

**Introduction**

1. When was the last time that you were speechless and didn't know what to say or do next?
  - a. We've all been in those moments of crisis where something unexpected has happened.
  - b. What should we say? What should we do? The right words and proper actions escape us.
  - c. We either stand there with a dumbfounded look or release nervous energy by doing something, sometimes the wrong thing.
  - d. Peter, James, and John found themselves in such a situation as Jesus was miraculously transfigured in their presence on a mountaintop. Peter, the only one of the three who spoke, proposed an action that missed the point of this miraculous experience.
2. The transfiguration of Jesus revealed His glory and confirmed to His inner circle of disciples His identity as both Messiah and Suffering Servant.
3. **Read Mk 9:2-13.**

**A. Going Up the Mountain (2a)**

1. Six days had passed since Jesus' first prediction of His impending death and resurrection.
2. The events of the previous week included: Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah (Mk 8:27-30), Jesus' prediction of His death (Mk 8:31-33), Jesus' call to radical discipleship (Mk 8:34-38), and Jesus' promise that some would see the kingdom (Mk 9:1). All of these events are related and come to a confirming culmination with the transfiguration of Jesus in this passage.
3. Jesus called His inner-circle of three disciples—Peter, James, and John—to go on an excursion with Him.
4. They went with Jesus up on a “high mountain, where they were all alone.” (2a)
  - a. Mt. Tabor in far southern Galilee is the traditional site.
  - b. Mt. Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi in far northern Galilee, is a more impressive and logical place for these events since they had just been in nearby Caesarea Philippi within the week.
  - c. The place is not as important as what happened there.
  - d. As we often find in scripture, a high mountain (e.g., Sinai, Horeb) is a place to encounter God and receive His revelation.

**B. On the Mountain (2a-8)**

1. Jesus was “transfigured” (Gk., *metemorphothe*) before the three disciples. (2a)
  - a. Warren Wiersbe defines transfigured as “. . . a change on the outside that comes from inside. It is the opposite of ‘masquerade,’ which is an outward change that does not come from within. Jesus allowed His glory to radiate through His whole being, and the mountaintop became a Holy of Holies!” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 107).
  - b. Like a butterfly coming out of the cocoon that surrounds it, the glory of Jesus burst forth from within Him and became visible to these three disciples.
2. Words fail to describe what these three disciples must have experienced.
  - a. Jesus' clothes and appearance became whiter than anything they had ever seen on earth. (3)
  - b. The three disciples saw Elijah and Moses “talking” (Gk., *sullalountes*) with Jesus. (4)
    - 1) Moses represented the Law, and Elijah represented the prophets.
      - a) Daniel Akin summarizes the importance of their presence by saying, “Elijah and Moses represent the Law and the Prophets. They were both great deliverers. Together they represent the prophetic tradition that points to the Messiah” (Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 180).
      - b) William Lane further declares, “Moses appears as the representative of the old covenant and the promise, now shortly to be fulfilled in the death of Jesus, and Elijah as the appointed restorer of all things (Chs. 1:2f; 9:11). The stress on Elijah's presence at the transfiguration indicates that the fulfilment of ‘all things’ has arrived (Ch. 9:12). The transfiguration is the prelude to the passion . . . the presence of Elijah with Moses thus has eschatological significance in the specific sense that they proclaim the coming of the end” (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 319).

- 2) The parallels between the experience of Moses and Jesus are striking as pointed out by Daniel Akin in his commentary (Akin, 179).
  - a) Moses went up Mt. Sinai with three named persons plus 70 elders (Ex 24:1,9)
  - b) Moses' skin shone when he came down from the mountain (Ex 34:29).
  - c) God appeared in an overshadowing cloud (Ex 24:15-16,18).
  - d) God's voice spoke from the cloud (Ex 24:16).
  - e) The people were afraid to come near Moses (Ex 35:30).
- 3) What were Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talking about?
  - a) According to Luke 9:31 they, "were speaking about Jesus' "death" (Gk., *exodus*).
  - b) Akin shares, "The word for 'death' in the Greek text is 'exodus'! Jesus would lead the people of God out of the bondage of sin in a new exodus through His death (a new Passover) and resurrection, and He would constitute a new people called the church" (Akin, 180).
  - c) Jesus was on His way to exit this world, but His exit would usher in the kingdom of God on earth in the new exodus of God's people from bondage to sin.
- c. Then a cloud (Gk., *nephele*) covered them all. (7a)
  - 1) A cloud is an important symbol in scripture for the presence of God.
  - 2) This cloud is reminiscent of Moses' meeting with God in a cloud on the top of Mt. Sinai.
  - 3) It is also reminiscent of the cloud that filled the tabernacle at its dedication (cf., Ex 40:34-35) and later the temple in Jerusalem as Solomon dedicated it (cf., 1 Kgs 8:10-11).
  - 4) God was present with them on the Mount of Transfiguration.
- d. Then they heard a voice saying "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (7b)
  - 1) God had already spoken most of these words at Jesus' baptism (cf., Mk 1:11).
    - a) The first sentence is a restatement of God's word in Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1.
    - b) Psalm 2 is not only an enthronement psalm for kings of Israel but also for the Messiah.
      - God through the psalmist declared, ". . . 'You are my son; . . .'" (Ps 2:7).
      - Only Israel (cf., Ex 4:22-23; Jer 2:2; Ho 11:1-3) and the king as Israel's representative (cf., Ps 2:7) are called God's son in the Old Testament.
      - Here, the Father again confirmed that Jesus is His Son, the firstborn of the new Israel, and the only perfect King in David's line whose reign has no end.
    - c) Isa 42:1 is the first of the four Servant Psalms of Isaiah. These psalms speak of a servant, a nation or individual, who will come to suffer for the salvation of all people.
      - Isaiah wrote, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1).
      - The last of the four Servant Psalms is found in Isa 52:13-53:12. It recounts the suffering of the Servant for the sins of the people.
      - Isaiah declared, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5).
      - The Father again, as He has at Jesus' baptism, affirmed that His Son, the Messiah, is also the Suffering Servant.
    - d) The voice of God gives witness to the truth of who Jesus is and what He has come to do.
    - e) Jesus has come as the Messiah and Suffering Servant of God who saves His people from sin.
  - 2) In addition, the Father also says, "Listen to him!"
    - a) This is a reiteration of the words of Moses in Dt 18:15.
    - b) Moses told the people that God would send another prophet after him and that "You must listen to him."
    - c) Jesus is the final prophet whom God sent and to whom they must listen to hear God's truth.
  - 3) These powerful words spoken by the Father from scripture are divine confirmation of what Jesus had disclosed about Himself to His disciples six days earlier—He was to be a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah.
- e. Wiersbe summarizes, ". . . the Lord gave a dazzling proof that God indeed does transform suffering into glory. . . He revealed His glory. This event was a vivid confirmation of His words as recorded in Mark 8:38, as well as a demonstration of the glory of the future kingdom (Mark 9:1; John 1:14; 2 Peter 1:12-21). The message was clear: first the suffering then the glory" (Wiersbe, 106).

3. Peter, ever the man of action, didn't know what to say or do, but he came up with something! (5-6)
  - a. Peter and the other two disciples were "frightened" (Gk., *ekphoboi*). (6)
    - 1) This parenthetical note most likely records Peter's personal testimony of his thoughts and feelings as communicated to Mark, the writer of the gospel.
    - 2) Luke's account adds that the disciples had just woken from sleep (cf., Lk 9:32).
  - b. In a frightened and startled state, Peter blurted out a plan of action: "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." (5)
    - 1) What do you think or feel that Peter was suggesting when he offered to build these shelters?
    - 2) James Brooks writes, Peter ". . . may have gotten the idea from the use of booths in the wilderness and at the Feast of Tabernacles (cf., Lev 23:39-43; Ho 12:9; Zech 14:16-19). The transfiguration may have taken place in the early fall about the time of that feast. To have erected shelters as Peter wished would have put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. It would have prolonged or even made permanent the situation. . . . Indeed, the association of the Feast of Tabernacles with the messianic age may have been a reason Peter wanted to build the shelters. He thought the end had come. The kingdom did in fact draw near with the appearance of Jesus, but it was not fully established at that time" (James Brooks, *Mark*, 142-43).
    - 3) Wiersbe surmises, "Peter's suggestion reflects again human thinking and not divine wisdom How wonderful it would be to stay on the mountaintop and bask in His glory! But discipleship means denying self, taking up a cross, and following Him, and you cannot do that and selfishly stay on the mount of glory. There are needs to be met in the valley below. If we want to share the glory of Christ on the mountaintop, we must be willing to follow him into the sufferings of the valley below" (Wiersbe, 107).
    - 4) Lane proposes Peter's ". . . desire to erect new tents of meeting where God can again communicate with men implies that Peter regards the time of the second exodus as fulfilled and the goal of the sabbath rest achieved. He is anxious to find the fulfilment of the promised glory now, prior to the sufferings Jesus had announced as necessary. His comment reflects a failure to appreciate that the transfiguration was only a momentary anticipation of the glory of the consummated kingdom. The blessings of the new age . . . cannot be secured until Jesus has accomplished the sufferings which are integral to his appointed task, culminating in his death" (Lane, 319).
  - c. Peter and the others had again missed the point of Jesus' teaching about suffering and resurrection.
4. Then as quickly as the Transfiguration had occurred it was gone. (8)
  - a. The three disciples were left standing on the mountain with only Jesus.
  - b. The vision of Moses and Elijah was gone, as was the cloud, the bright clothing, and the divine voice.
  - c. What now?

### **C. Coming Down the Mountain (9-13)**

1. The disciples had many questions about what they had just seen.
2. Jesus gave them "strict orders" not to disclose anything that they had experienced ". . . until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (9)
  - a. Jesus spoke of Himself using the now familiar term "Son of Man" which He uses ". . .with great regularity, especially in the context of His suffering (8:31; 9:9,12; 10:33,45; 14:21,41). The title hearkens back to the heavenly man of Daniel 7:13-14" (Akin, 182).
  - b. The Messianic secret was still in force until Jesus' mission was completed.
  - c. Akin notes, "This is our Lord's last command to silence and the only one that receives a time limitation. After the resurrection, proclamation will be the order of the day!" (Akin, 182)
3. The disciples obeyed Jesus' command but still did not understand what they had been told and had seen.
  - a. The three continued to discuss ". . . what 'rising from the dead' meant." (10)
  - b. They knew that they had seen Elijah but needed some help from Jesus about what it meant.
  - c. Lane notes, "The disciples' real question is, What have death and resurrection to do with the Son of Man? . . . The place of Jesus' passion and death, together with his resurrection, was the unexpected and incomprehensible middle term between the present and the magnificent future assured by the transfiguration" (Lane, 324).

- d. So, they asked Jesus, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” (11)
- 1) Jesus confirmed that they were correct about what the scribes taught. (12a)
  - 2) Wiersbe states, “They knew the prophecies in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6, and that their teachers expected these prophecies to be fulfilled before the Messiah appeared (John 1:21). Had Elijah already come and they missed him, or was he yet to come? Perhaps the appearing of Elijah on the mount was the fulfillment of the prophecy” (Wiersbe, 108).
- e. However, in characteristic style, Jesus asked them another question: “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?” (12b)
- 1) Jesus had just told them, , “. . . the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders” (Mk 8:31).
  - 2) Perhaps the key Old Testament passage relating the suffering and rejection of the Suffering Servant is Isa 52:13-53:12.
  - 3) Jesus wanted His disciples think through what He had told them about Himself and what they had just seen and heard from God on the mountaintop.
  - 4) Later, after His resurrection, Jesus would explain it again to them from scripture as Lk 24:25-27 records, “[Jesus] said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures about himself.”
  - 5) Lane notes, “Verse 12b serves as a warning that the suffering of John and his shameful rejection do not disqualify him from fulfilling the role of Elijah nor do Jesus’ sufferings discredit him as the transcendent Son of Man” (Lane, 326).
  - 6) The disciples heard Jesus’ words, saw the vision and heard the voice during the Transfiguration, but it was still all too much to process.
- f. Jesus added to their food for thought by saying, “. . . Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.” (13)
- 1) Of course, Jesus spoke about John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come before Messiah.
  - 2) The way has been prepared for Him as His Elijah, John the Baptist, had come and suffered just as scripture foretold.
  - 3) Now it was Jesus’ duty to fulfill scripture by suffering, dying, and rising from dead according to scripture (cf., Pss 16, 22, 110; Isa 52:13-53:12).
  - 4) Akin concludes, “John fulfilled the assignment given to him by God, and so would our Lord. God would faithfully see them through their suffering and greatest hours of trial! Might we not be able to trust Him to do the same for us?!” (Akin, 183).

#### **D. Reflections**

1. God’s plan of salvation is amazing in its simplicity, but it is still hard for us to understand sometimes. How could God love us so much that His son died in our place that we might have life abundant and eternal? That is amazing grace.
2. Sometimes we just need to be in God’s presence. It is not always about doing something for the Lord. Doing things through sacrificial kingdom service is important but so is simply being with the Lord and listening/seeing what He has for us in those holy moments alone with Him.
3. We must be listening for God’s voice of guidance and for visions of His plan in our daily lives. We won’t always have the experience of Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, but God is always speaking and showing us the way if we will only open our spiritual ears and eyes to hear and see what He reveals.
4. Sometimes we will see things in scripture that we have not seen before. The truth was there all the time, but we simply had not seen it or heard it as God intended. Thank God for those moments of illumination when the Spirit makes the connections, and we finally get the message that God had for us all along.
5. It is important to be a student of God’s word. We must continually study scripture and seek God’s illumination by His Holy Spirit for understanding and applying His word in our lives each day.
6. Sometimes God gives us unusual experiences or times of learning to help us along in our journey of faith and to prepare us for future ministry.

7. We may have mountain top experiences with God, but we must come down from the mountain to face the realities of life in this world. We take the revelation and confirmation of those special times with the Lord and put it to use by acting in faith to go out into a world that needs a witness of God and the love He has for it in Jesus Christ.
8. When you don't understand what God is saying to you, keep walking with Him; keep asking questions; keep listening to His answers and questions to you. In time, you will understand and be empowered to do what God calls you to do to His glory.
9. The Messianic Secret is no longer a secret. Jesus has died and been raised. We now must proclaim that truth from the mountain tops by every means available through our shared church ministry and our individual witnesses in words and actions.