

Lessons from a Holy Mountain

Turn with me to **Mark 9:2-10** as we look at the story of the Transfiguration. This is a remarkable scene as we are given a rare glimpse of the Son of God in his glory prior to his resurrection and ascension. Let's read this passage and then we will take a look at some lessons we learn from this extraordinary event on this holy mountain. (Read passage)

Remember from last Sunday Jesus and his disciples are in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi. Mount Hermon is only about twelve miles northeast of Caesarea Philippi which is why I think this is the likely site of the transfiguration. There are several small details you should notice in this passage – several comparisons we should make. Mark says Jesus led them up to a high mountain. It's interesting that a high mountain seems to be the place for special revelation in Scripture. Mountains figured prominently in the story of the two guys that showed up on the mount of Transfiguration. Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. It was on Mount Horeb that God spoke to Elijah and gave him instructions at a crisis moment in his life.

As you look at this passage, remember that we are dealing with a Jewish mindset. They considered Moses to be the primary figure in the Old Testament, the Law Giver. Quoting one bible scholar "Since Jewish traditions interpreted Moses' ascent of Sinai as an enthronement, the parallels with the Transfiguration cast Jesus as a king." They also expected Elijah to appear as a forerunner to the coming of the Messiah. This extraordinary event on the mountain would not be lost on Jesus' disciples.

It's interesting, the parallels between Jesus transfiguration on the mountain and Moses' receiving the law on the mountain.

1. Mark points out that it was after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him up to a high mountain where he was transfigured before them on the seventh day. Exodus 24:16 says Moses waited for six days until God spoke and called him to the top of the mountain on the seventh day where he would show him his glory.
2. Jesus took three named people, Peter, James and John. Exodus 24:1 God named three people Moses was to bring: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu along with the seventy

elders.

3. Jesus is transfigured. Matthew's gospel says his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Exodus 34:29 says when Moses came down from the mountain his face was radiant, shining.

4. In Mark 9 a cloud enveloped them and a voice spoke to them from the cloud. In Exodus 24:15 God appeared in a cloud that overshadowed the mountain-top and a voice spoke to Moses.

You get the point and so did Peter, James and John. But as the experience unfolded, what they saw indicated that one greater than Moses and Elijah was with them.

It's interesting that Jesus takes these three: Peter, James and John. He loved them all, but these three seemed to be especially close. They figure prominently in Mark's gospel. They were the first called (1:16-20). Jesus chose them to come with him when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (5:37-43). Peter is the first to confess that Jesus is the Christ (8:27-30) and James and John are the first to try to get prominent positions of power in his kingdom in Mark 10. They were closest to him at the last supper. These are the three that Jesus took with him to pray in Gethsemane. They witnessed his glory on the mountain and they witnessed his greatest struggle in the garden of Gethsemane. These are the three that hear God's voice on the mountain declaring again that this is God's Son.

We see Peter being Peter on the mountain as he blurts out his statement about building shelters. Nothing changes for some folks, not even in the presence of God. Notice Mark's parenthetical explanation in verse 6. Some believe that Mark's source for much of his information was Peter. I can hear Mark saying, "Well, that was stupid, that business about putting up three shelters." And Peter explains, "We were so frightened we didn't know what to say or do. I just blurted something out to keep from fainting."

We hear God speak again, giving total affirmation and confirmation to Jesus. Notice that when God spoke at Jesus' baptism he was speaking to Jesus. "And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" Mark 1:11. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God spoke but the message was to the three disciples and for all of us. "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Mark 9:7

Once again, the disciples were trying to work through all that Jesus was telling them about the days ahead – arrest, trial, beating, crucifixion and then resurrection. None of it fit their ideas concerning the Messiah. The whole idea of suffering and degradation, the idea of a cross for Jesus and for them was inconsistent with anything they had heard before. Remember, Mark 8 Peter told Jesus he had it all wrong. Now God himself speaks to Peter and the other two to tell them plainly, “Listen to him!” Forget everything else you expected and listen to what he is telling you. A good word for us yet today.

That’s kind of the background. Now let me focus quickly on three important lessons for us that we learn from this trip up the holy mountain. Why is this event so important for us?

This trip to the mountain affirms the divinity of Jesus the Messiah. We’ve pointed out the parallels, the similarities between Jesus going to the mountain and Moses, but understand, he is not one among equals, instead, he stands apart as the One and Only. This transfiguration is a revelation of his glory. According to Mark, **Jesus clothing “became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”** And according to Matthew’s gospel, **“His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light.”** Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus, but there was nothing extraordinary about their appearance, only Jesus is seen with the glory of God upon him. Moses and Elijah were there but it was Jesus that God spoke about when he said, **“This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him.”** And when the cloud disappeared and when the three disciples could focus again, it was Jesus alone who stood before them. Moses and Elijah were gone but Jesus remains. He is like no other.

The transfiguration was a revelation of Jesus’ glory. The Greek word translated as transfigured is the word from which we get our English word metamorphosis. It is referring to an outward change that comes from within. The glorious, divine nature of Jesus, that glorious radiance that he enjoyed with the Father before he took upon himself human flesh and became a man, that is what the three disciples witnessed that day. Jesus prayed in John 17, **“Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:5.** |

think Peter, James and John are given a glimpse of that glory on this holy mountain.

Peter would write later of his eyewitness account of this amazing experience and it was obvious the impact it made. **“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. 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.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.” 2 Peter 1:16-18**

John saw this revelation of Jesus’ glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. He would see it again before he died while exiled on the island of Patmos. Listen to John’s description of the One he saw when he was in the Spirit in the Revelation. **“I saw...someone...like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet...His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire....His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One. I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever!’” Revelation 1:13-18**

The glory they saw on the Mountain of Transfiguration, that is the glory of the Son of God, the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty, Everlasting, Eternal God. There is no other like him.

This trip to the mountain provides a balanced theology of suffering. I know you are thinking “how in the world did he come up with this?” So let me explain what I’m talking about. We Pentecostal/Charismatics have failed to articulate a theology of suffering. Often the teaching about suffering versus blessing has gotten out of balance and far from the truth of a grace filled, real life experience. But look at the extraordinary context of the transfiguration. It is a picture of real life for believers.

Peter has just declared that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus then begins to tell the disciples what is ahead for him, suffering and death upon a cross. He also tells them they too must take up a cross, deny themselves and follow him. They will find their life and save their life if they will lose it for the gospel. He tells them not to

be ashamed of nor to despise the weakness and the suffering of Christ and the cross nor to be ashamed of or despise his words, and then he takes the three up to the mountain and they see him transformed before their eyes into this glorified state. They move from talking about the cross they must bear here on earth to a glimpse of heaven's glory. And then they come back down the mountain and find the other disciples in a shouting match with the teachers of the law and the father of a demonized boy. Jesus comes from this fresh reminder of his glory, the glory he had and the glory that awaits him on the other side of the cross, and is confronted with this angry crowd and with disciples that don't get it and with demons that are controlling and destroying an innocent boy and Jesus says, "How long will I have to put up with this stuff?"

And here is the balance I'm talking about in terms of a theology of suffering. You see the glory of heaven and an uncontested, trouble-free life on the mountain contrasted with the suffering of the cross and the wickedness and evil and pain of the world we live in. And it all goes hand in hand for now. This is the real world. The suffering and the glory. The cross and the resurrection. The betrayal and death and the vindication of all he was and all he said. You don't have one without the other.

Remember what the apostle Paul said? **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."** **Philippians 3:10-11.**

Suffering is part of the journey. Knowing Christ in the power of his resurrection goes with sharing in his sufferings, in taking up a cross, denying ourselves and following him.

Now listen to me. I'm not saying we all just give in to trouble and suffering when it comes our way. We all just surrender and gather around and sing a verse of Que Serah Serah, what ever will be will be. I'm not suggesting we accept everything with some kind of fatalism, I'm saying **Don't let suffering throw you off course!** Don't be surprised by it. The bible says it better than I. Peter wrote, **"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."** **1 Peter 4:12-13.** God's still

at work. He's up to something. Don't give up on God because trouble comes. Don't reject God's word if sickness comes. Don't be angry at God if death comes, if things don't turn out as you had hoped or prayed. In this world you will have tribulation but this world isn't our final reality or our final destination. All of heaven's glory awaits us and the glory seen on the Mount of Transfiguration is just a glimpse of that glory. We get glimpses of it here, reminders of it here, moments of it here, but the final revelation of his glory, the final and ultimate reward of his glory is yet ahead for us. But don't let difficulties in life throw you off course. There is glory with Jesus ahead!

You see, we don't live on top of the mountain. Peter, because he couldn't think of anything smarter to say, said, "Rabbi, it's good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." "It's good to be on the mountain top. It's good to be here just basking in the glory of God and the glory of heaven. We don't want to go back down the hill because there is trouble and sickness and evil and demons and people arguing and accusing us. We want to just stay here." But Peter, James and John couldn't live on the mountain and neither can we.

They came down, confronted by the real world in Mark 9:14. But in spite of all of the fussing and fighting and trouble and wickedness of the real world, it couldn't rob them of what they gained on top of that mountain. Trouble couldn't steal from them the glory Jesus shared with them that day. Persecution, the execution of James, exile on Patmos for John, death on a cross for Peter, none of that could dim the reality of that glory they witnessed. Which brings us to the last point.

This trip to the mountain provides us with an unshakeable hope. I'm so glad this passage - this revelation of heaven's glory - is centered right where it is in the gospel, between the message of the cross and the struggles of real life on this planet, because you see, this is the hope we have. This is the reminder of the future that awaits us. So whatever is going on, whatever the battles with sin and the flesh and the devil, whatever the struggles against sickness or trials, whatever the circumstances that war against us, we know what is ahead for us: heaven's glory. It's what fills us with hope and keeps us going in spite of anything life throws our way.

I love the way the King James Version translates Paul's words in Romans 8. **"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be**

compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18. To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

I have to think that every day for the rest of their lives, Peter, James and John thought about the glory they witnessed on that mountain. Everyday of their lives they were affected by the hope they had in being with Jesus and feeling again what they felt, seeing again what they saw, themselves someday being changed into his glorious likeness like what they witnessed. So everyday they fixed their eyes on what was unseen, on the eternal. I have to believe on that day when King Herod had James beheaded he was thinking, “I may not understand why this is happening today, when I could be helping to build the church, but I’ve had a glimpse of what is ahead for me. It’s unseen today, but I remember the glory that is ahead, so I’m not afraid. In fact, I’m looking forward to finally being home, transformed into his likeness, reveling in his glory.” The hope of glory. The hope of heaven. That is what is ahead for us, so all the troubles here are far outweighed by the promise of heaven, the hope that keeps us going.

Don’t lose hope. Catch a glimpse of the glory ahead. In this world we will have tribulation, but Christ has overcome the world. Don’t be deterred by the trouble, instead, stay focused on what is ahead. Stay focused on the eternal, on the glory that awaits all who hope in Christ. We may not understand it all, Peter, James and John didn’t, but we won’t give up. We won’t throw away our hope. Heaven’s glory is ahead! Be encouraged today. Learn the lessons of the Holy Mountain and walk on in hope.

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.