

# Behind the Curtain

Ignorance and Insight: Part 12  
Mark 9:1-7 (Mt.17:1-6, Lk.9:28-35) 7/13/2018

What is the purpose of the Transfiguration? And how can it help you in your daily life? This message will answer those questions and show you how this event explodes with meaning when you understand the “hyperlinks” in the setting.

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**Mark 9:1** And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

**2** After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. **3** His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

**4** And there appeared before them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. **5** Peter 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.)

**7** Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" **8** Suddenly, when they looked round, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

**9** As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. **10** They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

**11** And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" **12** Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? **13** But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

**15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.**

## **Introduction**

Every day you are bombarded with thousands of messages. The great majority of them, your brain filters out. Some of them you hear. And a small fraction of those you really listen to. And the direction of your life and the final destination where you end up will all be determined by which of those voices are in the last category. Who really has your ear—that's what dictates where your life goes and what you become.

We come tonight in our study of Mark to a unique event. Usually when Jesus does a miracle, there are plenty of other similar miracles. But the Transfiguration is different. It's unique, and it's unexpected. If it had never happened, we wouldn't miss it. None of us would read the gospels and say, "You know, I think there should have been a transfiguration at some point."

It's unique, it's unexpected, and it just sort of comes and goes in the narrative without any concluding statement telling us what it means. They go up the mountain, Jesus becomes really bright and shiny, Elijah and Moses show up and talk to Jesus, then they disappear and they come down the mountain and have a discussion about Elijah. Then it's over, and Mark moves on to the next event. What are we to make of it? Why did it happen? And why is it in the Bible—recorded in three different gospels? And how should we respond? Peter throws out an idea, but Mark shoots that down. So we know one wrong way to respond, but what's the right way? At the end, I'll tell you exactly what the meaning and purpose and primary application are and how it all relates to what I just said about listening. But first, let's refresh our memory about the context.

## **The Promise: Some Will See**

### **Jesus Will Come in the Daniel 7 Glory**

The Transfiguration event arises out of a promise Jesus made at the end of ch.8. Jesus had just dropped the bomb about how he must suffer and die, and all his followers must follow in that path. It's a decidedly non-glorious picture he paints of his kingdom. But he ends his remarks by letting us know that the suffering and death and lowliness and weakness—it's all necessary, but it's not the last word. After the suffering, there's going to be glory.

**Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.**

The idea of the Son of Man coming in glory on Judgment Day comes from Daniel 7, where Daniel has a vision about someone who appears to be a human being (a son of man), and yet he is given an eternal kingdom and will be worshipped by everyone forever.

**Daniel 7:13 In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

When Jesus picked "son of man" as his favorite title for himself, he was saying, "The guy in that Daniel vision—that's me." So he's saying, "Yes, I'm going to suffer and die but that's not the last word. After the suffering I will come with authority, glory, and sovereign power." And when he does, on that day he will either disown you or he will put his hand on your shoulder and bestow upon you the greatest honor imaginable. That's where we left off last time.

## Most Will Die First

In the next verse he gives us an idea of when to expect all this, and it isn't any time soon.

**Mark 9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth,<sup>1</sup> some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come<sup>2</sup> with power."<sup>3</sup>**

Only some will see it before they die, which means the rest won't. Jesus is saying, "Most of you will be dead before this happens."<sup>4</sup> Now, how do we square that with the theme of Jesus' preaching throughout the book?

**Mark 1:15 The time has come. The kingdom of God is near.**

Which is it Jesus? Is the kingdom near or far off?

The answer is this: Jesus didn't say only a few would get to see the kingdom; he said only a few would see it **come in power**. You see, the kingdom comes in stages—first the small, unimpressive, suffering stage, and later on in eternal, glorious, power. Remember back in ch.4 he said the kingdom is like a mustard seed at the beginning, but then becomes expansive later on? It comes in stages.

So Jesus wants them to know—yes, the suffering is necessary, but it's temporary. The power and glory are coming. We've talked a lot about how the people of Jesus' day were looking for a political, military Messiah who would dominate all Israel's enemies. That was not a wrong expectation. It's exactly what passages like Daniel 7 promised. Their mistake wasn't in expecting a powerful, glorious, conquering Messiah. They just didn't understand that there was a suffering stage that had to happen first. But the power and glory part—not only was that true; it's Jesus' favorite part.

## Enduring the Suffering by Focusing on the Glory

Thinking about that part is what enabled Jesus to make it through all the suffering and humiliation.

**Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus ... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, thinking little of its shame**

How did Jesus manage to think little of his shame? He was able to make the shame and suffering small in his mind because the coming glory was so big in his mind. That's what we need to do as well. The glorious coming of Christ in power is our blessed hope that carries us through the suffering in this life.

**Titus 2:13 we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.**

## Who Are the Some?

That's our hope, but it's off in the future. Only **some** would get to see it in their lifetime. Who were the **some**? Does Mark give us any clues? Let's use our exegetical detective skills to pick up on any subtle hints as to who the "some" might possibly be. Mark 9:1 ..., "I tell you the truth, some who are standing

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<sup>1</sup> Lit. "Amen I say to you ..." The Jews, like us, used the word "amen" at the end of a prayer. Nowhere else in Jewish literature does anyone besides Jesus ever begin a statement with the word, *amen* (J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*. Cited by Edwards, 260. The Old Testament prophets established the authority of their words by saying, "Thus says the Lord ..." But Jesus appealed to his own authority to establish his words.

<sup>2</sup> This is in the perfect tense ("having come"), probably indicating that the kingdom, already present, will be made visible in a powerful way.

<sup>3</sup> This is the first mention of the Second Coming in Mark.

<sup>4</sup> Some interpret the "some" to refer to believers, who will see the kingdom come in power at Jesus' resurrection, and the rest to be unbelievers who will never see the kingdom come in power because they don't have eyes to see. It is possible that's what Jesus meant, but, in my view, unlikely.

here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John Okay. I'm no Sherlock Homes, but even I can spot that. "Some of you will see the power and glory, and, you three, come with me," and they go up and see Christ's glory. It's impossible for me to believe that Mark didn't intend for us to read that and say, "Oh, the **"some"** are Peter, James, and John."<sup>5</sup> The other 9 disciples and the crowd would all die before seeing the glory.

## The Transfiguration

So only those three saw it, but thankfully, Jesus told them that after his resurrection they would have the green light to tell what they saw. And they wrote it down for us so we can climb up that mountain with them and see what they saw.

**2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.**

The word **transfigured** is an antiquated word. A more up to date translation would be *transformed*. In what way was Jesus transformed?

### White Clothes

Matthew tells us that his face was as bright as the sun.<sup>6</sup> Go outside in the middle of the day, look directly in the sun, then you'll know what it was like for them to look at Jesus' face at that moment. Luke says it was like a flash of lightning.<sup>7</sup> Mark doesn't even try to describe his face; he just tells us the effect it had on Jesus' clothes.<sup>8</sup>

**3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.<sup>9</sup>**

The word in the Greek refers to a professional launderer. They would use a substance known as fuller's earth to whiten fabric, and Mark says no fuller could make fabric like this. The point is not even a professional procedure could produce something like this—it was obviously supernatural.

### Glorified Christ

So what's the point of that? Is it supposed to be a preview of Jesus after his resurrection? I don't think so. The description of Jesus here is nothing like the descriptions of Jesus after the resurrection. However, there is one description of Jesus in the Bible that is very similar to this one.

It's in the book of Revelation.

Remember—what does Jesus repeatedly call himself at the Transfiguration? **The Son of Man.**<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This means Jesus' resurrection is ruled out as the fulfillment of the kingdom coming in power, as the resurrection was just months away. Some think it's a reference to 70 A.D. because sometimes the word "coming" is associated with judgment. I do not believe that's even a remote possibility. If you go back to Daniel 7 and look at the end of the chapter where God gives the interpretation of the vision, the interpretation of the Son of man portion is that the divine court will sit, the beasts will be judged, and the saints will be delivered forever. 70 A.D. was the opposite of that. In 70 A.D. Israel's chief enemy came and massacred the Jews in a bloodbath. That was not the day God came and delivered his people from their enemies forever. I'm convinced this can only refer to the Second Coming. That's when the kingdom of God comes **with power**. It's the same event Jesus mentions later in ch.13.

**Mark 13:26 At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.**

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 17:2.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 9:29.

<sup>8</sup> He doesn't say the clothes were transformed. Jesus was transformed, but his transformation was so extreme that it had an effect on his clothes.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek says he was "shining white greatly," and the word *greatly* modifies the shining, not the white. His clothes were shining white extremely brightly.

Revelation

**1:13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man" 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.**

**16 ...His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.**

**17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid."**

**Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! ... 19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen.**

Now that I'm risen from the dead you have the green light to publish this and make it known.

Transfiguration

**Matthew 17:2 ... His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.**

**Matthew 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."**

**Mark 9:9 ... Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.**

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 8:38, 9:9.

All that to show you that the Transfiguration is not a peak at Jesus' resurrection body. It goes farther ahead than that all the way to his eternal glory in heaven after the ascension to the Father's right hand.

## **Jesus' Glory is His Real Identity**

And that is the truest picture of Jesus. Most people, if you tell them to close their eyes and imagine Jesus, would probably imagine a man walking around in sandals performing healings, maybe with some kids in his lap, or stilling the storm in the boat, or something along that line. But in the Transfiguration God teaches us that Jesus' humiliation isn't the most accurate picture of him. It's accurate as far as it goes, but that was a very temporary veiling of his awesome glory.

## **The Transfiguration is the converse of the Wizard of Oz (in Glory Second)**

The Transfiguration is the opposite of the Wizard of Oz. The wizard was someone who seemed to have awesome power and was thought to be unapproachable, but if you looked behind the curtain it turned out he was an ordinary man. Jesus is the converse of that. He looked like an ordinary man, but if you peek behind the curtain you see that in reality he is an awesome, powerful being. In fact, if you looked all the way behind the curtain and saw his full glory, you wouldn't survive. You'd be dead. The incarnation is a miracle that allows us to see the unseeable, and approach the unapproachable, to draw near to perfect holiness, and hear and feel and touch what would otherwise be utterly impossible to have that kind of interaction with. The second person of the Trinity took on a second nature—a human nature that allows people like you and me, when we get to heaven, to physically touch the face of God.

## **The Power of Moral Perfection**

But his divine nature remains just as awesome and glorious as ever. Only Peter, James, and John got a glimpse of it. And what was the glimpse? Did they get to see the millions of angels and the conquering wrath of Christ on his enemies and his glorious reign over every creature in the universe? How much did God show them? White clothes?

If you had been in charge of this event, and the purpose was to reveal apocalyptic, Second Coming glory, what would you show? Would your first choice be to make Jesus' clothes white? Couldn't God come up with something a little more spectacular than that? He could if his purpose were just to create a spectacle. But that's not the purpose. In a moment, God is going to say, "**This is my Son ...**" He's making an introduction. "Gentlemen, meet my Son." And in this introduction, God wants to reveal what's most important about who Jesus is. To see someone's face as bright as the sun, or to see anything that resembles a flash of lightning would be spectacular, to be sure, but more than the spectacle is the symbolic meaning.

## **Divine Wardrobe**

When you go back to the son of man vision in Daniel 7, where this is all coming from, guess who is the only one wearing white clothes? The Ancient of Days.

**Daniel 7:9 "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool."<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>11</sup> People normally didn't wear white, as it would be difficult to keep clean. When white clothes appear in the Bible and intertestamental literature, it is always a supernatural, heavenly being. Examples include the angel of the Lord who moved the stone from Jesus' tomb and the two angels that appeared at Jesus' ascension (Matthew 28:3, Acts 1:10. See also Revelation 4:4, 6:11, 19:14, 1 Enoch 14:20, 2 Enoch 22:8-9, 3 Enoch 12:1, Test. Job 46:7-9).

Only God is clothed with light.

**Psalm 104:2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment.**

And that's the idea here—the light is coming from Jesus. Normally, if you see white fabric, it looks white because light from the sun or a light bulb or some other source is shining on that fabric, and it reflects the wavelengths of light that come into your eyes as white. But this was different. It wasn't sunlight reflecting off really clean clothes. Mark doesn't say the clothes were transfigured, or transformed—Jesus was transformed. The light was emanating from Jesus to the point where it shined out through his clothes.

## Moral Perfection

So all that to say Jesus is clothed as God himself. That's one point of significance. The other symbolic meaning of the white clothes is given in the book of Revelation, where white clothes symbolizes perfect purity and moral perfection. The saints end up with white clothes, but only through Jesus' purity.

**Revelation 7:14 ... they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

So the point here is that when God introduces his Son and exposes his true nature, Jesus is clothed in both the glory and the character of God. He is a divine being who is perfectly sinless, spotless, holy, and righteous.

Of all the awesome, spectacular things God could have done on that mountain to impress us with the awesome power of his kingdom, this is what he pointed us to. God's idea of "awesome" and our idea aren't always the same. What's truly awesome is absolute, spotless, sinless, unblemished righteousness and holiness. That's the foundation of the power of this kingdom. When the wrath of God is unleashed upon the nations, and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ dominates the universe and brings every power and authority into submission, it will all spring from his flawless moral perfection.

## The Greatest Moment Ever

Another thing we need to pay close attention to if we're going to understand the Transfiguration is the setting, which speaks just as loudly as the words. One very common way God communicates in Scripture is by creating a setting that points you to some famous event in the past. Imagine a congressman getting up for a speech, and he puts on a stovepipe hat and a fake beard and starts his speech, "Fourscore and seven years ago ..." you would know right away he wants you to think of the Gettysburg address. There is a ton of that kind of thing in Scripture. Tim Mackie calls them hyperlinks.<sup>12</sup> When you read something online and a phrase is underlined, you click on it and it takes you to some other page. That's a hyperlink. The hat and beard and "fourscore" lingo would be a really obvious hyperlink to the Gettysburg address. The hyperlinks in the Transfiguration account are every bit as obvious as that, and those hyperlinks are designed to teach us the meaning of what happened. So let's click on the first one and see where it takes us. Jesus goes up a high mountain after six days. If you click on that, it takes you back to what was arguably the most monumental event in redemptive history: when Moses went up the mountain after six days of preparation to get the Ten Commandments in Exodus 24 and 34.

**Exodus 24:15 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, 16 and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. 17 To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. 18 Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.**

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<sup>12</sup> The more common term used by scholars is "echoes."

That event was probably the high point of the entire OT. When God came down on that mountain, he went out of his way to make sure people understood how big a deal it was. There was an earthquake, fire, smoke, ram's horns blaring out of heaven. God was teaching the people that this was the greatest moment in their history so they would understand the supreme importance of the law they were being given.

It was the greatest event ever—until this amazing day when Jesus said, “James, Peter, John—grab a day pack and put on some climbing sandals. We’re going to climb a mountain.” And God reproduces all the main elements of the giving of the Law on Sinai at the Transfiguration. Moses went up a high mountain; Jesus goes up a high mountain. Moses had three named people he brought up with him (Ex.24:1,9), Jesus takes his inner three. When Moses went up, there were six days of preparation (Ex 24:16). Mark 9:2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John Mark has never given a single time reference like this before.<sup>13</sup> Mark normally doesn’t give time references, but he often uses numbers in symbolic ways, which is what he’s doing here.<sup>14</sup> Moses’ face was shining with glory afterward (Ex.34:29); Jesus’ face shone like the sun. A cloud enveloped Moses and God spoke out of the cloud (Ex.24:15-16,18), a cloud envelopes the disciples and God speaks to them out of the cloud. And when Moses comes off the mountain, the people were afraid to come near him (Ex.34:30).

### **Mark 9:15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder**

We’ve seen some hints earlier in Mark that Jesus is the new Moses—when he feeds the multitude in the desert, etc. But this is a lot more than a hint. There is no question what God is doing here. A very clear hyperlink. God is re-creating the greatest moment in redemptive history and replacing Moses with Jesus as the central figure. Why? What does God want us to get from this?

### **Main Point: *Listen to Him!***

There are many different opinions on the meaning and purpose of the Transfiguration. Commentators have various theories. One common one is it was to prepare the disciples for the crucifixion. If that were the purpose, it didn’t work. They weren’t one bit prepared. Besides, if it was to prepare them to be able to handle the crucifixion, why did Jesus tell Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone until after the resurrection? It’s a little late for the other nine to hear something after the resurrection designed to prepare them for the crucifixion.

As I said, there are a lot of theories, but I would like to read you the interpretation from my favorite theologian. He is a brilliant Bible interpreter, and I can’t recommend him highly enough. I’ll read you his commentary on this event in full (it’s not long). The theologian’s name is God and his take on the Transfiguration is right there in v.7.

### **7 ... a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him."**

Here’s why I’m convinced that’s the primary meaning. First, anytime God appears in the middle of an event and speaks out of a cloud to tell you the meaning, that’s a pretty good clue. And just in case you miss that, Mark draws our attention to that by the way he structures the passage. I told you there is no summary statement or concluding explanation at the end, but remember, Mark doesn’t put his climaxes at the end. He puts them in the middle—just like the way he structured the whole book. The climax of the book of Mark is this section here, right in the center of the book. The whole first half points forward to it, and the whole rest of the book points backward to it. That’s what Mark does, and guess what appears

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<sup>13</sup> The only other time he does so is twice in ch.14 (vv.1,12) where he speaks of events two days before the feast and on the first day of the feast.

<sup>14</sup> Luke says it was about 8 days. It may be that Luke included the day of the departure and the day of the return, but Mark didn’t. It may also be that it was 8 days, but Mark says “after six” because his purpose was not to pin down the exact day, but to call to mind the symbolism of the number, reminding people of Moses. Mark seems to use numbers in this way. For example, in the feeding of the 5000, he mentions five loaves and two fish (totally seven). In the feeding of the 4000 he mentions the seven loaves and “a few” fish. No need to give the number since he’s already at his symbolic number of 7.



dead center in this passage? The words that God speaks from the cloud. And lest you think that's just coincidence, when I say "dead center," I'm talking about the exact middle. I counted the words in this passage. Starting at v.2, there are exactly 100 Greek words prior to the words of God in v.7 and exactly 100 after. I don't think that's accidental.

So, what is the meaning of the Transfiguration? What are we to make of it? Here's what God said:

**7 ... "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"**

What should be our response to the transfiguration of Christ? The transfiguration proves who Jesus is, therefore, *listen to him*.

Now, where have we heard something like that previously in Mark—about the importance of listening to Jesus? How about, everywhere. The book begins with God sending John the Baptist as the first prophet in 400 years, the new Elijah, pointing to Jesus as the one everyone should listen to (1:1-8). Then God the Father speaks from heaven affirming Jesus is his beloved Son (1:11). Then, in ch.4, an entire chapter about the right and wrong way to listen to Jesus' words. Don't be like those soils who listen but fail to produce fruit because they don't keep listening. Chapters 6 and 7, the disciples reveal their hard hearts by their failure to listen. Chapter 8—the healing of the blind man illustrates listening without understanding. And just in case you missed all that, he gets to the climactic center of the book, God peels back the curtain of Christ's humanity, reveals his glory, recreates the greatest moment in redemptive history, places replaces Moses with Jesus, and then states it in the plainest, clearest language there could possibly be: "Listen. To. Him.!" So I'm going to go way out on a limb and assume that the point of the transfiguration is to persuade us to listen to Jesus Christ.

And that word, "listen" is packed with all the meaning of all that we've learned so far in the book—listen in order to obey, listen carefully and thoughtfully, listen receptively with a soft, malleable heart, listen continuously—don't let anything choke his words out of your heart.

## The Prophet Like Moses

And that phrase, **listen to him**, is another hyperlink. Do you know why Moses had to go up on the mountain to get the 10 Commandments? Initially, God was speaking to the people down at the bottom of the mountain, but that didn't work out. They were so traumatized and terrified, they begged for it to stop. The holiness of God was way more than they could handle, so they said:

**Deuteronomy 18:16 ... "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die."**

And they were right about that.

**17 The LORD said to me: "What they say is good.**

Having God speak directly, revealing his awesome holiness, really is too much for human beings to handle. There is a much better way, and God announces it in the next verse.

**18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.**

I'll raise up a prophet—a Moses-type, and he will be my mouthpiece, but he'll be a human being, so you won't have to face the terrifying, dangerous holiness and glory of God every time he speaks. That's the first explicit promise of the Messiah in the Bible. And the number one thing God says about that prophet is this:

**Deuteronomy 18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.**

Then he repeats it in v.18—if you don't listen to him, you'll be judged.<sup>15</sup> For 1500 years Israel had been waiting for this unique, Moses-like prophet, and the #1 thing God said about this prophet is, "When he arrives, *listen to him*." Then, Jesus arrives, God takes him up on a high mountain just like Moses, the cloud appears, God speaks—the whole deal. And God says, "This is the one you are to listen to. He's the Moses-like prophet you've been awaiting for 15 centuries."<sup>16</sup>

## Special Relationship with the Father

What does it mean that he will be like Moses? What's the difference between Moses and any other prophet?

**Exodus 33:11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.**

**Numbers 12:6 "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."**

Moses had a uniquely close relationship with God. God spoke more directly and clearly to Moses than to any other prophet ever.

And he also listened to Moses. God listened to Moses' prayers and answered them—even changed his mind about the fate of the entire nation as a result of Moses' prayers. God did that because of how much he favored Moses. When Jeremiah wants to paint the most hopeless situation imaginable, listen to how he does it:

**Jeremiah 15:1 Then the LORD said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people."**

If you are so far gone that God won't even listen to Moses' prayers on your behalf, your situation is as hopeless as it can be because no one in the entire history of Israel had as much favor with God as Moses. God never spoke to and listened to any human being like that. There's never been another Moses type ... until Jesus. And he goes beyond even Moses. We'll see that next time when Moses and Elijah disappear and only Jesus is left. Jesus is greater. God will reveal things through Jesus that have never been revealed before. He will show us God with more clarity than has ever been seen before. And God favors Jesus even more than he favored Moses. And if Jesus prays for you, there's a 100% guarantee God the Father will answer that prayer. God once said, "Even if Moses prayed for you I wouldn't listen." He said that once about Moses; he never said it about Jesus, and never will.

Why? Because of the kind of relationship he has with God. It's even closer than what Moses had (if you can imagine). Listen to God's words again: **This is my Son whom I love.**

## Better than Moses

This is exactly the point made in Hebrews 12.

**Hebrews 12:18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."**

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<sup>15</sup> This is all in contrast to the world, who listens to divination (v.14). Don't listen to astrologers, psychics, etc.; instead, listen to the prophet like Moses.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 3:22 tells us explicitly that Jesus is the prophet like Moses.

Being spoken to directly by God is way too dangerous. But we don't go to a mountain like that to hear from God.

**22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem ... 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant ...**

Therefore what?

**25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.**

In other words, "This is my Son. Listen to him!"

**25 ... If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ... 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."**

The fact that we have a better prophet, a better mediator, we come to a better mountain, we have a better covenant—all that puts even greater responsibility on us to listen. Failure to listen to Jesus is even more culpable, more evil, and more worthy of punishment than failing to listen when God spoke on Mount Sinai and cracked the whole mountain to pieces.

## Conclusion

The Christian life is a life of listening to Jesus. Next time we'll talk a lot more about how to do that and what it looks like in practice, but for now we're out of time so let me just call your mind to this: When Jesus stood there six days earlier, looking like a regular human being and talking about suffering and rejection and humiliation and death, he said if we are ashamed of him and his words, he will be ashamed of us when he comes in glory. Which means if we are not ashamed of him and his words, he will honor us when he comes. If we are with him in his suffering, we will be with him in his glory.

**2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us.**

When Jesus makes that comment at the end of ch.8 about "when the Son of man comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels," that goes by kind of fast. And so God says, "Just in case those words didn't shake you to your core like they ought to, let me just show you something about what coming in his Father's glory is all about." This Son of man who will either bestow honor on you or disown you on that day—he is someone who is awesome and powerful and glorious and favored beyond your comprehension. He is the Judge every soul who has ever lived will appear before on that day. And every one of us will hear one of two things:

**Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**

**41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**

And how do you end up in the group on his right hand and not his left? Very simple: live a life of listening to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I started tonight by talking about the countless messages you hear all day every day. One of those voices is the voice of Jesus Christ. He is speaking to you, calling you, commanding you, teaching you, encouraging you, rebuking you. But there are other voices—this world shouting their ideas, your own heart shouting its ideas and feelings. Which of those voices has your ear? Which steers your life. Look at the awesome glory of the Son of God, tune everything else out, and listen to him.

## **Summary**

After telling them about his (and their) suffering, Jesus lets them know that it's only temporary. He will return in his Father's glory and reject or honor us on the basis of whether we were faithful to him (focusing on the glory is how you make it through the suffering). But most will die before seeing that day. Only Peter, James, and John get a glimpse. Jesus is clothed in God's glory and perfect, moral nature, which is the basis of his powerful reign. God recreates the setting of the giving of the Law to Moses but replaces Moses with Jesus and says, "Listen to him," which is the main point of the Transfiguration.