

Removing the Veil: Jesus Transfigured

Mark 9:1–13

Turn to Mark 9 please. In Mark 9, Jesus was changed. “Transfigured” is big word that means changed. God changed Jesus so that three disciples could see his true glory. They could actually see who they were following. The rest of the time, Jesus was veiled. But for a few minutes, his real glory shone through. God did this to encourage those three disciples.

A few days before Jesus was changed, near the end of Mark 8, Peter said to Jesus, “you are the Christ.” He was right. Peter had the right name for Jesus, he was the Christ. But Peter did not have the right thinking. Peter and the others assumed that being the Christ meant power and glory.

But Jesus said, “no, being Christ means humiliation, suffering, and death.” That was the right way to *think* about Jesus the Christ. Jesus wanted them to understand what kind of Christ he was. In the transfiguration, when Jesus was changed, the disciples got to *see* Jesus. God gave those three a chance to *look* at who he really was. The kingdom Jesus was a glorious man!

We should not separate Jesus being unveiled for a few minutes from his earlier words that he must be humiliated, suffer, and die. Jesus predicting his death and being changed into his true glory are bound together, they are two parts of one whole.

When Jesus predicted his death, the disciples went into a tailspin. They were confused and distressed. So God removed the veil that hid Jesus so they could see for themselves who he was. God wanted to show them that they were on the right path. He was telling them that following Jesus really was God’s way.

And God also wanted to make clear to the disciples that Jesus was right when he said that he must suffer and die. So God told them, “You keep listening to him. He’s telling you the truth.” Let’s read Mark 9:1–9

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” 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. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 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.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

1 See the Kingdom Come in Power? Mark 9:1–2

What does Jesus mean when he says some will see the kingdom come in power. Mark the writer links these words of Jesus to his transfiguration. Is the transfiguration a complete fulfillment of these words? Is seeing Jesus in his glory the same as seeing the kingdom of God in power? Or is it only a partial fulfillment? No one really knows. It is perplexing. But it is at least a partial fulfillment of seeing the kingdom in power.

2 God in the Cloud in Exodus 24:13–16

Turn to Exodus 24. The transfiguration in Mark 9 is a kind of echo of a story in Exodus 24, a story of God's cloud and glory and voice on Mt. Sinai. Mark wants us to see the similarity, because he wants us to see that God is on the move, just like he was on Mt. Sinai.

Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

Here are the similarities. Moses went up the mountain with Joshua, and Jesus went up the mountain with the three disciples that were closest to him. The God-cloud came down on both mountains. Both stories mention six days. In both stories we see Divine glory. In Exodus, God spoke to Moses from within the cloud; and in Mark, God speaks to the disciples from within the cloud. Not to Jesus, but to the disciples.

Seeing God's glory, seeing the God cloud, and hearing the actual Voice of God. That had not happened in Israel for many, many years. They all thought it was gone forever. But it wasn't. And it all pointed the disciples toward Jesus.

Why Peter, James, and John? Somehow, within the Twelve, these three were closest to Jesus. When Jesus raised Jairus's daughter from the dead in Mark 5, Jesus took these three with him. When Jesus was praying in Gethsemane in Mark 14, he went farther with just these three. He took them along in his more private moments.

3 Back to Mark 9 – the Scene on the Mountain – Mark 9:3–8

Even Jesus' clothes were changed. We read that no clothes on earth shone like Jesus's clothes. Matthew and Luke add that Jesus's face shone. This is the glory of the Lord that settled on Mt. Sinai.

People have different ideas about why Moses and Elijah were selected for this. Why those two? That's not clear. At the least, Elijah and Moses were really there, they were as real to the disciples as Jesus was. Hard to know how that happened. There's quite a bit of that in this story.

Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus shows us that the life and death of Jesus was tied to Israel's history. Jesus was something new, but he was not separate from Israel's past. Jesus was building on the past that Moses and Elijah represented.

From a Jewish perspective, Peter's suggestion about building three dwellings, three tents, was not a bad idea. What Peter did not yet understand was that Jesus himself was God's dwelling with people. John 1 says that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us. By the time Mark wrote this, Peter knew that.

And then the God cloud came, like the God cloud when Israel was in the wilderness. The God cloud both reveals God and hides him. It reveals him because he's right there, in the cloud. But it also hides him, because all we can see is a cloud. And they heard the Voice of God, the audible Voice of God with their real ears.

When Jesus was baptized, God said to Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love, I'm delighted with you." Now God says the same thing to the three disciples. "This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him!" "Listen to him" means, "Listen to him when he tells you what the Christ must do, his suffering and death."

Now this is important: Mark tells the story so we'll understand that the whole thing was staged for the three disciples. Jesus was not just changed, he was changed *before them*, that is *for their benefit*. Moses and Elijah did not just arrive, they appeared *to them*, *to the disciples*. The Voice in the cloud spoke to the three disciples. And at the end, we don't read that Moses and Elijah disappeared. We read that suddenly the disciples looked around, and there was no one there, only Jesus. God did this so those three disciples could see this and hear this. He wanted to encourage and support them.

4 Rising from the Dead, and Elijah – Mark 9:9–13

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. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" 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? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

Jesus will not let them speak of what they've seen until after he rose from the dead. Jesus was firmly convinced that people could not properly understand his glory until after they had seen and understood his death and resurrection.

Jesus is not just a glorious person. Jesus was humiliated, rejected, suffered, and died, and then he was glorified. At this stage the disciples could not understand the difference between those two, and that's what this part of Mark emphasizes. Jesus would suffer and die, Jesus was glorious. They could not put those two together.

We need to imagine Peter and James and John talking to each other afterward. Did you see Jesus? Did you see how he shone? Yes, yes we saw that. Did you see Moses and Elijah talking to him? Yes, we did, Israel's heavy-weights talking to Jesus. Did you see the cloud? Did you hear the Voice? Yes, we did. Did we really hear the Voice of God talking to us? Yes, it must have been God himself. Who else speaks from a cloud like that? We heard the Voice of God, and he told us to listen to Jesus. That's afterward. Back to our story.

Peter, James, and John have no idea what Jesus means when he says the Son of Man will rise from the dead. Furthermore, they are not about to ask him. The disciples had a breakthrough, when Peter spoke for all of them and said "You are the Christ." But since then we are mostly back to ignorance. They don't know what he's talking about. That's a good reason why they should not tell anyone what they saw.

What about Elijah? The disciples have just seen the Lord's glory, and they've seen Elijah. So they think the restoration must be close, so they ask about Elijah. They know Elijah will come first. They might also be objecting to all this talk about death, because if Elijah restores all things, why must the Christ die?

Jesus tells them that the Scriptures say that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected. They still don't want to accept that.

Jesus says that John the Baptist is the Elijah to come, and his repentance ministry is the restoration. John's martyrdom does not disqualify him from being Elijah to come, just as Jesus' rejection and death do not disqualify him from being the predicted Deliverer.

This was all a lot for Peter, James, and John to swallow. They really had no idea how to put all this together. They trusted Jesus, and they followed him, but they could not grasp the big picture. And God was fine with that, and Jesus was fine with that.

Let's assume it is still the same. God has been clear with us, and Jesus has been clear with us, but we still cannot put it all together. We don't always get the big picture. God is okay with this, and Jesus, the suffering and glorious Lord is okay with this. Let's hold on to Jesus, and follow him one more day. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, the disciples could not understand what we now can look back and understand. Thank you for the bigger story, thank you that the suffering and humiliated Jesus is our glorious Champion, our Lord and Hero that sits at your right hand, and rules heaven and earth. Help us to listen to Jesus every day. Thank you that he is with us every day, right to the end of the age. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.