

## 47 Mark 9:2-13

# The Transfiguration

### Text

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, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 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." 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

9 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. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. 11 And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" 12 And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."

### Its Context

Mark begins his gospel with the voice of one calling in the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord. Jesus follows and is promptly baptized. In that Baptism the heavens are torn open and God speaks from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son."

Immediately Jesus is driven into the wilderness to battle with Satan. In the 40 days of temptations, we learn from Matthew, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world if only Jesus will worship him. Christ prevails over Satan and begins his ministry.

He calls some disciples to himself and begins a whirlwind of a ministry: Teaching and casting out demons, teaching and healing people, preaching and cleansing a leper, teaching, forgiving sins and healing the lame, confounding the Pharisees on fasting and Sabbath observances, teaching and healing and casting out demons, condemning the Pharisees for blaspheming the Spirit and teaching on the end of Satan's rule, redefining family to be those who do the will of God.

And then a break. After all that and much more there was great confusion regarding the nature of this kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. So in chapter 4 we have a rare Markan glimpse into the teaching of Jesus. There will continue to be differing responses to the seed of the gospel. The kingdom will not be as they expect. It starts in a counterintuitive way, but nothing is hidden except to be brought to be disclosed in the fullness of time. The kingdom will start small and

seemingly insignificant, but it will grow to be massive; however, this growth is mysterious, being Divine, not human, in nature.

Then back into the rapids. He calms storms, casts out demons, heals the hemorrhaging woman, and raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. Chapter 6 provides some interesting foreshadowing. Jesus is rejected and afterward the disciples are sent out. John the Baptist, as Jesus' forerunner, is killed. Jesus then feeds the 5000, walks on water, heals the sick, walks on water, argues with the Pharisees over commandments, tradition, and purity. He then embarks on a long Gentile tour, foreshadowing the future expansion of the God's covenant people through the miracles that he works among them. He returns for another confrontation with the Pharisees before leaving them.

Jesus heals a blind man in two stages. For all the revelation that Jesus has given to the disciples, and all the miracles he has wrought, they still do not see him clearly. Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ and everything changes. Jesus now begins his second work in the disciples preparing them for the cross. Jesus gives his first passion predication.

Let us pause for a moment to consider what the disciples may have understood so far. They understood that Jesus is really smart, he is really powerful, he is compassionate, he is tireless, he is rock solid against all foes, he is the Christ. The kingdom of God may not come as they first expected. Ok, it will start small and there will be a mixed reaction. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense to them, but ok, perhaps they followed it that far. A mixed reaction they can understand, but complete rejection and death of the Messiah?! That was too much. That cannot be possible. He cannot be their liberator if he dies. Ironically, that is the only way he can be their liberator.

Peter rebukes Jesus for saying such things, and Jesus says to him, "Get behind me Satan!" At that moment, Peter was doing the work of Satan. He was suggesting the exact same course for Jesus. Give up the cross in order to have the kingdoms of the world. Subtle isn't it? When we euphemize sin and water down the gospel and blur the clear lines of scripture in order to avoid offending people in order that we may help them in some way, is this not the same thing? At those times are we not trying to gain the kingdom of this world to the neglect of the kingdom of God? There needs to be some qualifications to this, but we should see the essence of trading the kingdom of God for the kingdom of man.

That was the message of both Satan and Peter. Jesus rebukes him and begins discussing the way of suffering and the giving up of one's own life as the way to save it. This is where our text begins.

## **Its Purpose**

The phrase "after six days" is a rare use of a specific time indicator for Mark. Its existence should cue us to make a connection with something else in the text. The six days starts counting from Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ. He ascends the mountain and teaches his disciples. The transfiguration was for the benefit of the disciples.

God the Father speaks out of the cloud to the disciples saying, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." In other words, Peter, don't try to correct Jesus. Listen to him. No matter how strange it may sound to your ears. Listen to him.

Is this not a lesson for all of us? How tempting it is to follow the parts of scripture that we find appealing but reject the parts that are uncomfortable or that we just don't like. We seldom will say that we are refusing to listen to God, but in practice that is what we do. When the word

speaks with the utmost clarity and we feel the pain of conviction, we try to pretend that we did not read that portion, and in so doing we are not listening to the Son. This is massively widespread. In fact, I believe that this is the number one reason for so many different denominations. Very few of them are based on an honest difference of opinion regarding what a particular doctrine is. The majority of differing view points develop from an unwillingness to listen to the Son.

The second benefit to the disciples is to give them a glimpse into future things. When Christ was transfigured and his glory shone brightly, it became apparent that he was not some holy man of God coming to restore Israel. He was transcendent. There was an other-worldliness to him. His role is going to involve rejection, disgrace and death, but ultimately this results in a kingdom whose glory cannot be measured. It results in a victorious King above all kings. Peter's view of Jesus as a conquering kingly figure was actually too low of an opinion of Jesus. It was a way of saying "Peter, this is so far beyond your ability to comprehend that you need simply to trust me."

Dear Christian, whatever things you think you are giving up in this life for the sake of the gospel is no loss at all. What can you possibly give up that will not be rewarded 100 fold in the age to come? Moses, "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." The reproach of Christ is the way to the reward. The way of suffering is the way to glory. It may seem counterintuitive, but we must listen to the Son, be willing to partake in the way of suffering, and we must look to the ultimate glorious end.

## **Its Eschatological Significance**

### **The New Exodus**

As I look at the transfiguration, my first question is, "What is it?" I don't think the significance of the transfiguration was ever explained to me. It was just one of those amazing but strange things that Jesus did. Truly, I had no understanding of it. That was more or less the same view I had of miracles in general. They were just cool things that Jesus did but there was no rhyme or reason to them. Why did he climb this mountain and transfigure himself? Was it just an arbitrary act? As soon as we think about it we recognize that Jesus did nothing in an arbitrary manner and so we know that the transfiguration also must have meaning. We recognize that when we start to think about it, but there is still no real understanding.

Jesus goes up on a high mountain just as Moses ascended Mt. Sinai. The time reference of 6 days is interesting in that Moses was on Sinai 6 days with God revealing his glory on the seventh day. A cloud descends upon the mountain in both accounts. God speaks forth from the cloud in both accounts. Finally at the end of both accounts Moses and Jesus, respectively descend the mountain to find a faithless generation. There are additional, less exact parallels that serve to reinforce the relationship between these two accounts. If, as Watts notes, "Mark is describing a new exodus, then this is its Sinai." Elijah and Moses were the only OT figures to converse with God on Sinai, and now they are seen conversing with Jesus! God has come down and is leading a new Exodus. It is coming in a most unexpected form, but Israel's eschatological salvation has begun.

## **Son of God**

God speaks out of the clouds saying, "This is my beloved Son!" This is a reference to Psalm 2:7 which has heavy messianic overtones. This is only the second such reference to Jesus as God's beloved Son. Interestingly enough, the first one occurred in chap. 1 soon after Jesus is declared to be the Christ. Now after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, God again speaks from heaven and declares that Jesus is his beloved Son!

## **The Word**

Here we have the new Exodus. We have the new Sinai. But as God speaks out of the cloud, what follows is not a re-giving of the Decalogue. Instead of giving the Decalogue, God says listen to him! Listen to the Son! Jesus is the new Torah, he is, in living form the Word of God. He is the eternal Word that existed in the beginning. The Word took on flesh and made his dwelling among us.

## **The Son of Man**

*"And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them."*

The reference to the clothes of Christ also has significance to Jesus' favorite self-designation as the Son of Man. There is correspondence to The Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 whose clothes are dazzling white. And in Chapter 9 there is the terrifying figure of Son of Man who comes riding on the clouds.

## **Immanuel**

*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." 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.*

Many people have mocked Peter for this statement, but one can hardly blame him. Moreover, it may have been an informed, though misplaced suggestion. It was the hope of Israel that God would once again come and make his dwelling with man. To the Jews this meant a temple or tabernacle of some kind. The Feast of Booths in Zech. has eschatological significance. So when Peter suggests the erecting of tents, or booths, or tabernacles of some sort, he is probably speaking as an informed Jew with the Messiah on his mind. The part that he failed to recognize was that standing before him was the temple transfigured. Standing before him was the eternal word of God that tabernacled, or made his dwelling among man.

All of this provides flesh to the disciple's understanding of what the office of the Messiah entails. Jesus is the Messiah; he is the Christ. He is the Son of God. He is the Word of God. He is the glorious Son of Man.