

Jesus Christ Transfigured.

Text: Mark 9:2-9

Suggested Hymns:

500, 37, 747, 283, 273

- 1) Was Indeed A Glorious Vision
- 2) An Exposure Of Human Weakness
- 3) Brings Us A Divine Command To Hear The Word
- 4) Is Seen Only In Faith, In The Light Of The Resurrection

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 9:2-9, ²*Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.*

³*His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.* ⁴*And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.*

⁵*Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" --* ⁶*because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.*

⁷*And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"* ⁸*Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.* ⁹*Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The transfiguration is one of the most beautiful stories in the New Testament. Its radiance exceeds our comprehension and our descriptive powers. It is unique among all the events in the life of Jesus Christ.

It is a miracle, yet it did not involve feeding people, healing them, or the casting out of demons. Rather it anticipates Christ's demonstration of deity as

revealed in His resurrection and ascension. It was a very brief and transient glimpse of His glory. This mountain-top miracle is completely centred in Christ.

This great happening, appropriately commemorated in the church on the Last Sunday After the Epiphany, gives us a vision to see beyond the turmoil of our world and gives us a glimpse of the King in all His beauty.

Let us look carefully to see what Scripture tells us of this magnificent and wondrous event in our Lord's earthly life. The account is characteristically direct, lively, and vivid. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Transfiguration Of Jesus Christ Was Indeed A Glorious Vision

Our text begins, ² *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.*

The noun metamorphosis comes from the Greek verb which Mark uses to describe the great change that came over the human body and appearance of our Lord. *“He was transfigured before them.”* His whole appearance changed before their eyes. This could only happen because Christ “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature” as we learn in Hebrews 1:3.

Nobody on earth has ever been so bright and glorious! Peter, many years later, reported that he and the others *“did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”¹*

The transformation was so great that it carried over from Christ's body even to the apparel that was upon Him. *His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.*

Why did God cause this to happen? Peter had confessed faith in Jesus as Messiah and as God's Son less than a week beforehand. At Caesarea Philippi he declared, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”²* This glorious vision would prepare the apostles for the dark days ahead. The sight was to confirm Christ's people in faith so that they could endure persecution and even death for His name's sake.

This vision of Christ's glory was the fulfilment of promises and prophecies which God has given to his people many years ago. Isaiah had said, *"¹⁷ Your eyes will see the King in His beauty."*³ Two distinguished Old Testament people appeared. Their presence demonstrated the fulfilment of prophecy and the continuity of God's revelation.

⁴ And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Luke tells us that these representatives of the prophets, and the law, *"spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."*⁴ Everything centred on Jesus Christ!

Have you ever wished that you had been among those who saw Jesus in such a state? Do you yearn for a glimpse of the Lord and for a direct word from Him, or to Him? Does it bother you that the One in whom you trust, and to whom you pray, is now invisible? Don't spend any time seeking a vision of God which He simply doesn't grant to us now. And don't believe anyone who tells you that he or she has seen the Lord!

You and I, and anyone else, would not know how to take it if God would appear before us now. Consider what the chief spokesman for the apostles had to say when he saw Christ in His glory. *⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

Peter's suggestion was not irreverent or wicked. He was deeply impressed by what he and James and John had seen. He wanted to mark and commemorate the occasion. It seemed fitting and proper to provide some kind of a memorial so that people in the future would be reminded of what had happened. Peter's statement was a well-meaning response to a God-given revelation. He could have done much worse! Our text says that *he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.*

2. The Transfiguration Of Jesus Christ

Exposed Human Weakness

Jesus Christ's transfiguration teaches us a lot about ourselves. It was an exposure of human weakness. Most of us probably would not be able to make a suggestion that would be any better than Peter's.

I strongly suspect that many of us would not do as well. Peter, at least, recognised that something great had actually taken place. He felt that the transfiguration should be remembered.

The tendency of people today would be to analyse their subjective state and feelings. Did we really see that which we thought we saw? We might even forget the reality of the vision in a frenzy of self-analysis. Because of fright, we might turn to a psychiatrist in order to have the benefit of whatever relief or therapy that he could provide. Some would probably call in a sociologist in order to have a comparative, contemporary evaluation.

People today show a persistent tendency to turn from God to humanity. We incline to become confused and lost in ourselves, or with others. “Group therapy” is often good and helpful up to a point — but it can never bring anyone to God, nor can it strengthen us in saving truth and wisdom.

People together sometimes merely compound confusion. They may even draw each other away from God rather than towards Him. Jeremiah, wiser than we, expressed it perfectly when he prayed, ²³ ***O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.***⁵

The mere sight of Christ, glorified in the transfiguration, did not, in itself, do the saving work of God’s Spirit. Peter’s suggestion clearly missed the point. God’s manner of establishing and keeping His people in His kingdom depends upon much more than sight, sound, and structures. 2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that ***we walk by faith, not by sight.***

God’s communication is given to us in and through one particular person, Jesus Christ. God addresses us by means of His word. ⁷ ***And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!”***

Isn’t it strange and amazing that God would say that, after He had just provided such a glorious vision? He completely ignores Peter’s suggestion that they memorialise the occasion. He doesn’t suggest that they mark the particular place where the vision transpired. He doesn’t even tell them specifically to remember what they had seen, or to write down their individual impressions. God simply says, ***“This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.”***

3. The Transfiguration Of Jesus Christ Brings Us A Divine Command To Hear The Word

Jesus has words of judgement, truth, life, and salvation that can mean far more to us now, than the most glorious vision of His divine nature. The mere sight of the Redeemer did not save people then, and it will not do so now!

After all, most of those people who saw Jesus in the flesh, even as He did miracles, did not believe in Him. We know that the enemies of God will see Jesus when He comes in glory on the Last Day. That mighty sight, alone, will bring terror rather than triumph, death rather than life.

Scripture says in Revelation 1:7, ***⁷ Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.***

Those who are Christ's people listen to His Word. Those who really see Christ, and truly hear Him, receive a message which is more than sight and sound. The Word of God is the one thing that is needful.

Peter explains it beautifully and fully, near the end of his life, when he had had time to grasp the deeper meaning and purpose of the transfiguration. ***¹⁸ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.***

¹⁹ And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; ²⁰ knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."⁶ God's Word brings His saving light and life.

Today we do not see Jesus present in any form. The physical sight of His humility and His glory has been taken from us. Yet, He speaks to us in the Law and the Gospel. St. Paul connects God's Word, his preaching, the Gospel, and the Scripture, as he writes to the Corinthians, ***⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone***

*in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*⁷

“This is My beloved Son; listen to Him” — the Father Himself makes this declaration. He tells us to do this. It has been hard for modern Christians to grasp the intimate connection between faith in Jesus Christ and reverent and regular use of holy Scripture.

There is an unbreakable relationship between God’s Son and the Bible, which brings His word to us. The incarnate Word comes to us by means of the written Word in the light and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus once said to some Jews who had believed in Him, *“If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* ³² *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*⁸ Our Lord, before His passion, emphasised the seriousness of His speech to us in Luke 9:44 ⁴⁴ *“Let these words sink down into your ears.”*

We often miss out on the very best in life because of neglect of what is at hand. It is futile to try to grasp that which is beyond us, or withheld, or forbidden. This is simple, basic wisdom, as we read in Proverbs 28:19, ¹⁹ *He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough!*

A gambler, scorning hard work and wise economical management, often dies penniless. An adulterous couple, turning away from each other, vainly seek in strangers that love which they could have together. A mother, neglecting her child, reaching out for a freedom and fulfilling life, may end her quest alone and forsaken.

Don’t miss out on God! Don’t strain and seek for Him in vain, where He cannot be found. Some people who write learned books believe that God exists — some are atheists. Many now turn to astrology, their horoscope, and the occult. The old religions of the orient, and some new ones, have contemporary appeal. Don’t be deceived! The Word alone brings us God and His gifts.

We read in Romans 10:6-9 that *the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ “ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷ or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ “ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we*

preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Our text continues, ⁸ *Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.* The account of the Transfiguration ends rather quickly. We have another indication that the sight and the place were not of primary importance. The Lord wouldn't let His apostles remain on the mountain top where they had seen the vision.

So Jesus had one final word of wisdom and instruction for them. ⁹ *Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

The story of the vision, great as it was, should not yet be told. People might make of it something different, contrary to God's purpose. There were zealots, political revolutionaries, who would use it for the furtherance of their own plots. It was only after Christ's death and resurrection that it should be told to all people.

4. The Transfiguration Of Jesus Christ Is Seen Only In Faith, In The Light Of The Resurrection

Some people who hear this story now have eyes to see, and ears to hear, but some don't. Faith and unbelief challenge us to face the fact that God's ways are mysterious.

Yet, the last great truth connected with the transfiguration gives us the assurance that Christ's brightness is reflected, in a measure, in us who are His people. The God of life and glory, who manifested Himself in His only-begotten Son, is also working His purposes in our heart and mind and body, for *"we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*⁹

Take heart! You and I did not see the transfiguration. There is much that we do not understand; we lack much that is good; and we are far from the goal. We often tremble because of the terror and danger and darkness upon earth.

Yet, the God of glory is at work in us right now! Some day we will see much more than Peter, James, and John saw even at the transfiguration. The Kingdom for which we pray each day has come to us even now, in a measure.

Let us rejoice in the words of Scripture which tell us that *our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*²¹ *who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*¹⁰ May God grant this to us all. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Peter 1:16

² Matt. 16:16

³ Isaiah 33:17

⁴ Luke 9:31

⁵ Jer. 10:23

⁶ 2 Peter 1:18-21

⁷ 2 Cor. 4:5-6

⁸ John 8:31

⁹ 2 Cor. 3:18)

¹⁰ Phil. 3:20-21