

The Glory of God Revealed

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Our Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, verses 2 through 9:

And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, He charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Here ends the reading of the gospel.

Today, we're wrapping up the series that we've been going through over the last few weeks entitled *Light Shines in the Darkness*. This series has led us through the season of Epiphany, where we have used the coming of Jesus Christ and John 1:5 as our guidepost. John 1:5 says, "The light (*that is Christ*) shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This is important for us because the reality of the world that we live in and often the experience of our own lives is that it can feel like there is an awful lot of darkness. But in faith, we cling to the promise of God that He revealed to us in Jesus Christ that His light will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

Today we come to the end of this series on Transfiguration Sunday. My hope for us, as we turn to God's word, is that God would use today's text to root out misconceptions that we may have about Him and about Jesus, and tune us into the truth of the true glory of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. So let's dive in and take a look at our text for today.

We find this passage in three of the gospels, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It's really a pivotal text. It's not one of those - it's a terrible way to think about it, but often, we think of a

story is like a flyover story. We can just sort of breeze by it and not give it too much thought. But this is not a flyover story in scripture. It's not just a little interesting tidbit. It is a profound instance where something crucial is happening, that is revealing something important to us about God in Christ. It's sort of one of those stories that I like to think of as a tree that's got a lot of fruit on it, but the fruit is all at the top, so it takes a little bit of work to get there. This passage hyperlinks to all sorts of passages in the Old Testament that bolster up and give us a robust understanding not only of this story, but of the character of God and how it is revealed and expanded in this story in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Transfiguration is a fascinating scene. Jesus brings Peter, James, and John with him up to the top of a tall mountain. Here's a little bible hack for you. Anytime in a story where somebody goes up a mountain, something significant is probably about to happen. Abraham takes Isaac to sacrifice him up a mountain. Moses gets the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. There's Jesus's sermon on the ... mount. It's all over the place in scripture. Those are just a few examples, but when we see people go up mountains in the Bible, that's a cue to pay attention. It's a bit of a literary device that tells us that something significant is about to happen.

So on top of this mountain, Jesus is transfigured before them. It's a Greek word that is also translated as transformed, but really, it has the implication of an outward transformation of appearance in this text, more so than an inward transformation. It was this outward transformation that happens to Jesus as he shines in glory as his clothes look like they are radiant white. In that glorious moment with Christ, Moses and the prophet Elijah appear. The heroes of the Hebrew faith in the Old Testament scriptures.

To Jews, Moses and Elijah were themselves a representation and embodiment of what was often referred to as the Law and the Prophets. The Law and the Prophets were a way that they used to refer to the Old Testament scriptures. You'll see it sometimes in the New Testament - all the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in this. It's all over the place. So this Law and Prophets language is used to talk about the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures. Moses, the one through whom God gave the Law to the people, and Elijah, the quintessential Prophet. The one who didn't die, but was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, appeared right there in their presence with Jesus.

And Peter sort of fumbles a little bit - it's good for us to be here, you know; maybe we should build some tents. But the passage says he didn't really know what to say. They were terrified and understandably so.

Then there's this cloud that comes and surrounds them. Here is one of those *hyperlink* moments for the disciples. It's starting to look an awful lot like Moses's encounter with God on Mount Sinai - the mountain, the cloud, the radiant glory, Moses himself was there, and then a voice from within the cloud speaking to the people, speaking to those present there. They were standing in the very presence of the Lord Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. Makes sense that they were terrified.

If you remember in our Old Testament text this morning, the people in Moses's time wanted him to cover up his face because he had second-hand glory radiating from it and it made them a little uncomfortable. They were frightened by that glory. The experience of the presence of God was frightening to them because they knew that they were unworthy and they were standing in the presence of a holy and a perfect and a glorious God. It is a frightening thing to come unworthy before the King.

So imagine being in the place of those disciples that day. They knew they were in the presence of the one true God. And God's words in that situation? "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." It was an affirmation of Jesus. "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him" and then in an instant, it was all gone. Nothing was left except Jesus. The Jesus that they had followed, that they had lived with for years, that they traveled with, that they shared meals with, who was their Rabbi and their friend, was God's beloved Son.

In this story, we see the full glory of God in the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures right there in the person of Jesus Christ. For a brief moment, there was a flash of His true glory, the true identity of Christ for them to see and then it was gone. Or it was present in a different kind of way.

Then Jesus does something fascinating, something he actually does quite often in the gospel of Mark. He tells them to not tell anyone about it. He says keep quiet until I have risen from the dead. And that's where our passage ends today. At least, our story for today ends.

It's incredible. It's profound. It's a heart-pounding story. It's a history-changing moment and it happens in eight short verses here in the Gospel of Mark. So we sit here with this text and

maybe you're wondering like okay, this is interesting; this is great, but what are we as God's people supposed to make of this today? This isn't really one of those "how do I apply this in my life" kind of stories. It's more of a story about implication than application. If this is true, then what does this mean for my life?

I want to zone in on a few things from our text today. One big thing is that we see in the story of the Transfiguration that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and the culmination of the Old Testament scriptures and of God's salvation history, of His history of working for the salvation of His people from generation to generation. It culminates here in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law. He doesn't abolish it. He says He fulfills it. Moses went up Mount Sinai and he descends with the Law. Through Abraham, God had already made a covenant with His people. He had promised them. He said, "I am your God and you will be My people." He had already saved them from the oppressive yoke of slavery in Egypt before they had ever known the Law. Then in the Law, God says you are My people and this is what true righteousness looks like. This is what holiness looks like. This type of life will be your testimony to the world about the type of God I am.

But the reality is that we, much like them in that day, are completely incapable of being faithful to the righteous requirements of God's Law by our own power. We know this. You don't even have to be a Christian to know this. It's a cultural cliché. We say "nobody's perfect," but I think "nobody's perfect" is a profound theological statement. It sounds a lot more palatable to most people than all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We know this is true because how often do we know things that are right, that we believe are the right things to do for ourselves, and nonetheless, choose to do otherwise. I know salad is healthy but I'd rather have ice cream. It is not in our power to overcome sin in our lives. We cannot live up to the righteous requirements of the Law because sin is alive in us.

But luckily for us, through Jesus, a righteousness, a way to be right before God, has been made known to us, apart from the Law. I think that's why Jesus tells them don't tell anybody about this until after I've been raised from the dead. Because I don't think this is quite going to click for people until we see exactly how Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Law on our behalf and made us right before God. It was through the cross and it was through conquering the power

of sin and death and the Devil. Friends, the glory of God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, in the cross and in the empty tomb, and how far He was willing to go on our behalf.

Because of what Jesus has done, we are not bound to the Law. We are not required to earn our salvation. We don't do it by being good people. The good news of the Christian faith is that Christians don't have the best rulebook of them all. That's not what this is about. Rather, it is about being made right before God, through faith in Jesus Christ. It's about how we can know and be absolutely certain that we are saved because of Jesus. When we put our faith in Him, when we hold the bread and the wine in our fingers, the body and the blood, when we tasted on our tongues, when we hear the words "given and shed for you," we can know that we are forgiven and that we stand right before God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the Law.

Not only does Jesus fulfill the Law on our behalf, but He fulfills the prophetic texts too. Not just those predictive ones in the Old Testament, but he fulfills the very office, the very ministry of prophet for us. When most of us think about prophecy, I think it's easiest for us to think about it as words that predict the future. That is part of what prophecy is. It's a part of what it can be. That is very much one of the ways in which Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. There are 300+ prophecies in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That's a compelling reality in and of itself, that generations and generations of prophets foretold Jesus is coming.

But prophecy is not just about predicting the future. The most basic truth about prophecy is that it is God's specific word for a person or a people in a specific time and place. Sometimes that word is a prediction, but what it is all the time is a call to turn or to return to the God who loves you.

Jesus fulfills the prophets because He is God's definitive word *to* us and God's definitive word *for* us. That word is to repent and believe the good news. That word is you are saved by grace through faith. That word is that God himself has made the move towards us before we could ever do anything on our behalf. It's like the prodigal son who's returning home only to find out that his father is already running towards him with arms open wide. To hear God's word for you, you need to look no further than Jesus.

Friends, this is the glory of God. Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God, comes to us and He gave Himself for us, so that we could be made right with God, we can be filled with the Holy

Spirit, and we could live as God's people in his love. Not just for today, but for all of eternity. Also not just for heaven, but for today.

Because we have this good news, we can be bold and confident in sharing the message of Jesus Christ. Because we do not carry a heavy burden to lay on the shoulders of a beaten down and weary people. We do not exchange one set of chains for another. One burden of living up to the unobtainable righteous requirements of the Law for another. It's good news because we have been made right before God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As a saved and as a redeemed people, we can begin the work of reconciliation here and now, knowing that God's salvation for us does not depend on how we live or on what we do. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that is true freedom. That is the light that we carry and it is a light that cannot be put out. God, who said let light shine in the darkness, made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. When we look to Jesus Christ, we see the light of the glory of God.

This message of the Gospel is not just a message to share with someone else. This might be the message that you need to hear this morning. This good news is that God has shown up for you in all of his glory in Jesus Christ, to heal the hurting, to comfort the troubled, to give peace to those who have no peace, forgiveness for what you've done, and healing and wholeness for what has been done to you and taken from you.

This is no Hallmark movie kind of peace. It is the peace that says that God in Jesus Christ not only came to this world, but that He is gone down to the depths of the grave and back for us, so that we can know with confidence that there is no depth to which we can sink in this life that puts us out of the reach of the loving embrace of our God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the story of the Transfiguration is not just some interesting eccentric story to add to the anthology. It reveals to us the very heart of God and the heart of the Gospel. That Jesus Christ, the glory of God, is the fulfillment of the scriptures. That He is the word of God, through whom God teaches us and shows us who He really is. The truth of God is known when it is found in Christ. The grace and the love of God are heard and known when we hear them in the words "given and shed for you." A new life is found when we look for it in the empty tomb. The real transfiguration, the real transformation, happens for you and me, for us, people of God, when we encounter the glory of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.