

The Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-29 (CGS#13)

INTRODUCTION: 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. 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."¹

Did you catch that last line? That 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.

GETTING STARTED – As a group, take time to answer this question. Has there ever been an experience in your life where your initial sight (view) of something left you confused or wondering what it was or how it happened? It could have been a foggy morning or a large-scale illusion.

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage(s). It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 261.

landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions.

1. What is being clarified for you about Jesus as we walk through the Gospel of Mark?
2. If you had to pick three attributes to describe Jesus to a non-believing friend, what would they be? How do you think Mark would answer that question?
3. How is the transfiguration and Jesus' baptism similar? How are they different? Why are those differences important?
4. How does this passage help you understand what the author of Hebrews meant when they wrote, "Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God." (Heb. 1:3)
5. If Jesus isn't God, how would that change your everyday life? Really think about your different interactions, experiences, and motivations. Now, if he is who he claims and demonstrates to be (i.e., God), are there areas of your life where you live as if he isn't, and why?