

Transfigured
 Mark 9:2-8
 ABC 9/17/23

Have you ever tried to describe the indescribable? That's what Mark tries to do today from Peter's eyewitness account. Open to Mk 9. Jesus wasn't getting through to His disciples. Even though they lived with Him, listened to His teaching, witnessed His miracles, & saw His sinless life they weren't getting who Jesus really was. Peter has just figured out Jesus is the Messiah (8:29). But, like all Jews, the notion of a murdered Messiah was incomprehensible & unacceptable to them. Peter & the rest eagerly awaited the glory of the kingdom, but not the scandal of the cross. After giving the disciples the crushing news of His coming death, Jesus encouraged them by telling them that **the Son of Man** will one day come **in the glory of His Father with the holy angels** (Mk 8:38). It was hard for the disciples to accept that Jesus would die. So Jesus told them, **there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power** (9:1). In promising a preview of His **kingdom** or it could be translated, His *royal splendor*, Jesus seems to have been speaking of His transfiguration, which would be witnessed by 3 of the disciples in this life & would encourage their faith. Jesus had just told them the cost of following Him, that every disciple must be willing to **deny himself, & take up his cross & follow** Jesus. What happens next? 2-8

1. The Setting **6 days later** connects the transfiguration to what came just before. It also recalls the exodus story where the cloud settled on Mt Sinai for 6 days before God spoke to Moses from the mountain (Ex 24:15-16). Why Peter, James, & John? No reason is given although it fulfills the prediction of vs 1 that **some** of the disciples will experience the kingdom of God with power in this life. **Jesus ... brought them up on a high mountain &** Luke tells us they **went up ... to pray**. We don't know what they prayed, but they were praying. Tradition says the mountain was Mount Tabor, about 11 SW of the Sea of Galilee. Mt Tabor is less than 2k ft above sea level. We know they'd been in Caesarea Philippi, which is near the foot of Mount Hermon, a 9,200 foot tall mountain. This is more likely. But our interest isn't in the mountain but in what happened there. Throughout Scripture, mountains are places of revelation where God reveals His Word, character, & Himself.

Mark tells us they were all alone, **by themselves**. Luke mentions they were **overcome with sleep** (9:32). After the long climb up, the thinner air, the late hour, & the quiet location, all of it seemed to make sleep irresistible.

2. The Transfiguration The last phrase of vs 2 says, Jesus **was transfigured before them**. Literally, He was *metamorphosed*, He was drastically changed in appearance or form. The verb is used 4x in the NT: here, in Mt's account (17:2), & twice in Paul, where it refers to believers' transformation into the likeness of Jesus (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).¹ The idea is to change into another form, like a caterpillar into a butterfly. It's the act of giving outward expression of one's inner character. Jesus' inner person came out & changed His outward appearance. Jesus was 100% man & 100% God. But while ministering on Earth, His glory, His deity was veiled by His humanity. That's why Jesus prayed at the end of His ministry, **Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was** (Jn 17:5). While on earth, His glory was hidden or veiled, except for here. Briefly, the veil of His humanity was lifted & His true essence shown through. What the disciples saw is a glance back to what Jesus was before He was born. It's a peek at who He is now as our Advocate & Lord, & it's a look forward into His future glory as the returning King. His outward form was radically changed. His glory was unveiled. His deity & God-ness was showing. His glory is the summation, the totality of His character. His infinite perfections were revealed. His appearance was transfigured. What was it like? **3**

His glory shone through His humanity in an awesome bright whiteness. Lk tells us the appearance of Jesus' **face became different** (9:29) & Matthew records **His face shone like the sun** (17:2). This may connect this scene with Ex 34:29 & the description of Moses' shining face. Jesus transfiguration even affected His clothes. **His garments became radiant**, sparkly, glittery, or glowing. Mark continues saying they were **exceedingly white as no launderer on earth can whiten them**. Only Mark talks about the **launderer**. He's saying the whiteness of Jesus' garments was beyond the ability of any washing machine or bleach to produce. None of this is a borrowed brightness or a reflection of light. It's Jesus Himself who's bright, white & gleaming. John & Peter

¹ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 383

both describe it later. John says, **the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth** (Jn 1:14). & Peter says, **we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty** (2 Pt 1:16). What a glorious declaration of Jesus' deity. He is God, the Christ, the Messiah, & He is worthy of following at any cost.

3. The Friends Picture yourself there with the disciples. You're looking at Jesus, the One who you know is the Messiah & He's shining brightly. Suddenly, with Him & His glory, 2 men appear. **4** Why Moses & Elijah? We don't know but both had previously conversed with God on mountaintops (Ex 31; 1 Kgs 19). Both had been shown a glimpse of God's glory. Both had famous departures from this earth. Moses died on Mount Nebo & God buried him (Dt 34:5-6). Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:11). Moses was the great lawgiver & Elijah a great prophet. Moses was the founder of Israel's religious economy & Elijah was the restorer of it. Together they were a summary of the OT. Elijah representing the prophets & Moses the giver of the Law. Their presence testified that Jesus is God the Son, the promised Messiah, & He's the only One who can bring salvation. & **they were talking with Jesus**. The tense indicates this was an extended conversation. They, the chief representatives of the Law & the Prophets, were talking with Jesus, who'd said, **Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill** (Mt 5:17). What are they talking about? Wouldn't you have loved to hear that conversation? Apparently, the 3 disciples do. Lk tells us, **They were speaking of Jesus' departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem** (9:31). They were talking about the cross & Jesus' coming death. Jesus' death is what the transfiguration was intended to prepare the disciples for.² Jesus was to die, but that wouldn't negate God's plan & the glory that was to come. Jesus was the fulfillment of everything toward which the Law pointed. He fulfilled what the sacrificial system pointed to. He fulfilled every Messianic prophecy, everything toward which their religion & history had been moving.³ Jesus will soon complete His earthly ministry by dying for our sins. He will suffer, die in our place, & rise from

² John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, p 6

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, p 16

the dead. This is all part of God's plan. The cross is Christ's mission, His passion, His purpose. Peter tells us the cross is God's plan during His 1st sermon in Acts 2:23, **This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan & foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men & put Him to death.** Jesus was God. & His sacrificial death is a substitute for those who put their trust in Him. No one can come to God by following Jesus' example. No one can be a perfect sacrifice themselves. We are all sinful. Jesus was perfectly sinless & could suffer the punishment of God's wrath for sin as our Substitute. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah in 8:29, & the mission of Jesus to go to the cross in 8:33, & the cost of following Christ in 8:34-38 is all confirmed by the Transfiguration. Jesus is the Christ who must go to the cross which makes Him worthy to be followed at any cost. But the disciples are confused. They've realized Jesus is the Messiah, but they haven't embraced Him as the God-man or accepted His mission to die in the place of His people. They think He'll deliver Israel from Rome. They don't see Him as the perfect sacrifice for sin or as the One who'll be punished for our sin as our substitute. So in the plan of God, the Lord's 3 closest disciples are asked to climb up a mountain with Jesus, & the they get to experience Christ's deity & Elijah's & Moses' testimony of Him.

4. The Reaction 5-6

Never at a loss for words despite his recent rebuke (8:32-33), Peter interrupts the conversation between Jesus, Moses, & Elijah & blurts out, **Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.** Why does Peter say this? Luke says just as Moses & Elijah are about to depart (9:32), Peter speaks. Why? I don't know. He states the obvious. Why? We can only guess. Why build 3 tabernacles? Are they meant to recall the Exodus & a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39-43)? Maybe it reflects Peter's desire that the suffering & death of Jesus be avoided. He wanted them to stay there permanently in their glorious state & establish the kingdom on the spot. Whatever Peter's intention, Luke tells us Peter didn't even know what he was saying (9:33). If the offer to build 3 shelters suggests some desire to honor these 3, Peter mistakenly puts Jesus on the same level as Elijah & Moses & fails to recognize His true rank. Elijah & Moses, great as they were, don't share God's glory with Jesus. Only Jesus offers the solution to the human predicament & only He will fulfill God's purposes for

mankind.⁴ Only Jesus is God in all His glory. Moses & Elijah worship Jesus as their Lord. This is why, before Peter is even done speaking, he's interrupted. Matthew tells us that **while Peter was still speaking**, he's cut off by God the Father.

5. The Voice 7

God interrupts Peter's interruption of Jesus, Moses, & Elijah. A bright cloud arrived & **overshadowed** them. This is the word used when Gabriel came to Mary to announce she was to be the mother of the Savior. When she asked how such a thing could be possible, he said, **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...** (Lk 1:35). Clouds can symbolize God's presence. Think of the cloud at Mount Sinai that descended on the mountain for 6 days & then, **on the 7th day God called to Moses from the midst of the cloud** (Ex 24:16). A study of the OT shows that a radiant cloud, God's shekinah glory, was a sign of the presence of God as He revealed Himself to Israel. The pillar of cloud by day & of fire by night went before Israel in the wilderness (Ex 13:21). This was the cloud which passed by Moses as God covered him in the cleft of the rock so Moses only saw the afterglow (Ex 33:18-23). This was the cloud which covered the nearly finished Tent of the Meeting & filled the new Tabernacle with God's glory so that Moses couldn't enter it (Ex 40:35). It was the same cloud that filled Solomon's Temple so the priests couldn't enter the Temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Chron 7:1). It was the same glory which Ezekiel saw rise from between the cherubim & move to the threshold of the Temple (Ezek 8:4; 9:3), & then finally rising to be seen no more from the Mount of Olives (Ezek 11:22-25). It's been 600 years since anyone in Israel had seen the shekinah glory. But as Jesus & His 3 disciples stood on the mountain, a cloud appeared & enveloped them (7). I believe it was the Shekinah. As they stood with Jesus in the cloud, this was a picture of what was to come. In the future, in death, they would meet the risen Jesus in the clouds to be with Him forever (1 Thes 4:17, 18). They were to put their arms around this experience & remember it. So must we! It is our hope. 1 Thes 4:17 says that the same Lord is going to return in a cloud of glory & that those who die before are going to rise to meet Him in the air. The living are going to meet Him in the air too, in that cloud of glory. Someday all believers

⁴ David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 345

are going to be in that cloud. The Shekinah glory is going to surround us!⁵ Luke tells us the disciples were fearful as the cloud arrived. That's understandable. Imagine being immersed in the visible glory of God & then hear His voice come out of the cloud & say, **This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!** At Jesus' baptism, the Father commended His Son saying, **You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased** (Mk 1:11). Whereas that was God's approval & commissioning for Jesus Himself, this statement is for the benefit of His disciples, who need courage & assurance to take up their cross & follow Him.⁶ The voice confirms Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), the Son of God. God the Father does 2 things here: He commends His Son to the disciples & commands the disciples to **listen** to Jesus. Matthew & Luke give us the fuller text: **This is My beloved Son, My Chosen One, in whom I am pleased, listen to Him.** This is a continual action command giving them the ongoing duty of not merely hearing, but obeying what Jesus says. Just like when your mom said, *Did you hear me?* She was expecting you to obey her command. The Greek word **listen** holds the same expectation. Listen in order to obey; hear & heed. It means hearing with understanding & then acting on it. This is likely an allusion to Dt 18:15, where Moses tells the Israelites that God will raise up a **prophet like me** & that **you shall listen to him**. The command to **listen** applies to all of Jesus' teaching. Accept Him as God's spokesperson. In the immediate context it means to listen to Him about His suffering & death (8:31–32) & its implication for discipleship (8:34–38). This is what they must hear & heed. The Law & Prophets were only partial expressions, but Jesus is the final word. **Listen to Him!** The writer of Hebrews begins his letter by saying, **God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions & in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...** (Heb 1:1-2). Jesus is the ultimate expression of truth. The disciples were to listen to what Jesus said about the necessity of His death & of their embracing the paradox of the cross. We all need to listen to Jesus' words about everything. As Peter once said, **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life** (Jn 6:68). May we listen to no other voice. We must listen when He says, **If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the**

⁵ Hughes, pp 16–17

⁶ Strauss, p 386

Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water' (Jn 7:37-38). We must listen when He says, **Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, & you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy & My burden is light** (Mt 11:28–30). We must listen when He says: **If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me** (Mk 8:34). Do we listen & obey the words of our Lord? The Father says to the 3 disciples, Jesus must be obediently heard. In other words, listen to Jesus over Moses & Elijah. Jesus is now God's authorized spokesman. Listen to what He teaches as He clarifies & expands upon the teaching of the OT. Listen in order to obey His teaching above all else. The irony here in this event is that it places so much emphasis on the sights: Jesus robed in glistening white, Elijah & Moses appearing with Him, the overshadowing cloud, yet the voice doesn't command them *to look at Him* but to **listen to Him**. & yet Jesus says nothing here. What are they to hear? Peter & the rest of the disciples must keep quiet & bend their minds around what Jesus says about His suffering. Jesus has already said the Son of Man must suffer (8:31). He will declare that **the Son of Man ... will suffer many things & be treated with contempt** (9:12). Announcements that God's reign advances through the death of the Messiah surround the Transfiguration. The Son always does the Father's will. The Son always fulfills the Father's plan. Everything He does pleases the Father. He is obedient, faithful, & what He says is perfect. He's going to suffer, because that's God's perfect will. He's going to Jerusalem to die, because that's the best plan. So the Father says, *Listen to Him & obey what He says*. Then just as dramatic as the event itself was its conclusion.

C. The Conclusion 8

The sudden disappearance of Moses & Elijah has several implications. 1st, it confirms the miraculous nature of the event, as those 2 disappear as quickly as they arrived. 2nd, it confirms the preeminence of Jesus. This is all about Him, not these other 2. He's the Son of God to whom they must listen. 3rd, & by implication, the prior revelation through Moses, Elijah, & the prophets is being superseded by the new revelation given through Jesus. It is **to Him** they must listen. God is doing something new that the OT pointed to. The Transfiguration was so awesome, the glory-cloud so

overwhelming, & the Father's command so imposing, Matthew's gospel tells us the 3 disciples hit the dirt face first. Mt 17:6, **When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground & were terrified.** When sinful men face God, there is terror. Right now, sitting where you are, if you experienced the physical presence of God & His glory, you'd hit the dirt. We'd pass out shaking with fear. That's how sinless & holy God is & how sinful & unholy we are. But **all at once, suddenly,** all the lights went out. They looked around & there was no more voice, no more glory cloud, no more Elijah or Moses, no more transfigured Jesus with glowing clothes & bright shining face. Everything went back to normal. Jesus was veiled in His humanity once more. He is the climax of salvation history & the fulfillment of what Moses & Elijah came to accomplish. God's self-revelation reaches its climax in Jesus, the Messiah & Son of God. Matthew describes Jesus' kindness as He then walked over to where His disciples lay face down & touched them, told them to get up, & not to be afraid (17:7).

What does all this mean for us? The presence of Moses & Elijah on the mountain signifies all that has come before in Israel's history. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the OT & the climax of salvation history. Jesus is going to accomplish all that Moses & the prophets predicted. The episode that follows confirms this, as Jesus speaks of His suffering & death as that which was written about, & the suffering of Elijah/John the Baptist, as predicted in Scripture (Mk 9:12-13). The opposition to Jesus & His death on the cross isn't a surprise to God or a setback in His plan. It has always been His purpose & plan.

As the glory on the mountain fades, Moses & Elijah disappear, & Jesus is alone with 3 of His disciples. The fate of the world rests on His shoulders. Everything that has come before was preparation for His coming & the salvation He'd accomplish. The superiority of the new to the old is the theme of Hebrews. The writer begins with the statement that everything God spoke through the prophets in the past was partial & preparatory, but **in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son** (Heb 1:2). Jesus is far greater than all who've come before. He is the Creator & Sustainer of all things, the Heir of the universe, who provided purification for sins (Heb 1:2-4). History has its culmination in Him. This is also a central theme of the book of Revelation. Jesus is the Alpha &

the Omega, the 1st & the Last, the Beginning & the End (Rev 22:13). As the Lamb who was slain, He restores all creation to a right relationship with God. The glimpse of Jesus' glory here is a preview of the vision of the Son of Man that John will experience on the island of Patmos, the glory of His exaltation & 2nd coming (Rev 1:12–16; 19:11–16).⁷

As Peter describes the Transfiguration years later he describes the 3 disciples as **eyewitnesses of His majesty & we were with Him on the holy mountain** (2 Pt 1:16, 18). Yet even though this experience was real, Peter doesn't put His confidence in it but only in God's Word. He continues, **we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place** (2 Pt 1:19). Don't trust your intuition, your feelings, impressions, dreams, or experiences. Trust in God's Word alone. The Transfiguration really happened & was wonderful. But Peter, who experienced it, says God's Word is more certain, more sure than even that experience. Trust God's Word & don't trust your own heart, feelings, or experiences.

Coming on the heels of Jesus 1st passion prediction (8:31), the transfiguration functions both as confirmation of Jesus' identity & assurance of His vindication. The command to **listen to Him** likely refers to what Jesus has just taught about His own suffering & death & the call for all His disciples to take up their crosses & follow Him. The path of discipleship isn't easy. The conversation coming down the mountain is also dominated by this theme. When the disciples ask about the restoration of all things through Elijah, Jesus redirects them to the sufferings of the Son of Man (12) & John the Baptist (13). The message of the transfiguration is that this suffering & sacrifice aren't in vain. The vision of the glorified Christ is confirmation that after His humiliation, suffering, & death will come His vindication & glorification. This is a message not just about Jesus, but about all who follow Him. Whatever the difficulties we face in this life, God is the sovereign Lord of history, who will restore & reward all who remain faithful to Him (Rom 8:31–39; Rev 2:7, 10, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The Transfiguration serves to confirm that the suffering Jesus will endure isn't incompatible with His glory. For a brief moment, the disciples glimpse the truth as divine glory shines through the veil of suffering. It foreshadows the time when God will gloriously enthrone Jesus after His humiliation on

⁷ Strauss, pp 390–391

the cross. This flash of glory brightens the dark cloud of tribulation that presently hangs over Mark's original readers & confirms Jesus' promise that those who follow & suffer for Him won't have done so in vain.⁸ What was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration is the promise of glory. What the disciples need to hear as they come off the mountain & reenter the everyday realm is the requirement of suffering, the way of the cross & death. The biblical heroes vanish from sight. The splendor fades. The voice of God falls silent except as God speaks through the Son. Visions come & go, but His word remains.

Many Christians today suffer from Bible amnesia. They remember only the parts that promise wealth, happiness, & glory. They forget, or fail to listen, to the calls for self-sacrifice, suffering, & bearing one's cross. They want to skip the class of Suffering 101 & move on to the class of Glory 909. Mark's gospel emphasizes that the Messiah must carry a cross, embrace humility, & renounce brute force. His disciples must do the same. The disciples however are reluctant to do so. They want it all now. They want to share His power over unclean spirits (9:28), to be great (9:34), to control others (9:38; 10:13), to get a reward for following Him (10:28), & to sit on His left & right in glory (10:37). They must learn from Him that if they're to share these things with Him, they must share His suffering on earth. As Paul says, we are **heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*** (Rom 8:17). Elijah & Moses were talking to Jesus about His death coming in Jerusalem. God wanted the 3 disciples to know that His glory was consistent with His suffering. For these Jews, the Roman cross & God's Kingdom would have been polar opposites. The Transfiguration forces us to embrace the truth that glory will follow Jesus' suffering; that the cross wasn't an interruption of God's plan but the cross & glory blend perfectly. Christ must 1st suffer, die, & rise again. Then one day He'll return in glory, a glory like what was seen on this mountain. At His 1st coming, there was suffering & death. At His 2nd coming there'll be glory & triumph. Jesus just told us He'll come again in glory. Remember Mk 8:38? **When He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels...** Jesus is coming again, but 1st He had to die for us & then rise.

⁸.Garland, pp 343–344

Think about what happened: Moses & Elijah talked with Jesus about His coming death in Jerusalem. How much more convincing do you need that the Messiah must die in order to provide salvation & forgiveness? No one could bring more certainty that the crucifixion was the plan of God than Moses & Elijah. The cross had to happen. The OT prophesies it, Moses & Elijah discuss it, & Jesus accomplishes it. Peter had tried to silence Jesus from talking about the cross, & Jesus rebuked him for it. Why? Because the cross had to happen. It was necessary! Every human is sinful. We've all sinned, & even one sin separates us from God forever. Going to church, praying a prayer, making a decision, living morally, & avoiding evil won't rescue us from God's wrath for our sin. We need a perfect Substitute, a perfect Man who could die as our substitute & only God Himself could bear God's wrath for sin. & Jesus Christ is He. He is the God-man who had to die so you might live. You must turn from your sin & give Him your life by faith. & when He saves you, He will transform you from the inside out & make you a new person who will want to live for Him, die for Him if called upon, & follow Him the rest of your life, until He takes you home with Him to eternal glory. Our risen Christ wants to encourage us. He has called us to confess Him as Christ, & that involves confessing Him as a suffering Messiah. It involves also embracing the suffering which comes from the cross, the suffering which comes from being like Him, from living His commands in a fallen world. We must deny ourselves & carry our cross if we're to follow Him. But along with this, we're to appropriate for ourselves the encouragement which comes from putting our arms around the Christ of the Transfiguration & drawing Him to ourselves. Put yourself on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is a preview of the glorious Savior you'll know & love throughout eternity. Jesus was completely man & yet completely divine. He's the fulfillment of everything Moses & Elijah, the Law & the Prophets, ever intended or suggested, & He brings that fulfillment to us. He brings the presence of the Triune God to our lives & one day we will bathe in the glory in His presence. We must hold Him & this truth close in this life as we live & suffer for our obedience to Him. If you haven't yet put your faith in Jesus, it's not too late. Do so today. If you are His disciple, are you listening to & obeying Him? Are you denying yourself, living for Him, taking up your cross & willing to die for Him?