

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Mark 9:2-9

Verses 2-4

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John and brought them to a high mountain where they were alone, by themselves. Jesus was transfigured before them and his clothing shone exceedingly white, much whiter than any bleacher in the world could whiten them. Elijah and Moses appeared before them talking with Jesus.

The last reference to an occasion was in 8:27 where Jesus and the disciples were visiting the villages around Caesarea Philippi. **After six days** does not make a great deal of sense. However, the event on the mountain will shed light on Jesus' predictions about his suffering that would occur before the coming of the kingdom in great power. It may then be a literary device, a symbolical way of describing the period of time after Jesus' resurrection before he comes in glory at the conclusion of his people's suffering.

Only the inner three witnessed Jesus' transfiguration. Quite abruptly, Mark relates what he no doubt heard from Peter: **Jesus was transfigured** μετεμορφώθη. The description of this change is given. Christians undergo an inner change through the transformation of our minds (Rom 12:2). Clearly, some of the glory he was endowed with in heaven was revealed for human eyes. It must have been a stunning sight because his clothing began to radiate. Light normally reflects off an object such as a coat and provides our eyes with colour. It would seem that light was coming from Christ himself and his garments began to shine. Strangely, it is only the clothing that is mentioned though we know Christ himself was transfigured. Revelation provides us with an earthly attempt to describe what defies earthly parameters (1:13-15). One is reminded of Christ's appearance after the resurrection. Though not transfigured, his appearance is different so that he was not recognized and he could move through physical objects like walls and doors (Lk 24:16,31,36;m Jn 20:15,26; 21:4).

Elijah and Moses appeared before them talking with Jesus. These were the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. Moses referred to himself as a prophet (Deut 18:15) for he received and proclaimed the word of God. Clearly, Jesus was familiar with these men and they conversed together, as they did in the unseen kingdom of God. The other inference to be drawn is that Jesus fulfills the work of these prophets by establishing a new covenant through his blood (14:24).

Verses 5-7

Peter responded saying to Jesus, "It is good that we are here. Let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He did not know what he was saying. It happened then that a cloud enveloped them and voice from the cloud began to say, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

Peter embarrassed himself once again but this reveals the integrity of the gospel account that the great leader of the church should suggest a ridiculous thing. What were they going to do up on the mountain? Our Lord had been visiting the villages of Galilee; he could hardly stay up there when his work was amongst the people and then in Jerusalem (8:31).

The Father spoke from heaven about his Son through the cloud. Just as the glory of the Son is hidden behind the flesh of the man Jesus, God hides his glory behind the cloud. Mount Sinai (Horeb) was shrouded in fire and smoke too when Moses received the law from God. Jesus does not receive a new law but the Father's love. The relationship between God and Jesus is clear: he is **the Son** but more than that, **the beloved Son** ο οὐιός μου ο ἀγαπητός. The uniqueness of the Son is emphasized by the definite articles and the personal pronoun. Jesus is not merely a divine being but the Father's Son and he is also the Son. And as I have said, the love of God is uniquely resting on this man. He is favoured as no other is.

However, the gospel is in these words too. The disciples are called to **keep listening** (present tense) because Jesus is God's Son for them and it is through his unique position with the Father that he can dispense his love to them. Jesus could not stay in this love alone, sitting in a tent luxuriating in the Father's love. He must speak this love to others and in the end, communicate the love of God to all people through the totality of his being. Calvary is the final place where this love is given for all to receive, not on a remote mountain alone with a few others.

Verses 8,9

Suddenly, as they were looking around, they saw that no longer anyone was there except Jesus only. When they were descending the mountain Jesus was commanding them to not discuss what they saw with anyone until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Jesus sometimes told his disciples and others to remain silent about what he had done to them or what they had seen (8:30). Scholars speak about the Messianic secret, supposedly peculiar to Mark. Certainly, it is strongly present in this gospel (Matt 8:4). In this case, the disciples have to wait till Christ **is raised**. Why then? It is after the resurrection that Christ ascends to heaven and his time on earth has come to an end and the church begins and continues his work on earth. Or is it to do with the fact that the resurrection will teach the disciples the full meaning of this event and by then, having received the Holy Spirit, the disciples will be in a better position to proclaim the full gospel? Perhaps both are right.

We can assume that when the cloud enveloped those on the mountain, they lost sight of each other. Then **suddenly** ἐξαπνίνα, the cloud was lifted, and the three saw **Jesus only**. Moses and Elijah were gone, Jesus was no longer transfigured and the voice had stopped speaking. However, the injunction **to keep listening** to Jesus is connected with the unaccompanied Jesus, **the Jesus only**. Glory will not remain for as a later disciple said, we live by faith and not by sight (2Cor. 5:7). The glory followers wish to see is within them, which is Christ in them, waiting to be revealed (Col 1:27).

Mark emphasizes the so-called 'messianic secret': **Jesus was commanding them to not discuss what they saw with anyone** (8:30). The practical reason was that Jesus needed to finish his assignment from the Father without an early arrest that fame might bring him. Further, we know that in humility Christ resisted the desire for the crowd's adulation (Mt 4:6,7). But was he also abjuring silence so that the disciples themselves would properly know his identity and purpose? This seems to be the case when we consider how this part of the testimony ends: **until the Son of Man had risen from the dead**. Only after his death and the disciples' understanding of how necessary it was in order to effect salvation, could they possibly give a proper rather than a sensationalist interpretation of it. This connection to the preceding pericope supports this. When Jesus predicted his ugly death at the hand of sinful church and government leaders, Peter wanted to stop him (8:32). Then came the famous statement for disciples to take up their crosses and follow him (8:34).

The glory the disciples were so desperately trying to grasp and capture for themselves, could only be the eternal glory of the resurrection in the visible presence of Christ, that could occur only after **the Son of Man had risen from the dead**.