

The Gospel of Mark – Unmistakably God

The Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-29

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



We have now been in the Gospel of Mark for just over three months, and we're only halfway done with our study. Jesus and the disciples, with him, keep on their approach towards Jerusalem and Jesus to the cross. We're not there yet, as Mark still has much to tell us about this third year of Jesus' ministry. Up to this point, we've seen Jesus feed the thousands, heal the sick, and make it very clear he is indeed the Messiah. It has been a very full two years of ministry, to say the least. But continuing in the theme of the confusion of the disciples, Mark now tells us about the transfiguration. The transfiguration helps the disciples to see Jesus' true nature. That is powerful and important. One of the things we often talk about is that God doesn't ask us to operate on blind faith. That is faith without any evidence. Yes, faith is always remarkable because it means trusting God for what is unseen out into the future. But it is always done in the context of what God has done in the past. So, when we finally get to life after the resurrection, where the disciples are to carry the gospel forward, they do so with a whole mountain of past evidence to draw on in trust. This is one of those moments. And yes, we should have sympathy for Peter; he's trying but still saying some wild things! Why? Because he doesn't get it fully yet. However, that is precisely the point of what Jesus is doing, and he's helping Peter and the other disciples see clearly. Every new step with Jesus is another step in removing their confusion. Soon enough, they will see and understand the fullness of Jesus' mission. Here's the crux of it all, who Jesus is only matters if it is true. **And if Jesus isn't God, then the disciples were fools.** The transfiguration shows us that he is indeed God, and while the disciples struggled to see it at that moment, the world would soon be turned upside down.

1. A voice in a Cloud. – God's Son

a. Clarity about Jesus – The theme of this final section.

- i. Remember – The larger theme of this final section of Mark is the confusion around Jesus.
 1. **The disciples** – They keep getting the right answer with the wrong conclusion.
 2. **The Scribes and Pharisees** – Keep missing him altogether and have hard and unwilling hearts.
 3. **The crowds** – See Jesus only in light of their pressing daily needs. I.e., They can't see the forest through the trees.

- ii. **The Transfiguration is all about making Jesus clear, especially to this inner circle of disciples.**
 1. Peter, James, and John have been with Jesus from the beginning. And as we look forward to the book of Acts, it will be Peter and John that play the most prominent role in the development of the church in its earliest days.
 - a. Even looking at the NT as a whole, outside of Paul, Peter and John are the second most significant authors.
 - b. Even the Gospel of Mark is not Mark's first-hand account, but is Mark writing down Peter's sermons and teachings on Jesus.
 2. Don't forget Jesus is preparing the disciples for life after the cross. And, we all know that Peter will deny Jesus,
- iii. **Authorship Rewind - The tradition of the early church then affirms consistently that this gospel was written by Mark in Rome as a record of Peter's teaching, most probably while Peter was still alive and therefore not later than the early sixties of the first century.¹**
- iv. **Why did he write his gospel? → Simply, Mark wrote his Gospel account to help others see Jesus clearly and follow him accordingly.**
- v. It is appropriate to label Mark a *witness document* that found its creative impulse in the early apostolic preaching of salvation through Jesus Christ. **It is intended to be neither a formal historical treatise nor a biography of Jesus, but proclamation.** The evangelist's intention is grasped when the opening line of the Gospel is paraphrased, "The beginning of the preaching of the joyful tidings." **What follows is a historical narrative oriented around a crisis—the death of Jesus the Messiah.** There are valid reasons for believing that the Gospel was written for people who themselves confronted a crisis not dissimilar to the one faced by Jesus.²
 1. Mark's Gospel has been described as "a passion-narrative with an extended introduction." **The reason that almost half of Mark's sixteen chapters describe the final period of Jesus' ministry** is that it is in his suffering, death and resurrection that the revelation of God in Christ is most clearly seen.³
- b. **The Transfiguration** - Another way of understanding what is happening in this section. - Those 'outside' look and look, but never see; the disciples are having their eyes opened, so that they can see for the first time the inner reality of God's kingdom, and the central truth that—even though he doesn't look like what they might have expected!—**Jesus really is the Messiah. Thus the story so far keeps telling us about eyes being opened, in several senses, and it all concentrates on Jesus himself and God's kingdom that is arriving with him.⁴**
 - i. The Father speaks over his Son. (v. 7)
 1. A cloud then overshadows them (**v 7**), and God the Father speaks. This is the second time that God the Father has spoken audibly in the Gospel of Mark. Let's compare the two.

¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 38.

² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1.

³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 2.

⁴ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 115.

2. “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’ ” (1:11)
 3. “And a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ ” (9:7)
- ii. Two big differences come to the fore. First, God the Father speaks directly to the Son at the baptism: “*You are my beloved Son.*” At the transfiguration, the Father speaks to the disciples about the Son: “*This is my beloved Son.*” Second, the message at Jesus’ baptism is a statement of identity. The message at the transfiguration is a statement plus a command. The Father makes the point as clear as possible: ***This is my beloved Son—so—listen to him!***⁵
- c. **Exodus and God redeeming his people.**
- i. The Scriptures are a long-form picture of a God who desires to redeem what was broken in the fall through sin.
 1. We don’t like the conversation around sin or thinking that we are sinful. However, that actually causes great harm in the long run, both for us and for society.
 2. If we have nothing to be redeemed from, then we have nothing to be redeemed for.
 - ii. Philosopher Christopher Watkin helpfully explains, “**Put at its simplest: making more of sin is good for society. As a matter of fact, it is also good for democracy, good for equality, good for resisting tyranny and imperialism, and good for finding meaning in life. Sin itself is not good. We would, it is safe to say, be better off without it. But an approach to society that does not shy away from the robust biblical doctrines of sin and judgment has much more of a fresh, truthful and, yes, positive vision to offer than one that fails to see what the Bible hides in plain sight.**”⁶
 1. In other words, “I need to be careful to not diminish what the Word of God has made plain and clear. And by doing so, I actually diminish the beauty of the life the Bible actually offers all of humanity.”
 - iii. **The exodus is a really important backstory for the transfiguration.** Moses went up a high mountain, God’s glory came down in a cloud, and Moses heard God’s voice. All of these details are here: (1) the high mountain, (2) God’s glory in the cloud, (3) God speaking from the cloud, and (4) even Moses himself making an appearance. Even the reference to six days seems to be an intentional parallel (Mark 9:2; Exodus 24:16). Mark is rarely so precise with chronology. But there is also a stunning difference in the two stories. The transfiguration takes place on a different mountain—not Mount Sinai. Why? Because this is *not* Mount Sinai all over again. At Sinai, Moses saw the glory of God and even reflected it in his own face, as the moon reflects the glory of the sun (Exodus 34:29). Jesus, however, is not like the moon but the sun itself—the *source* of the glory. **The transfiguration shows that he is God. He produces the glory—it emanates from him. Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God” (Hebrews 1:3).**⁷
- d. Again, don’t miss Jesus!

⁵ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 124.

⁶ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 110–111.

⁷ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 123.

- i. Here is how one commentator helpfully summarizes what happens at this point in Mark's Gospel. - "Mark's presentation of Jesus reached a decisive stage at Caesarea Philippi. Until Caesarea Philippi, Mark portrayed Jesus teaching, healing, and interacting in Galilee and the Decapolis. Until this point in his ministry, the disciples have not yet been challenged to commit themselves to his person. The question of Jesus on the way to Caesarea Philippi, " 'Who do you say I am?' " (8:29), will, in effect, set the direction for the second half of the Gospel. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ is, as we have seen, correct in name but not in content. Jesus radically reinterprets messianic triumphalism by means of the humiliation of the Son of Man, indeed, by his suffering and death. This climactic disclosure is immediately followed by the account of the transfiguration and linked inseparably to it. Peter's confession in 8:29 might be seen as Mark's way of portraying believers' *initial* response to the "scandal" of the cross (1 Cor 1:23). The transfiguration, likewise, is his way of indicating what their understanding must become if they are to see Jesus from God's perspective. **In Peter's confession Mark teaches how disciples should *think* about Jesus (8:33), and in the subsequent transfiguration narrative he allows them to *behold* his true nature.**"⁸
 1. So, if the Transfiguration helps me (us) to see Jesus' true nature, what difference does that make?

2. Just a prophet or more?

- a. A twofold image – Greater than the greatest of the OT & Greater than Greek lore.
 - i. **One commentator helpfully explains the figures of Moses and Elijah. - The Greeks honored a pantheon of heroes who, because of their great achievements, were promoted to heaven without dying.** The term used to describe this was *apotheosis*, the making of mortals into gods. The apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter* 15–17, as we have seen, conceived of Jesus as some kind of divine man who was whisked into heavenly glory from the summit of the Mount of Transfiguration. Mark's Jesus, to the contrary, refuses the upward mobility of the divine man. True, the transfiguration anticipates the glorious existence the Son of Man will enter after he is raised from the dead (9:9). And, yes, the transfiguration is a prolepsis of the resurrection, a present momentary representation of a glorious future event. But the resurrection and the glorious restoration of all things heralded by Elijah must not be either the first or the only thing in the disciples' thinking. Mark uses the dialogue in 9:9–13 between Jesus and the disciples to steer readers away from the concept of messianic triumphalism implied in Peter's declaration of 8:29. **In vv. 11–13 three separate figures are introduced or alluded to—Elijah, the Son of Man, and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, each of whom attests to the same truth: that suffering must precede glory.**⁹
 1. Remember – Mark is writing to a primarily Greek audience in Rome. They would only have loose association to the figures of Moses and Elijah.
 - ii. Again, Jesus is clarified here, he is not merely a prophet, even compared to the two greatest prophets of the OT.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 261.

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 272.

1. Moses – Gave the law.
2. Elijah – Defeated Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel.
- iii. It isn't just the Transfiguration, Jesus goes on to heal a young boy.
 1. Again, we see a theme that we have seen before with the bleeding woman and the Gerasene man, Jesus is greater than any doctor or treatment that has failed before. Why? → Because he is God.
- b. **Faith – Help my unbelief! → What only Jesus can do. (v.24)**
 - i. The father takes Jesus' word to heart. He suddenly sees the real source of the problem: he believes partially, not fully. **What should he do about that? Try harder? Resolve to doubt less? No, he brings even his unbelief to Jesus.** "Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' " (v 24)¹⁰
 - ii. You should hear this word "crying out" as a desperate shout—something you do when one thing becomes everything. This desperate desire has seized him; it has become the only thing that matters in this moment. → Pride will keep someone from crying out like that. You don't want people to see you desperate or that needy. Sometimes if we face difficulties, the impulse is to try harder, do better, or persevere longer. It is a symptom of the same problem—proud unbelief.¹¹
- c. **Courageously following Jesus → Top God be the glory!**
 - i. In John's letter, Revelation, Jesus is revealed in the fullness of his glory in chapter 1. There is no mistaking who Jesus is or how one should respond to him in that chapter.
 - ii. Revelation is written as a book of hope and an exhortation to the churches in Asia Minor to keep pressing on faithfully. Both in Revelation and here at the Transfiguration, we are reminded to that to regard Jesus in his true nature, is to give him the glory that is rightfully his.
- d. **What does it mean to bring glory or give glory to God in your life?** Four aspects that are your acts of both physical resistance in this age and over the spiritual battle.
 - i. **Not compromising your faithful witness** – Remember Peter's words (1 Pet. 3:15) – **"...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."**
 1. The validity of my public life begins in private. → Is God making my day?
 - ii. **Rule over the powers of evil by doing good** – Believers are to be about the common good of their neighbors. (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12) → This is a historic position of the church in times of great social pressure and turmoil is to treat others uncommonly well.
 1. In the middle through late Roman empire Christians were known to rescue infants who had been abandoned to die.
 2. **"But, perhaps above all else, Christianity brought a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death. ... Finally, what Christianity gave to its converts was nothing less than their humanity."**¹²
 - iii. **Defeat sin in your life** – If you are in Christ, you are to live like it. (1 Jn. 2:6)

¹⁰ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 129.

¹¹ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 130.

¹² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Harper Collins, 1997), 214-215.

1. This is a daily battle and one that is won in the trenches of repeated and routine repentance. That is, stepping off of the way of self and back onto the way of Jesus.
 2. Defeating sin also requires that we take sin seriously. Sin easily snares and tangles us up when we rationalize, excuse, and make room for it in seemingly small ways.
- iv. **Defeat the powers of this age by identifying with Jesus** – Paul reminds us in Eph. 6:12 that our fight is not just a physical one, but a spiritual one. The greatest act of spiritual rebellion against the devil and the values of this age is repeated and routine identification with Jesus.
1. Your faithfulness is not a passive and personal pursuit on its own. It is an act of spiritual resistance and warfare.
- v. When I submit to God as God, I am set free to live a life of peace and flourishing now in part, and completely in eternity.