ways. We can identify in our lives moments of grandeur, moments where we experienced something fantastic, and yet how did you respond to it, and more importantly outside of hindsight, how has it changed you.

Tonight we are going to look at a story in the book of Mark called the transfiguration. And we are going to talk about what that word means in a little bit, but here is what we are going to see tonight: **The transfiguration of Christ shows us the person to which we should respond and also the hope through which we live as Christ followers.**

Let's **pray**.

So for those of you who don't remember, in the last two weeks we have seen Jesus telling his disciples the truth about who he is. He is the Christ, and additionally he is going to be murdered. But this week rather than telling the disciples who he is, he is going to show them who he is. **Mark 9:2-4.**

So here we have something pretty phenomenal happening. Jesus takes his core inner three disciples up a mountain with him. And while on the mountain he is temporarily transfigured.

Now the Greek word for transfigured is metamorphou which means to be changed. You can hear the root of metamorphosis in it. And in this moment, Jesus while keeping his earthly self is radically enhanced in a special way.

His body, his robes all glow a radiant white. He was illuminated in a way which doesn't happen to other humans. Mark is grasping at words here trying to describe what is happening to Jesus because it is so extraordinary. And then there appears, speaking with Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

Now Moses and Elijah are two Old Testament figures. Elijah was seen as the chief prophet of the Old Testament. He boldly spoke the word of God, he challenged the pagan rulers of the day. But we also see an interesting end of Elijah's life. **2 Kings 2:1,11**. Elijah didn't die, he was just taken to heaven.

Then there is Moses. Moses was the one who gave the law, the rules demanding the perfection of God's people. Laws, procedures and practices which set the people of God apart from the people of the world. And Moses became discouraged because the people of God kept breaking God's commands, and Moses said "God if I could just see your face I would be hopeful again. If I could just see your glory I would have the strength to continue." And God says to him, **Ex 33:19-20**. Moses wasn't allowed to see the face of God. Peter, who is witnessing this, reflects on the hope of the prophets later in **1 Peter 1:10-11**. For the whole Old Testament the prophet's longed to see the glory of God, the longed to see the Christ.

And here on the mountain, Moses finally gets his wish. Even though both Elijah and Moses had been with God in heaven, it is here that they see the true picture of who God is. Here they see the glory and face of God in Jesus Christ, the God man.

What we see here is not simply a transfiguration of Christ, but a glorification of Christ. Here on earth Moses, Elijah, Peter, James and John are getting a glimpse of something we will not see again until heaven.

You see it is true that after Jesus rises from the dead he appears to many, but it is never described in such splendor. It is never described in such glory as what these men are now witnessing. Only when we see the returning Christ do we see this language of radiance.

You can imagine the emotions that was going through the hearts of Peter, James and John. For some time now they had heard Jesus proclaiming a Kingdom. They had seen him performing miracles and healings testifying to a kingdom, but here, they see the Kingdom. Jesus is the Kingdom. In the glorified Christ, in him there is no death, in him there is no disease, or hatred, no more cancer or hate crimes. In him all the glory and hope of God is displayed. They were overwhelmed by the waves of majesty.

And here is Peter's response (**The Object of Response**), **Mark 9:5-8**.

Peter often gets a bad rap for being an impulsive dumb dumb in scripture. And in some ways he is very deserving of that. And in our background this sound pretty dumb. I'm going to build you some tents.

But we need to understand what Peter is thinking here. First, he understands it is good for them to be there. There is no truer statement in all of the Christian experience. It is good for us to be in the glory of Christ.

Secondly Peter knew that the feast of the booths was at hand. And the feast of the booths was a festival which celebrated the rediscovery of the law and the wanderings of the Israelites. And when this feast was inaugurated people lived in tents for a whole week while the scripture was being read. Peter says this is the greater feast, let us build tents that your glory may dwell here on this mountain.

Peter's response wasn't out of ignorance, Peter's response was out of misplaced worship and incomplete understanding. And God speaks to Peter, **Mark 9:7-8**.

You see this whole event is for the disciples. This whole event is for us as Christians.

Often times we can get caught up in the same response. We can have moments of great gospel clarity much like Peter experienced. Perhaps it is through a retreat, or a worship service, a sermon or a book.

But like Peter we can misplace our worship and respond in an inappropriate way because we do not have a full understanding of what we are responding too.

So many times we can fall into the trap of Peter, thinking that the only response to the glory of God is to do something. We are almost compulsive doers. We can become obsessed with ourselves and what we will do as a response rather than allowing ourselves to simply see the beauty of Christ. God has a great work for Peter to do, and he will need to do it, and so will you, but first Peter needs to listen to Christ. Peter needs to be transformed by the glory of Christ before he can ever do anything for Christ.

When we experience the person of Christ it can become uncomfortable, I imagine that is part of Peter's terror here. As we see Christ we see our own sin, as we see his glory we see our own flaws and it's easy to become busy with going to church, reading the Bible, going to community groups and retreats, doing things which look like right response but in all reality we are doing them to avoid stopping and encountering the gospel.

Still others of us will get our taste of the gospel and move past it. Thanks God, I got it from here, I don't need you anymore. We think we can live out our Christian experience apart from the church of God, apart from the word of God and apart from the Spirit of God. We see Jesus as merely a door we needed to walk through and something we can then leave behind.

But this too is a wrong response to worship. This is not how we are to respond to the person of Christ. What God wants of us is faithful followers transfixed on the person of Christ.

Now Peter, James and John had just seen something beyond comprehension. Moses and Elijah appear, God speaks as from a cloud, directly to them, and then they look up and the cloud is gone, Elijah is gone, Moses is gone and it's just them and Jesus and he says, "Let's go."

Imagine what is going on in their heads right now as they are walking down the mountain. But these thoughts get even more complicated as we see what happens next: **Mark 9:9-13**.

So here we see again Jesus speaking of his coming suffering. He says don't tell anyone about what has happened here until after I have risen from the dead, and the disciples are dumbfounded at this. They can't understand that Jesus is going to die.

And so the disciples ask an obscure question, "Doesn't Elijah need to come back first, isn't he going to restore all things?"

Because if Elijah is going to come back and if he, like the prophecies say, is going to set everything right, then you don't need to die. The disciples are trying to avoid the cross, but Jesus again directs the conversation back to it.

He says, Elijah will restore all things, there will be a restoration, there will be newness and all things will be as you just saw on the mountain. But I tell you Elijah has come, and the world didn't recognize him.

In the other gospel's it becomes clear that Jesus sees John the Baptist as the new Elijah, the one who prepared the way for him. But what did we see happen to Elijah in the Old Testament? He wasn't believed. What did we see happen to John the Baptist in the New Testament, he wasn't believed and he was murdered. So Jesus says if this is what they did to Elijah, what do you think they are going to do to me?

You see here we have the disciples seeing the clearest picture of Christ's glory the world will ever see this side of death. They saw Jesus fully glorified in a way we will not see until heaven, they heard God speak specifically to them, and yet they still don't understand. In the moment of great clarity there are still clouds of obscurity.

How could the disciples respond properly if they were so confused at the clearest picture?

Well Peter, who witnessed this with his eyes, he did manage to gain greater clarity. In the book of 2 Peter, Peter gives another account or interpretation of this transformation. **2 Peter 1:16-21**.

So here Peter recounts the story of the transfiguration, this wonderful event but then he goes on to say we have something greater. He says we now have Jesus and we have scripture. Something greater than the phenomenal experience on the mount? How can we get greater than that? Have you seen the radiant Christ? Have you heard the audible voice of God?

What gives Peter the audacity to interpret that event on the mountain in this light? The cross. You see that's why Jesus charged the disciples not to speak of the event till after he had risen again. Because while Jesus was fully glorified on the mountain, he is fully understood on the cross.

This is our **Hope for Following**. This is the second portion of the puzzle.

You see Moses stood in the Old Testament as the portrait of the law. Moses stood as a reminder of the perfection God demands. A perfection that we could never meet through rules and regulations. Elijah stood as the mouthpiece of God. Speaking the word of truth, but being rejected and thrown away. The cloud that God spoke from, in the Old Testament it was in a cloud that the real presence of God would dwell with his people, it was a pillar of cloud which would lead the people of God to where they needed to go.

But did you see what happened on that mountain! **Mark 9:8**. Moses, gone. Elijah, gone. The cloud, gone.

Why? Because in Jesus we have the perfection of God. In Jesus we have the true word of God. And in Jesus we have the real presence of God. The whole of scripture, the law and the prophets they existed to bring us to Christ. And Christ has brought us the presence of God.

How is Jesus perfection, because he was fully God, sinless in every way. How is Jesus the word? Because he is the gospel himself, God's spoken plan of redemption. And how is he God's presence? Because through his saving work on the cross sinners are granted restoration here in this world.

How are we to respond and follow Christ well? Are we to look back at that conversion experience and try to squeeze every drop of motivation out of it? No! Like Peter, we don't dwell on the past, but we dwell on Jesus' work in our immediate life.

In God's word, as Peter said we don't simply memorialize God, we encounter him. Through scripture and through the cross scripture proclaims we have a greater picture of God's glory.

You see that word metamorphou turns up again. This time at the hand of Paul, **2 Corinthians 3:18**.

There is a kingdom dripping in glory. There is a great hope in this life and a greater hope beyond it. There is a radiance which is transforming. And I have two questions for you.

1. How will you respond to it?

There are some of you in here who have seen the gospel and it makes some sense. There are some of you in here who have yet to see it. But you are held responsible for your response to it. Pray that as God was kind to the disciples that he would also give you clarity. Because as fantastic as the event on that mountain was, we have a greater picture of Christ this side of the cross. Tonight, will you see Jesus rightly? Tonight will you respond rightly?

2. How will you follow Christ?

Will you follow him in vain emotionalism? Looking back at your conversion and trying to labor in your own power for the remainder of your life? Or will you see that Jesus is the Christ, the beloved son of God, and will you listen to him.

Will you be so transformed by the word and presence of God that you are able to do rightly? Will you see that because we have Jesus, because we have the presence of God we can do disciple things? We have been empowered for something more.

One day we will see that radiant glory. But in the immediate, the cross is a sufficient motivation and a constant reminder of the glory which will one day be our reality.