

The Glory of Christ Revealed.
Mark 9

Genesis 22:1-19
1 Corinthians 15:12-28
Congregation 1 Peter 1:3-9

Today we are beginning here in Mark Chapter 9, but as we can see, and as is often the case with Chapter divisions they are linked to the previous chapter, and in this case it seems to be right in the middle of the conversation. So lets go back a bit this morning and read starting in verse 27 of Chapter 8, to the end of the chapter.

To summarize the lesson last week we see that In the end of chapter 8 here Jesus is laying out the foundation for discipleship. Showing that being a follower of Christ is much more then just verbal agreement or ascent. Rather a disciple of Christ must be willing to sacrifice all things for Christ, even the the point of death. We know this because he says, whoever desires to follow me must take up his cross and follow me. The cross being a tool of cruel punishment and death in the Roman empire this statement would have been understood as just that. This is not flippant as we may use the term today in saying that this or that is our cross to bear. It was a clear message of suffering, and as his disciples will find out it also points to a sort of identification in the death of Christ himself. Just as Christ bore our sins upon the cross, suffered and died, we to lay down our life for Him, and the gospel which we get from the following verses.

“Whoever desires to save his life will loose it, but who ever looses his life for my sake, or the gospels will save it” This is a serious commitment, and quite honestly not really one that any of us are capable of doing....on our own. It is tied to God's work in his children, his grace, and his provision to keep us. To continue living is a basic human desire, and when faced with possible suffering or death because of ones belief ends up being the true test of that belief. And he says here, that if you seek to save your life, it proves out that your faith was not true. This really is a hard teaching, I wondered how I would have handled being in situations we read about in other countries with the persecution of Christians. I know that standing for Christ is only because he would grant me the strength to do so because I know I probably don't have it on my own.

But as we see the reward in this death is greater then any life on this earth. Everything we have is fading, it is fleeting and temporary and that truth because more and more potent as we age and see time fly by, see our children grow up, our parents grow old. We look back and recall an event and are surprised that it happened like 6 or more years ago, and not the 3 that it seems like. I think of even things in our recent history, we are entering an age where there are very few people alive today who lived through the 2nd world war. Yet I think already we are seeing a fading into obscurity. For instance, June 6, was the 75th year of D-day, the allied invasion and push into Germany, the beginning of the end of the war...yet did we hear about it, was it mentioned at all? Same with December 7, a day that will live in infamy...yet, it was barely mentioned or recalled, and even something as recent as Sept 11 seems to already be fading in the minds of people. The days come and go, time passes by, people are born, people die and time keeps marching on.

Jesus says, What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but losses his soul? Riches, fame, glory, in the end don't matter, it all fades, it all becomes dust. What does matter is the eternal soul, it is the life after this life that truly is important. For the soul is eternal, the life that is gained in Christ is everlasting, it does not fade, it does not die.

For what would a man give in exchange for his soul? Even this changes with age. When we are young, and we feel invincible we think little of dying, we think little of our soul and we are wrapped up in our day to day desires. There are plenty of stories, and songs that make a whole premise out of selling ones soul to the devil to be granted desires here on earth.

I don't think that is necessarily what is meant here, it is not this idea of selling ones soul to gain riches although I suppose there are some you could say probably have done so. Not necessarily in an official deal with the devil type situation, but have become so ingrained in their pursuit of wealth, fame, comfort, and happiness they think little about their eternal state. They numb themselves to the idea of death. We see that in our own society today, we are surrounded by it, constantly reminded at how short this life is yet we see this trend that funerals are not longer what they once were, but have now become what is called a celebration of life. In seeking to sort of desensitize ourselves. We have hardened ourselves, steeled ourselves against the reality of death and what comes afterward. We have in a sense sold our soul for pleasure, caring little about the fact that our lives a wreck, we convince ourselves that there is no ultimate judgment for our sins, and it would actually seem society today has even been taking it a step further and trying to eliminate even the idea of sin.

We can see that in the statements such as, "it is my life, I can do as I please." "What does it matter what I choose to do as long as I am not hurting anyone else." We are loosing a concept of God, we are hardening our hearts to sins, it would seem that this concept that we will one day answer to our creator doesn't exist anymore. We have sold our soul for our own pleasure, for our will, for our own desire, and no one can tell us otherwise. Then there is the other side of this coin, as we age and see how life is fleeting we become concerned with the legacy that we will leave behind. Our existence after death is not a concern of the soul, but a concern of who will remember us, or how we will be remembered after we are gone. But that is striving for an empty hope, that we will be remembered in the hearts and minds of people for generations to come. Do you ever think of your great great great grand parents? No, you did not know them, and outside of just some interest in history and family line you probably don't really care to much about them. Legacy's fade, we will all be forgotten so even that is meaningless when compared to the value of our soul.

I also think that this statement here by Christ, saying what will a man give for his soul is pointing to one who is now looking at death, they have reached the end of their life and looking at the great darkness. Without Christ, there is no hope, it is unknown, it is darkness, and it would seem that the growing thought today is that we just cease to be. Yet how much would anyone facing such a thing without Christ give to continue to live? A man will give almost anything to extend their life just a few more weeks, or months, or maybe even years, for they are facing the emptiness of death. But a life in Christ, it is a different experience. Death is not to be feared, as we know we do not cease to exist, but instead will be reunited with our savior. Knowing and believing this brings a peace when faced with death, and not only when faced by our own death, but also the death of our brothers and sisters in Christ knowing that this time of good bye will one day be a glorious reunion around the throne. It is not a soul that cries out in fear and desperation seeking to do about anything to keep on living, it is a soul that comes to death in peace, who passes in rejoicing in God's grace toward them as they pass from this life to the next. Jesus sums it all up in the last verse, "for whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. A true disciple is not ashamed, will take up his or her cross and face suffering and persecution with unwavering faith. Having little concern over gain in this life, or a legacy left behind but being focused on the matters of the soul, of being a witness for Christ. And one day, Christ will return with the angels in all of his glory and gather up all of God's children.

And with that, is a perfect segway into chapter 9, for here we get a small image of the Glory of Christ in the account of the Transfiguration. Let us read our passage this morning starting here in chapter 9, verse 1. Now right away here in verse one there is already some controversy. What does Christ mean that there are some there who will not taste death until see the kingdom of God present with power? Some have believed Christ was meaning his second coming, where he would come and gather his followers and take them all back to the heaven. But as we all know, time has disproved that idea. So He must have been talking about something else, which I believe was likely the death and resurrection. Some believe that it has to do with the transfiguration, and that maybe but only Peter, James and John witnessed this, where as Jesus death, and resurrection was witnessed by all. And is the culmination of his ministry, and of God's reconciling work. Christ's crucifixion was his coronation, after ward he rose from the dead and sat down at the right hand of the Father.

But I think that this little debate is not one worth spending a whole lot of time and effort on, because whether it was mentioning the transfiguration, or the death and resurrection it is clear that in both of those accounts God's kingdom was revealed in power. In the transfiguration, it was revealed to Peter, James, and John, to which they were instructed to tell no one. Jesus was still shrouding his identity to the world until his death and resurrection when his power and authority was revealed to all, even his power over death.

Many have debated over the generations as to what was the purpose of the transfiguration, what is it's significance. It seems to me to be a clear representation and revelation of who Christ is. This account of the transfiguration takes place, as Mark says, 6 days after the previous conversation where Peter says, "We believe that you are the Christ." and then is rebuked for seemingly trying to correct Jesus about his coming suffering and death. Here, he is revealed to Peter, and to James and John truly who he is, as the Son of God shrouded in light, and glory. So I do not think that we can separate the transfiguration from the previous conversation, it does not just appear in this little bubble here but rather this is the culmination of Jesus current revelation to his closest disciples, which takes place on a mountain as does most of God's direct dealing with mankind in scripture. His encounter with Moses on Mount Sinai where the law was given, and we also see throughout Christ's ministry that he often went up into a mountain to pray, to preach, and perform miracles. Also it was on a mountain that he was tempted by Satan, and also where he called his disciples and set them on their mission. Then lastly we see Christ's ministry on earth ended on a mountain in his death on the cross.

I also think that the appearance of Moses and Elijah is quite significant. These 2 men were held with the highest esteem and respect the the Jews. Many scholars see their appearance as a reference to the law, and to the prophets and That these 2 men are representative of their respective roles in the history of scripture and of Israel. It is here on this mountain that we see a gathering of these prominent Jewish figures representing God's work in his revelation toward his people. In Elijah the messianic prophecies, and in Moses the establishment of the Nation of Israel through the laws and traditions. And in their midst, Jesus, the Messiah in glory, whose face shown like the sun according to Luke's account, and as Mark states here that even his clothes became shiny like white snow, whiter then any launderer could whiten them.

I could only imagine who both awesome, and fearful it would be to witness this event. And we see Peter's response that they should build tabernacles was one out of a response of fear for it says in verse 6. "Because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. This response is not really a ridiculous one if we understand where Peter is coming from.

The Jews believe that the tabernacle will be rebuilt, that God's presence will return to Israel in this one way day. So when confronted with this imagery of Moses, Elijah, and The Messiah shining in glory it is easy to understand Peter's request in a moment of fear and excitement, for being a Jew it is likely he too was waiting for the physical return of the temple. But it is here in God's response that we see that there is more to it than just establishing a new physical temple but rather that it is in Jesus himself that all of these things are established.

After Peter had said this, a cloud came over them and shadowed them and a voice came saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." God has established for himself his own tabernacle, a place of meeting between God and man, and it is in his Son. Throughout the gospel of Mark here we have seen in Jesus teaching a constant call to listen, to hear if you are able. And we see here God himself saying to listen to his Son. Now that he has come, it is him that we listen to. One greater than Moses has come, he is the one in whom all of the prophets and laws pointed to. As it says in the beginning of the book of Hebrews, "God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things through whom also he made the world.

The time of the law has past, it has faded and has been fulfilled in Christ. The time of the prophets have now passed, they have faded and they have now been fulfilled in Christ. As Jesus said in the previous chapter, why do we still seek a sign? Why do we still seek prophecies, and subject ourselves to law? These all have been established, completed and their purpose fulfilled in Christ. This is why I don't think that there is any biblical evidences toward there being any prophets today, any special revelation given to people today for as Hebrews said, God worked in such a way throughout various times, but now he speaks to us through his son, hear him.

So, in closing, the transfiguration stands as a precursor to Christ entering his glory. It showed the Peter, James, and John that he truly was who they had believed him to be. As I said last week, Jesus ministry has been on a death march to Jerusalem, to him that has always been the end goal of his earthly ministry. But as we saw his disciples could not accept the idea of a suffering messiah for it did not align with their belief of a conquering messiah. But as we know, his suffering and death was not defeat, but rather it was victory. Through the shedding of his blood, the perfect lamb of God the veil of separation between God and man had been torn and we can now approach God not through the temple, or through sacrifices but through Christ who embodies all of this previous shadows and prophecies.

Another effect that the transfiguration would have, is witnessing the truth of the resurrection. Here, Moses and Elijah stood with Jesus before Peter, James, and John. Even though the concept and idea of the resurrection has been known since the old testament. Abraham when he went to offer his son as a sacrifice knew that God could raise him up from the dead if he so desired. But here, we see proof of the resurrection, of life after mortal death. I think it is no coincidence that this event happened shortly after Jesus discussion with his disciples asking who they believed he was, and the whole teaching on the importance and value of this belief. What good is it to gain the whole world, but lose your soul? The transfiguration here, both instructs and encourages his disciples. Now knowing and understanding that the messiah must suffer. For in the previous chapter he told them and they did not understand and Peter in fact rebuked Christ for saying it. But here, they see Christ in Glory with Moses and Elijah and a voice comes in the cloud saying to listen to Jesus, for this is God's son, the promised messiah, hear him.

But with this understanding that there is coming a time of suffering, we also see that there is a promise of deliverance for in death, we are united in Christ. There is hope in a life after this one, as we read this morning in Corinthians, Christ has risen from the dead, for since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. Is this not a beautiful promise? Praise be to God for his atoning grace and the work of Christ on the cross to reconcile us to him.