

*The Transfiguration: Mark 9:1-13*  
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Our task this morning is to see the glory of Christ. Our joyful task is to see the majesty of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. The passage before us today recounts an amazing event in which His glory was displayed. The transfiguration was a glimpse of what is to come. It was a manifestation of the radiant grandeur of who Jesus is. It showed His power, His preeminence, His magnificence. Therefore our assignment as we study these verses is a simple one, yet a supernatural one. Our assignment is simply to gaze upon this display of Jesus' glory, and my hope and prayer is that we will be supernaturally caught up in the worship of our great Savior. By God's grace, as we see Him and worship Him, we will be radically changed. In another passage in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes about the transforming effect of beholding the glory of the Lord. He says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." That's my hope for all of us today. Let's behold the glory of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the transfiguration, and let's pray that this will revive us, inspire us, convict us, encourage us, embolden us, and give us great hope and joy in our Savior. I want us to be transformed this morning as we behold the glory of the Lord. I want us to be overcome and overwhelmed by the greatness and power and authority of Jesus Christ. I pray that meditating on this amazing account will bring us to our knees in repentance for our sins, and inspire in us a deep trust in Jesus.

We should have a holy fear of our Lord. We should tremble before Him, as the disciples did in this passage. They saw the glory of the Lord, and they were terrified. Isaiah had a similar experience in his vision of the Lord. In the presence of the Holy God Isaiah said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5). As we see the holiness and majesty of the Lord, we should have a similar response. We should fear Him and be increasingly aware of our depravity. And then it should also instill in us a deep trust in Him. We fear Him because of His holiness and power, but it's not the kind of fear that makes us run away from Him. Instead, we run to Him in faith.

I love how C. S. Lewis captures this in the character of Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia. Aslan is the Christ-figure, and he is a Lion of great strength and authority. Those who enter his presence rightly fear him. But the children in the story come to

trust him and love him as well. They fear his roar, but they also embrace him and cling to his mane. Early on in the story, before the children meet Aslan, Susan asks if Aslan is safe. The children have just heard of him for the first time, and are told that he is a lion, the King of Beasts. And Susan says, “Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a Lion.” And the response comes back, “Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

The account of Jesus’ transfiguration should impress upon us the reality that Jesus is not safe. He’s not a Savior you can put in a box. He’s not predictable. He is powerful and glorious and holy and majestic, and He demands our attention and our reverence. And He is so very good. He is our Savior, our redeemer. And we should embrace Him and cling to Him as our only hope.

Let’s read the passage and then pray that God will do these things as we study His Word this morning.

There are two sections to this passage. First, there is a glimpse of Jesus’ glory. This is the account of the transfiguration, itself, in verses 1-8. Then there is the conversation that follows the transfiguration, in which there are questions about suffering (verses 9-13).

This passage has its similarities with the previous section (8:27-38). There had been Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, and then the discussion about suffering and discipleship. Now we have the transfiguration and another discussion about suffering. So Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity (8:29) corresponds to the Father’s affirmation of Jesus’ identity (9:7). And Jesus’ talk of suffering and the disciples’ confusion is similar in 8:31-38 and 9:9-13. We’re seeing the same things again. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the disciples now accept and affirm this. But then there’s also this mysterious talk about Jesus suffering and dying and rising again, and the disciples are very baffled by this.

### **A Glimpse of Jesus’ Glory (verses 1-8)**

Verse 1 concludes the previous section and points forward to the transfiguration. After His statements about discipleship at the end of chapter 8, Jesus gives this promise that “there are some standing here [it turns out it will be Peter, James and John] who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” Now that statement surely would have sparked all kinds of speculation in the minds of those who heard it. What is He talking about? He must be saying that the end is very near! Well, the disciples still have a lot to learn, as we continue to see in these verses. But three of them got to experience this amazing

glimpse of the kingdom of God coming with power. It's like a preview of what's to come. It's a foreshadowing of what will happen someday when Jesus returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels, like He mentioned in the previous verse (8:38).

Mark wants us to know the precise timeframe of this event, so he tells us in verse 2 that this happened six days after Peter's confession and the discussion about suffering and discipleship that followed. They were in Caesarea Philippi, and now Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. This was most likely Mount Hermon, which is in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, and it climbs to an elevation of 9,100 feet.

Here Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word that is used here is the word from which we get metamorphosis. He was changed. His appearance changed. And the transformation that occurred was a clear and powerful manifestation of His glory.

Let's look at this account from the vantage point of past, present, and future. The transfiguration hearkens back to certain events in the past, in Old Testament history. It was also a shocking and unforgettable experience in the present for the three disciples who were there. And it also points to the future, to the second coming of Christ.

## **PAST**

Thinking to the past, listen to these two Old Testament passages and consider the similarities with the event of Jesus' transfiguration. In Exodus 24 the Lord summons Moses to come up on the mountain. "The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. . . . Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights." (Exodus 24:12-18)

In 1 Kings 19 Elijah was summoned to the mount before the Lord, and he witnessed God's power. He was fleeing from Jezebel, and the word of the Lord came to him, "'Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.'" And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the

earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-13, ESV)

Those Old Testament theophanies experienced by Moses and Elijah foreshadow the transfiguration of Jesus. Moses and Elijah encountered God on the mountain. Now Peter, James and John encounter God on the mountain, in the Person of Jesus. The fact that Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus shows that Jesus even supersedes these Old Testament heroes. Jesus is greater than Elijah. He's not merely one of the prophets. He's greater than Moses. And what an amazing scene this is, what a vivid display of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Elijah and Moses, who had died centuries before this, appeared with Jesus and spoke with Him, and then they vanished. What does that say to us? It says that everything has been pointing to Jesus, and now He's here! The Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus, and now Jesus has come as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. This is the transfiguration from the vantage point of the past.

### **Present**

To observe this from the vantage point of the disciples in their present experience of it, let me read to you the way that it is described in each of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. We read here in verses 2-3 that Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them." Matthew's account adds that "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Matthew 17:2). This reminds us of Moses again, whose face shone when he came down from the mountain after he had talked with God (Exodus 34). Luke also gives us some additional details. "And as [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him." (Luke 9:29-32, ESV)

This was quite an amazing event. It was stunning and surprising. It was, in fact, terrifying for these three disciples. They saw the glory of the Lord in such a vivid and magnificent way, in a way they had never seen it before. They had watched Him heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, calm the sea, multiply bread

and fish, and even walk on water. But here it was as though His divine splendor shone through in His very appearance. His glory blazed before them, testifying to His identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ.

Peter's curious reaction to this shows how much it shook him up. If there was ever a time for silence, this was it. If there was ever a time for the disciples to simply watch and listen, this was the time. It was not a time to speak. It was not a time to make suggestions. But Peter, who was accustomed to putting his foot in his mouth, blurted out in verse 5, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." It's hard to know what Peter had in mind with this statement, but Mark explains to us that Peter might not have known what he meant either. Verse 6 says, "For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified." And rightly so. All the more reason to be quiet. Maybe you can identify with Peter here. You feel nervous or uncomfortable in a certain situation, and words just start flying out of your mouth, and you think back on it later and think, What on earth was I talking about? That was Peter. He had no business saying anything, but in his fear he blurted this out.

Following Peter's statement, which is ill-informed and lacks any authority, we then get the divine and authoritative statement from God the Father in verse 7. "And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him.'" The Father made a similar declaration after Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:11. A voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." In the transfiguration the Father adds this command for the disciples to "listen to him." In light of the discussion that had happened a week earlier, in the previous verses, it seems that this command is probably especially referring to what Jesus has said about suffering. The Son of Man must suffer, and His disciples must deny themselves and take up their crosses to follow Him. Peter had resisted this. He rebuked Jesus for speaking of such things. Now Peter, and the others, receive this stern command from the Father to listen to what Jesus is telling them.

This utterly overwhelming experience ended as abruptly as it began. All of a sudden, as they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. That was their present experience of the transfiguration.

### **Future**

Finally, the transfiguration also looks forward into the future. It is a preview of the glory that will be revealed on the last day. Jesus gives these disciples a foretaste of what is to come. Look back to the last verse in chapter 8. Jesus speaks of His

second coming. He speaks of the Son of Man coming in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. Then, in 9:1, He tells them that “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” Now, the ultimate coming of the kingdom of God with power will be on that last day when Jesus comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. But “some standing there” would have the privilege of seeing a preview of what that great day will be like. That’s the link between what Jesus says in 9:1 and the account of the transfiguration in verses 2-8, and that same connection is seen in Matthew and Luke as well.

The other place in the New Testament where the transfiguration is described is in a letter that Peter, himself, wrote. Peter, one of the eyewitnesses of this event, wrote this in 2 Peter 1:16-18. "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [he’s talking about the second coming of Christ, and here’s how he defended the fact that Jesus is coming back], but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." Do you hear what Peter is doing? He is citing his eyewitness testimony of the transfiguration as a ground and support for the reality that Jesus is coming back in power. The revelation of Jesus’ glory on the holy mountain was a foretaste and an assurance that He is coming back in power and glory.

We’ve looked at the transfiguration from the vantage point of the past, present, and future. It was a profound glimpse of Jesus’ glory which hearkens back to Old Testament theophanies. It was such a spectacular event that it amazed and terrified the disciples. And it was a foretaste of the glory that is to be revealed when Jesus returns.

### **Questions about Suffering (verses 9-13)**

The remaining verses have to do with suffering. There is discussion about the Son of Man rising from the dead, and the disciples question what this means. The big question has to do with the relationship between suffering and glory. The disciples don’t see how these two things could ever fit together. In chapter 8 the glory of Jesus was declared from Peter’s own mouth when he confessed, “You are the Christ.” But when Jesus began to teach them about the Son of Man suffering, Peter rebuked him.

A similar thing is happening again now. Jesus’ glory has been revealed in the transfiguration. Then on the way down the

mountain He mentions rising from the dead, which, of course, implies dying first. Again, Jesus doesn't want them talking about these things, because their understanding is still so limited. He doesn't want them proclaiming the fact that He is the Messiah or telling people about the transfiguration until after He rises from the dead. That's when it will start to make sense. That's when the connection between suffering and glory will become clear. For the time being, though, Jesus wants the disciples to keep their mouths shut about these things.

The question in verse 11 may seem abrupt and unrelated, but it actually fits right in with the discussion about suffering. They had just seen Elijah appear with Jesus in the transfiguration. Jesus has spoken of the kingdom of God coming with power. It sounds like the consummation of all things is imminent. The end is near. So the disciples are trying to figure out where Elijah fits into this timeline, and how suffering could possibly fit into this equation. Their logic might have been this: the end seems to be so close, therefore the coming of Elijah must be the only major event left, therefore what place could suffering have? It's time for glory, not suffering.

But what Jesus has to show them is that suffering is the path to glory. He tells them this by identifying John the Baptist as the Elijah figure who was promised to come, and connecting John's suffering with the Son of Man's suffering. Jesus responds to them in verse 12 by agreeing that "Elijah does come first to restore all things." Then He says in verse 13, "But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him." Mark leaves to the reader to understand that this is a reference to John the Baptist. Matthew makes it explicit, saying that "the disciples understood that [Jesus] was speaking to them of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:13). And what happened to John the Baptist? Jesus says they did to him whatever they pleased? Was he made a king? No, he was beheaded by Herod and Herodias.

And in the midst of these comments, Jesus refers to His own suffering as well. In verse 12, "And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?" Here's the point: Elijah has come, and he suffered and died. Now the Messiah is here, and He, too, will suffer and die.

This is the Christian faith. This is the wonder and mystery and majesty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is suffering, and there is glory. And contrary to popular opinion, these two things actually go together. They are inextricably linked. The Messiah had to suffer. It was part of the plan. He is glorified because of His suffering. Listen to the connection between suffering and glory in each of these verses. Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we see him

who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death.” Philippians 2:8-11 says, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Revelation 5:12 says, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” The fact that Jesus suffered and died does not detract from His glory. It is, rather, a chief way in which His glory is seen. He is glorified and honored and highly exalted and worthy of all praise because of His suffering and death on the cross.

Suffering and glory. Jesus is glorified, not in spite of His suffering, but because of His suffering. His suffering was the path to glory. He saw that and embraced it and joyfully set His face toward the cross. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that “for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” This is our suffering Savior, our glorious Savior. And this, brothers and sisters, is the wonder of the Christian faith. This is the hope we have in the midst of our suffering, because we will share in Jesus’ suffering and then also experience His glory. 1 Peter 4:13, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 5:10, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Suffering was the path to glory for Jesus, and suffering is the path to glory for us, too. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

And we can have this hope that our suffering will lead to glory because in Jesus’ suffering He purchased our salvation. We have hope that our sins are forgiven, because Jesus suffered in our place. Jesus entered this harsh and sinful world, and He went to the cross to bear the penalty for our sin. He died in our place. It should be a tremendous encouragement to us that Jesus did not distance Himself from suffering. He did not avoid pain. He joyfully went to the cross and laid down His life for His enemies.

I want to close with a quote from John Stott in his book *The Cross of Christ*. He has a chapter entitled “Suffering and Glory,” and in it he writes this: “I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as ‘God on the cross.’ In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have



entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us.”<sup>1</sup>

This is our great Savior. He didn't run from pain, but embraced suffering as the path to glory. He suffered for us in order to bring us to glory with Him. I hope this morning we have seen the glory of Christ. I hope we have seen His majesty, His power, His preeminence, His magnificence. And I hope God will bring us to our knees in repentance and faith as we behold Jesus' suffering and glory. He is glorified because of His suffering. May we glorify Him in our repentant and faith-filled lives, because He suffered for us.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), page 335-336.