

**+ Mark 9:2-9 + Christ Revealed as Our Glorified Lord +  
+ Last Sunday after Epiphany: Transfiguration of Our Lord + 7 February 2016 +**

Nobody likes to talk about death. It's uncomfortable. It's depressing. It's a topic you and I generally avoid. We don't want to think about it, but it's something we all need to talk about at some point. Of course, there's the big question—Where will I go when I die? For believers in Christ, the answer is easy. I'm going to heaven to be with Jesus.

Trusting in your Savior Jesus, you have that confidence. You know where you're going. Yet if you knew you were dying, how would you prepare your loved ones? What would you do? What would you want to tell them? You'd probably want to make sure that you put things in order for your family. You'd make sure your life insurance and your will were up to date. You'd want to spend time with your family while the Lord still gives you that time. You'd want your loved ones to know how much you love them. Yet you'd also want to make sure that your loved ones know what's most important to you. You'd want them to know about Jesus and what he's done for you and why you're going to heaven. You'd want to make sure above all else that they knew the truth about your Savior and theirs for their eternal good.

...But why talk about such a depressing, uncomfortable subject today? It's Super Bowl Sunday! A day when millions of Americans sit back, have some fun, and maybe even watch a little football. This isn't a funeral. It's certainly not Estate Planning 101. We're even in a church season of joy—Epiphany! We've seen Christ reveal his miraculous power, his mighty mercy, and his compassionate love! Yet even though Jesus has revealed so much about himself, today we find Jesus preparing his closest followers Peter, James, and John because he knows he's going to die soon.

Jesus had been preaching and teaching for about three years by this time. He was immensely popular with the people. Large crowds followed him so they could hear him teach with unparalleled authority and see him perform amazing miracles. At the same time, opposition was growing against Jesus. His enemies—the religious leaders—were looking for ways to get Jesus arrested and put to death. As true God, Jesus knew that his death for the sins of the world was coming soon. It was time to prepare his disciples.

Jesus wasn't dying of cancer or heart disease or some other terminal illness, but in a matter of weeks, he was going to die at the hands of his enemies. So Jesus **“began to teach [his disciples] that [he] must suffer many things and be rejected by [the religious leaders], and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”** Jesus **“spoke plainly about”** all these things. He spoke about the humiliating suffering and death on a cross he would soon endure. He wanted to prepare his disciples for what would surely shake them to the core. They would suffer grief and fear and doubt, but he didn't want them to despair. So he always reminded them that **“after three days [he would] rise again.”** (Mark 8:31-32)

Now if you don't like to talk about death, you certainly don't want to hear that a loved one is going to die. It was no different for Jesus' disciples. Peter pulled Jesus aside and, as he so often did, he told Jesus what was on the minds of the disciples. He **“began to rebuke”** Jesus. “You don't need to die, Lord! Stay away from your enemies. You can avoid death! Why talk so foolishly?” What Peter and the other disciples didn't realize was that Jesus had to suffer and die. So he rebuked Peter, **“Get behind me, Satan! ...You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”** (Mark 8:32-33)

Further preparation was needed. The disciples were not ready for his impending death. So about a week later, Jesus took his three closest disciples—his “inner circle” of Peter, James, and John—and went up a high mountain to prepare them. They were all alone when suddenly Jesus **“was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”**

Jesus had looked like an ordinary human being before, but now he was transformed to reveal his divine glory. This glory didn't come from the sun shining at a certain angle behind Jesus, but from within him. Jesus was truly human, but also truly God. That meant that Jesus was in control of all things, even his own suffering and death. The disciples needed to realize that before Jesus suffered death.

The gospel writer Mark tells us, **“And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”** Just as suddenly as Jesus had appeared in glory, suddenly standing with Jesus were two of the greatest prophets from the Old Testament. Moses had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. He had served as the giver of God's holy Law and the proclaimer of his loving promises. He had pointed ahead to Jesus—the Prophet from his own people who would far surpass him.

Elijah had been the instrument through whom the Lord brought thousands back to God at a time when it seemed like all was lost. Elijah had been taken into heaven body and soul without death. So the prophets after him had looked ahead to Jesus—the Elijah who would come to deliver God’s people when all seemed lost in this sinful world.

Both had come for one purpose—to speak with Jesus **“...about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”** (Luke 9:31) From the unique vantage point of eternity, these two great prophets discussed Jesus’ coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Moses and Elijah had also appeared to help Jesus prepare his disciples for what was coming. By their appearance they testified that Jesus had come to fulfill what they had foretold and proclaimed, not only with his holy life, but with suffering and death to come. They had come to help the disciples look ahead to the cross, where Jesus would no longer appear in glory, but in humiliation.

With all this glory blazing around Jesus and two of the Old Testament’s greatest prophets talking to their Lord, the disciples were quite shocked and terrified. They cowered on the ground, but Peter had an idea that he had to share. **“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.”**

Peter had wanted to see Jesus’ glory. He didn’t want to see Jesus face suffering and the cross and death. He didn’t want to see all the blood and bruises and humiliation. That glory emanating from Jesus was so dazzling. That moment was so beautiful, so glorious that Peter didn’t want it to end. So he came up with a solution that made sense to him. “Let’s keep everybody here. We’ll have heaven on earth and never have to come down from the mountain. Jesus won’t need to go to the cross and die. We can just stay here and enjoy this glory forever. Maybe we can even invite the other disciples”

As nice as that would be, Peter said what he said **“because he did not know what he should say, since they were terrified.”** (Mark 9:6 HCSB) Just as Peter didn’t know what he was saying when he tried to deter Jesus from the cross, Peter didn’t know what he was saying here either. This moment of glory was meant just a glimpse of who Jesus was meant only to prepare his disciples. They would have to come down the mountain, and Jesus would have to face death on a cross.

To emphasize this even more, God the Father appeared with a glorious cloud that enveloped them. He spoke from the cloud, **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** In that cloud of glory, God himself not only strengthened his Son for the difficult journey ahead, but also prepared the disciples to follow Jesus to the cross. “This is my beloved Son! He is true God, and I approve of what he has done and is about to do. Listen to him because he proclaims the truth, even if you don’t want to hear it.”

Then just as suddenly that cloud disappeared. **“...When they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.”** All that terrifying glory was gone, but Jesus was still there calmly bringing them peace. It was time to come down the mountain. On the way, Jesus commanded his disciples **“not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”** You see, a long, dark road to death lay ahead for Jesus, but a time was coming when they could share what they had experienced. They would see his glory again at his resurrection, but only after suffering and death.

You and I are so much like Peter and the other disciples, aren’t we? We want glory, not suffering and death. We want to be dazzled, not humbled and crushed. We want to see Jesus in all his glory and might—and as true God, he has all that! We want him to blow us away with amazing displays of power, to make heaven on earth, to make our lives one glorious moment on the mountaintop.

...But like Peter, you and I need to see Jesus in all his humility. We need to see Jesus battered and bruised. We need to see him covered in shame and washed with blood. We need to see Jesus hanging on the cross—despised, rejected, carrying our sorrows, afflicted by God for your sins and mine, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, punished to give us peace with God, and sacrificed for the sins of all.

You and I need to see Jesus in humility and suffering and death occupying the tomb that every single one of us deserves as the wages for our sin. You and I need to see Jesus that way because the Lord who reveals his glory is the One who goes to the cross so we can see eternal glory! That’s why Jesus uses that glorious moment of transfiguration to prepare us—his loved ones—for his death.

Like Peter, we need to come down the mountain with Jesus and follow him to the cross. As the shadow of death looms larger and larger for him, you won’t see a blazing cloud of glory where God proclaims, **“This is**

***my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!***” Instead you will see Jesus, your Savior and mine, accomplish what he came to this earth to do.

You will see him hanging on the cross and, when all his suffering is done, cry out, ***“It is finished.”*** (John 19:30) Amidst all that blood and suffering and death, you and I will see his greater glory hidden behind it all. By his wounds you are healed of sin’s guilt, of the awful ruin and destruction that sin and death have wreaked in your life and the lives of others, of the self-centered demands for glory that come so naturally to every one of us, of the reality of death that terrifies us all.

Yet just as Jesus promised, glory—resurrection glory—will come and we will once again shout our alleluias for his glorious grace. That empty tomb will be God’s seal of approval that Jesus did accomplish what he came to do—to rescue you from sin and death and hell. So we follow Jesus down the mountain. We listen to his Word as he prepares us for his coming death and even for our own. He prepares you and me for the cross and for the glory yet to come. To him be glory forever and ever! Amen.