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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Mount of Transfiguration: A Preview of Christ's Glory

Mark 9:1-8

As we come to this text this morning, we come to the ultimate mountaintop experience. All my life, I have loved the mountains... I grew up going to the White Mountains in New Hampshire... and I loved hiking Tuckerman's Ravine up Mt. Washington... amazing views!

But the most spectacular mountain experience of my life was on the top of a 15-passenger van, descending from the Khunjerab Pass on the Karakoram Highway leaving China to go to Pakistan. I sat on the luggage rack of that van, something that no transportation company would ever have permitted in America. But in Pakistan, I guess they don't care that much if some foolish American tourists want to risk their lives and ride in the luggage rack on top, so I and two other men did. The scenery was breathtaking, surrounded by three great mountain ranges: the Karakoram, the Hindukush, and the Himalayan Mountains, the highest mountains in the world. The road switchbacked down the side of the mountain from the Khunjerab Pass. 15,397 feet of elevation... winding down, down, down for hours... the snow-capped mountains around us were all over 20,000 feet tall, and the highway rode a gash in those mountains roughly following the Indus River.

From my lofty perch on the luggage rack, I could see for miles and miles. And the view was glorious!

But the physical glories of those mountains pale in comparison with the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. His glory is so perfect and so brilliant, it will light up the New Jerusalem in the New Heavens and New Earth. And on one particular moment in time, Jesus gave a glimpse of his divine glory to three men.

This morning we are going to ponder the most spectacular miracle connected with Jesus prior to his resurrection from the dead.

Certainly the stilling of the storm was visibly amazing... as were all his healings, and his walking on the water

But his transfiguration into heavenly glory on this sacred mountain, and his conversation with Moses and Elijah is the most spectacular display of Jesus' true divine nature. At that time, Jesus invited just three of his apostles, Peter, James, and John, to share that sacred moment with him. But now, in the text, the Holy Spirit invites us all up to the mountaintop to see the glory of Jesus.

I. The Context: A Needed Preview of Christ's Coming Glory

A. What Has Been Happening

1. Jesus on retreat with his apostles at Caesarea Philippi
2. Discussion of the identity of Jesus: The most important question we will ever face!

"Who do people say I am?" "Who do you say that I am?"

3. Peter's confession of Jesus:

Matthew 16:16 "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

4. Jesus' stunning revelation of his imminent death

Mark 8:31-32 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this

5. Peter rebuked Jesus... then Jesus rebuked Peter

Mark 8:32-33 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

6. The Kingdom of God built by Christ's suffering and death... and by the self-denial and suffering of his followers

Mark 8:34-38 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

B. The Apostles Must Have Been Reeling

1. They would have agreed with Peter about Jesus not ever suffering or dying
2. The Kingdom of God was glorious, powerful, dominant... it would fill the world with the glory of God
3. The Romans would melt like wax before the coming kingdom
4. So how could the Messiah suffer and die? Especially if he was not merely human, but "the Son of the living God" as Peter confessed
5. It made NO SENSE WHATSOEVER!!!
6. Of course, they didn't understand that the real threat facing them was the wrath and justice of a holy God whose laws they had all broken, who could by no means clear the guilty without this blood sacrifice
7. But Jesus knew that their hearts were stunned and crushed, reeling, unable to wrap their minds around this infinite contradiction... a personage so obviously powerful—able to still the storm, able to walk on the sea, able to drive out a Legion of demons with a word,

able to heal any disease and sickness effortlessly, able to make bread and fish appear from thin air... how could such a powerful and perfect man be arrested like a common criminal, suffer rejection and torture, and be crucified by the Romans?

8. Jesus knew what they needed...for a brief moment, he would allow their faith to be sight
9. He would reverse the basic rule of the incarnation... that he had left the FORM of the GLORIOUS GOD he is behind briefly
10. He would let them LOOK ON HIS TRUE NATURE for a moment to restore their faith in his ultimate triumph as King of the Kingdom of God

C. The Promise Made

Mark 9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

1. Many theories about what this statement means
2. But in all three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—this same statement is immediately followed by the Mount of Transfiguration
3. I believe that experience by Peter, James, and John was the direct fulfillment of this promise... they did not “taste death” before their eyes would behold his glory
4. The phrase “they see the kingdom of God come with power” is very provocative
 - a. For Jesus’ heavenly glory to be revealed briefly is a preview—a foresight rather than foretaste—of his kingly power
 - b. Jesus’ full second-coming glory will be powerful, even to the destruction of all of his wicked enemies

The glory of the Second Coming is the POWER of the Kingdom of God

Mark 8:38 the Son of Man [will come] in his Father's glory with the holy angels

D. So... Jesus knew his disciples NEEDED this foresight of his Kingdom's immeasurable power and glory

They didn't have to wait long... SIX DAYS LATER, it came!

II. The Earthly Eyewitnesses of Christ's Majesty

Mark 9:2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.

A. Why Three... and Only Three?

1. These were the inner circle... the apostles closest to him
2. They would be the same ones with him as he prayed in Gethsemane
3. And the number three is significant... because that is the number of witnesses needed to establish truth in a Jewish court of law

2 Corinthians 13:1 "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

4. These three would officially testify to what they would see to the other Apostles, and eventually to the world

B. Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

2 Peter 1:16-18 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

1. Peter says the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ were not cleverly invented myths... but were based on actual history
2. And all actual history is established by the testimony of eyewitnesses

3. Peter says “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” when he was revealed with divine glory on the sacred mountain and by the voice of Almighty God, as we shall see in our account in Mark
4. Peter says “we ourselves heard this voice” as he says we ourselves saw his glory as EYEWITNESSES
5. And the Apostle John also spoke of his role as an eyewitness of the glory of Jesus Christ

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

C. The Point of Everything: The Deity of Christ

John 20:31 these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This transfiguration is overwhelming evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ

So... Peter, James, and John were led by Jesus up a high mountain where they were all alone.

Luke tells us they went up to pray... and Jesus liked to do this... to pray on high mountains

Something about the “mountaintop experience” ... something about being high above the plains and the seas and rivers, looking down even upon the clouds from above... it is awesome

We don't know for certain what high mountain they were on, but given that they were near Caesarea Philippi, many scholars think it was Mount Hermon... Mt. Hermon rises to 9232 feet above sea level and the views from its slopes are spectacular

III. Jesus Transfigured Before Them

Mark 9:2-3 There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

A. Stunning Transformation in the Appearance of Jesus

1. Essential to the incarnation was Jesus' ordinary appearance

Isaiah 53:2 He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

2. This ordinary appearance was essential to his being known only by faith, not sight... and so his enemies would despise and reject him
3. If he looked glorious all the time, everyone would have been on their faces before him

B. A Radiant Light

Matthew 17:2 His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

1. Jesus' face was shining like the sun... overpowering light was coming directly from his face
2. So also his clothing

Luke 9:29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

His clothes were shimmering, light flashing like a jewel

And they were heavenly, brilliant white ... symbol of perfect purity

3. Light is strongly connected with the presence of Almighty God

Psalm 104:2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment

C. Jesus' Preincarnate Glory

1. Before Jesus entered the world, he shared radiant glory of the Father

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

2. His preincarnate glory is depicted powerfully in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1

Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

In John 12:41, John tells us that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory...

So, it was before the glory of Jesus that the seraphim were covering their faces

In Ezekiel 1, the prophet had a vision of cherubim who moved as wheels within wheels... and the cherubim were themselves brilliant like lightning... flashes of lightning went constantly back and forth among them

Then, high above them was an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome;

Ezekiel 1:26-28 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown

Ezekiel's reaction is common for all who have encounters with the glory of God in the Bible... they are always overwhelmed, knocked to the ground

These passages give us a sense of the infinite glory that was Jesus' before he was incarnate

3. Paul makes it plain that essential to his incarnation was Jesus' humility in laying aside the FORM of God... the outward appearance of glory and majesty that was his by fight

Philippians 2:6-8 though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- a. This word “form” in the Greek is *morphe*... it has to do with the appearance, the presentation of his likeness
- b. The radiant light, the majestic glory that belongs to God alone was Jesus’ by right, since he was equal in deity to the Father
- c. He laid aside the *morphe*, the “form”, the “appearance” of God and took on the *morphe*, the “form”, the appearance of a human being and a servant of God...

As Charles Wesley put it in “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”:

“Mild he lays his glory by; born that man no more may die.”

D. Transfiguration = “Metamorphosis”

1. That is the Greek word
2. Jesus’ *morphe*, his form, his appearance, his likeness changed... not his essential nature, for he was always God and nothing could ever change that
3. But he usually looked completely ordinary... until this one moment
4. He allowed some of his divine glory, a glory that is his BY RIGHT, to show to these three eyewitnesses
5. The Greek word *metamorphoo*... is in the passive voice... he WAS transfigured or transformed... it was done to him by God himself
6. And this transfiguration happened RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES... indeed that was the whole point; the light was not for his own benefit, but for theirs, to prop up their flagging confidence in the light of his revelation that he would suffer and die

IV. The Heavenly Eyewitnesses of Christ's Exodus

Mark 9:4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

A. As If This Weren't Amazing Enough... It Gets Even More Amazing!

1. Two deceased heroes of Israel's past appear from heaven
2. We believe that they were among the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" that the author of Hebrews speaks of in Hebrews 12, worshipping with the angels in the heavenly Mt. Zion
3. Moses, the great lawgiver, the author of the first five books of the Bible, the leader of the Exodus from bondage in Egypt
4. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, who ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire
5. Many scholars have said that they represented the Law and the Prophets in their testimony to Jesus

B. This Proves the Resurrection from the Dead

Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'

1. So also he is the God of Moses and Elijah...
2. Though Elijah was escorted to heaven in a chariot of fire, we know for a fact that Moses died and he was buried by an angel who disputed with the devil over his body
3. But he is still alive in heaven, awaiting his resurrection body
4. For this brief encounter, God allowed these two men to have some sort of physical appearance as men talking with Jesus
5. How did they know it was Moses and Elijah? We don't know, but somehow their identity was clearly communicated

C. The Topic of their Conversation? The Exodus Jesus Was About to Work

Luke 9:30-31 Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

1. The word “departure” could definitely refer to Jesus’ death
2. But the Greek word is “exodus”... going out...
3. Jesus’ death works the TRUE exodus, just as sin is the true slavery

John 8:34-36 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.... ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

4. This shows that Moses and Elijah clearly testified that Jesus’ death was essential to God’s saving purpose

V. Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

A. At This Moment, Peter Speaks!!

Mark 9:5-6 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.)

1. As I’ve often noted before, there are two kinds of people: 1) those who when they don’t know what to say, SAY SOMETHING; 2) those who, when they don’t know what to say KEEP QUIET!
2. Peter felt the need to speak despite the fact that they were all of them terrified by Jesus’ glory

B. Peter’s Words Were Foolish

1. First, “It’s good for us to be here!” Perhaps meaning, “This is an incredible experience... a true mountaintop experience... Let’s just stay up here and not go back into the suffering and death you just spoke of!”
2. Second, making three shelters, as though they were going to stay there for awhile, and as if Moses, Elijah, and Jesus were EQUALS!

C. God the Father Appears

1. As if the moment weren't overwhelming enough, suddenly Almighty God appears in a glorious cloud
2. The full text tells us what happened

Matthew 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them

God often appeared in the Old Testament in a bright cloud... especially when Moses completed the Tabernacle and when Solomon dedicated the Temple

The cloud enveloped them... wrapped around them... surrounded them in cloud and light

3. And the voice of Almighty God came from the cloud

Matthew 17:5 ... and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

4. This is the second time God has said these words
 - a. In Mark 1, he said them to Jesus

Mark 1:11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

- b. Here, he says them to Peter and the other two apostles

"This is my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased."

D. The Delight of God the Father in the Perfections of His Son

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being

1. God declares his PLEASURE in his Son

One of the most important lessons of the Bible: GOD IS HAPPY....
GOD IS A DELIGHTED BEING

And the pinnacle of his pleasure is the glory of his only begotten Son

In his book, *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper writes:

“A great part of God’s glory is his happiness.... It is a glorious thing for God to be as happy as he is. God’s glory consists much in the fact that he is happy beyond our wildest imagination.”

Piper goes on to argue that the happiness of God is first and foremost a happiness in his Son

From eternity past, God the Father has stared into the face of his only begotten Son and has delighted in it... He is infinitely “well-pleased” with his Son

And our salvation very much consists in being able to enter into that joy, that happiness, that indescribable love FOREVER. What an incredible thought!!! God the Father wants us to share in the love he has for his Son... He is going to transform us to be just like Christ so that he can delight in us as much as he delights in Jesus

But the key to that transformation is the faith that come from HEARING Christ’s voice!!

John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish

SO... STOP TALKING, PETER!!!

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God

God’s message is simple... listen to Jesus! Hear him speak!!!

Habakkuk 2:20 the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

2. As the ancient hymnwriter put it:

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth
our full homage to demand.

The essence of our faith is LISTENING to God when he speaks about Christ and believing in him... his glorious deity, yes, but also his wise plan to work our Exodus by his blood shed on the cross

Rom. 3:25 God presented him as a propitiation, through faith in his blood.

VI. Jesus Only

Mark 9:8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

- A. Moses and Elijah Are Not Equal to Jesus
- B. The Bright Cloud From Which God Spoke Is Also Not Needed
- C. Christ Alone is Sufficient... Final Word from God to the Human Race

Hebrews 1:1-2 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... the RADIANCE of his glory!!

VII. Lessons

- A. The Infinite Glory of Jesus
 - 1. Not one of us fully realizes how great is Christ's glory; not one of us sees him properly; all of us should yearn for a clearer vision of Christ... of his power and glory
 - 2. All of us should yearn to LISTEN to Christ's clear voice
 - 3. And all of us should realize the delight the Father has in Christ
- B. This Jesus is the Savior of the World... Trust in Him
 - 1. Peter could not accept the need for Jesus to shed his blood for our sins
 - 2. But this is the gospel... Jesus, the glorious Son of God, made himself nothing in order to die on the cross so that we might spend eternity glorious in heaven
 - 3. Trust in him for the full forgiveness of your sins

C. Learn to Listen to God and to Christ More Than Ever Before

1. Peter trusted in his own wisdom and it was to his shame
2. God speaks out of a glory cloud to tell us to listen to our Good Shepherd

D. Mountaintop Experiences Are Necessary

1. Christ knew that his apostles needed this experience to strengthen their faith
2. So also Jesus wants you from time to time to come away from the crowd and get alone with him and remind yourself of his glory

E. Mountaintop Experiences Are Temporary

1. They are about to descend into the path that will lead to the cross...
2. We have work to do!