

This Is My Beloved

Lesson Text: Mark 9:2-13 **Background Scripture:** Mark 9:2-13

Devotional Reading: Matthew 17:1-13 and Luke 9:28-36.

Mark 9:2-13

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 and 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 covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, 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.”

LESSON AIMS:

- **Facts:** to show that Jesus is the Servant-Leader who is approved by God the Father Himself from heaven.
- **Principle:** to see that God the Father sent Jesus as our Servant-Leader so that we might listen to Him and find life.
- **Application:** to know that since God the Father has sent Jesus to us and has approved of Him, we ought to listen to Jesus and give our lives to Him.

INTRODUCTION

Metamorphosis

A striped caterpillar climbs to a precarious perch on a tree limb, clumsily hangs down, and begins to spin a cocoon (more precisely, a chrysalis) about itself. In only a few days what was once a mere caterpillar begins to break free from the cocoon. Fragile wings unfurl and harden as the caterpillar transforms into a beautiful Monarch butterfly. The Greek name for “transformation” comes directly into English as our word metamorphosis.

On a high mountain north of Galilee, Jesus experienced a metamorphosis before the startled eyes of three disciples. We call this experience His transfiguration, but literally in the original language it is metamorphosis. This was a spectacular change of His visible form. What happened there was different from a butterfly’s metamorphosis, however, in two important ways. First, when Jesus’ appearance changed into shining glory, it was an unveiling of what had been His true nature all along. Second, this revelation of His glory was temporary, because Jesus changed back to His earthly appearance rather quickly.

For just this brief moment the mantle of flesh was transformed, and Jesus was seen in the majesty that was rightly His. But then the shining glory left Him so that He might resume His journey toward the cross. (Parallels to today’s text are Matthew 17:1-13 and Luke 9:28-36.)

LESSON BACKGROUND

The transfiguration follows about a week after Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ" (Matthew 16:16). Following that confession, Jesus voiced certain promises, including the fact that He would rise from the dead (Mark 8:31). He promised that He would build His church on a rock and that that church would never be defeated (Matthew 16:18). He promised that the Son of Man would someday come in the glory of the Father (Mark 8:38). Following these breathtaking promises, Jesus took His "inner circle" of three disciples to a mountaintop where He gave them proof that such promises would be kept. The proof was a glimpse of His true glory.

Jesus also made certain demands following Peter's confession. He demanded that Peter not try to revise the plans of God (Mark 8:32,35). He demanded that His disciples not be ashamed of Him, even though their belief was at odds with that of their own generation (Mark 8:38).

Because these demands of discipleship are so challenging, Jesus also needed to give evidence to these first leaders of the church that whatever price they paid would be worth it. The ultimate evidence in that regard was the resurrection. Preliminary to that event was evidence of the transfiguration.

TRANSFIGURATION (Mark 9:2,3)

Peter, James, and John are sometimes known as the "inner three" or "inner circle" of the apostles in that they witness things the others do not (compare Mark 5:37; 14:33). Perhaps these special experiences are necessary for Peter because he will preach the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:14–40); for James because he will die as the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:1, 2); and for John because he will live on to speak and write to the church for virtually the rest of the first century.

The time frame after six days refers to Peter's confession and the events surrounding it. They climb a high mountain, which is not named. However, the highest peak in the area was Mount Hermon, just north of Caesarea Philippi and rising over nine thousand feet. Presumably, this was the mountain where the transfiguration occurred, though we cannot be sure.

1. Who ascended the mountain with Jesus? What mountain was it (Mark 9:2)?

The outward manifestation of Jesus' transformation is described in straightforward terms. His clothing becomes whiter and brighter than anything the three apostles have ever seen. A "fuller" (Mark 9:3) was a launderer whose job it was to get clothing as clean as one could in those days. The idea is that Jesus' clothing appeared to be whiter than anyone could possibly bleach them. Jesus' garments are as white as the snow on the mountaintops (compare Daniel 7:9). The parallel accounts add descriptions of how the appearance of Jesus' face is altered (see Matthew 17:2; Luke 9:29). It must be such a spectacular sight that human words can scarcely describe it (compare Revelation 1:13–16).

2. What kind of transformation did Christ undergo on the mountain (v. 3)?

HISTORIC VISITORS (Mark 9:4-8)

As the three awe-struck apostles were gazing at Jesus, two important figures from the past appeared, coming to pay homage to the long-awaited Messiah: Moses and Elias (Elijah). Since Moses was the great lawgiver and Elijah a great prophet, it is usually suggested that they stood for the Law and the Prophets, which Christ came to fulfill (Matt. 5:17). Both Moses and Elias participated in great acts of revelation on mountains (Exodus 3:1; 19:20; 1 Kings 18:19–46; 19:11–13). Another great revelatory event on a mountain is under way.

How the disciples knew that the two personages before them were Moses and Elijah we are not told. Perhaps sharing in this heavenly experience gave them immediate knowledge of things that are ordinarily hidden from us on earth. This also speaks to the age-old question concerning whether we know one another in heaven. Indeed, why would we know less in heaven than we do on earth?

Luke alone informs us that the conversation that Christ was having with Moses and Elijah concerned His approaching death in Jerusalem (9:31). These three know the plan of God and the mission of Jesus. They know what awaits Him in Jerusalem.

3. Who appeared with Jesus on the mountain? What did their presence signify (v. 4)?

Peter, rarely at a loss for words, apparently blurts out the first thoughts that come to his mind: it is good for us to be here. In proposing to build three tabernacles or tents, he probably has in mind those that are built every year at the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:42). Does Peter think that Moses and Elias (Elijah) plan to stay awhile? No doubt Peter means well and only wants to help. But Peter's knee-jerk plan puts Jesus on the same level with Moses and Elias. To be put on a par with Moses and Elias would be a great honor for anyone but Jesus. But the point of the transfiguration is that Jesus has a divine glory that is far above the rank of the greatest of humans.

Peter speaks, even though he has no idea what to say (Mark 9:6). He and James and John are too terrified to think straight. Moses and Elias (Elijah) have been dead for many centuries, and yet here they are talking with Jesus. And while the apostles have seen Jesus as a great teacher and miracle worker, they have not seen anything like this display of majestic splendor. The disciples' fear is parallel to that of the shepherds who heard the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus and were surrounded by the glory of God (see Luke 2:9). The disciples are afraid because this is an event they cannot comprehend.

4. Why was Peter's suggestion to Jesus inappropriate (v. 5)?

Now the point of this dramatic scene becomes clearer as the visual imagery is accompanied by words spoken by God himself. This voice was heard before, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. Then as now, God identifies Jesus as His Son (compare Mark 1:11).

The depiction of the cloud on this mountaintop reminds us of the cloud on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:9). It is a depiction of God's presence. Notice that in Mark 1:11 (and the parallels Matthew 3:17 and Luke 3:22), God's voice comes from "heaven." But here God's voice comes out of the cloud.

The voice from the cloud identifies Jesus and commands the disciples to hear him. Both words carry important meaning. When God tells them to hear, it means they should not repeat the recent mistake of opposing what Jesus says (Matthew 16:22; Mark 8:32). They are to pay attention and accept Jesus' words, whether they like them or not. When Jesus speaks, they are to listen!

The second word in the phrase hear him sharply separates Jesus from Moses and Elias (Elijah). Moses spoke the word of God in his day, as did Elias. The people were expected to listen to and to heed those two spiritual giants. But now it is not Moses with his laws nor Elias with his prophecies through whom God speaks. It is Jesus who speaks for God.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to know that you are obeying God's command of listening to Jesus and not merely rationalizing that you are?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- John 14:15
- Acts 7:57
- James 1:22-25
- 1 John 3:16-20

The sudden disappearance of Moses and Elijah (verse 8 of today's lesson) intensifies the words of God concerning His Son. No longer will Moses speak for God, because the old covenant is about to be replaced (see Mark 14:24; Colossians 2:14).

No longer will the people need to read the words of Elias and the prophets to anticipate the coming of the Messiah because the one who fulfills all those prophecies is here. From now on, the disciples must listen to Jesus! He is God's final message and the messenger to the human race (see Hebrews 1:1,2).

Moses and Elias attest to Jesus' greatness, but He does not need their assistance. Their job was to prepare for His coming, and they did their job well. But now Jesus is here. Therefore, Moses and Elias are removed from the scene.

5. *Whose voice did the apostles hear on the mountain? What was the significance of what was said (v. 7)?*

RESURRECTION PROMISED (Mark 9:9-13)

As they descended the mountain, the privileged three probably could not wait until they saw the others and be able to relate what they had seen. The Master, however, "charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen."

This demand for secrecy is the same that was heard the previous week (see Mark 8:29, 30). Even so, we sympathize with how hard it must be for Peter, James, and John to pretend that nothing out of the ordinary has happened!

The need for secrecy is bound up with the danger of having incomplete information. At this point, it would be easy to draw wrong conclusions about what Jesus comes to do. Jesus frequently restricted people from proclaiming His miracles in order for God's plan of salvation to be carried out. The need for secrecy, however, will last only until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. Just as His identity as Messiah is inseparably linked with His upcoming death (Mark 8:29–31), the glory of His transfiguration is inseparably linked to His subsequent resurrection. He will die, but the tomb will not be able to hold Him. God will not leave the Son of Man—His own Son—in the grave. This is the key point Peter will stress when he freely proclaims the risen Lord on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:29–36).

6. *Why did Christ forbid the disciples to share what they had seen (Mark 9:9)?*

As they make the long journey back down the mountain, Peter, James, and John have opportunity to talk among themselves. They keep pondering this saying of Jesus. What can He possibly mean by rising from the dead? Jesus has, in fact, already clearly told them that He will be killed and will rise again (Mark 8:31). He will tell them again as they pass through Galilee (9:31); when they hear these words a third time and cannot understand them, they will be afraid to ask Jesus to explain (9:32). Jesus will tell them a fourth time as they approach Jerusalem (10:34). But the disciples still will not be able to accept the clear meaning of Jesus' words (see Luke 18:32–34, which is parallel to Mark 10:34).

"Though Jesus often spoke of His death and resurrection, the disciples had a hard time with this whole concept. Many today still struggle with the idea of Christ's resurrection. But the resurrection is the core of

the gospel (1 Corinthians 15). Do we really believe that God acted in this marvelous way and that Christ's resurrection guarantees our own?" —A. W.

Jesus intended His words to be taken literally when He spoke of His death and resurrection to His disciples. Once the resurrection occurred, however they would be able to reveal all that Christ did and said.

7. Why were the disciples confused about the resurrection (v. 10)?

The disciples have just seen Elias (Elijah) with Moses, and this triggers a connection for them. While they are afraid to ask about Jesus' death and resurrection, they have the courage to ask about Elias. Why do the scribes say that Elias must come before the Messiah comes?

The reason that the scribes say this is that the prophet Malachi said the same thing some 400 years earlier. The closing words of the Old Testament promise that God will send Elias the prophet before the coming of the Day of the Lord (see Malachi 4:5, 6). Therefore the disciples wonder: Does the appearance of Elias on the mountaintop mean that the Day of the Lord is at hand?

In reply, Jesus confirms that it is necessary for Elias to come in advance of the Messiah (verse 12 of today's lesson). Elias is to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children in that preparatory work (Malachi 3:1; 4:6). But even when all things are restored in that sense, it does not mean that everything will be smooth and easy for the Messiah. It will still be necessary for the Son of man to suffer many things. The Messiah will be set at naught, snubbed by the very people He comes to save. The disciples must realize what lies ahead.

8. Why did the scribes say Elijah had to make an appearance (v. 11)?

Jesus carries His explanation further. In fact, Elias (Elijah) has already come—in the person of John the Baptist. Jesus has already explained this earlier in Matthew 11:11–14. In a parallel passage to this week's text, Matthew 17:13 says, "*Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.*" John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and forcefulness of Elias, is the one who fulfills the centuries-old prophecy of Malachi.

The similarities of John and Elias have been noted often. Both were bold prophets who defied kings and called the nation to repentance. Both had a strange appearance, lived in the wilds, and ate unusual food. Both endured the wrath of an evil woman and her influence on the king.

The vicious words of Jezebel that threatened Elias with death were not fulfilled (1 Kings 19:2). Instead, Elias rode victoriously to Heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), with Jezebel meeting an inglorious end (2 Kings 9:30–37). John, for his part, was beheaded at the request of the evil Herodias (see Mark 6:17–28). Thus, John suffered the fate proclaimed for Elias. Jesus will suffer death as well as He submits to the will of God.

9. How was this prophecy fulfilled (v. 13)?

CONCLUSION

They Never Forgot

The disciples who were present at the transfiguration never forgot their mountaintop experience. They saw the Lord in His true glory, and it changed their lives forever. Peter wrote of this many years later when he recalled the experiences "*when we were with Him on the sacred mountain*" (2 Peter 1:18). Peter was forever changed by what he saw.

Near the end of the first century, John could look ahead to a future day of glory. With eager confidence he wrote, *“But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:2). He knew that everything is changed when seeing the Lord as He really is.

We Must Always Remember

Through the disciples’ testimony we can watch with spiritual eyes as the Lord is transformed into His true glory. We can remember that we serve a Lord whose glory and power far transcend everything on earth. Jesus’ metamorphoses on the mount of transfiguration and from the empty tomb reveal His power to bring about our own metamorphosis.

Jesus demonstrated that He has the power to change us into what we can never be on our own. As we surrender ourselves to His authority, we are “transformed by the renewing” of our minds (Romans 12:2), and we are changed degree by degree into the glory of His image (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus has the power to change us *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”* (see 1 Corinthians 15:52). When Jesus returns, He will change our lowly bodies to be like *“His glorious body”* (Philippians 3:21). *“We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus’ promises always come to pass (Mark 9:2,3; cf. v. 1)
2. Wise is he who says nothing when he does not know what to say (Mark 9:4-6; Eccles. 5:1,2).
3. In the final analysis, no matter what others are saying. It must be Jesus whom we hear and obey (Mark 9:7,8).
4. Every command of Jesus has a purpose, whether we fully understand it or not (v. 9).
5. Our preconceptions must never keep us from seeking the truth from Jesus (vs. 10,11).
6. Prophecy may not always be clear to us, but it will always be fulfilled (vs.8:12,13).

PRAYER Father, we praise You and we praise Christ Jesus our Lord in all His glory and splendor. Help us to proclaim Your Majesty in all the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER One day we will see Jesus in all His glory.