

Mark 9:2-13 – The Transfiguration

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

Jesus was interested to know what people were saying about him. Did they really understand who he was? Did anyone, even his disciples, really understand him?

Obviously Jesus was a celebrity in the area, everyone had an opinion on who this teacher, preacher, healer, miracle worker was. It seems that many people were into reincarnation.

²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

I heard a story of a woman who was involved in a traffic accident. It was a fairly nasty accident and she was nearly killed. She was taken to hospital and was immediately rushed into theatre. While the surgeons were operating, she had an outer-body experience and she met God. And as she stood before God, thinking she was dead, she asked "is this it? Am I dead?" "Oh no" said God, "You still have a good 30-40 years yet." She awoke from the operation and while she was recovering she thought to herself 'well, if I've got another 30-40 years left, I might as well make the most of it'. So while she was still in hospital she arranged to have a bit of work done. She had a face lift, a tummy tuck, various bits of her body reshaped, others enhanced, she even had someone come in to re-colour and re-style her hair. By the time she eventually left the hospital, she looked like a completely different person. She looked fantastic and she was sure her new looks would help her make the most of the 30-40 years she still had to live. But as she walked out of the hospital she was knocked down by a speeding ambulance and she was killed. She once again found herself face to face with God and she said to him "I thought you said I had another 30-40 years left to live – what's with the speeding ambulance?" God replied "Sorry about that, I didn't recognise you."

Jesus wanted to know if people recognised him. Did they know who he was really?

Now Peter speaks up. Good old Peter, always willing to have a go – usually getting it wrong and when he begins to speak Jesus must have thought "oh here we go, I might have known that Peter would have an opinion". Those of you who are teachers will know what I mean, or especially if you are at college. There's always the one opinionated person in the class who always has something to say and usually it's just a load of drivel. BUT... this time Peter gets it right. This time Peter is spot on "You are the Christ" or in the other gospels "You are the Christ, the son of the living God". Jesus looks at him amazed and says "Peter! Blessed

are you Peter for this was not revealed to you by people but by my Father in heaven". I can't help thinking that Jesus was saying "blimey Peter, you've never understood anything before, this can only be the work of the Holy Spirit!"

In some of your translations it might say Messiah instead of Christ. This is because Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word 'Messiah'. They both mean "The Anointed One". The world had been waiting for the Messiah, the one who would bring salvation, the one who God would send to rescue them. Of course they thought the Messiah was going to rescue them from the Romans but they had not understood that there was a much bigger victory to be won.

A little further down we see that Jesus was talking to the crowds and at the beginning of chapter nine he says:

"I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

What did Jesus mean by this? Well, some say that he was hinting at the possibility of eternal life but it is unlikely that the disciples would have understood it this way and it is unlikely that Mark understood it this way when he wrote the gospel. To 'taste death' simply meant to die. So it is more likely that Jesus meant 'some of you standing here in this crowd, will see the kingdom of God come with power IN YOUR LIFETIME. Wow, that's quite an exciting thought isn't it?

Has anyone seen something in their lifetime that they did not expect to see?

Jesus was indicating that at least some people within the crowd were going to see something amazing within their lifetime. So what did he mean? Well, again there are a couple of theories. Some say that perhaps Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection, his powerful victory over death. Or perhaps Jesus was referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Or some say that Jesus was referring to the event that Mark records immediately after these words – what we call 'the transfiguration'. It could of course, be a combination of these things as you'll see in a moment.

Verse 2 says that six days later, (presumably not many of the crowd had died in that time) Jesus took three of his disciples (Peter, James and John) up a high mountain. Just three. We are not told why Jesus took these three but there are several times when these three disciples are privy to something that the others are not. These three seem to be the inside group that Jesus was closest to.

In the time and culture of the Bible, mountains had a special significance. They were associated with closeness to God and a readiness to receive from him. So mountains may be seen as the place to meet with God. God had appeared to both Moses and Elijah on mountains. Moses on Mt. Sinai when he was given the

ten commandments and Elijah on Mt. Carmel when he faced 450 prophets of Baal. We also know that Jesus often climbed a mountain when he wanted to be alone with his father. So as Jesus climbs the mountain with his disciples, they may well have had a sense of expectation. Was Jesus leading them to a place where they would meet with God?

So where was this mountain?

Traditionally it was always believed that the site of the transfiguration was Mt. Tabor which is about 10 miles from the Sea of Galilee. However, there are two problems with this. The first is that Tabor is only 2,000 ft above sea level so could we really call it a 'high' mountain? Perhaps we could but the second problem is a slightly bigger one. Apparently during the time of Jesus there was a Roman guard stationed on Mt. Tabor which makes it unlikely that Jesus would lead his disciples up this mountain. Another suggestion is Mt. Carmel but this seems an awfully long way from Caesarea Philippi so we can probably rule that out as well. But a third suggestion is Mt. Hermon which is about 12 miles North-West of Caesarea Philippi and is about 9,000 ft. This seems more likely but in truth nobody really knows.

Anyway, Jesus and his disciples climb the mountain and as I said, they may well have anticipated a meeting with God. I wonder how the disciples felt as they were climbing.

How would you feel if you were climbing a mountain and you knew that when you got to the top, you would meet with God?

- How many would feel excited?
- How many would feel scared?
- How many would feel excited and scared?

They must have known that Jesus wanted to tell them something or show them something but they can't have known exactly what it was. These three men were about to see Jesus in a way that no one had ever seen him before.

Before their very eyes they saw Jesus transfigured. Now the word used is an interesting word. In Matthew and Mark the Greek word used is:

μετεμορφωθη (Metamorpheo (Greek) = Transfigured (English)).

This is where we get the word Metamorphosis from. It is the word we use to describe the change that takes place when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. It means a significant change. There must have been a significant difference in Jesus' appearance for the gospel writers to use this word.

³His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

Matthew adds that his face shone brightly too.

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.
(Matt 17:2)

Jesus' clothes being white is quite significant. White was associated with purity and cleanliness. It was a colour that wouldn't usually be worn to work in because it soiled too easily and would be difficult to get clean again. But notice the little emphasis that Mark puts on this, "whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." This was a brilliance, a purity that was beyond what was humanly possible. This was glory beyond human glory. This was divine glory. The disciples were seeing Jesus as he really is, in all his glory and splendour.

It's interesting that we call this the transfiguration, really we should perhaps call this 'the unveiling'. For a brief moment these disciples got to see the full glory of Jesus.

Then as they observed this Jesus was joined by Elijah and Moses. Do you remember what the people were saying about Jesus? "Some say you are Elijah..." Here are Jesus and Elijah together. So Jesus isn't Elijah then. Elijah was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. He was perhaps the most famous of the prophets since he had a mention by name earlier. He was the prophet everyone instantly thought of and here at the transfiguration Elijah represents the prophets and the prophecies that had been made in the Old Testament. Moses of course represents the law. He was the one whom God had given the ten commandments to, God's law for his people. Now the law and the prophets stand with Jesus and they are talking with him.

If you look at Luke's version of the events in Luke 9 we see what they were talking about.

³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

They were talking of Jesus death and resurrection. The fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

Next we see Peter back on form. Just to prove he hasn't lost his touch he says:

⁵Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Don't you just love v6 – 'He did not know what to say, they were so frightened). It's probably a sign of shock. Those of you involved in the medical profession will

be able to tell me if this is a likely explanation but this is how some people respond to shock isn't it? Some people just talk a lot. Well we know that Peter quite often didn't put his brain in gear before he spoke so perhaps this is a natural thing for Peter to do here. To build three shelters (or memorials), one each for Jesus, Elijah and Moses was to treat them all as equals. Had Peter forgotten the confession he had made earlier when he said "you are the Christ"? Did he not understand that Jesus was greater than Elijah and Moses and that they were simply forerunners like John the Baptist, they prepared the way for Jesus.

God himself this time corrects Peter. A cloud surrounded them. The disciples would have known that this was the way God was present with the Israelites, they may have realised that this was God and to confirm it God speaks from the cloud saying "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" It's viewed by many commentators as a rebuke to Peter. That God is saying to Peter "I'll tell you again Peter, this is the one you have been waiting for. This IS the Messiah. This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

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I think after that Peter must have recognised once again that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Perhaps now it was starting to sink in, the answer to Jesus' all important question which is of course not 'who do people say I am' but the second part of that question:

²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Some said he was Elijah, some said he was John the Baptist, Peter said he was the Christ but what about you? Who do you say Jesus is? Perhaps that's a question you've never thought about before or perhaps it's a question you've thought about lots of times but you're still undecided.

Perhaps like Peter, the penny has suddenly dropped for you and you now realise who Jesus is. If that's you, please don't leave today without speaking to me. If you have come to realise who Jesus is then as Jesus said to Peter, it isn't because of what I've been saying or anyone else, it's because God has been speaking to you. But recognising who Jesus is is only the start of the journey and there's so much more. But I'd like to pray with you and encourage you because it really is an amazing journey but not always the easiest of journeys so it helps sometimes to have a little support.

Come and speak to me or anyone else you know who is a Christian too if you are still wrestling with trying to decide who Jesus is. If you still have questions then

I'd be happy to talk through some of those questions with you, and I'm sure others would too.

And finally there is a challenge in here for those of us who do know Christ and have accepted him as our Lord and Saviour. It goes back to that word μεταμορφωθη

- This is the same word that Paul uses when he says "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind"
- Transformed into Christ's likeness as Paul explains to the Corinthians:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being **transformed** into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Again it is the same word that is used.

The glory of Christ should be seen in our lives. Jesus told them not to tell anyone until after he had raised from the dead. What they witnessed only made sense after Jesus' resurrection, after he had triumphed over death. Until then they had to conceal it. But Jesus told them that after he had risen from the dead they could tell everyone what they had seen.

With that final piece of the jigsaw, everything makes sense and the glory of Christ can and should be revealed.

Christ has risen from the dead. The Holy Spirit has come and the kingdom in here, if only in part. We should not be concealing the glory of Christ anymore, we should be demonstrating it. If Christ lives in us then something of his glory should be seen in our lives. His glory should be transforming our lives. The transfiguration gave the disciples a glimpse of Jesus' glory, when people look at us, can they see a glimpse of the glory of Jesus in our lives?