

Transfiguration Sunday

February 11, 2018

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Mark 9:2-9 ² Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" -- ⁶ because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. ⁷ And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" ⁸ Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. ⁹ Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Years ago when I was still in college, I was out west visiting friends at our church in San Francisco. My sister was teaching out there at the time. While I was out there the whole church went on a rafting trip. My friends and I, all high school or young college aged males got into one raft. One particular young woman from the church was in another raft with her family and some of the other church members. It was immediately obvious to us what needed to be done. We needed to chase down that other raft and splash them all with water. Since the other raft had old people, young children and one teenage lady, this seemed like an easy enough feat. What we did not know was that one man in particular on that raft was an expert river man. He knew how to steer the raft to take advantage of the currents.

We had youth, strength and determination on our side. They had knowledge and wisdom. And so began an epic three hour race. Whenever there was a straight slow part of the river we were able to slowly close the gap. Whenever there was a twisting or faster part of the river, he was able to use his understanding of the river to pull ahead. And so they remind always just out of reach, close enough that we never gave up. We always thought just a little more and we can catch them. Finally with the end of the rafting trip in sight, we were able to close the gap just enough that one young lad thought he might be able to jump and grab their raft. Sure enough with a might leap and a little splashing he grab the back of the other raft. A mighty cheer went up from us, and an piercing scream of terror issued from theirs.

You see there was also on that raft a young girl, three or four. She didn't understand that it was all in fun. All she knew was that she been pursued by unknown villains for three hours and now they had caught up to her. She was terrified.

Imagine the scene on top of the mountain from Peter, James and John's point of view and background. These were men who grew up in some ways as we did going weekly to "Sunday school," hearing the stories, reading the word, memorizing passages, but with rather a different emphasis. The first passage they memorized was not "God so loved the world," but rather "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." One of the most important bible stories was not the "good shepherd" but the giving of the law, when the voice of God shook the mountain, when the glory shone so brightly that it had to be hidden by a cloud, when the mountain of the Lord being filled with his presences was untouchable to the Israelites. They were taught from little on that every sin they did, every mistake they made, must be paid for by sacrifice. The mercy seat of the Lord who dwelt between the cherubim was behind a curtain which none could part except the high priest, in a temple which none could enter except the priests, within a wall that none could walk through except the pure. In short the one thing that had been hammered into their head by every bible, every passage, every ritual, every festival, since the time of their birth was this, "God is holy and sinful man cannot enter into his presence or look upon his glory or he will die."

Now suddenly these men find themselves without warning staring into the glory of God, on the mountain of God, standing before the two greatest prophets Moses and Elijah. I think it not unlikely that they thought for certain they were going to die.

In such a situation Peter's words although wrong are understandable. Terrified, certain of death, mind racing for a way out, he falls back on the one way sinful man has always sought to win God over: "let me do something for you. We will worship you, we will build you a temple, and Moses and Elijah we do not deserve to stand in your presence either, we will build a tabernacle for all of you, only do not let us die." This is the word that Peter spoke, "in great fear."

The reply came from the Father, "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

They most certainly would have died, if the glory of the Lord which they saw came from any source other than Jesus Christ. But as the Father said, "This is His beloved Son."

In Him we can see the glory of the Lord and not die.

In Him the word of God becomes not, "Love the Lord," but "God so loved the world."

In Him the sacrifices are gone.

In Him the veil and the temple and the wall are torn down and the only thing that remains is the mercy seat visible to all, approachable for all.

The transfiguration is the symbol of the incarnation, God become man. That which was hidden behind the cloud, that which the Israelites must not touch lest they die, the which even Moses could see only from behind . . . HERE IT IS, IT WALKS AMONG YOU

“This is my beloved Son, hear Him.”

My Son

“true God, very God of very God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.”

A son bears all the major attributes of his father. If you are the son of a man, you are a man. If you are the son of a snake you are a snake.

Jesus is the son of God, eternal, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, unchanging.

He is the beloved

Not only God but true man, not only true man but obedient in all things to the Father. The one man who did what we never could do, who kept the law in all respects, who was without sin from birth to death. He was the man who was able to approach the mountain and stand in the presence of God without death. From whom unlike Moses the glory did not fade when he left the presence of God, because the glory was His own and not a mere reflection.

Hear Him

This is the one we are to listen to, not Moeses, not Elijah, but this one who is the true Son of God. For they heard in part and spoke in part, but now the fullness of truth and the fullness of God’s glory is seen in His Son.

We do not need to be afraid like Peter when we suddenly find ourselves surrounded by the Glory of the Lord, because the glory that surrounds us is the glory of the one who died for our sins, and the word of the Son of God, the only one we are to listen to, that word is the word of forgiveness.

“This is my beloved Son, hear Him.”